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# Intimacy and Hedonism: The Aesthetics of the *Terrazza* in Italian Cinema

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**Abstract**

This article discusses the developments of the *terrazza* ("roof terrace") as a cinematic space in post-war and contemporary Italian films. By taking a historical approach, I show how the *terrazza* has evolved, from the post-war years to the present, to become an architecture of intimacy and hedonism. In Italian film aesthetics, the *terrazza* replaces the *piazza* ("square"), the space normally assumed to represent quintessential Italian life. This article considers the cinematic and aesthetic development of elevated architectural space in five key films, ranging from the post-war classics Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti* (*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*, 1960), through *Una giornata particolare* (*A Special Day*, 1977) and *La terrazza* (*The Terrace*, 1980) by Ettore Scola, to Paolo Sorrentino's very contemporary *La grande bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*, 2013), a film clearly indebted to the aesthetics of its ground-breaking predecessors.

**Keywords**

Italian film aesthetics, terrazza, architecture, Mario Monicelli, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ettore Scola, Paolo Sorrentino, above

## Introduction

The British undergraduate students taking my module "Post-War Italian Cinema" unanimously agreed that the most exciting experience they hope to have when in Italy is to attend a decadent Roman party on a terrace overlooking the eternal city, all lit up. Of course, the Roman terrace party at the back of their minds is the lavish yet disturbing scene at the beginning of *La grande bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*, 2013, directed by Paolo Sorrentino), where we are introduced to the phenomenal character Jep Gambardella (Toni Servillo). My students' comments suggest that this scene may well be one of the film's most culturally characteristic moments, appealing especially to a foreign audience. Yet the *terrazza*, or "roof terrace," is employed in a number of Italian films as a space soliciting new cinematic and narrative experimentations: Its elevated location, above the bustling city square and streets, naturally characterizes it as an aesthetic "space with a view" and as one specifically mediating between the above and the below. In this article, I analyze a series of terrace scenes in Italian cinema from 1958 up to 2013 to show how different film

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directors (Mario Monicelli, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ettore Scola, and Paolo Sorrentino) have employed the terrace not only as a culturally relevant architectural space (e.g., when filming Rome, the city of terraces) but also as one denoting specific cinematic and aesthetic borrowings and allusions. The five films selected for this analysis are all emblematic of key moments and styles in Italian cinema, allowing one to trace the development in the presentation and construction of the terrace as an aesthetic space among different types of quality Italian filmmaking from the late 1950s to the present. Moreover, these films reflect key moments in Italy's changing socioeconomic structures in the period: from the adjustment of the post-war economic boom to the consumerist society of the early 21st century.

Terraces are so pertinent to Italian culture that the Italian language has two ways of rendering the English *roof terrace*: *terrazza* (feminine) and *terrazzo* (masculine), which are employed fairly interchangeably in spoken Italian. The term *terrazza* (f.) means both *ripiano scoperto d'un edificio* ("a building's rooftop," "a roof terrace") and a large balcony, as does *terrazzo*, although the latter is mainly used to indicate a large balcony (*Dizionario Treccani Online*, 2017). The dual essence of the word *terrazza* (f.), as both a shared, communal rooftop (or roof terrace) on top of a building and a large balcony belonging to a private flat, is at the core of my analysis of this space as one suggestive of intimacy and hedonism. Throughout this study, I will use the terms *terrace* and *roof terrace* in English for linguistic convenience, while effectively interpreting them as an Italian *terrazza* or *terrazzo* and not an actual terrace, which in British English mainly refers to a terraced house rather than a large balcony, an obsolete meaning now (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017).

Enclosed yet open, secluded yet accessible, intimate yet shared, modern yet ancient, the terrace encompasses a series of contradictions that make it a distinct part of the Italian culture and lifestyle. Whereas recent scholarship on Italian culture and architecture has focused on the square, or *piazza*, and its contamination of "public and private" as well as of "security and community" (Canniffe, 2008, p. xv), I want to solicit new investigations on this cultural and architectonical space "above" the buildings and "above" the square. If throughout the centuries the piazza has proven to be a virtually uninterrupted continuation of the Greek *agora* and, to an extent, the Roman *forum*, embodying modern Italians' "way of life, [and] concept of living" (Kidder Smith, 1954, p. 47), in the second half of the 20th century and in the early 21st century, the Italian way of life also takes on a vertical architectural dimension (see Milan's Torre Velasca example in Benevolo, 1971, p. 720). This emphasis on the elevated space in architecture, I maintain, parallels an interest in the terrace as a cinematic space in the works of major Italian film directors. The roof terrace, however, presents a deviation from normative ideas of vertical architecture (i.e., skyscrapers), still connected with authoritarian regimes as, in the words of Henri Lefebvre (1991), "the spatial expression of potentially violent power" (p. 98). In fact, the roof terrace of post-war Italian architecture served a similar function as that in the post-war Anglophone world: It was first intended as a communal and recreational space for the building's residents (Miller Lane, 2006).

