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# Death 24x a Second

Stillness and the Moving Image

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REAKTION BOOKS

Chapter Six

Roberto Rossellini's  
*Journey to Italy / Viaggio in  
Italia* (1953)

While Hitchcock's innovation in *Psycho* is derived from a tightened, streamlined narrative, shot almost exclusively on set, some years earlier Rossellini had created a landmark film by, on the contrary, loosening the lines of narrative, displacing its drive, shooting casually in city streets. But both films have certain structures and thematic preoccupations in common. Both revolve around an initial journey that leads, after a halt, to a space of the uncanny. In *Psycho* this is a space of suspense dominated by the uncanny of the maternal body in which the archaic material revealed relates only to the unconscious. In *Journey to Italy* the space is dominated by the ruins and traces of an ancient civilization. Rossellini used this terrain to extend into cinema the blurred boundaries between the material and the spiritual, reality and magic, and between life and death that Bazin and Barthes associated with photography. In both films, however, death forms a central thematic element and both films enable the cinema's paradoxical relation between movement and stillness to achieve a degree of visibility.

In *Journey to Italy*, Rossellini used the environs of Naples, the sites and ruins of the area, to bring the presence of the city's past into the film, almost like an essay woven into the story. Ingrid Bergman remembered Rossellini's long-standing interest in this particular region:

He adored Pompeii. He knew everything about it. He was only looking for a story into which he could put Pompeii and the museums

The excavation: Pompeii.



and Naples and all that Naples stands for which he was always fascinated with because the people of Naples are different from the people in Rome or Milano. He wanted to show all those grottoes with the relics and the bones and the museums and the laziness of all the statues.<sup>1</sup>

Rossellini was interested in the paradoxes associated with Vesuvius, the material traces of the past, the immaterial presence of the dead that haunt memory, religion and superstition. *Journey to Italy* was a source of bewilderment while in production, seemingly aimless and almost plotless, leaving its stars struggling for direction. On similar grounds it was dismissed on release, with only a few critics understanding that it was carefully constructed to undermine conventions of event-driven narrative and open out space and time for thought. The places included in the film were carefully chosen for their resonances and associations, from which Rossellini creates an implicit, idiosyncratic, commentary on the cinema, its reality, its indexical quality, as well as its uncanny ability to preserve life.

Some of these themes come together in the Pompeii sequence towards the end of *Journey to Italy*. The film's protagonists, the English couple Alex and Katherine Joyce (played by George Sanders and Ingrid Bergman), are taken to witness a dramatic excavation at Pompeii. Over time, the bodies buried by lava had disintegrated, leaving behind a void, as in the contours of a

mould,<sup>2</sup> which was then carefully filled with liquid plaster. When hardened, the mould would be uncovered and the imprint of the figures revealed. It was the final stage of the process, the slow uncovering of the plaster cast, that Alex and Katherine have been invited to witness. Finally, the figures are uncovered and, in the words of one of the workmen, they see 'A couple, a man and a woman, perhaps husband and wife, just as they were at the moment of death'. Due to the suddenness of the eruption, the figures uncovered at Pompeii are preserved as they died, caught in the moment of transition between life and death. Here, the figures are lying side by side, stretching towards each other as though the impact of the lava had snatched one from the other's embrace. Raymond Bellour comments on the scene: 'There emerges the form of a couple clasped in an embrace, as a picture appears in a developer. Thus, a photograph is formed from the real itself.'<sup>3</sup> The plaster casts, formed from the imprint left by an original object, are, like photographs, indexical images.

