

Europa '51: The Face of the Star in Neorealism's Urban Landscape

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Roberto Rossellini's *Europa '51* (1952), which was shot approximately three years after the director's first collaboration with Ingrid Bergman, *Stromboli*, *Land of God* (1949) and immediately following *Francesco*, *Giullare di Dio* (*Francis*, *God's Jester*, 1950), transplants the foreign woman from the harsh but beautiful southern landscape of the volcanic island to the postwar urban environment of Rome. The city depicted in this film, however, bears no resemblance to its portrayal in the director's most famous postwar works, *Rome Open City* and *Paisà*. It is, as others have pointed out, austere to the point of abstraction, barely concretely denoted, reduced to a few features.¹ This, I will show, is a consequence, on the one hand, of the way in which certain framing and editing patterns deployed in relation to the figure of the star – such as, frequent close-ups of her face, and extended periods of immobility as the camera rests on her image – serve to block movement and break down the connecting links between people and locations within the urban geography. My reading of *Europa '51* will thus provide a framework for addressing the problem of theorizing the relationship between the cinematic image of the woman – as spectacle or fetish – and a set of spatial and temporal relationships extending beyond her that a film establishes between characters and objects, what we might call the story-world or realistic setting of the film. The five feature films Rossellini made with Bergman are an important body of material through which to examine this issue because they insert the image of the female star into a setting and mode of depiction radically different from that of the Classical Hollywood style. Yet, while an important process of translation and transformation occurs in the star's importation

from the American context into Rossellini's Italian landscape, these works do not, as some have claimed, aim to destroy the Hollywood aura or show the 'real' Bergman underneath the star. Rossellini used Bergman's star status in revolutionary ways, ways that not only re-defined her image significantly, but also strongly influenced the evolution of the director's own so-called Neorealist aesthetic, his exploration on film of the complex, uncertain encounter between the individual and his environment.

I

The first person to theorize the connection between the cinematic image of the woman and the transfixing or immobilizing aspects of spectacle is Laura Mulvey, in her highly influential article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' Her argument remains central in discussions of the representation of women in film, and is a point of departure for my own reading here of Bergman's image. According to Mulvey, mainstream film, and the Classical Hollywood style in particular, neatly combines spectacle and narrative by inserting the fetishized image of the beautiful woman into a narrative and visual economy in which she functions as erotic object for both the male characters within the diegesis and the spectator, who is solicited to identify with the active masculine gaze. The extradiegetic tendencies of the woman as spectacle, which tend to work against the forward movement of the narrative, are neutralized by the man's role as 'the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen [The man] controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator.' The image of

the woman as fetish 'is fixed and held for the pleasure and reassurance of the male spectator.' This holding process, however, which threatens to freeze the flow of action, is incorporated into the narrative through the mediating gaze and actions of the male character, who 'demystifies, possesses, or sadistically punishes the woman.'² Mulvey's argument has been criticized primarily for its narrow conceptualization of female spectatorship. She allows only two choices for the female viewer of the classical cinema, it has been argued: passive or masochistic identification with the woman as erotic object or a 'masculinization' of the spectator through her identification with the active male hero.³

Much work has been done since Mulvey's essay was published to 'rescue female spectatorship' from this impossible place, to conceive of the female viewer's position in terms other than of an absence.⁴ Less attention has been directed, I would argue, towards a consideration of the author's definition of spectacle as the image of the woman as erotic object. The strength of Mulvey's argument is her point that the representation of the woman, and of the female star in particular, consistently has the effect of suspending narration, of at least temporarily breaking the sequential flow of cause and effect in narrative cinema. However, her article and its legacies have not adequately addressed the specificity of the filmic articulation of what we normally call spectacle (that is, non-narratively motivated shots or shot sequences).⁵ Furthermore, Mulvey does not address the masochistic aspect of fetishistic disavowal. For her, the image of the woman as fetish always has its basis in castration fear and sexual difference defined as female lack, thus provoking a desire for male control over her. One question I will address is whether the cinematic image of the woman as fetish always functions as erotic object. Within the structure of masochism, as Gilles Deleuze argues, identification with the woman accords power to her and desexualizes her. She is endowed with a phallus that is the ideal organ of a neutral energy that in turn generates the ideal of rebirth without the father. Thus, the constant return to the fetish, which is

the image or substitute of the female phallus, reveals the unconscious wish to exorcise the dangerous consequences of movement, the harmful discoveries that result from exploration.⁶ I will examine these issues below, as I re-visit the question posed by Mulvey of the relationship between the compulsive return to the fixed image of the woman and the diegetic world into which that image is inserted.

II

Europa '51 tells the story of Irene Gerard (played by Bergman), a wealthy American woman living in Rome with her husband George (Alexander Knox), who manages a successful American factory, and her ten year old son, Michel (Sandro Frachino). In the beginning of the film Irene is depicted as a rushed, distracted socialite and career woman who has little time or tolerance for her son's pleas for attention. Suddenly, as Irene and her husband are entertaining guests, Michel throws himself down the long spiral staircase in the center of their home, and from his delirious speech under the anaesthetic, the doctor discovers that this act may have been intentional. As Michel lays in bed resting, Irene begins to question her life, telling her husband that they can no longer go on as they have. Yet moments after she has expressed this, the nurse comes in to tell the couple that Michel has died, apparently of a blood clot that the doctors had not detected. The film goes on to show Irene's initial state of profound shock, and her subsequent emergence out of this state through her search for a completely new meaning to her existence. Through her cousin Andrea (Ettore Giannini), who is a Communist, she develops connections with residents of the poorest Roman neighborhoods, and eventually abandons her family to stay at the bedside of a prostitute dying of tuberculosis. While attending to the woman, Irene inadvertently becomes involved in the getaway of a young bank robber who is the prostitute's neighbor. When Irene later admits to the police that she persuaded the young man to leave the apartment, rather than turning him into the authorities, they send her to

a psychiatric ward in a Christian hospital to be observed. After tests and interviews with the hospital's cold and bureaucratic psychiatrists and priests, Irene is proclaimed insane and committed to the asylum. The film ends with a close-up of her face framed by the bars of a window looking out onto the world outside from her room inside the asylum. Her family has left her and below stands a crowd of the poor whom she has helped – they have proclaimed her a new saint.



• The stark, white apartment blocks in Rome's outlying districts, as depicted in *Europa '51*.

The often noted austerity, even abstractness, of *Europa 51's* urban landscape is a result, on the one hand, of the frequency of interior scenes in the film. In fact, we can say that, with the exception of Rossellini's brilliant short film *Una voce umana* (*A Human Voice*, 1948, which focuses for its entire thirty-five minutes on a character played by the actress Anna Magnani as she speaks to her departed lover on the telephone), this film has by far more interiors than any of Rossellini's previous works, and in this regard marks a departure from both *Stromboli* and *Francis, God's Jester*, both of which were shot almost entirely outside. Yet, even in the scenes depicting Bergman's character, Irene, travelling through the exterior urban landscape – to the newsroom where her cousin Andrea works, to the factory, to the neighborhoods of the poor – the life of the city is portrayed through a series of often spare, disconnected spaces which convey little sense of

a communal presence, or of a linked urban space. The stark cityscape of *Europa '51's* Rome, however, is very different from the oppressive, alienating city of Berlin depicted in Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero*. The latter film, we might say, shows the fragmentation of the urban space to be a direct consequence of the war, as reflected in the young Edmund's tragic submission to the city's destructive force. The represented community – while profoundly marked by loss and defeat – is nevertheless shown to exist within a symbolic order from which Edmund comes to be excluded. In *Europa '51*, on the other hand, we can discern no distinction between Irene's perception of the city and what we will call – for want of a better term – an 'objective' or 'real' city that exists independently of her experience of it. André Bazin's discussion of Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* describes just such a confluence of the objective and subjective as seen in that film's view of the southern Italian landscape. He argues that Naples is in this film "'filtered" by the consciousness of the heroine . . . it is a mental landscape which is both objective like a pure photograph and subjective like pure consciousness.¹⁷

Bazin puts forth the claim that films like *Voyage to Italy* and *Europa '51* – which were thought by many to be 'involutions' of Neorealism – in fact push the aesthetic of Neorealism the furthest precisely in the way that they challenge our understanding of what the 'real' is. Yet because his ideas on this topic were not systematically developed, and can be discerned primarily through his readings of individual films, it is useful at this point to look to both Pier Paolo Pasolini's and Deleuze's discussions of the relationship between the imaginary or subjective and the real in the cinema's depiction of objects and of urban and natural settings. In his important article on the 'cinema of poetry' Pasolini introduces the concept of 'free indirect discourse' into an understanding of film's means of expression. Direct discourse, he argues, corresponds in cinema to the point-of-view shot, in which the filmmaker cedes his 'gaze' to that of a character.

