

AN EYE FOR THE CITY



THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO ART MUSEUM

EDITED BY ANTONELLA RUSSO

AN EYE FOR THE CITY

ITALIAN PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE IMAGE OF THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

FOTOGRAFIA ITALIANA E IMMAGINE DELLA CITTÀ CONTEMPORANEA

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An Eye for the City. Italian Photography and the Image of the Contemporary City provides a great opportunity not only for exchanging with the North-American public ideas and knowledge on contemporary photography, architecture and urban studies but also for meditating on the quality of today's city-living. For this exhibition concerns photographs which refer to and analyze our daily living, our way of seeing and taking a position in the place we choose to live in, endowing a public dimension to our city-living. This is also the first Italian group exhibition to be shown in an Art Museum in the United States and thus it is an important event welcomed by those lovers of the Italian visual arts who also wish to learn about our recent photography. It is certainly a long wished-for moment by all the participating photographers in this exhibition many of whom learnt photography by looking at American photography and studying images by Walker Evans, Paul Strand, Lee Friedlander, Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore and many others. Photographers included in this exhibition perceived this show as a not-to-be missed opportunity for bringing to the attention of scholars, students and the general public their own contribution to the history of contemporary photography.

The necessity to organize an exhibition on a brief history of photography related to Italian architecture and urban studies became urgent during the last two years which have seen a flourishing of biennials and exhibitions on Italian photography in private galleries in the United States. Probably helpful initiatives, such shows have consistently omitted to make reference to Italian photographic culture, negating any reference to the history of our photography.

I owe to Peter Walch, a passionate scholar and patient weaver of ideas, the opportunity to organize this first exhibition on the history of Italian contemporary photography. As Director of the University of New Mexico Art Museum, Walch encouraged me to organize this exhibition, not only assisting me with his refined sensibility but also smoothing every single phase of its preparation. I will always be grateful to him as a person and talented organizer who I deeply esteem.

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Antonella Russo

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A Self, a City. Representation and Identity in The Contemporary Italian City

Antonella Russo

THE SHAPE OF THE CITY

A short film by Pier Paolo Pasolini, containing an appeal urging UNESCO to safeguard the architecture of historical cities, has once more become pressingly topical in recent years. Broadcast on Italian television in 1974, this short, entitled *Io e... Pasolini e la forma della città*,¹ explained how to look cinema/photographically at city skylines and why it was important to conserve them. In order to represent the skylines and structures of ancient cities like Orta or Sana'a in Yemen, Pasolini showed that it was necessary to capture the development of their architectural forms and the balance with their natural settings. This harmony between form and surrounding landscape, which characterizes ancient cities, today appears decidedly compromised. Pasolini denounced the consequences of the irreparable loss of ancient city skylines due to the thoughtless introduction of mediocre modern buildings, the result of property speculation or reckless choices, which cause a "disturbance in city shape," deeply offending and wounding the entire cultural heritage.

This loss of city shape is a problem that involves all of us, not only the aesthetes. It is a central issue in today's global society, in democratic countries as in communist ones, in the first world and, even more so, in the third world. Pasolini, however, specified that safeguarding historical city shapes was of the greatest urgency in Italy, since here works of art and architecture form a whole with the natural landscape. Destroying an ancient city skyline thus means that part of the natural landscape disappears.

In its brief synthesis, this film is a valuable witness to Italy's most committed poet's farsighted vision. Already in the seventies, he sensed and foresaw the irreparable damage that homologation would cause to our cultural, architectural and natural heritage. Moreover, this film was also Pasolini's moral testament, left to the Italian public one year before his death: an invitation to 'look at' our cities from a historical point of view.

By taking up this last appeal of his, I intend to identify possible, historically different, models of city images and their subjects that belong to the culture of modern and contemporary photography, and to reflect on the contribution of the Italian artists in this exhibition.