In 1952, when Rossellini was shooting *Journey to Italy*, the excavations in Pompeii had only just resumed after the war. He had good contacts with the archaeologists and made sure that he would be informed of significant discoveries in time to film them. Rossellini clearly felt that the tragedy of Pompeii was essential to his film. He stands within the tradition, perhaps its last representative, of the fascination that the buried town had exerted on European intellectuals. It is a fossil of the ancient civilizations that signified so much for different waves of Enlightenment culture.<sup>4</sup> But it also brings with it the shudder of the uncanny, the return of the repressed, the presence of the dead, the difficulty of understanding death and time itself. Anthony Vidler describes this history:

This dramatic confrontation of the homely and the unhomely made Pompeii a locus for the literary and artistic uncanny for much of the nineteenth century . . . *L'étrange, l'inquiétant, das Unheimlich*, all found their natural place in stories that centered on the idea of history suspended, the dream come to life, the past restored to the

present . . . The special characteristic of this retrospective vision was its unsettling merging of past and present, its insistence on the rights of the unburied dead. In Pompeii, it seemed, history, that solid real of explanation and material fact, was taking a kind of revenge on its inventors.<sup>5</sup>

'The idea of history suspended, the dream come to life, the past restored to the present', these images of the excavated town might also be used to describe the cinema's unique ability to confuse time. As people and history recede into the past, the traces they leave on the world mark their absence, the impossibility of regaining time, but also bear witness to the reality of their once-upon-a-time presence. With the cinema, the past is preserved in the full appearance of reality. In the Pompeii sequence, filmed in 1952, with the living presence of the anonymous workmen as well as Hollywood stars, another layer of fossilized history is superimposed on the ruins of the city. Those alive in the scene, then, are now as fossilized in their screen image as the plaster casts of the Pompeian couple.

Various themes associated in different ways with death run throughout *Journey to Italy* and on the last day intrude more insistently on Alex and Katherine. There is the physical reality, the inevitability of death, that so upsets Katherine at Pompeii. And during the film the English couple encounter the Neapolitan culture surrounding death, both poignant and easy-going, assuming an afterlife and an intimacy between the living and the dead. This is not a culture of fear or, indeed, of the uncanny, and includes the broad beliefs of popular Catholicism, its statues, cults and miracles. In Freud's terms, this is a world in which 'primitive beliefs' are not yet 'surmounted'. For Rossellini, it represents a world that keeps alive the past through its ancient beliefs and through an easy everyday contact between the living, the present, and the dead, the past. This culture and its superstitions, the intermingling of past and present, lead to the cinema's fusion of past and present and its paradoxical capacity to preserve the living as inanimate ghosts, for which he finds allegorical representations throughout the film.

This cinema is a direct descendant of the 'natural magic' practised by Giacomo della Porta and Athanasius Kircher. For them, as for Rossellini, the machine's reality was a matter of both science and beauty.

Rossellini's films before 1952 prefigure his intense commitment to cinema's reality as well as his interest in the invisible, the remains of suffering, a lost past. Ruins come to have a privileged position as a metaphor for this meeting of material and immaterial worlds. His cinema was born during World War II and found maturity in the ruins left in its aftermath: the physically damaged cities and the mentally damaged people. The post-war films that established his international reputation, *Rome Open City* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946), were about Italy under occupation, very recent experiences that were still vivid in collective memory and Italian national consciousness. Rossellini chronicled the dramas and tragedies that overtake ordinary people caught in events beyond their control. The war was over but its reality was still visible and could be recorded before it faded into history. In *Germany Year Zero* (1947) and his first two films with Ingrid Bergman (*Stromboli*, 1949, *Europa 51*, 1952) the reality of war was in the marks left in the minds of people, the traumas that still persisted after the war and the occupation. From Rossellini's Catholic perspective, suffering marks the soul as it does the Freudian unconscious. From André Bazin onwards, critics have pointed out that Rossellini's cinema mediates between the visible and the invisible, whether in the translation of historical memory, the exteriorization of trauma or the materialization of the Christian soul. But he was particularly interested in the mingling of Catholicism and popular beliefs. *The Machine for Killing the Bad* (1948) is an explicit reflection on these interwoven worlds. The camera plays an explicitly central role, tying together the themes of superstition, popular Catholicism and, in a parody of photography, the transition from life to death. This film, set on the Amalfi coast that Rossellini associated so closely with popular religion, places the camera firmly within the legacy of the magical and the miraculous. When he came to make *Journey to Italy* in 1952, Rossellini was able to weave together

these previous preoccupations and passions and bring the cinema's reality and its magic into dialogue with the popular culture of Naples and its environs.