The point-of-view shot, thus, is always signaled as such.⁸ In what Pasolini calls the free indirect subjective, on the other hand, the world is viewed through the 'eyes' of one of the protagonists. The technical or stylistic features of the film, in other words, articulate the character's gaze upon the world; yet this gaze *includes* the character, making a distinction between the subjective and objective indiscernible. It is precisely the constant, indiscernible movement between the objective and subjective, real and imaginary which characterizes for Pasolini the stylistic tendencies of a new modern cinema, a 'cinema of poetry.'⁹ As Deleuze points out, the free indirect subjective is a form in which two kinds of images – of what the character sees subjectively and what the camera sees objectively – contaminate each other. Thus, the vision of the character and of his world, which on the one hand is substituted for the filmmaker's worldview, is in the other direction *itself* transformed and reflected by that of the filmmaker. The story, Deleuze says, 'no longer refers to an ideal of the true which constitutes its veracity Objective and subjective images lose their distinction, but also their identification, in favor of a new circuit where they are wholly replaced, or contaminate each other, or are decomposed and recomposed.' The cinema here goes beyond the subjective and the objective 'towards a pure Form which sets itself up as an autonomous vision of the content.' A representation of an object or setting does not in this case presuppose the independence of its object. The depiction 'replaces its own object, on the one hand it erases or *destroys* its reality which passes into the imaginary, but on the other hand it powerfully brings out all the reality which the imaginary and the mental *create* through speech and vision. The imaginary and the real become indiscernible.'¹⁰ For Pasolini this contamination of the two kinds of images manifests itself in stylistic aberrations, such as, 'insistent pauses' of the framing and of the rhythms of editing, 'obsessive framing (i.e., the sequential juxtaposition of two insignificantly different points of view of the same image), or an

obsessive immobility of the frame.'¹¹ Pasolini's analysis is developed out of a reading of the modern styles of Antonioni, Bertolucci, and Godard, but his theory of the free indirect subjective – particularly as it relates to both the Bazinian and Deleuzian concepts of cinematic realism – will be shown to be in evidence already in Rossellini. When Bazin describes Rossellini's rejection in *Europa '51* of the categories of acting and of dramatic expression in favor of a style in which the feelings of the heroine are expressed through the *mise en scène*, and the framing and movement of characters within the urban landscape, he is not so far from Pasolini's description of a modern cinema whose revelatory power is found not in subject matter, but through extreme technical or stylistic devices. Bazin claims that *Europa '51* has been misunderstood by many critics precisely because of a tendency to try and understand its subject without 'taking into consideration the style that gives it its meaning and its aesthetic value.'¹²

Europa '51 is, as José Luis Guarner has pointed out, in many senses a continuation or working out of the structures and themes of the films Rossellini made immediately prior to it – i.e., *Germany Year Zero*, *Stromboli*, and *Francis, God's Jester*. *Europa '51* makes it clear, Guarner argues, that Rossellini 'is not trying to create an oeuvre composed of several self-contained films, but use a series of film fragments to create a single, composite film.'¹³ This is apparent, for instance, in the recurrence in the director's works of this period of a traumatic moment which radically alters the protagonist's view of the world, and her place within it. In *Stromboli* and *Germany Year Zero*, this traumatic break occurs towards the end of the film, whereas in *Europa '51* it takes place near the beginning. In the former works, the break precipitates the protagonist's aimless journey through a fundamentally altered physical landscape. In other words, the trauma of the final abandonment of ties to the social world is confronted in the protagonist's encounter with a now in some way wholly unfamiliar environment. Peter Brunette addresses this difference in structure in order to argue that in the other films

the existential moment serves to resolve the narrative, whereas *Europa '51*, he claims, is more like *Paisà* in its lack of resolution within the main characters.¹⁴ Brunette, while making an important point about placement, focuses solely on the extent to which such moments of loss or transformation are felt on the level of narrative. Although these crises, which also function as epiphanies, originate in diegetic action (Karin's escape from the village, Edmund's murder of his father, the death/suicide of Irene's son), the force of their effects is felt not so much in the narrative consequences as in what we could call the film's *space-time* or its powers of description.¹⁵

The opening scenes of *Europa '51*, before Michel throws himself down the spiral staircase, are markedly different in style and shot structure – particularly in relation to Bergman's character, Irene – from the rest of the film. This section shows Irene mostly in medium or medium long shots, often framed with other characters. In the opening segment the camera follows Bergman's character through the window of her car on the rain soaked, half-lit street outside, up the stairs, and into her apartment where she rushes around – moving in and out of the frame – preparing for a dinner party that evening. She is here depicted as the busy, distracted socialite and career woman who has little time for her needy son. He trails behind his mother, expressing dissatisfaction at having spent another day alone. In one shot Michel is shown looking at his reflection in Irene's dressing table mirror as she speaks to him from offscreen. In a gesture that echoes Edmund's action in *Germany Year Zero* of pointing a piece of rubble in the shape of a gun to his head minutes before jumping to his death, Michel picks up one of his mother's necklaces and wraps it tightly around his neck as if to strangle himself. These scenes set up a conflict between Irene's distance towards her son (and her consequent failure to recognize the signs of his distress) and her engagement with her husband George and the upper class, largely expatriate community of which they are a part. Yet what is perhaps most striking about the first twenty minutes or so of the film is the extent to which Bergman's star qualities are here

underemphasized, in contrast to *Stromboli*, which immediately anticipates and distinguishes – through shot structure and framing – her presence from that of the other women in the displaced person's camp which opens the film. This has to do with the fact that Bergman's character is in *Europa '51*'s opening section depicted as being fully integrated into a particular community, whereas after Michel's death she becomes progressively more distanced from that community. Her initial sense of belonging within a social world is manifested at the level of the image in a camera style which grants the spectator only limited views of the figure of the star.¹⁶ The first unobscured close-up of her face comes only at the very end of the long opening segment, as she speaks of her son Michel to the gathered dinner party guests, and immediately before the maid runs in and interrupts them with the news of his accident. The child's accident precipitates a dramatic shift not only in the focus of the story, but, more importantly, in the film's technical or stylistic language, in particular, its way of regarding the Bergman figure and her relation to the surrounding environment. The effects of the trauma of Michel's death, which on the level of the story radically alter Irene's relation to the represented life-world of the domestic and urban environment, becomes visually manifest in the camera's insistent, even obsessive identification with her countenance.

The centrality of Bergman's face as a kind of centripetal force through which the film's most deeply felt sentiments are expressed, has been noted in much of the criticism on *Europa '51*. Guarner's position is perhaps the most extreme, in his claim that the film, like *L'amore* (of 1948, starring Anna Magnani) and *Stromboli*, becomes *wholly* identified with the face of the star, and even its structure 'assumes the confused, passionate nature of this image.' An attempt is made, he says, 'to express a far-reaching moral conflict . . . by means of a series of actions, sketched out in a few strokes with a simplification that touches on abstraction.' But ultimately, he continues,

it is this face that gives internal coherence to an otherwise notably discontinuous film, in the same way as the image of Falconetti or Anna Karina fills the gaps in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* or *Vivre sa vie*. When Irene's face, imbued, as it is, with such strength, appears on the screen, the consequent depth of emotion makes us forget the quite short, but irritating explanatory passages.¹⁷

For Guarner, the image of the star is not actualized, or given meaning through its function within the depicted world of the film (as object, or subject, etc.), but rather, *itself* becomes the film's dominant structuring force. Narrative events (referred to as 'explanatory passages') are associated with the discontinuous, the abstract, even the superfluous, and are subordinated to the capacity of the star's face to express, in Bela Balázs' words, 'a whole which is intelligible by itself.'¹⁸ Maurizio Ponzi, furthermore, calls the film 'a documentary of a woman's face,' while Bazin claims that the film aims not to demonstrate, but to show, through the *mise-en-scène* and the 'moving spiritual presence' of its star, whose face bears the 'outlines of a certain property of suffering.'¹⁹ In all these readings the face of the star is equated in some essential way with the 'reality' or 'truth' conveyed by the film; yet little attempt is made to provide a definition of what kind of meaning that image expresses. Bergman's face is, in a sense, understood to 'speak without words,' to require no explanation. And this has contributed to a failure in much of the criticism on *Europa '51* to link a discussion of the central importance of her image to an understanding of the overall visual rhetoric of the film, in particular, its depiction of the postwar urban setting of Rome.