A SELF IN THE (MODERN) CITY

With the rise of modernism, the image of the city slowly started to lose its outlines,

as though it was slowly going out of focus. In modern cities, the urban world would be seen as never before (and, moreover, would never be seen again). Numerous town-planners, philosophers, historians, art historians and photography historians agree that the modern city took shape in Paris during the Second Empire. Rebuilding of the French capital began after 1848 with expansion to the railways and the first demolitions of the districts around the *Hôtel de Ville* and the *Louvre* by Jean-Jacques Berger. Commissioned by Napoleon III, it was in fact carried out by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who also completed a 're-styling' plan of the city. As is known, the 'Haussmannizing' of Paris had more than one consequence. In the first place, it meant the demolition of the medieval districts of Paris and the *Ile de la Cité*, which, with the exception of *Notre-Dame* and the *Sainte Chapelle*, were entirely razed to the ground. Rebuilding also involved 're-settling' a large chunk of the population (workers and craftsmen), moving them from the center of the city to the peripheral areas of *La Villette* and the hill of *Belleville*. Between 1849 and 1870 Paris was a building site. Every day old and even new buildings were pulled down and newer ones constructed; roads were widened and old routes wiped out. The city was constantly changing: as Baudelaire so aptly remarked, "it is changing faster than the human heart."²

In this period of the massive renovation of Paris, photographic campaigns were begun that testified to these great modern urban transformations. From 1849, artists and photographers were involved in portraying monuments and documenting the urban reconstruction of Paris.³ Some of the most interesting images were those by Henri Le Secq and Charles Marville, which were published in several albums entitled *Paris photographique* (1851-55). These photographs were not only a way of 'fixing' the image of the city, made transient and uncertain by its very reconstruction, but, in some cases, prefigured the future developments of modern Parisian town-planning. This is the case of Charles Marville's photographs, for example. Marville specialized in photographing the old streets to be demolished. He positioned his camera along the axis of the future street and, thanks to his choice of placing it almost at ground level, succeeded in capturing everything destined for demolition.⁴ These new routes seemed to have already internalized those "views in perspective down long street-vistas,"⁵ as Benjamin defined Haussmann's town-planning ideal, literally foreseeing future developments in the city's urban fabric.

Despite their document-image approach, something unsettling appears to emanate from these photographs that were to 'fix' the image of the city before demolition began. It is a sort of anxious impermanence and uncertainty that seems to re-emerge on the surfaces of the images in the form of 'photographic mistakes'. Blurs



CHARLES MARVILLE - *Tour Eiffel behind Saint-Germain*, Paris, c. 1865, Albumen Print, Musée des Monuments Français, Paris.



HENRI LE SECQ - *House in rue Tison*, Paris, 1852, Albumen Print, Collection du Musée des Monuments Français, Paris.

and vapors incapable of recording movement took the place of passers-by. This haze, these uncertainties of shape, are not dissimilar from the lines and fragmented brushstrokes of Manet's, Monet's and other Impressionists' painting: they reproduce the same anxious precariousness and uncertainty of living in modern Paris.⁹ This 'Haussmannizing' caused the shape of pre-modern Paris to be lost and disseminated a feeling of extraneous detachment from their city amongst Parisians.⁷ A feeling of anguished uncertainty about their future collocation and economic and social future was added to this. Walter Benjamin, who has written more than any other philosopher on the origins of modernist Paris, identified the *flâneur* as the new subject of Haussmann's city, who stood on the thresholds of this city and the bourgeoisie, precariously balancing in both. Representative of the petit bourgeois intelligentsia and bohemian artists, the *flâneur* perceived the uncertainty of his own economic position and social collocation.⁸ In this new Paris he walked around promoting his own image, already seeking future sponsors and, above all, tried to affirm his own vision of the city.

THE FLÂNEUR: A DIVINER OF THE CITY'S IMAGE

The *flâneur* represented above all a way of looking at the great city and capturing images as they changed. Terrified by the reconstruction that had deleted the *faubourgs* of Paris, he was fascinated by the new scenes that unrolled before his eyes: the great universal exhibitions, the cafés, the department stores that had started multiplying in the city and, above all, the new, grandiose framework provided by the boulevards. He was a first-row spectator in the modernity show who reflected while wandering about the city center, letting himself be guided by the crowd. As Benjamin pointed out: "The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city appeared as a phantasmagoria to the *flâneur*. In this, the city was now a landscape, now a room."⁹

An expert of images, the *flâneur* knew how to observe and capture the infinite continuously multiplying and changing city shapes. During his city wanderings, he took in visual fragments, turning his stroll into a prolonged, intense visual experience. A true protagonist and witness of modern city living, "a kaleidoscope with a conscience", the *flâneur* incarnated a photographic mode of operating, perceiving the whole city as a visual universe, moving like a water diviner to go straight to the images in the midst of urban reality. As Benjamin stressed, the *flâneur* seeks images wherever they are.¹⁰ He is a "great expert of thresholds; he knows the minimum passageways separating the city from the plains, one part of

the city from another: building sites, bridges, metropolitan railway flyovers and squares are all considered and honored."¹¹