The film begins with the Joyces driving in their Bentley through the Italian countryside, the open road signifying the opening of the story, its narrative line stretching towards Naples. The future blockages and delays to the story are prefigured as the Bentley is forced to slow its pace for some small herds of cattle. It is Alex's Uncle Homer's death that has brought them to Italy, to sell the house and property left to them. Forced to wait for prospective buyers, they find that Naples affects each of them differently and their marriage comes under increasing strain. Through the meandering middle section of the film, Alex and Katherine take the story into different directions. On the last day their paths re-converge. After the expedition to Pompeii, the film ends with the Joyces again in the Bentley, in a drive towards an end that balances the beginning. Again their path is halted by their surroundings, this time by a religious procession, dominated by a statue of the Madonna. This time, the halt precipitates their reconciliation and 'the end' on which narrative closure depends.

*Journey to Italy* was not an easy film to finance and Rossellini needed his stars Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders, from this practical point of view. But their presence gives an essential aesthetic weight to one side of Rossellini's experiment. As stars they are signifiers of Hollywood and represent a foil to the new kind of cinema that Rossellini introduced into the film. That is, without its stars, *Journey* would not have been able to symbolize so vividly a point of transition in cinema history. Rossellini left Bergman and Sanders without character guidelines or the usual support that serious actors expect from a serious director. As a result, as Rossellini intended, their presence on the screen is uncertain. Icons of stardom, they are also themselves, unsure where the boundary lies between performing stardom, performing as actors or as stars who are forced to perform themselves. However, within the fiction, the characters of Alex and Katherine Joyce enable the film to create an opposition between different kinds of cinemas,

divided between modern and conventional modes of cinematic story-telling. Katherine carves out a space for reflection and for the journey into the past. Alex is impatient to drive the action forward. Katherine allows the plot to wander. Alex tries to keep it on track with an ordered sense of movement and event. These divergent directions divide along gender lines, with masculinity and its anxieties identified with conventional action-driven narrative and femininity with the kind of cinema that would enable Rossellini's 'essay', that is, his journey to Naples and its past.

In this experiment with film narrative, Alex and Katherine Joyce represent divergent paths not only due to gender but also due to the opposing but emblematic attitudes to time. Through Alex, Rossellini introduces the geographical difference between northern and southern culture and *mores* (implicit also between north and south Italy). The ordered clock time of the north encounters uneasily the more leisured time of the south, just as the smooth forward path of the Bentley had been halted by the cattle. After their first lunch at Uncle Homer's house, on the second day, Alex and Katherine lie in the winter sun on the terrace. Here the tensions in their marriage and the directions in which they will take the story begin to come to the surface. Alex is restless. The empty time of the siesta begins to bore him and he wanders off in search of more wine, taking the story into one of its small digressions. He wanders downstairs into the kitchen and wakes the sleeping servants; then a series of linguistic misunderstandings leads to his increasing discomfiture. This is a north-south confrontation but also one of sex and class as the representative of the north, bourgeois and male, faces the representative of the south, working-class, female and woken from her siesta.