Yet the films analyzed in this article complicate the idea of the terrace as a useful space for controlled recreation. They are key witnesses to the terrace's cultural and historical evolution as a complex elevated architectural space, over a time frame of 50 years, including such different films as Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti* (*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958), Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*, 1960), Ettore Scola's *Una giornata particolare* (*A Special Day*, 1977) and *La terrazza* (*The Terrace*, 1980), and Paolo Sorrentino's *La grande bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*, 2013). The wide time frame allows for a diachronic exploration of the *terrazza* through the years and via central moments in the history of Italian cinema. The artistic medium of cinema, like photography or illustration, naturally only allows for metonymic representations of space, which necessarily betray errors of "fragmentation" and "illusions" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 96-97). In these films, it is hard to get a complete, realistic understanding of

the social space involved; the camera (with one exception, Sorrentino's party terrace, which I shall discuss later in "*Terrazza* IV") is not interested in showing the spectator a full image of the terrace but, rather, only proceeds by depicting evocative, fragmented images, which are far from being spatially accurate representations of terraces. Where does Sorrentino's first party terrace begin and end? How wide is the bell tower's terrace in *L'avventura*? Following Henri Lefebvre's (1991) tautological position that "space can [only] be shown by means of space itself," we know that all other metonymic or metaphorical representations of social spatialization are "incriminated" by default (pp. 96-97). Their incrimination lies in the fact that they belong to the realm of art and subjectivity: They cannot be pure, neutral space but, rather, are illusory images of fragmented space. These images, however, carry a most interesting relevance as they betray "the artist's eye and gaze" (p. 97). Therefore, I am particularly interested in the production of the *terrazza* as a cinematic space, placed in its historical perspective. As all social spaces are specialized (e.g., "leisure spaces") yet often perceived as intrinsically "contradictory" (p. 310), the cinematic terrace develops specific meanings over the decades, which complicate, and sometimes contradict, its original function as a space for controlled recreation. When discussing domestic bourgeois space, Lefebvre importantly equates the distinction between indoor space and outdoor space to the one between "intimacy" and "festivity." The terrace, though, sits quite uneasily within this categorization. An outdoor space yet not openly visible to everyone as, for example, the square or the street, it shows a contradiction intrinsic in its representation, acting both as an intimate space and as one of pleasure and hedonism, precisely by virtue of its height and elevated location. This essay will complement the ideas of height and elevation raised in this special issue by considering how the cinematic gaze makes use of the elevated architectural space.

## *Terrazza* I: *I soliti ignoti* (*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958, Directed by Mario Monicelli)

Giuliana Bruno (2002), in her interdisciplinary theorizations on the intersections between space, film, architecture, and art, has framed Italian neorealist cinema as the one cinematic "movement that developed street life filmically, exposing the living component of the production of space" (p. 30). The Italian street, in the period of transition between the end of World War II and the first germs of the economic boom, is appropriated by the film directors of *neorealismo* to reveal the "social epidermis" of the new Italy in its process of post-war economic and architectural reconstruction and of social and creative reinvention (p. 30). Bruno energetically defines most neorealist films as "city walks" (p. 30); as for the neorealist director, the street is the most accurate *mise-en-scène* to portray life on the wide screen of cinema. Similarly, architectural historian Leonardo Benevolo (1971) claims the existence of a certain neorealist influence on post-war Italian architecture: just as neorealist cinema turned to the use of nonprofessional actors and regional dialects, so did post-war architecture turn to simple, "concrete and solid" forms, connected with Italians' everyday reality (p. 712).

