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Fragments of Milan: Frammenti di MIlano

Ciro Discepolo

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Foreword The sensitive and creative talent of Federico Fellini is rather insuperable and perhaps only Paolo Sorrentino is worth of a comparison that would make sense without appearing as a showdown. Each time I watch the initial scenes of his Roma, showing the infernal impact on the Eternal city's fitting ring, I feel always new and uncontainable emotions. Just to fix a possible temporal sequence along an improbable similar line, I propose a piece of my personal "amarcord", on my first impacts with the Ambrosian capital. I first came there during a school trip with my classmates, at our senior year, section A, at the Augusto Righi high school, in the last spring of 1967, by a bus rented by the students' families. The Sole highway was inaugurated only three years before, and when we arrived, after an interminable (at least for me) journey, the first thing I saw before leaving the highway, was an Agip Motel (or something like that), where we stopped for a snack. The impact was not so good. Our passage in Milan, then, was not touristic at all (we didn't even visit the Duomo!) and we visited rather quickly some factories in the outskirts, as part of that huge economic growth that in those years the so-called "Italian miracle" represented. I remember we paid a one-hour visit to the Siemens, where transistors were assembled, checked and completed manually by young women, all dressed in white work shirts and headsets. What really struck me – which I considered as one of the main, if not the most emblematic, features of "milanesità", that is of "being Milanese" – was that during our visit in this large room of almost fifteen metres for thirty, despite the very close presence of thirty handsome young men, none of those women raised her eyes from her microscope, even for a second. I really was impressed by this behaviour, which I considered as belonging to another world, and perfectly corresponding to the then circulating urban myth about that city. Subsequently, I had other hard confrontations with Milan, not during the following five years, when I worked in the National Research Council in Naples, but when I started to collaborate with my father charging myself with a role in the technical assistance of different scientific machines, which he sold to Universities, research centres, private laboratories, and elsewhere. My journeys to Milan were always marked by over-intensive coursers of seven or eight hours, in small rooms, or even basements, with artificial light. Soon I developed inside me a little kaleidoscope of symbols and images. By simply pronouncing the word "Milan" a series of figures appeared to my mind, reminding me unavoidably of duty, efficiency, fastness, stakhanovism, to the impossibility to make mistakes and errors, and I could go on for long.. But, as many of you may already know, another part of my soul was unfolding, widely fuelled by literature, cinema, photography (which I had soon had to take apart), psychology, psychoanalysis, astrology… Without making blasphemous comparisons, I can say that like Carl Gustaf Jung but long before the age of forty, I made a journey into the cellar of my house-unconscious, discovering that immense treasure about which Pauwels and Bergier wrote wonderfully (Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, Le Matin des magiciens, 1960). And what did I discover? Many things. Above all the possibility to give space to my soul, to free my fantasy and remove the barriers interfering with my imagination and sensitivity. Then, paradoxically, it was just the same Milan that had annihilated me some year before, with the robot-women working in the Siemens, that opened me the doors of a fantastic world, which I would have never abandoned, that of the "magician's morning" (Le matins des magiciens).

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