On the terrace, Katherine has been daydreaming in a mental journey of her own, into her past and her relationship with Charles Lewington, a poet who had been in love with her and had died after the war. He had been in Naples with the British Army and Katherine associates the city with him and his poetry. As she tells Alex the story, eyes closed and half-asleep, this lapse into a 'feminine' world of poetry and sentiment irritates him profoundly and

provokes an irrational outburst of jealousy. This episode is based on the central premise of James Joyce's story 'The Dead'.<sup>6</sup> Katherine's relationship with the young poet echoes Gretta's with Michael Furey. Both women have been loved hopelessly by a young, sensitive and frail man, one a singer, the other a poet, who then die prematurely. In both cases, this young, doomed, long-dead lover returns by a chance triggering of memory to disrupt the present. But once felt, his presence haunts both husbands. In 'The Dead', jealousy and irritation give way to an intimation of universal mortality; in *Journey*, Alex's jealousy exacerbates his impatience, his sense of impotence, his irritation with Katherine. Charles Lewington haunts Katherine, Alex and the film itself.<sup>7</sup> Katherine's memory first introduces this 'ghost', but Alex's jealousy keeps him there, an eruption of the past into the present. But other ghosts haunt the film. For instance, Uncle Homer's aristocratic Neapolitan friends not only joke about his death but talk easily of meeting him 'up there', as though exchange between the living and the dead were commonplace. Charles drives a wedge between Alex and Katherine, but his ghostly presence in the Joyces' rational world creates a link to the part played by 'the dead' in Neapolitan popular culture.

The growing distance between Alex and Katherine during the empty waiting time sends the story into a series of loops, small journeys of thematic rather than narrative significance. For Gilles Deleuze, Rossellini's cinema, along with other significant directors of Italian Neo-realism, marks a point of transition between the 'movement image' and the 'time image'. D. N. Rodowick sums up the change:

According to Deleuze, the appearance of neo-realism represents a crisis in the cinema of action and movement. Especially in Rossellini's films, such as *Germania Anno Zero* (1947) and *Stromboli* (1949) or *Viaggio in Italia* (1953), narrative situations appear where reality is represented as lacunary and dispersive. Linear actions dissolve into aleatory strolls. Events occur where it is no longer possible to act or react . . . Since the linking of motor

images is no longer activated by action, space changes in nature, becoming a disconnected or empty space. Acts of seeing or hearing replace the linking of images through motor actions; pure description replaces referential anchoring.<sup>8</sup>

Alex's part, played perfectly by George Sanders, is to rebel against this decline of action and the change of pace. Empty space and time bore him as though he were a reluctant spectator of a Neo-realist movie. He stands for the cinema of 'movement image', and for a defensive desire for action and order that masks his fear of impotence and loss of masculinity. For Alex there is something demasculinizing about southern time and his recurring rant against the 'laziness' of Naples is, on some level, a complaint about the plot, its lack of energy and direction.<sup>9</sup> Given the irony that Rossellini invests in the characterizations of Alex and Katherine, his mischievous blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality, there is also an element of complaint about the director himself and his refusal to play by the rules of the 'movement image'. All the plot offers Alex in the way of action or event is a small opportunity for sexual adventure. On the fifth day he follows his pleasure-loving friends, particularly Marie, to Capri. Once again, nothing happens and Alex loses another round in his struggle with the meandering plot. His attempt to bring action, even sexual action, to the story fails miserably. His search for an adventure tails away to impotence as Marie quite simply rejects him.

Katherine, on the other hand, guides the film willingly into highly determined, mythical spaces in which her role is to look into the past and link its sites to the wider terrain of the film's themes. It is hard to describe Katherine's journeys as feminine in any particularly positive way, except in the sense that the woman, by tradition and convention, has had less control over the cinema's 'action image' than her male equivalent. A female guide is neutral rather than feminine; her passivity more easily allows other kinds of narrative time and space to materialize in her presence. In his characterization of Katherine, Rossellini shows a sneaking sym-

pathy for Alex's irritation with her rather smug sentimentality and her caricature get-up as English lady tourist, as well as for Alex's preference for having 'fun' in Capri over visiting museums ('museums bore me').