Slavoj Žižek, on the other hand, makes no mention of Bergman's visual presence in *Europa '51*. He locates her power (or star quality) in this film, rather, in her encounter with 'the real,' that is, with the 'ontological void that swallowed her son.' This is an encounter, he argues, that cannot be contained by the ideological constellations presented by the film, in fact, cannot be contained within any kind of

symbolic universe. Her guilt over her son's death, and the actions she takes to assuage it, are attempts to integrate this traumatic encounter into an ideological field, but in fact the film's ending shows us that this guilt was only an escape, an attempt to conceal the trauma of the radical negativity she confronts in her son's suicide. Bergman's absolute separation from the other characters – not only in *Europa '51*, but in all the Rossellini films in which she stars – is for Žižek, finally, an *ethical* stance, one which can only be explained, however, by the consequences of her characters' actions on the level of the narrative. As noted in the discussion of *Stromboli*, his failure to consider the cinematic effects of her image, in fact, to consider any dimension of the formal features of the films she made with Rossellini, leads him to idealize her difference as the embodiment of an absolute 'feminine' freedom which goes against and beyond the 'masculine' world of action, of the performative.²⁰

The retreat of Bergman's character, Irene, from the world of business and social obligation is a central theme in *Europa '51*, and is linked to the cinematic presentation of her figure, that is, her separation on the level of the image from other characters. Michel's accident is the moment of trauma that precipitates Irene's withdrawal from the community of characters of which she had been shown to be a part. And it is at this moment as well that we witness a shift in the camera's relationship to her. The sequence immediately following the accident, which takes place in the hospital and at the Gerards' home as Michel is first treated for and then convalesces from his fall, adheres most closely to the classical style in its presentation of Bergman's character within a clearly defined set of causal and spatial relations. Much of the sequence is dominated by the shot-reverse shot pattern, alternating between medium shots and close-ups of Irene and those – including her husband, her cousin Andrea, and the doctors at the hospital – with whom she discusses her son's fate. In contrast to the opening segment, frequent close-ups of Bergman's face here more strongly establish her identity as spectacle and as star. Yet her isolation

at the level of the image is not – as is typically the case in the classical style – the effect of a desiring male gaze within the narrative. In fact, if any erotic connection is here depicted, it is not between Bergman's character and her husband, or other adult males in the film, but between her and her son, Michel. This is shown most strongly in a long take of almost three minutes of Irene and Michel in close-up. Her head rests on the pillow next to Michel's as she caresses and kisses him, talking of their time together during the war. This is the second time in the film that Irene speaks of the deep bond between her and her son during the war years, while George was away. And clearly Michel longs for a return to that phase of their relationship, when their connection to each other excluded all others. When Irene refers to his father's return at the end of the war, Michel responds that from then on he didn't see her as much. And Irene assures him then that she won't leave him again, ever, that she will 'stay with him always.' Thus, the intense attachment between mother and son has apparently been recuperated as a consequence of Michel's desperate act.

In *Europa '51*, as in *Germany Year Zero* and to some extent in *Rome, Open City* as well, the agency of the child exerts a powerful influence over the visual and narrative economy of the film. This power, however, is not that of the confident male protagonist described by Mulvey, whose actions are shown to directly respond to, modify, and overcome events and situations.²¹ The agency of the child, rather, is indirect, dispersive, born out of a sense of helplessness (in the case of Edmund and Michel) or (as for Romoletto in *Rome Open City*) of exclusion from the centers of power. One consequence of Michel's act of throwing himself down the staircase is the expression of suffering it effects in the face of his mother. The son's 'possession' of her is felt, then, in the camera's obsessive attraction to this countenance, an attraction which dramatically shifts the focus of the film away from her interaction with others to her profound alienation, an alienation which is at this point in the film expressed in the 'property of suffering' outlined by her face and in the

desire she articulates to reject her way of life and go back to the intense, exclusive attachment she had with her son during the war.²² The potentially transgressive attachment between mother and son, as Gaylyn Studlar demonstrates in her analysis of Dietrich's character in von Sternberg's *Blonde Venus*, subverts the dominance of the male head of family and, as we now see in Rossellini's film, his controlling gaze in relation to the image of the woman.²³



In *Europa '51* the image of the woman, i.e., Bergman, as spectacle is often rendered through 'aberrant,' discontinuous (or 'false') cutting and camera movements which threaten the coherence of the fictional space, and manifest what Pasolini would call a kind of neurosis or obsessiveness. This 'insistence' in relation to the face of the star is felt most strongly in the scene immediately following Michel's death. After a brief opening shot of the maids preparing a meal in the kitchen, the scene cuts to the living room of the Gerards' home, as Irene's mother – who we are later told has flown in from America – discusses with George what to do about her daughter's inconsolable grief. The camera then follows George out of the living room and into Irene's room. Up to this point, the space of the apartment and the placement of characters within it have been clearly established by an editing pattern which links actions (e.g., George's opening of and entry through the door of Irene's room) with the depiction of the setting. This spatial continuity is broken, however, after George enters the room and is

shown walking towards the camera as he addresses Irene, who is offscreen. The camera then cuts abruptly to an extreme close-up of her face, illuminated by soft focus lighting, against the background of an all-white pillow. The translucent white of her face on the white of the pillow against which she is resting creates a surface of intense luminosity. The pillow is abstracted from its use as an object within a particular setting and becomes a surface out of which is drawn a source of light. As Claude Ollier has analyzed in relation to von Sternberg's *The Saga of Anataham* (also known by the title, *The Only Woman on Earth*), space is reduced by abstraction, location compressed by artificiality, leading us by elimination of the whole universe to a pure woman's face.²⁴ A medium shot establishing the space of the room, and the placement of George and Irene in relation to each other comes only *after* this extreme close-up. Both the *mise-en-scène* and shot structure, thus, contribute to the separation or abstraction of the image of Irene's grieving face from the story world of the film, that is, its depiction of her grief as coming out of and having consequences within a series of events and set of relations with other characters in the film.

The sequence of shots that follows – depicting the couple's rather stilted efforts at communication – continues this pattern of discord. Fairly conventional shots of the two together or of George speaking to his wife and, briefly, on the telephone alternate with a series of extraordinarily close, abstracted images of the face of the star – abstracted in the sense that these close shots are not contained by conventional editing patterns (such as, the shot-reverse-shot or the point-of view-shot) which would neutralize their singularity. In fact, the editing pattern is itself abnormal or excessive, in its irregularity, its arbitrary, or what Pasolini would call 'insistent,' focus on the face of the star. There is a pretense of following a continuous pattern which would link the length and framing of the shots to the course of the depicted conversation between husband and wife. But the abnormal duration of shots – which, precisely, *does not* correspond to the back

and forth of the dialogue, but seems, rather, to have its own alternative rhythm – and the obsessive immobility of the frame in relation to Bergman's face (in contrast to the varying scale of George's figure and face) upset and ultimately destroy this pretense, creating 'a sort of technical scandal.' These stylistic deviations – of irregular, insistent shot duration, of always staying a *bit* too long on the face of the star – where the camera's focus on her can not be justified by the depicted interaction, and in fact conflicts with it – or finally, of an obsessive immobility of the frame in relation to her figure – are evidence of an alternative rhythm and view of the world which challenges the causally linked time and space of the narrative action.²⁵

The weakness of George's character, in terms of both diegetic action and processes of identification, only further undermines the containment of Bergman's image as spectacle within the conventionalized structure of the family romance. George, who is played by Alexander Knox, is notable for his business-like manner and complete lack of charm. It is difficult to believe, as Diane Gibbons points out, 'that the lovely presence that is Irene could ever have cohabited with her unsympathetic and lifeless husband.'²⁶ As in almost all the Rossellini films starring Bergman (with the exception of the last one they made together, *La Paura* [*Fear*, 1955]), the love relationship between man and woman is subordinate to other, more powerful forces, which are never, however, embodied by a rival male character. If any 'rival' exists in *Europa '51*, it is, as I have said, the 'pull' of the son's suicidal act, the traumatic event that radically transforms her confrontation with the world around her. George is identified with the world of business and social obligation from which his wife is retreating (while he sits next to her on the bed in the above described scene he receives a work related call from London). And in this sense his function is not so different from that of Karin's husband, Antonio, in *Stromboli*, who is defined by his unquestioning allegiance to the traditional community of the island, an allegiance which is shown to be inaccessible to his foreign wife, and against which she rebels.