Author of modern city images, the *flâneur* belonged to French literature and, consequently, to the culture that also gave life to photography. So, it is not surprising, as Benjamin emphasized, that the *flâneur* did not originate in Rome, for example, because "the great reminiscences, the historical thrills, are nothing for the genuine *flâneur*, who willingly leaves them to the traveler."¹²

TOWARDS AN IMAGE OF THE MODERN ITALIAN CITY

Rome was never the capital of modernism but, like other major Italian cities – Milan, Turin, Naples, Florence – it was *also* a modern city. For the main Italian cities are above all historical cities, founded either on ancient monumental complexes or near archaeological sites, churches or palaces, and in most cases they still live on the old reputations of their great artists and architects. These cities only have sections of modernism, buildings and districts built in various phases or in segments, while mostly preserving and still living on the architectural structures of the pre-modern city.

If Paris entered the twentieth century already during the mid-nineteenth century, establishing the most emulated city-planning model of the modern period, Italy, at the time of Haussmann's rebuilding, was still the destination for the Grand Tour, a crossroads of Classical and Renaissance cultures. In the same way, photographs of modern Italian cities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show them mainly as archaeological sites and monumental complexes.

The largest Italian photographic business, the Alinari Brothers, which was founded in Florence during the second half of the nineteenth century, produced and disseminated photographs of Italian cities for educated tourists throughout the world. They proposed our major cities as places of art history, portraying them from the same angle and with the same perspectives, light contrasts and other formal conventions re-appropriated from Piranesi's engravings, the earliest pre-photographic images of Italian cities available.¹³

Nevertheless Italy, too, contributed towards the vision of an entirely modern city. It is necessary to wait, though, until the beginning of the twentieth century before we can find a representation of metropolises having the configuration of twenty-first-century capital. This is because, as rightly pointed out by Peter Walch in his foreword, the Italian modernist city was imagined and thus transposed exclusively into images and experienced only as the project of architects, such as Antonio



VITTORIO DE SICA - *Bicycle Thief*, 1948, Black and White, 90'.

Sant'Elia, or the avant-garde, visionary Futurists, such as Umberto Boccioni, who drew and painted it. The Futurists conceived a modern metropolis, which was then built elsewhere, which would circulate like the images of Chicago and New York, already capitals of future metropolises at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead, Italy had to wait until the end of the Second World War before seeing the birth of an image of a completely modern Italian city rising as an agglomerate of buildings on the extreme boundaries of the historical city, in the suburban *terrain vague*. The image of a large city, which was not the result of a rebuilding project like Haussmann's, started taking shape in the suburbs of Rome, Milan and later Turin, as a consequence of a different sort of cataclysm: reconstruction after the Second World War.

In Italy, the modern city rose against a background of shanty towns and dirt roads; it was a construction site, a pre-city surrounded by building land, criss-crossed by tram lines which unloaded thousands of workers and builders every day. This image of modern Italian cities had little in common with painting, being closer to the crude black and white documentary sequences of neo-realist films (*Bicycle Thief* (1948) or *Miracle in Milan* (1951), for example), where the still half-destroyed urban background announces the modern city, together with its promise of a possible everyday life that would finally go beyond mere survival.

With the arrival of projects for modern Italian cities the most interesting Italian photography came into being, together with a different way of seeking images and of identifying them; a mode that had little in common with the *flâneur's* visual strategy.¹⁴ Indeed, I believe one can say that in this country, from the second post-war period onwards, a new way of identifying images of cities was experimented with, together with the search for a place to look at the urban universe from. In other words, photography proceeded by appropriating image-documents, with a vocation for the crude recording of visual data that was a far cry from the *flâneur's* nostalgic-romantic dimension.

In Italy in these years, there was an attempt to look at the city without the *flâneur's* heroic, *petit bourgeois* dimension, which brought us to a more earthly, less literary, condition, an everyday existence well described in Bernardo Secchi's essay. The vision of Italian cities during these reconstruction years was close to the spaces and buildings frequented by ordinary citizens, men and women who were seeking a home, a job and a future in the urban space. This gaze of anonymous citizens, of ordinary men and women, with their hopes and their expectations, was affirmed in Italian photography of the second post-war period.