The stars' performances confirm that Rossellini intended to produce reality, not realism, in *Journey to Italy*. Bergman and Sanders had no script and the schedule seemed chaotic, offering little by way of clues to chronology of event or emotional structure. Essentially they were expected to be spontaneous, improvise and play themselves. The traditions and conventions of star- and event-driven cinema are overtaken by the emptiness that allows another kind of cinema to feel its way into being. When the journey's narrative momentum comes to a halt, time opens up for digression and reflection so that this new cinema seems to be coming into being before one's eyes. In this sense, the film allows time not only for thought about its themes, but also for thought about the cinema and its history. The presence of disorientated Hollywood stars in a European art film dramatizes such a change in cinematic direction. And perhaps the only Hollywood stars who would have been prepared to participate in, and thus enable, this crisis in the narrative film would be these two semi-Europeans, both at crisis points in their lives, both uncertain as to where their private and professional futures were leading. In *Journey to Italy*, out of a minimal plot line and two bewildered Hollywood stars, Rossellini managed to create, in the opinion of many critics, the first modern film. At the same time, he replaces realism, a style of cinematic fiction, with reality, documenting places and people, passers-by in the street, as well as his stars. The fictional journey undertaken by Alex and Katherine Joyce is partially pushed to the side by history, geography and geology.

Almost like a refrain running throughout the film, Rossellini punctuates *Journey* with sweeping panning shots which take in the expanse of the Bay of Naples. These shots descend directly from the visual culture of nineteenth-century Naples, which celebrated the bay's beauty and its status as a tourist attraction. Giuliana Bruno describes this tradition:

Attention to panoramas, exterior views and landscape is traditionally an important component of the visual culture of Naples . . . This is reflected in its artistic tradition: landscapes and 'vedute' [views] predominate in Italian art from painting to photography.<sup>10</sup>

The Joyces' first morning in Naples opens with a pan of the whole bay, accompanied by a Neapolitan folk song, taken from their window but detached from their point of view. The second pan is from Uncle Homer's terrace. As Tony, his manager, points out the features of the landscape to Alex and Katherine, the whole expanse of the bay is mapped out. The camera follows his gestures:

Over there is the Vesuvius, ever since the eruption of 1944 there has been a period of calm but the temperature is beginning to rise a little though. That point there, behind the hill, that first hill, is Pompeii. Then Castellammare, Torre Annunziata. Resina's over there and Naples. There's Ischia, the Isle of Capri and that large strip down there is the Sorrento peninsula.

Vesuvius dominates the landscape physically and also dominates the culture that the film explores, the relation between the material relics of the past and the symptoms of religious belief. The volcano is a geological phenomenon that has created a specific geographical environment. The rich volcanic soil produced a thriving agricultural economy, and an eruption created the natural harbour and the curve of the bay that first established the strategic significance of Naples in the ancient world. The rich history of the area grew out of the natural conditions created by the volcano. The Greek colony of Parthenope and Neapolis, with foundations at Cumae dating back to about 750 BC, became the most flourishing economic and intellectual community outside Greece. Later, Roman intellectuals, such as Virgil, were drawn to the Greek culture that continued to flourish in the city after the decline of Athenian power. The beautiful coast, islands and volcanic baths have made a playground for the rich from ancient times, bringing wealth and culture to the area. The Roman emperors Tiberius,

Nero and Caligula built themselves luxurious villas on Capri and Ischia, initiating the islands' long-standing, if later less excessive, association with decadence. The towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum grew up on the mainland as the Roman rich, attracted to the sea bathing, the volcanic hot springs and mineral waters, turned the bay area into the first European holiday resort during the first century AD. The traces of this history are there in the sites that feature so prominently in *Journey to Italy*.