Bergman's character in *Stromboli*, however, while seldom seen through the eyes of a desiring male protagonist, is much more strongly sexualized than is Irene's. While Karin adamantly resists her husband's efforts to possess her, she exhibits a powerful sensuality, as revealed in relation to him and other male characters (e.g., the lighthouse watchman) and, even more forcefully, in her encounter with the landscape of the island. Irene has a much more physically and emotionally restrained manner (which I will discuss at length below), and is in fact shown openly rejecting the sexual advances, first, of her husband, and then of her cousin, Andrea. In two, consecutive scenes, Irene is depicted in medium close and close shots averting her eyes and turning her face away from the man's expression of desire.

The marginalization of the male protagonist, thus, is felt at many levels. Irene's rejection of all that she lived for before Michel's death clearly includes the social and business world with which George still identifies. Yet, her explicit rejection of Andrea makes clear that by turning to him she is not seeking a replacement for her husband, but only a means of gaining knowledge about the city's poor and working classes. On the level of the image, as I have begun to show, the persistent isolation of Bergman's character is never the effect of a desiring male gaze within the diegesis. And in fact, *mise-en-scène* and patterns of editing in relation to her figure in many instances conflict with and undermine the male protagonist's enunciatory power and his control over the fictional space.

The sequence described above – of Irene in bed as her husband George tries to console her – constitutes in this film what I have discussed in relation to *Stromboli* and *Germany Year Zero* as the moment of epiphany, of a radical break experienced by the protagonist, around which, one could say, the work as a whole is structured.²⁷ In the latter two films this break is shown in a long closing segment which depicts the protagonist's isolation from the community and his or her confrontation with a transformed physical landscape. The transformation of the urban or natural setting that I have described in

the endings of these earlier works is dependent upon the prior depiction – which takes up most of the film – of the protagonist's struggle (and, ultimately, his or her failure) to find a place for herself within the social world that is linked to that space. *Europa '51* reverses this order, placing the moment of separation towards the beginning of the film, and only thereafter depicting the protagonist's encounter with the space of the city. The experience of a radical break, furthermore, is revealed not – as in the former two works – through the character's changed relationship to the exterior environment (the streets of the city, or the island volcano) but rather, in an interior scene marked by its excessive, irregular focus on the suffering face of the female heroine.²⁸ I have highlighted these differences in structure because I believe that an understanding of their significance will help explain the uniqueness of the film's *mise-en-scène*, its bare, almost abstract depiction of the urban environment encountered by Irene.

Although *Europa '51* was the only Rossellini film in the fourteen years between *Rome Open City* and *Il Generale della Rovere* (1959) to have any degree of box-office success in Italy, the reception by the Italian press was largely negative. Many critics focused, precisely, on what they saw to be the 'unreal' or abstract quality of the film's portrayal of the postwar urban milieu. Tommaso Chiaretti, for instance, wrote in *L'Unità* that Rossellini 'puts everything on an ideological plane. The poor neighborhoods aren't actually real for him . . . they are an aspect of the world soul, outside of time, an abstract category.' Massimo Mida commented on the film's failure to 'invent, around the figure of Irene, a functional human chorus; some episodes were convincing in [*Stromboli*], nothing is now.' As in his first film with Bergman, and this time even more egregiously, Mida said,

Abandoning the simple people of the working class, Rossellini does not understand the errors he is making. As he sacrifices working-class characters, he is constrained to take refuge in cerebral elaborations that are alien to him, and that make his cinematographic language labored and prolix, and his

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dialogue contrived . . . the crisis and spiritual drama of the female protagonist of *Europa '51* seem abstract and far from reality.

Others said that Bergman's character lacked 'true and proper social solidarity,' that her absolute isolation from the social world was so extreme as to be implausible ('even Indian santons and hermits are part of human society,' Alberto Moravia asserted), and that the film's message was 'ambiguous, contradictory, confused.'²⁹ These criticisms, like those directed at *Stromboli*, must be considered in the context of the critical debate over the definition of the concept of Neorealism. Both detractors and supporters of *Europa '51* invariably compared its style to that of the director's earlier films, in particular *Rome Open City* and *Paisà*, which for many were still (and, one could say, would always remain) the defining works of the new realist aesthetic. As Bazin demonstrates in his 'Defense of Rossellini,' responses to the film (and other Rossellini works of this period) were often determined by a definition of Neorealism which imposed a priori limitations on its potential evolution by locating the uniqueness of its style more in the director's choice of subject-matter (e.g. the Italian Resistance of *Rome Open City* and *Paisà*) than in his chosen form, i.e., his mise-en-scène and 'his elliptical and at the same time synthesizing presentation of events.'³⁰ Critics were right to note the important differences between *Europa '51*'s depiction of the Roman cityscape and the portrayal of the

Italian setting in the director's immediate postwar works. Yet, what they failed to see adequately was the way in which the space of the city as captured on film could show not only the most immediate, physical destruction of the war, but also the traumatic, broken state of survivors, like Irene and her son Michel, who have no language, no articulate story to express their bereft condition.

In *Europa '51* the depiction of location reflects the broken link between Irene and the world in the aftermath of her son's suicide. The traumatic moment of his death – in which time and movement were suspended (in the sense that an unbridgeable gap was born in that moment between the time before and the time after his suicide) – makes itself felt in the film's depiction of Irene's aimless journey through an empty, indistinct, and disconnected urban landscape. The emptiness invoked here, however, is different from that of the tragic, defeated Berlin of *Germany Year Zero*. This is the familiar, even banal landscape of the periphery of the modern city, which does not have, as Guarner points out, the glamour of Rossellini's previous settings, 'the ruins of Germany, the desolate island of Stromboli, the simple beauty that nature holds for the Franciscans.'³¹ At the same time, it lacks the specific, on some level recognizable images of the city that we saw in *Rome Open City* and *Paisà*. This is not to say that the settings of the latter two works are dominated by easily recognizable or monumental sites. But while *Paisà* in particular may on many levels depict a



• Shots of Rome's outlying neighbourhoods in *Europa '51* show a sparsely populated, impoverished urban landscape, austere 'to the point of abstraction.'

destabilized, heterogeneous national space, both these films nevertheless utilize many familiar and symbolically imbued locations (e.g. the Dome of St. Peters and the Piazza di Spagna in *Rome Open City*; the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the Roman coliseum, and the Po Valley marshes in *Paisà*). Even those settings which do not explicitly refer to an actual place – such as, the various residential districts depicted in *Rome Open City* – are clearly marked to be representative of a particular class and/or region of the city (the tenement in which Pina lives standing for one of the working-class districts on the city's outskirts, Marina's apartment in the Parioli [closer to the center] being more typically middle-class, etc.).³² The only recognizable site in *Europa '51* is that of Michelangelo's statue of Marcus Aurelius outside the Roman capitol.³³ Irene and her cousin Andrea drive there in the sequence immediately following the portrayal of her breakdown after Michel's death. Yet, significantly, we see only a brief, low angle shot of the statue, barely visible in the darkness of the night. The sequences that follow – of Irene at the apartment block of the poor boy for whom she buys medicine, at 'Passerotto's' ('Little Sparrow,' played by Giulietta Masina) shack on the outskirts of the city, at the newsroom where Andrea works, and in the factory where she goes to work for a day – depict a bare and fragmented urban space. The stark, white apartment blocks, for instance, which are clearly located far from the city's center, line sparsely populated streets or empty lots. As the camera pans across this landscape, only a few small clusters of residents are shown on the edges of the residential dwellings: a parent and child walking in the distance, two young boys playing with what looks like an unloaded rifle. The buildings themselves – looming concrete structures, their windows blocked by shutters – reveal no signs of the lives inside. While the rooms inside Passerotto's shack, in a later sequence, are filled with the cheerful activity of the Masina character and her brood of fatherless and orphaned children, whom Irene befriends, the area outside their home is as desolate as that of the apartment houses. No link, furthermore, is established between the



disparate spaces of the city. Bergman's character simply appears in these different locations, and her perspective on them is always that of the outsider.