TRAVELING IN THE SUBURBS

By the late forties, the suburbs were the designated location of Italian photography, represented as a threshold between the city and elsewhere. A liminal place, they seem the setting for the primary scene. This was where the Italian metropolises rose, from the huge reconstruction sites after the devastation of the Second World War, where the unemployed found jobs, the evacuees promises of homes and the prostitutes their customers. This was where thousands of workers flocked every day to build the future low-income housing estates and others came to seek temporary shelters. For many thousands of people in this post-war period, the Italian suburbs represented a new urban horizon, the promise of a home and a possible future.

Still during the mid-fifties, the suburbs seemed for many Italian home-seekers to be their final destination, a horizon opening up beyond the historical city centers, and also their new, uncertain destiny.

The first memorable photographs of Milanese suburbs taken by Ugo Mulas at the beginning of the fifties show skylines of the first modern buildings standing against gray backgrounds or buildings partially destroyed by the recent war. Each one of these images has its protagonists: groups of workers walking off and leaving fresh footprints in the snow; children playing on mounds of rubble overlooked by blocks of flats; old people selling delicate wooden planes to the rare passers-by. These subjects are the real fulcrum of the photographs: they are the true protagonists of the suburbs and suburban life. What transpires from these photographs is the 'solidarity' of the photographer's eye: a certain consonance with the way of life in the suburbs; a delicate form of momentary co-habitation, of co-existence, of feeling as one with the suburban dwellers.

By the beginning of the seventies, however, the destiny of Italian suburbs seemed completed. No longer the image of the promise of a livable city, they appeared as a chaotic mass of different city skylines. The desolation of suburban streets exposed the inhumanity of modern cities and a profound feeling of alienation pervading it, where no one could feel at home, where no one could belong. In Rome, as in the major industrial cities of the north, the areas on the borders of the historical city center were besieged by low-income housing, which would render the city increasingly less livable and less visible.

One of the boldest photographic sequences of the seventies is entitled *Entrare a Torino* [Entering Turin] (1972-73) by Giorgio Avigdor. This is a series of sixty photographs representing the visual phenomenology through descriptions of the fifteen different urban entry routes to the city of Turin. In reality, these images



VITTORIO DE SICA - *Miracle in Milan*, 1951, Black and White, 100'.

expose a calculated, neutral record that reproduces the gaze of a city council technician, the absolute indifference towards the urban development of Turin's suburbs, due to a by then irremediable fracture between the coherent architectural shape of the city and the haphazard development of its suburbs. The remarks of the Turinese photographer published in the presentation of this project are still topical: "Turin, as an urban and administrative entity, starts where these photographs were taken. Many people, including those who frequently cross the outer band of the city, will not immediately recognize the places they think they know [...]. Nearly everywhere, buildings break the space in a traumatic way: more hostile towards the natural environment in that they were, mostly, ramifications disjointed from the body of the city; mere episodes of projects realized outside any coherent vision of the urban scene."¹⁵ Suburban urbanization appears coherent with the expansion logic of the modern city and, in Italy as elsewhere, developed from the center outwards, towards the extreme limits of the city, with the building of dormitory districts, factories and industrial sheds in these extreme fringes. However, the suburbs, especially in Italy, were not only places of incoherent urban development; they were also desolate lands, dumps for waste and debris and, from the end of the eighties, demolition areas where old factories were being torn down. Guido Guidi sought his images in suburbs that in Italy, by the end of the eighties, had become a hard and hostile land, loaded with industrial rubbish. Guidi was one of the first Italian photographers to examine and describe the process of post-industrialization in progress in modern Italian cities, documenting with obsessive dedication the progressive, systematic dismantling not only of an architectural model, but also of a chapter in the history of modern Italian industrial culture. At the end of the eighties, Guidi started a sort of pilgrimage, seeking the places where industrial complexes had stood only a few decades earlier, in order to photograph recent ruins, pulled-down sheds, stripped walls and flooded courtyards. For more than a decade, Guidi repeatedly returned to the industrial areas of Marghera, creating a personal topography of post-industrial buildings, of the shapes of a city made of industrial plants that rises as a suburban appendix to Venice. Guidi dedicated himself to reconstructing a map of places that only four decades earlier had formed the neuralgic pole of the national economy, which later became notorious world-wide for its pollution. In his photographs, these abandoned factories appear in all their poisonous lividness, ferrous ruins emerging at intervals between the rhetoric of uselessly functional, dynamic architectural shapes. The landscape was that of a post-nuclear ghost city, vaguely recalling places in Eastern Europe. Guidi dedicated a cycle of photographs to this emptied city, deleted from tourist routes and made invisible by its own industrial architecture, meditating on