But the volcano has its other side. In AD 79 came the eruption that destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum as Vesuvius revealed its dark and destructive power. The population, tied to the economic benefits and the pleasures of the volcanic landscape, lived in perpetual fear of Vesuvius, and an array of cults and superstitions has always been rife in its environs. This tradition, already characteristic of the daily life of Pompeii, continued in the semi-pagan, semi-Catholic religion, with its ritual processions and statues of saints that fascinated Rossellini. Vesuvius illustrates vividly the way that a material, geographical, reality creates cultural practice and religious belief. The most significant symbol of Neapolitan popular culture is missing from *Journey to Italy*: the patron saint of Naples, San Gennaro. Since the fourteenth century, San Gennaro has been the Neapolitan antidote to Vesuvius. Three times a year the saint's blood miraculously liquefies, defending Naples from all kinds of harm, but most particularly from the volcano. Tag Gallagher's biography of Rossellini reproduces the roughly written list of locations, the city's historic sites that were to be included in the film.<sup>11</sup> Three locations are not in the final film, and the most important of these is the Cappella di San Gennaro, in Naples Cathedral.

Discussing his fascination with Neapolitan popular culture in a *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview in 1954, Rossellini mentions San Gennaro, saying:

Besides, you must remember that Naples is the only place in the world where a miracle takes place on a fixed date, September 19th, the miracle of San Gennaro. And San Gennaro look out! If the



miracle doesn't happen, he gets into trouble. And all kinds of dreadful things start to happen!<sup>12</sup>

But no sequence relating to this central figure was filmed. Probably the chapel of San Gennaro was too holy and his cult too sacred for filming to have been allowed in the cathedral.<sup>13</sup> But the miracle relates closely to the themes that interested Rossellini. The liquefaction of the dead saint's blood pre-empts the coming to life of the volcano, or, if the worst comes to the worst, stills the invading flow of molten lava. Both these phenomena, the natural and the superstitious, revolve around movement and stillness, the animation of an inanimate substance and lead to the culture of the uncanny.

Although San Gennaro is missing, Katherine's sightseeing trips take the film to sites that have a related significance. Her first journey, on the third day, is to the Archaeological Museum of Naples. This sequence is not a record of a tourist's visit but a careful selection of images that are relevant to Rossellini's 'essay' film. In this large and complex museum, he decided to concentrate on only a few of the statues. The sequence is filmed with an extremely mobile camera, a crane and tracks, which was necessary not only to film in proportion to the size of the enormous Farnese statues,<sup>14</sup> but also to give the sequence its distinctive style. The camera movements take on their own autonomy, moving beyond Katherine's point of view, enhanced by the first appearance of Renzo Rossellini's music. As Katherine and the guide reach the Farnese *Hercules*, the camera moves higher with sweeping movements, defying gravity as it transcends the limitations of the human eye and its earthbound perspective. Throughout the sequence the music, with its eerie, other-worldly quality, is mixed in ironic juxtaposition to the guide's patter.

Rossellini begins the sequence with a dissolve that brings Katherine into the museum as it were through the huge stone base of a pillar. Movement emerges out of stasis, setting the scene for the rest of the sequence. It is as though Rossellini imagined that his camera would be the magic means of bringing life to those blocks of stone. Most of the statues are poised in mid-gesture, the

*Discus Thrower* with his eyes looking just above the camera, the *Drunken Poet* caught at the moment he falls backwards into a stupor. It is as though the gaze of the Medusa, or some other malign magician, had turned living movement into stone. Classical Greek sculpture, later copied by the Romans, aspired to create the illusion of a frozen moment. Rossellini's concentration on this style creates a link that jumps across the centuries to photography's transformation of this aspiration into reality and to André Bazin's sweeping condensation of the history of art into this single line of progression. In *Journey*, however, the camera adds a dimension that transcends still photography, as it brings the cinema's movement to the statues, attempting to reanimate their stillness. This strategy reaches a crescendo with the gigantic Farnese *Bull* group, in which the brothers, Zethus and Amphion, struggle to hold still the huge rearing bull on which Dirce, who lies at their feet, will be tied. The camera circles around this violent scene, both extending its melodramatic, theatrical qualities and trying to duplicate the sculptor's attempt to create the appearance of an action caught at that split second and then left for ever in suspended animation. Rossellini celebrates the way these sculptures convey movement in stillness, images of life in inanimate stone.