On the level of the plot, Irene's visits to these places can be explained as a search for meaning (and redemption from the guilt she feels over her son's death) in the lives of the poor. Yet, the depiction of her encounter with them – which is impenetrable, lacking in dramatic action – makes such an explanation profoundly unsatisfying. The film, as Alain Bergala argues, does not portray the heroine coming into consciousness, learning and evolving from her experiences, but rather, shows a kind of compulsiveness on her part, an illusory desire to escape the terrifying condition of stasis or absolute incomprehension with which she was confronted by her son's suicide.³⁴ This is reflected by a pervasive sense of repetition in the film's depiction of her contact with the poor in these scenes. In each encounter, Irene witnesses a scene of working class life – a family

unable to afford the medicine their sick son needs, a mother of six barely getting by, the dehumanizing work of a factory employee, a prostitute dying of tuberculosis. Yet, the different scenes are not linked by a structure of motivated actions and reactions within a determinate set of spatio-temporal coordinates. On the one hand, as I mentioned, we have little sense of spatial continuity between the various places that she visits, of an interconnected urban geography. The framing and *mise-en-scène* within each episode, furthermore, is relatively static and controlled (particularly when compared to the many mobile, exterior shots in previous works like *Stromboli* and *Germany Year Zero*), at times even tableau-like, alternating between close-ups or medium shots of Irene's usually stationary figure and the (often interior) scenes of urban life she encounters. Instead of a build-up of successive events moving towards a climax or resolution, we witness the repetition of a scenario in which Irene confronts ideologies or realities which are then abandoned or rejected.³⁵ This sense of a compulsive return, to a scene of incomprehension or inaction in the protagonist's confrontation with others, is enacted on the level of the image in the camera's insistent focus on Irene's figure. The camera's persistent isolation in particular of her face is most intense in the climactic sequence (immediately after Michel's death) discussed above. However, the subsequent scenes depicting the effects of this traumatic event continue to subordinate the depiction of the urban setting and its inhabitants to the 'insistent pauses' which frame the image of the star.³⁶ The camera's fixation on Bergman's image, in other words, serves to disrupt or disturb the depiction of her character's insertion into a causally linked, integrated fictional space.

III

This brings me back, finally, to my opening discussion of the way in which the fixed image of the woman, and of the star in particular, has been shown to work against or interrupt the depiction in film of a causally motivated, continuous time and space. But her disruptive

presence is, according to Mulvey, consistently masked over or naturalized through conventionalized structures of editing and framing which focus agency around a controlling male figure who mediates relations between the spectator and the image within the linear development of narrative.

In *Europa '51*, however, the compulsive return to the fixed image of the woman is not contained within the kind of conventional (or 'classical') narrative patterns Mulvey and others describe.³⁷ In psychoanalytic terms, the structure of repetition in *Europa '51* might be better understood by the masochistic compulsion to repeat which was described by Freud in his discussion of the *fort/da* game played by his grandson. What was of interest to Freud in his grandson's game was the compulsive desire it showed in the boy to return to the traumatic scene of his mother's disappearance. Although Freud theorizes the *fort/da* game as a means for the child to gain mastery – through play – over the loss of the first object of desire, he goes on to argue that the prolongation of the moment of suffering is linked to the regressive desire for a return to an earlier, inanimate state, a state of death or 'non-being.'

In her analysis of the films Von Sternberg made with Marlene Dietrich, Gaylyn Studlar argues that the structure of repetition they enact

signals the collapse of conventional narrativity in which cause/effect action and unifying codes of spatiotemporal contiguity lead progressively to an endpoint of satisfying, non-tensioned resolution . . . Masochistic repetition charts the regressive movement toward the fantasy goal of a return to the beginning of the womb of rebirth and nothingness. Breaking free of repetition's expected relation to the pleasure principle, the masochistic economy of desire uses compulsive repetition to privilege similarity over difference, inertia over action, stasis over change. Hence the 'frozen' quality of masochistic repetition.³⁸

The Deleuzian model Studlar uses to understand what she calls the masochistic aesthetic of these films is not, for the most part, one I would apply to Rossellini's work. However, the temporal

modes she describes in the Von Sternberg/Dietrich collaborations – of excessive repetition, of ceaseless re-enactment of the same scene, of an impression of stasis or 'frozen' progression – can help us understand similar patterns in relation to the image of the star in *Europa '51*.

In *Germany Year Zero* the fragmentation of the urban space and breakdown of the human community are portrayed in the protagonist, Edmund's wanderings through a city which has become alien to him. This alienation is felt most strongly in the last sequence, after he has killed his father, in his encounter with an emptied, unstable cityscape. In *Europa '51* the 'pathology' of the modern urban landscape comes to be felt in part through framing and editing patterns which block or freeze movement and work against the depiction of an integrated, coherent fictional space. These patterns, as I have shown, are largely an effect of the camera's fixation on the figure of the star, its often obsessive immobility when focussed on her, and its resistance to pulling back or cutting away from her image in order to situate it within a determinate location and set of relations between characters and objects. This resistance to movement and progress, this attraction to a condition of repetition, stasis, even death is felt, moreover, at many levels of the text. The story's climactic event is, after all, the suicidal act of a young boy, in distress over the loss of the close bond he had shared with his mother. Most of the film portrays Irene's attempts to confer meaning upon that traumatic event by 'locating it within an ideological field.'³⁹ But what is shown in the depiction of her various encounters with the ideological constellations which fascinate her and with a social realm far from the wealthy, expatriate community she has rejected is the repetition of a scene of disappointment and failure, failure, that is, to integrate the tragic loss of her son into a world of action and meaningful contact with others.⁴⁰ The abstract, indefinite, even on some level 'unrealistic' depiction of the urban environment and its inhabitants is a function, on the one hand, of a narrative which, rather than moving forward towards the resolution of tension, is constantly looking back,

fixated on a moment of profound trauma in the past. The depiction of the city and its people, in other words, becomes contaminated by the heroine's state of incomprehension, of being stuck in a kind of 'frozen progression.'⁴¹ Yet, it would be inaccurate to say that what we find here is a wholesale substitution of the director's style for the view of the neurotic woman. Rather, we have, in Pasolini's words, 'a mutual contamination of the worldviews of the neurotic woman and of the filmmaker.' These views, which in different ways feed into an economy of repetition, countermovement, stasis are not always 'readily distinguishable, they shade into each other' and become indiscernible. The camera's insistent and aberrant framing of Bergman's character imposes a 'vision' of the world through which the heroine's own view is transformed and reflected, and vice versa.⁴²