what was left after the end of industrial architecture, as though he wanted to photograph the spirit of these places, together with all the abandoned materials.

L'USAGER DE LA VILLE

Passionate theoretician of cities, at the end of the sixties, Roland Barthes asserted the need to *read* cities, rather than promote investigations and studies *on* cities. In other words, the French semiologist urged an understanding of cities as forms of visual writing, a series of images that narrate urban experience. In a conference held in Naples, which became a crucial text for city-planning studies, Barthes actualized an intuition summarized in Victor Hugo's famous motto: *Celui-ci tuera celui-là*.¹⁶ As already predicted by Hugo in the mid-nineteenth century, the advent of the modern city would first of all have produced a multiplication of literary suggestions, innumerable plots and written pages that would have had the city as their subject with books replacing inscriptions carved on monuments, the first form of urban literature. Towards the end of the sixties, Barthes sensed that an additional paradigmatic change was in progress in city development and predicted a new *Celui-ci*, "*l'usager de la ville*", the author-photographer of contemporary city plots / photographs.¹⁷ This new author of contemporary city texts / images behaved, and above all observed, as an ordinary 'passer-by'. This anonymous city dweller of our times absent-mindedly collected fragments of phrases, shouts, conversations and greetings here and there in the course of his daily walks, as well as the many millions of texts, but also fragments of images, sensations, details and colors, which form the (visual) plot of city narratives, that he then reprocessed in secret. The future author of *La chambre claire* predicted the *photograph / usager de la ville contemporain* as an anonymous passer-by who recounts the everyday life of contemporary urban space and multiplies the visions of today's city.

We do not know if Mimmo Jodice heard Barthes' conference in his home city, but certainly Jodice, more than any other photographer of his generation, appears to incarnate the *usager de la ville*, the author-photographer who becomes an ordinary passer-by in order to collect visual fragments and shreds of images, to multiply descriptions and update readings of contemporary cities. Certainly Mimmo Jodice's urban passages dock in unreal, apparently timeless, spaces, of which only Naples appears able to preserve a memory. In this way, in temporary migrations towards the most marginal areas of his city, Jodice captured the surreal incongruity of incomplete and already decadent new ring-roads, flyovers and provincial roads

claimed by Neapolitan street urchins. Images of a city resisting a new Pompeii, surviving more recent planning cataclysms, Naples emerges, at intervals, still bewitching between mediocre architecture and unauthorized building. To find traces of the Naples of times gone by, Jodice inaugurated personal archaeological missions during the past decade, returning to the courses and places where this city, freed from the network of unusable motorways, unauthorized development and brutal road signs, can finally still appear in places like Torre del Greco and Castel Sant'Elmo; names that evoke a glorious past. In the metaphysical calm of a storm that has already arrived, these places, though, always and only make it evident that something is lacking. Naples, contemporary city, can only be represented as an invisible city, an arcane, unreal place, which, frame after frame, exposes alienation from its own image.

THE SHAPE OF CONTEMPORARY CITIES TAKEN BY SURPRISE

To sight the shape and skyline of the contemporary city, Vincenzo Castella chose to start from what lies in front of our eyes from the upper floors of city buildings, the corporate soul view, the view from managers' offices. It lies at a dizzying height, from where the view of the city is not yet abstract, a reachable height from where the city still appears accessible. From this height, low-income housing, suburban blocks of flats, residential complexes, business centers and railway junctions appear in their ordered, foreseeable monotony; they are minimized and camouflaged as lines and colors that bridle city shapes in modular structures. From this height, Milan, Naples and Turin simply become denominations that can hardly contain and give meaning to these homologous buildings and architecture, not dissimilar from those that rise in Amsterdam or Madrid. The diffused transparency over the entire surface of the image exalts the unhoped-for sharpness of details, in the foreground and in the background, so that the image of this city seems to appear under our own eyes: the arrogance of the great corporate building up front, down below an abyss of urban traffic; over there blocks, cars and factories, and then still more buildings, constructions and more buildings as far as the eye can see.