Katherine's visit to Cumae, on day five, presents a sharp contrast to the aesthetic of the statues in the Museum. The statues belong to a comparatively short and historically coherent period of ancient history. Cumae's history is layered with different epochs, different cultures, different religions and mythologies. The oldest of the Greek settlements, with its massive walls supposedly in Minoan style, Cumae stretches back into prehistory and emerges into mythology as the site of the Sibyl's cave. After the decline of Rome, the Christians used the site as catacombs and later the Saracens used it as a fortress. In contrast to the museum, the sequence is organized around Katherine's subjective responses to the place. The guide, telescoping the long history of the site, says: 'After abandoning Troy, Aeneas landed here on this very beach. In the last war, the British troops landed here.' The subsequent shot shows Katherine's reaction as it dawns on her that Charles

Lewington had probably encamped in that very spot. The guide demonstrates the echo that resounds through the huge passage and Rossellini holds the shot of Katherine and the guide walking, with light and shadow falling across their path, until they reach a chamber of Christian remains. The music links the scene back to the eerie atmosphere of the museum. The lines of Charles's poem begin to run through Katherine's head, but the guide breaks into her reverie, drawing her attention to two marks on the wall where, he claims, the Saracens chained their prisoners: 'This is how they would have tied a beautiful woman like you.'

Although its uncanniness is, by and large, refracted through Katherine's thoughts and Charles's ghostly presence, Cumae brings with it an accumulation of resonance, trace and relic. It is also a place of mystery, or rather of 'the mysteries', the secrets of the religion, whether of the Oracle or of early Christianity, that their devotees believed in. The echo, which takes on a life of its own as it reverberates, accentuates that aura of dematerialized mystery. At the same time, the echo is also a material link with the past, in continuity with all the previous echoes, stretching back across the centuries to when, as the guide explains, it was much louder because the walls were covered in bronze. And, bringing the atmosphere of the scene out of its other-worldliness into its historical reality, Rossellini uses the marks made on the wall by the pirates as a material sign of the presence of the past, an indexical inscription.

Katherine's third journey, on day six, takes her to the Phlegraean Fields, where she witnesses the live volcanic activity of the 'little Vesuvius' and the 'mystery' of ionization. Here the film reaches into the seething substructure of the area that occasionally comes to the surface, as in these sulphur pits or in the actual eruptions of Vesuvius itself. The sequence is organized visually in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, there is Katherine's delight in the natural phenomena she is witnessing. She photographs the smoking pits, experiments with the ionization mystery, exclaiming as the whole area responds in unison to one lighted paper or cigarette with a massive increase in smoke. She recognizes, in the

'pocket Vesuvius', the ash and cinders that had buried Pompeii in AD 79. Meanwhile, the camera finds its own independent relation with the movement of the smoke. As the volume of smoke increases, the camera follows it as it drifts away until it fills the screen. There is a stark contrast between the camera's relation to the hard-edged, exquisitely worked bodies in the museum and this insubstantial flow without shape or form, beginning or end. As the smoke drifts across the screen and the camera drifts with it, once again, even if on a less formally evolved level, the image moves away from its fictional frame of reference. Film turns into something beyond its usual subservience to iconic representation, dissolving into wispy grey tones. But there is a thematic link back to the two previous expeditions. The volcanic activity and the smoke from the ionization process have a flow and a movement that animate an inanimate material, the earth itself.