Ingrid Bergman's acting style in *Europa '51*, which is restrained and lacking in strongly defined or easily legible expressions and gestures, contributes to the film's static, 'tableau' effect. The means of expression employed by her character in *Stromboli*, which were much more physical, emotional and sensuous, directed outwards (towards the harsh landscape of the island, towards her husband, etc.) give way to a reflecting or 'reflexive' face that registers, often enigmatically, its reaction to the surrounding environment. As with Edmund in *Germany Year Zero* (this being only one of many connecting links with that film), Irene does not so much act upon or try to change the setting as much as she passes through or is subject to it. She is a kind of 'actor-medium,' a passive observer who nevertheless can be said to reflect or in some way bear the imprint of the surrounding environment, although not in any essential or pre-determined sense.⁴³ In contrast to the nonprofessional actor filmed in his native environment, whose presence and gestures – even in the absence of dramatic action – point to a link between himself and 'those elements in which he lives every day,' her relation to the urban and social environment through which she moves is not one of integration or of gaining access to a collectively experienced past.⁴⁴ Yet,

neither, as is the case with Karin in *Stromboli*, is Irene shown to openly resist and act out against the realities she confronts. *Europa '51*'s rejection, as Bazin points out, of the traditional categories of acting and dramatic expression, its extreme stripping down of reality, aims to locate meaning, in some ways even more radically than Rossellini's prior works, purely in the complex, uncertain relationship, uniquely captured by the cinematic lens, between the individual and the environment.⁴⁵

The face of the star becomes, in *Europa '51*, a surface upon which is reflected the damaged fabric of the postwar urban landscape. Her character's desire to return to or prolong the moment of trauma explains her attraction to those segments of society which she believes have the potential to reveal to her the emptiness and isolation that overwhelmed him. Thus, increasingly, Irene is drawn not simply to the poor and those in need of her help, but to individuals who express the same desire for self destruction to which her son succumbed. When Irene leaves her family to attend to the bedside of a prostitute dying of tuberculosis, her expression of suffering, as Brunette points out, seems excessive.⁴⁶ Yet, the film does not, as some have argued, offer an explanation for the excess of her response in terms of an authentic, non-institutional sense of Christian charity. Again, I would emphasize the extent to which her actions are shown to obsessively re-enact the trauma of her son's suicidal act, and her helplessness in preventing it. This is particularly evident in a scene close to the end of the film, which takes place inside the women's psychiatric hospital to which Irene has been committed for a period of observation and testing. After a beautiful young patient is rescued from an attempt to hang herself by a noose tied to the bars of her window, Irene is shown entering the room. The camera then cuts to a low angle close-up view of her face, as she approaches the girl lying on the bed. The following shot shows the two women in close-up, as Irene rests her head on the pillow next to the patient's, caressing the girl's face and comforting her with words that echo almost exactly those spoken by her to Michel right before

his death. She tells her, 'You're not alone. Don't worry. I'm with you. I'm with you. I'll stay with you always.' Both the dialogue and mise-en-scène, thus, explicitly re-enact the crucial scene between Irene and Michel right before his death, the moment in which the possibility of redemption, of restoring the intense attachment between mother and son, still existed. Irene herself, in the explanations she gives to the hospital psychiatrists for her actions, emphasizes the feelings of self-hatred and compulsion that motivate her. When a psychiatrist asks her why she left her husband to go and live with a prostitute, Irene responds, 'It would take too long to explain. Perhaps I don't myself know.' Later, when another doctor questions the motivation behind her actions towards the suicidal woman, Irene responds that her love for others is born out of the hate she feels for herself, 'Hate for all that is and has ever been mine. It's nothing more than that, nothing more.'

These final scenes, all of which take place inside the hospital or just outside on the garden path leading up to its entrance, bring us back into the enclosed, interior spaces of the climactic scenes right after Michel's accident and subsequent death. The image of her character here, as in those earlier scenes depicting her break from family and social ties, is usually presented in close-up against a white background (of the linens on the bed, of the bare hospital walls), thus further isolating her figure and focussing attention on the struggle, or 'property of suffering,' outlined by her face.⁴⁷ Irene's actions in the final sequence, of breaking off all worldly family ties and assuming a saintly attitude of abandonment in her declaration of absolute devotion to the needs of others, is the film's most direct allusion to the legend of St. Francis which was an inspiration for Rossellini's conception of her character.⁴⁸ However, her embrace of the Franciscan spirit of charity cannot be understood on the basis of prior historical or religious interpretations of the saint's message as seen to be embodied (or not) by her figure. As Bazin points out in an analogous argument defending the film's borrowing of circumstances from Simone Weil's life,

One sees the particulars that [Rossellini] has borrowed from [her] life, without in fact being able to recapture the strength of her thinking. But these reservations don't hold up before the whole of a film that one must understand and judge on the basis of its *mise-en-scène*. The author of *Germany Year Zero* (in which a boy also kills himself) is profoundly haunted in a personal way by the horror of their suicide, and it is around his heroine's authentic spiritual experience of such a suicide that the film is organized.⁴⁹

Michel's death makes itself felt as an absent structuring force, a dispersive power that blocks or freezes movement and breaks down the connecting links and legibility of the fictional space. Irene, as the grieving mother whose relationship to the city and its people is determined by her fixation on that moment in the past, becomes the figure through whom the child's loss and helplessness is expressed. She re-enacts and bears the burden of the afflictions – of which Michel's suicidal act is an expression – of the postwar survivor. It is in this sense that we must see the film, as Guarnier has argued, as a kind of sum and extension of the works Rossellini made right before it: 'the hideous spiritual effects of war on a child from *Germany Year Zero*, the grim isolation of a woman in a universe that does not respond to her demands from *Stromboli* and the attainment of perfect charity from *Francis, God's Jester*.'⁵⁰ Rossellini himself saw the film (which was among his favorite works) along these lines. After *Germany Year Zero* and *Stromboli*, he said in a 1954 interview, '*Europa '51* depicts man's retreat into himself. It came out seeming more anguished, less constructive [than the former two works] . . . In contrast to Karin, who solves everything for herself, Irene is in my opinion a martyr.'⁵¹ As in the case of Edmund in *Germany Year Zero*, Irene's withdrawal from the world is realized, in some sense paradoxically, in the film's portrayal of her encounter with it. The space of the city, disclosed in the protagonist's aimless journey through it, comes to bear the traces of her 'internal' struggle.

In *Europa '51* the sign of the star is integral to the depiction of the neurotic, middle-class

heroine through whom the director's modernist vision of the world is viewed. It is usually Antonioni, in his famous works with Monica Vitti, who is perceived to have been the first to use the isolated woman's figure as a means of reflecting the fragmented, emptied, unstable landscapes of modernity. The fact that a connecting link between the Rossellini/Bergman films and Antonioni is so seldom identified might have something to do with the seeming contradiction between the sign of the star as fetish and the stylistic tendencies, described above, associated with cinematic modernism. Part of what I have attempted in my reading of *Europa '51* is to show how certain structures of seeing that are associated with the woman as spectacle or star are in Rossellini's film no longer restricted to her image, but in fact bleed into or contaminate the depiction of the world she inhabits. The immobilizing or transfixing aspects of the woman's image, which in Hollywood tend to be integrated into a narrative economy ordered by sexual difference, in Rossellini's work become part of the character's and the camera's vision of the world.

IV

Let us, in conclusion, come back to Bazin's 'Defense of Rossellini' in which, responding to Guido Aristarco's hostile review of *Europa '51*, the author addresses precisely this issue, of the way in which, particularly in the director's later works, the depicted landscape becomes an imprint, 'a sort of luminous cast' of the ontological reality of the subject's consciousness or point of view. In answer to Aristarco and other critics who complained that *Europa '51* and *Voyage to Italy* portrayed a fragmented, incomplete world by drawing attention away from the Italian setting and its people and onto the displaced Hollywood star, Bazin argued by way of example that the latter film presents an image of Naples that is 'filtered' by the protagonist's state of mind:

If the landscape is bare and confined, it is because the consciousness of this ordinary upper-middle-

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class woman is itself of a rare spiritual poverty. The Naples of the film is not, however, fake (which on the other hand a three-hour documentary could be); it is a mental landscape which is both objective like a pure photograph and subjective like pure consciousness. It is clear that Rossellini's attitude towards his characters and their geographical and social environment is a second-degree reflection of that of his heroine when faced with Naples.⁵²

In *Europa '51* relations between the disparate spaces of the city are established not through a structure of motivated, continuous action, nor (as in *Rome Open City* and to some extent *Paisà*) by a network of connections between its inhabitants. Our only link to these disconnected places is the attraction they hold for Irene, whose view of them is 'contaminated' by her state of incomprehension and compulsive fixation on the trauma of the past. Her character's fragmentary and 'obsessive' vision of the urban landscape, furthermore, is enhanced and reflected by the immobilizing aspect of her image as spectacle, which is often rendered through insistent or aberrant framing and editing patterns. Thus, we might say that the view of the director in relation to the female star shades into and overlays the heroine's own 'distorted' view of the world, creating a kind of subjective/objective view of the broken fabric of the postwar urban setting.