Rather than looking at the contemporary metropolis, the photographer must perceive it; he must make his way through the architectural commotion, surprising not one, but multiple, city shapes, capturing them at the accelerated rhythm of urban development. Gabriele Basilico is the high priest of new metropolis photography. His works, from an obsessively systematic stance, show segments of contemporary cities besieged by road signs, hostages of the omnipresent urban furnishings, prisoners of a multitude of styles and architectural schemes. Looking at these photographs, one is surprised at how the point of view succeeds in giving coherence and shape to the chaotic development of the elements, and in reaching an unhoped-for visual balance. Paradoxically, this balance is based on an obsessive, continuous introduction of shapes up to the limit of visibility, as though the photographer was making constant compromises in order to include other and more complex architectural moments in his images, managing always to recover other forms of the contemporary city. Representing major Italian cities implies capturing their rhythm and following their development. It also means choosing visual strategies, not only points of view that reproduce the shapes of these new cities as they happen. As explained by Bernardo Secchi, the new millennium cities are no longer articulated around a single center, but rise from many urban nucleuses that develop simultaneously without sharp demarcations, lacking defined and visible boundaries. These sprawling cities find their space on the limits of the modern city, appearing almost as elastic bodies stretching out to stray elsewhere

and grow in the form of agglomerates of corporate architecture, shopping centers and business centers that rise especially along the arteries of the major motorways. Walter Niedermayr, for example, lies in wait in a slightly raised point, as though in ambush, to capture the development of urban architecture on the limits of motorway routes. The motorway in fact represents the most powerful symbol of the global contemporary metropolis. Precisely this asphalt belt, with its clearly evident buildings and road signs of the global society, enlivens the landscape between urban scenes and contemporary city suburban architecture, and leads us from one undefined urban horizon to another, naturalizing our passage. In Italy, Europe and the United States, motorways are built and extended following the economic development of the society that produces them. These motorway routes are viewing metaphors for entering the new century, giving us the perception (and the illusion) of being *en route* towards a destination that cannot be represented. As stated by urban historian Robert Fishman, the promise of a possible encounter with the natural landscape and its harmony is what disappears, being always postponed to the next exit.

CONTEMPORARY CITIES AS TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SELF

From the fifties to the present day the image of Italian cities appears to have been progressively and inexorably depopulated. Mulas' photographs are possibly the most successful experiment in the representation of a city and its subjects, rendering faces, social and cultural identities and a variegated 'Italianness', together with the shape of the city. Probably from the mid-fifties to the beginning of the sixties it was still possible to describe a certain belonging of subjects to their city, and to recount the city experience. During the sixties, a feeling of being extraneous started to emerge in images of cities, pushing its way through the city crowd, mixing with urban architecture and transpiring from the attitudes of pedestrians. In Avigdor's photographs from the sixties, for example, passers-by seem captured in their appearance on the city scene, distant, bored, fully aware of the hostile competitive dimension that was being affirmed in the modern city. This awareness of the progressive dehumanization of the city environment was anticipated in the images of an enforced stroll under the arcades and the streets which already seems codified; a social convention rather than a way of living the city; a competition between various ways of appearing, between the many images of oneself, of who one would like to be and of who one pretends to be. Slowly, though, also the physiognomy of the city crowd tended to disappear from the images of the city, as though the new urban buildings had won the competition for controlling urban space. There is no longer any room in contemporary photographs of Italian cities for faces and bodies, as though they were not capable of representing even a minimum of humanity.