Katherine leads the plot to one side of her own fictional story, standing back, as it were, to allow the cinema to find its own dialogue with the history and geography of the area so that Rossellini can extract and translate into film the visible presence of the past. The statues, frozen in motion, have an analogous relation to photography, preserving the stilled movement of the human body 'then' across time into 'now'. Cumae, on the other hand, is topography and exists across time. A sacred site since prehistory due to its intrinsic geomantic qualities, it was subsequently overlaid by layers of other histories that add to the power of the place itself. While the statues are like snapshots, moments of frozen time, Cumae is a palimpsest. As a place sanctified by human belief in the supernatural, it leads logically to the sulphur pits, where a natural phenomenon assumes the appearance of mystery. The theme that unifies the three sites, on a second level, is the relation between inanimate matter and its animation. The statues, still and inorganic, aspire to depict human movement, gesture and a moment of time so that the inanimate and inorganic masquerade as organic and animate. Cumae's walls come alive with the echo of voices, reaching back across time to the haunting presence of spirits and ghosts summoned up by the power of human belief. Most particularly, the

volcano challenges the separation of movement and stillness into the organic and the inorganic. All three relate to the mysteriousness of the cinema in which inanimate photograms come alive in projection, giving frozen moments of time a semblance of animation.

Towards the end of the film both Alex and Katherine encounter a more immediate presence of death as a faint trace left by the suffering of World War II. Alex meets a young prostitute who has just witnessed the death of her best friend and has, herself, only a residual wish to live. Although this is not ultimately a sexual encounter, it evokes the memory of Naples under the occupation when so many women were reduced to prostitution in the face of starvation. This episode is the only scene that harks back to *Paisà*, a film made just seven years earlier. For Katherine, the encounter is more vivid.

The Joyces' hostess, Natalia, offers to take Katherine to the Church of the Fontanelle, in which skulls and skeletons are piled around the walls. Rossellini tells an anecdote in his autobiography about the Neapolitan attitude to the dead. When an influx of people from the country overwhelmed the city in the nineteenth century, the skeletons of the dead were displaced from the graveyards, which were then deconsecrated to make room for living people. The bones were thrown into the Roman catacombs. When the poor hid in the catacombs during World War II families gradually began to adopt individual skeletons. He says:

I was told 'We have lost so many sons on the other side of the sea. No one knows where they're buried, dispersed by the wind and the sand or burnt by the . . . sun. We have nothing, not a tomb, not a cross to pray to. So we have turned to these; they will stand for our loved ones in front of God.'<sup>15</sup>

In the church, Natalia tells Katherine about her brother who was killed somewhere in Greece and whom she mourns in this church of the unburied. Katherine is disturbed by the skulls and skeletons and she watches Natalia from a distance as she makes the, to Katherine, unfamiliar gestures of the Catholic faith.

The skeletons: Church of the Fontanelle.



In *Journey to Italy* reality constantly intrudes into the fiction. These tensions come to the fore at the end of the film. Alex and Katherine are driving from Pompeii when a religious procession in a small town on the Amalfi coast halts the progress of the Bentley.<sup>16</sup> Just as the film had opened with the visual equivalent of a play on the word 'drive', so narrative closure also finds a graphic visualization in the car's gradual loss of speed, for the word 'end'. There is an application of the brakes, a blocked passage. Now Rossellini weaves together two endings. Alex and Katherine are forced to leave the car at the moment when a cry of 'miracle' comes from the procession as a cripple throws away his crutches in front of the Madonna. Katherine is dragged away by the press of people rushing forward. As Alex and Katherine find each other again, the miracle of the cure is repeated in the miracle of the conventional happy end, essential both to Hollywood and to folk-tales, the *deus ex machina* that enables the forward drive of narrative to find stasis. In recognition of this convention, Alex and Katherine declare their love and they kiss in the time-honoured image of cinematic narrative closure.

But this ending does not fit Rossellini's concept of cinema. The camera turns away from the star couple and their ending. A crane shot follows the people streaming along the street; and the camera then finds its own ending in this renewed flow of movement, not of narrative but of reality. The film simply fades away



The Hollywood ending.



Life goes on.

as the local brass band plays and people drift past. Life goes on. One ending halts, the other flows. One is a concentration focused on the stars' role in producing the fiction and its coherence, and the other is a distraction, the film's tendency to wander off in search of another kind of cinema. This is the 'continuance of time' that, for Jacques Rivette, is the essential element in Rossellini's mode of story-telling.