Notes

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London, Athlone, 1986), p. 45. André Bazin describes the film as 'the very opposite of a realistic one 'drawn from life': it is the equivalent of austere and terse writing, which is so stripped of ornament that it sometimes verges on the ascetic.' (*Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, edited by Bert Cardullo, and translated by Alain Piette and Cardullo (London, Routledge, 1997), p. 139).
- 2 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986) and Mary Ann Doane, 'Gilda: Epistemology as Striptease' (in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York, Routledge, 1991), p. 101.
- 3 See, for example, Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 249.
- 4 Hansen, p. 249.
- 5 Lea Jacobs and Richard De Cordova have argued this in their, 'Spectacle and Narrative Theory,' *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Fall, 1992), 293–308.
- 6 Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* (New York, George Braziller, 1971), pp. 31, 87, 110, and throughout.
- 7 André Bazin, 'Defense of Rossellini' (1955, an open letter to Guido Artistarco printed in *Cinema Nuovo*), translated by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and reprinted in *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London, British Film Institute, 2000), p. 159, translation modified.
- 8 This is not to say that there is a uniform means of constructing point-of-view shots in film, but merely that they in some way signal that the view of an object or setting corresponds to a particular character's perspective, as opposed to the 'omniscient' view of the camera or author/filmmaker.
- 9 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'The "Cinema of Poetry,"' in *Heretical Empiricism*, translated by Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 175–181.
- 10 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London, Athlone, 1986), p. 74, and *Cinema 2*, pp. 149 and 7.
- 11 Pasolini, pp. 178–181.
- 12 Bazin, *Bazin At Work*, p. 137.
- 13 José Luis Guarnar, *Roberto Rossellini*, translated by Elisabeth Cameron (New York, Praeger, 1970), p. 53.
- 14 Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 142.
- 15 Bazin, as discussed above, focuses on the significance of *Europa '51*'s mise-en-scène in order to get at the film's particular form of realism. I, borrowing from Deleuze, prefer to use a term which refers not only to the organization of objects and characters within shots, but also to the way in which spatial organization is born out of relations between shots.
- 16 Brunette, while not referring exclusively to Bergman's presentation, does note that the constant dollies in the beginning of the film have the effect of blocking identification with the purposely two dimensional characters (p. 142).
- 17 Guarnar, pp. 51–52.
- 18 Béla Balázs, *Theory of Film* (1952), translated by Edith Bone (New York, The Arno Press, 1972), p. 60.
- 19 Maurizio Ponzi, 'Due o tre cose su Roberto Rossellini,' *Cinema e film*, 1: 2 (Spring 1967), 25, and *Bazin At Work*, p. 138.

- 20 Slavoj Žižek, 'Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man,' *October*, 54 (Fall 1990), 21, 29, 32. In her article 'Veiling Over Desire: Close-ups of the Woman' in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York, Routledge, 1991), pp. 44–75, Mary Ann Doane looks at how certain philosophical and psychoanalytic texts – such as of Nietzsche, Derrida, and Lacan – construct woman as the site of the 'beyond' – the limit of theory, the abyss, truth/untruth, the annihilation of the subject. Her argument can be applied to Žižek's characterization of Bergman's difference as well. She says that we need to question 'the desire of the philosopher or psychoanalyst who appeals to the woman as a form of theoretical proof – the desire to reveal her status as support, substrate of truth/untruth or representation, and simultaneously to maintain her 'operation,' because she can be so representative of so many things even if she doesn't understand them herself. The question is why the woman must always carry the burden of philosophical demonstration, why she must be the one to figure truth, dissimulation, *jouissance*, untruth, the abyss, etc.' Doane looks at the ontological status of woman in these writers' work through their respective mappings onto sexual difference of the dichotomy between the visible as guarantee and the visible as destabilized, between truth and appearance. In such configurations, she claims, the woman is always idealized, either as undecidability or *jouissance*, inhabiting a space outside the male philosopher's theory, or "beyond," interestingly, the very limit of what is theorizable.' She considers these issues in part through an examination of the fascination with the female face in close-up (particularly the veiled face) in the cinema. 'At moments it almost seems,' Doane says, 'as though all the fetishism of the cinema were condensed onto the image of the face, the female face in particular.' She suggests that we might begin to understand the philosophical and psychoanalytical envy of the woman through understanding her status as 'the object of desire, which reflects the lack that haunts theory.' And this desire, she concludes, 'always only seems more visible in the cinema' (p. 47, pp. 74–75).
- 21 Also see Deleuze on the 'action-image,' in which the 'sensory-motor link' is very strong. Forceful character action, in other words, clearly motivates the rhythm of shot structure and framing, and thus the linking of action and reaction and the logical relations of cause and effect (*Cinema 2*, p. 2). And Rodowick, 74.
- 22 Bazin says that the drama of Bergman's performance in this film 'lies far beyond any psychological nomenclature. Her face only outlines a certain property of suffering' (*Bazin At Work*, p. 139). This quality of suffering was not foreign to Bergman's Hollywood image, as evidenced, for instance, in *Gaslight*, *Under Capricorn*, *Notorious*, and *Joan of Arc*.
- 23 Studlar argues that the eroticized relationship of mother and child contributes to *Blonde Venus*'s 'subversion of its conventional 'woman's film' aspects. Helen's oral aggressiveness toward Johnny [her son] is contrasted with her sexual passivity toward both husband and lover.' 'The eroticization of motherhood,' she goes on to argue, 'is not the film's unconscious demonstration of the 'incompatibility . . . of female sexuality and mothering,' as E. Ann Kaplan writes . . . , but a logical result of the dynamics of the masochistic alliance and its aesthetic expression,' which shatters the expected progress toward the idealized, stable patriarchal family structure (*In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 76 and 112–13).
- 24 Cited in Deleuze (*Cinema 1*, p. 93), who refers here as well to Von Sternberg's great practical knowledge of linens, tulles, muslins and laces, from which he drew – in his images of Dietrich – 'all the resources of a white on white within which the face reflects the light.'
- 25 Pasolini, in his discussion of Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution*, argues that the dominant stylistic system of the film, which serves a fairly conventional realism, is charged during the abnormal duration of a shot or an editing rhythm until it explodes in a sort of technical scandal. 'This insistence on particulars,' he continues, 'especially on certain details of the digressions, is a deviation in relation to the method of the film: it is the temptation to make another film. It is, in short, the presence of the author, who transcends his film in an abnormal freedom and who constantly threatens to abandon it' (p. 180). While my reading of the above described sequence is strongly influenced by Pasolini's important insights into such 'aberrant' stylistic expressions, I would hesitate to locate the origins of these aberrations so decisively – as he seems to do – in the latent inspiration or freedom of the director.
- 26 Diane Gibbons, *Rereading Rossellini: Cinematic Realism, Neo-Realism, and Realist Style* (New York University, PhD Dissertation, 1983), p. 307.
- 27 In response to Mario Verdone's question concerning the structure of his films from this period, Rossellini answered, '[E]very film I make interests me for a particular scene, perhaps for a finale I already have in mind. In every film I see on the one hand the narrative episodes such as the first part of *Germany Year Zero*, or the scene from *Europa '51* that you just saw me shooting – and on the other the event. My sole concern is to reach that event. In the other narrative episodes I feel myself hesitating, alienated,