Paola De Pietri did not portray the anonymous inhabitants of an Italian city, nor the ways for living contemporary Italian cities, but rather a sort of phenomenology seeking (urban) space. By means of the by now rare activity of walking or wandering around, with all the operations that that implies, De Pietri attempted to capture the form of the spatialized text that is composed in a city. As stated by Michel de Certeau, developing Barthes' thought further, walking is a way to achieve bodily experience of the urban space.¹⁴ More precisely, walking is an operation that in any case produces spatialized writing, a (photographic) text that passers-by write with their own bodies, but which can only be used by others. De Certeau went on to explain that the act of walking is similar to a language system, being in fact a process of appropriation of places. Step after step, a course

is formed, a path always reaching a place (or the image of a place). The final objective of walking is always the *mise-en-scène* of a place. Walking means making choices: a street (like the stimulus for a photograph) is chosen, and, by doing this, another is rejected. In a similar way, in language the use of one word implicitly excludes another. In discourse one can go around objects, places and facts and, similarly, when walking one can turn and go around places. If, when walking, one can choose and change paths (or the subject to portray), so, likewise, while speaking one can start a line of reasoning, interrupt it and begin a new one. Like language, therefore, walking has its rhetoric. After all, talking does nothing more than affirm what one is not and what one does not have; walking does nothing more than make the lack of a place visible, express an absence in the very moment in which it is sought. As de Certeau declared: "All movements about the city do nothing else but multiply and centralize making the city itself an immense experience that means not having any place."¹⁹

The image of contemporary Italian cities was constructed by means of a series of brief migrations and temporary exiles within multiple urban universes. In these movements that have lasted several decades, various generations of Italian photographers have produced different gazes and different ways of seeing urban space and its architecture, anonymous passers-by, pedestrian-authors of extremely personal topographies, or unreal, almost aerial, visions of the city. All these articulated and variegated descriptions of the places of contemporary Italian cities simply decline an absence, the disappearance of the shape of historically differentiated Italian cities. This absence starts the moment homologation of the shapes of contemporary cities occurs, destroying particular realities, localisms and the cultural manifestations of the various ways of being men and women that Italy produced in a historically differentiated manner.

All the photographers present in this exhibition propose a vision of contemporary urban realities threatened by no place in particular.

¹ Io e... Pasolini e la forma della città, 1974, directed by Paolo Brunatto, Rete 2, Rai TV, 20; transcription published in Colusso, Paolo, Da Giau, Fabrizio, and Villa, Angelo (eds.), *La città del cinema: Pier Paolo Pasolini*, Venice: Istituto Universitario Architettura-Archivio Progetti Angelo Masieri-Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1995.

² Benjamin, Walter, "Il ritorno del flâneur," in *Ombre corte*, Turin: Einaudi, 1993, p. 472.

³ Congeval, Guy, Mondenard, Anne and Walusinski, Gilles, *Photographier l'architecture 1851-1920. Collection du Musée des Monuments français*, Paris: Edition de la reunion des Musées nationaux, 1994, p. 51.

⁴ Congeval, Guy, Mondenard, Anne and Walusinski, Gilles, *Photographier*, cit., p. 75.

⁵ Benjamin, Walter, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" in *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1976, p. 173.

⁶ For a detailed discussion on the category of vagueness in Modernism see Clark, Timothy J., *The Painting of Modern Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

⁷ Benjamin, Walter, "Haussmann or the Barricades" in *Charles Baudelaire*, cit., p. 174.

⁸ Benjamin, W., "Baudelaire or the Streets of Paris," in *Charles Baudelaire*, cit., p. 170.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Benjamin, W., "Il ritorno del flâneur," in *Ombre corte*, cit., p. 471.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 472.

¹² Ibidem, p. 469.

¹³ Russo, Antonella, *The Alinari Brothers: Architectural Photography and its Conventions*, M.A. Thesis, Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico, N. M., 1984.

¹⁴ My theoretical position contrasts with the one posited by Costantini in Costantini, Paolo, "Le immagini, dovunque esse siano," *Venezia-Marghera. Fotografia e trasformazioni nella città contemporanea*, Milan: Charta, p. 22.

¹⁵ Avigdor, Giorgio, "Presentazione," in *Entrare a Torino*, booklet, Turin: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1974.

¹⁶ Barthes, Roland, "Semiologie et urbanisme," Lecture of 16 May 1967 held at the French Institute in Naples and organized by the Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura dell'Università di Napoli and by the magazine *Op. Cit.*, republished in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, vol. 42, no. 152 (December 1970 – January 1971), pp. 11-13.

¹⁷ Barthes, "Semiologie," cit., p. 13.

¹⁸ Certeau, Michel de, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Los Angeles-London: Berkely University Press, 1984, pp. 91-110.

¹⁹ Certeau, Michel de, "Walking in the City," cit., p. 103.