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- absent *Germany Year Zero*, to tell the truth, was conceived specifically for the scene with the child wandering on his own through the ruins. The whole of the preceding part held no interest at all for me' ('A Discussion of Neo-Realism: Rossellini Interviewed by Mario Verdone,' in *My Method*, ed. Adriano Aprà [New York, Marsilio, 1995], p. 38).
- 28 Bergman's character in *Stromboli*, as I have shown elsewhere, is also granted this kind of insistent framing and editing rhythm. However, in the film's final sequence in particular, it is her encounter with the mountain that becomes the means by which the potentiality of her visual presence is explored.
- 29 'Rossellini abbandonando la gente semplice del popolo, non comprendo o non può più comprendere, gli errori che commette. Sacrificando i personaggi popolari è costretto a rifugiarsi in andagini cerebrali che gli sono estranee, che rendono il suo linguaggio cinematografico ansante, prolisso, con un dialogo programmatico, insisto la crisi, il dramma spirituale della protagonista di *Europa '51* appaiono stratti e lontani dalla realtà.' All citations, except for those from Mida and Aristarco, come from Tag Gallagher's thorough and insightful synthesis of the Italian reception of the film (in *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini: His Life and Films* (New York, Da Capo Press, 1998), pp. 386–389. Aristarco's quote comes from his review in *Cinema Nuovo* (December 15, 1952) reprinted in *Antologia di Cinema Nuovo 1952–1958: Dalla Critica Cinematografica alla Dialettica Culturale*, ed. Aristarco (Florence, Guarnaldi, 1975), p. 684. And Mida, *Roberto Rossellini* (Parma, Guanda, 1961), p. 68. It is worth noting that I have quoted from the second edition of Mida's text, the first one having come out in 1953, about one year after *Europa '51*'s release.
- 30 Bazin, 'Defense of Rossellini,' p. 156.
- 31 Guarner, p. 52.
- 32 David Forgacs, *Rome Open City* (London, British Film Institute, 2000), pp. 36–44.
- 33 Brunette identifies the statue, p. 142.
- 34 Bergala, 'Celle Par Qui Le Scandale Arrive,' *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 356 (February 1984), 10. A number of authors, including Bazin, have discussed the problems in judging this film on the basis of its content or 'ideas.' He says, in regard to the details that Rossellini borrows from Simone Weil's life, that one sees them, 'without in fact being able to recapture the strength of her thinking. But these reservations don't hold up before the whole of a film that one must understand and judge on the basis of its *mise en scène*' (*Bazin At Work*, p. 138). Guarner, similarly, asserts that '*Europa '51* is Rossellini's most paradoxical work; one has to look for its significance in its images rather than in its ideas' (p. 52). In this sense, we might compare *Europa '51* to *Germany Year Zero*, which deliberately refuses, in Bazin's words, to provide a direct link between Edmund's act of killing his father and the morally corrupt Nazi ideology espoused by the boy's former schoolmaster (*Bazin at Work*, p. 123). In both films, significance lies not so much in the acts themselves (or, their effects on the level of the plot) as in the way in which those actions come to be felt in the protagonist's relationship to the depicted urban milieu.
- 35 Many critics have viewed this structure of repetition as the demonstration of an argument about the ideologies of the Italian postwar era (Catholicism, capitalism, communism, etc.). Irene's inability to adapt to society and, conversely, society's failure to understand the 'universal value' of her search for truth shows, they claim, the limitations of the ideological and theological discourses of the time. See, for instance, Maurizio Ponzi, who says that, 'Irene's drama is simple and can be summed up in one sentence: in Europe during the 1950s it is not possible to live without an ideology . . . *Europa '51* is the latest film in a society in which everyone is sure to have found the truth (p. 211, my translation). Gianni Rondolino, in an analogous argument, states that, 'It is clear that the themes of incomprehension, 'madness' and solitude that were already sketched in *Stromboli* have once more become the center of the drama [in *Europa '51*]. And these are themes that are closely tied, on the one hand, to debates about women and their place in contemporary society, and, on the other, to debates on the individual's struggle with the world in a search for universal values.' (Rondolino, *Roberto Rossellini* (Turin, Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1989), p. 194. My translation). By reading the film in this way – as a straightforward political statement – one fails, in my view, to explain how stasis and repetition exist not only at the level of plot events, but in fact are central features of the film's formal structure.
- 36 Most critics, as I noted, discuss the isolation of Bergman's character in *Europa '51* primarily in terms of story events rather than cinematic style. Those who comment on the uniqueness of her presentation tend to attribute it to what is ambiguously referred to as her moving 'presence' and/or the authentic nature of her performance in contrast with that of the other, secondary actors. Lo Duca, for instance, criticizes the film harshly, but concludes that it is made bearable only when the viewer allows himself to be 'hypnotized by the 'presence' of Ingrid Bergman, which is far from impossible If the film had been nothing but a monologue for her, only for her, we would have believed in it. It may even be that the actors we found so bad actually aren't, but only seem like mere larva next to Ingrid' (*Cahiers du Cinéma* 16, October 1952, p. 14, cited in Gallagher, p. 388).

- 37 Mulvey, pp. 203, 205. Also see Doane, 'Gilda: Epistemology as Striptease,' p. 101 and Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 214.
- 38 Studlar, pp. 123–24.
- 39 Žizek, p. 32.
- 40 Bergala, 'Celle Par Qui Le Scandale Arrive,' pp. 10–12.
- 41 In his description of the structure of the masochistic narrative, Deleuze states that 'The same scenes are re-enacted at various levels in a sort of frozen progression' (*Masochism*, p. 31). Bergala, referring to the ideological discourses and realities Bergman's character confronts, says that, 'Rossellini's focus is not to judge men or the ideologies that Irene will encounter in her path but to confront these with *the reality such as he films it* and to let us see, simply, how his character will react in the course of this traversal, becoming more and more enigmatic for those around her and more and more refractory to the expected codes of the spectators Each time Irene is confronted with a new reality, this reality turns out never to conform to her expectations. Her belief in salvation and the liberation of the poor people through work is physically contradicted by her work day in the factory. She will discover as well that the generosity of the people (working class) doesn't protect them from being biased (the disdain and exclusion of the prostitute) or from selfishness and vanity' ('Celle Par Qui Le Scandale Arrive,' p. 11, my translation).
- 42 Pasolini, p. 180 and Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 74.
- 43 In the modern cinema, Deleuze argues, a new type of actor is needed, 'not simply the non-professional actors that neo-realism had revived at the beginning, but what might be called professional non-actors, or, better, 'actor-mediums,' capable of seeing and showing rather than acting . . . ' (*Cinema 2*, p. 20).
- 44 Giuseppe De Santis and others argued that the depiction of the real Italy was dependent on the integration of cinematic characters with their natural and social environment. How can we understand man, he asks, 'if he were to be separated from those elements in which he lives every day, and with which he is in constant communication? These elements are . . . the walls of his house, which must show the marks of his hands, his taste, his nature, and so on, . . . the streets of his town, in which he meets other men (such meetings must not be occasional, but must be underscored by the special character that such an act carries with it) . . . his timid profession and his identification with the nature which surrounds him' ('Towards an Italian Landscape' (1941) translated and reprinted in David Overbey, *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neo-Realism* (Connecticut, Archon Books, 1979), pp. 125–26).
- 45 Bazin, 'Defense of Rossellini,' p. 160 and 'Europa '51' (in *Bazin At Work*), p. 138. Also see his 'Theater and Cinema, Part Two' in *What Is Cinema? Vol. II*, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971), pp. 95–104, esp. 102, 106.
- 46 Brunette, p. 145.
- 47 Bazin, *Bazin At Work*, p. 139.
- 48 Žizek, p. 29.
- 49 *Bazin At Work*, p. 138. In this review he defends the film against those Italian critics who accused Rossellini of indulging in a 'confused, even reactionary political ideology.' It is quite possible that Bazin's discussion of Rossellini's use of details from Weil's life is in part a response to Alberto Moravia's claim, in his review of the film for *L'Europeo*, that the director had stripped Weil's life work and philosophy of its most valid justification, that is, its communion with great European cultural traditions. 'Weil can easily be defended intellectually,' he argued, 'but reduced to emotions, as here, [she] becomes eccentric, self-destructive, and above all isolated in a way Weil never knew, because Weil was the expression of a whole society, that of Europe's highest culture This is the film's conceptual weakness: Irene's purely sentimental position, her real isolation, which cannot exist in reality' (cited in Gallagher, pp. 388–89).
- 50 Guarner, pp. 52–53.
- 51 Cited in Gallagher, pp. 388–89.
- 52 Bazin, 'Defense of Rossellini'.