In this light, the square should be seen as an important extension of the neorealist street. In post-war Italy, Italians reoccupied the space of the piazza, which during World War II was the center of the fascist rhetorical stage (Canniffe, 2008). According to Eamonn Canniffe, neorealist films mostly avoid famous urban spaces (especially squares) previously connected with fascist political propaganda, preferring the poorer suburbs. Impoverished piazzas thus function as a backdrop for these neorealist "city walks." It is only with Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (*The Sweet Life*, 1960) that Italian cinema abandons the neorealist bleakness of the city suburbs for "the glamour of the central spaces of Rome" (Canniffe, 2008, p. 218). As film scholar Richard Dyer (2018) notes, even when more iconic shots of Rome figure in Italian films of the immediate post-war period, they only work as "a taken for granted backdrop to the characters' lives" (p. 13);

with *La dolce vita*, we record "a shift from a Rome for Romans to a Rome for the jet set" (p. 12). Lesser-known squares and open spaces in the suburbs, or even in central Rome, as filmed in these reconstruction films (e.g., the Porta Portese gate in *Ladri di biciclette* [*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948, directed by Vittorio de Sica], home to Rome's market for stolen bicycles) show Italian cinema's active endeavor to reappropriate historical urban and architectural spaces in the immediate post-war period.

Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti* is technically not a neorealist film.[1] Rather, it is considered to be the foundational work of a new film genre altogether, *la commedia all'italiana* ("Italian-style comedy"), developing from *neorealismo rosa* ("pink neorealism"), a combination of neorealism and the Italian curtain-raiser genre *avanspettacolo* (Fournier-Lanzoni, 2008, p. 21; Mondadori, 2005). The film still engages with some of the neorealist themes and devices, such as a depiction of the poorer strata of Italian society, the idea of city walks, and the employment of non-professional actors. At the same time, the film, usually labeled as a parody of Jules Dassin's noir *Du rififi chez les hommes* ("Of a Fight Among Men," *Rififi*; 1955), was also intended as a parody of neorealism, or better perhaps as a parody of "a certain realism around us, with the poverty, and with people who had to do the best they could with whatever means possible to survive," because neorealism itself was for Monicelli already a "thing of the past" by 1958 (Totaro, 1999). *I soliti ignoti* encapsulates, in a realist yet parodic fashion, the early moments of transition to the Italian post-war economic boom: while Italy's economic development was "impressive" in the 1950s and 1960s, unemployment and low pay were still widespread at the time of Monicelli's film (Dunnage, 2014). The film is not only representative of its times, and the beginning of a new direction in Italian cinema, but also crucial for situating the function and meaning of the terrace in the films that were to follow, being one of the very first Italian films with a prominent scene shot on a terrace. The roof terraces in the film are blatantly used by Monicelli as meeting points for his gang of rather clumsy thieves, while providing a visual background and social commentary on the disparity between the poor and the rich. The first inspection of the scene of their future robbery—the Monte di Pietà pawn shop—occurs from above, filmed in a reverse shot, with Peppe "er Pantera" ("the Panther"; Vittorio Gassman) and his company secretly meeting on the roof terrace of the building adjacent to the pawn shop. Situated in central Rome, the terrace overlooks a number of stunning Roman buildings, which the thieves, too busy spying inside the pawnbroker's and discussing the feasibility of their plans, do not appear to be impressed by (Figure 1). Rome's history and its architectonical beauties cannot possibly interest this bunch of inexperienced, uneducated, hard-to-believe robbers.

Later in the film, we meet the same group of budding thieves as they again prepare for and plan the robbery at the pawn shop on a roof terrace, but the overall scene is quite different from the previous one, creating a comic effect. Dante Cruciani (Totò), a masterful crime teacher, meets the gang on the roof terrace of his dilapidated building, where he keeps a safe, hidden behind laundry sheets, to teach crime (Figure 2). The landscape view from the terrace is one of run-down buildings and roof terraces in the Roman periphery, with kids congregating in the square below. The same kids call out to Dante Cruciani from the square to annoy him, fabricating the arrival of a policeman looking for him. They subsequently call him a second time when the local *brigadiere* (police superintendent) is effectively there to pay a visit to Dante, to check whether he is up to no good, which, of course, he is. When the *brigadiere* is about to appear on the roof terrace, tired from walking up the stairs, he suspiciously exclaims, "Dove sei finito, Cruciani?" ("Where did you end up, Cruciani?").[2] Mario Monicelli frames the gang in a most humorous long shot, in typical Italian comedy style (Totaro, 1999), where the film's "usual suspects" are busy fumbling with the laundry. Although in the film the robbery teacher Dante Cruciani can still be summoned by the people below and found by the police, he selects the roof terrace as a hiding spot and thinking space for the budding robbers' gang. Its elevation from the public spaces below promises

**Figure 1.** (From left to right) Mario (Renato Salvatori), Ferribotte (Tiberio Murgia), Capannelle (Carlo Pisacane), Peppe (Vittorio Gassman), and Tiberio (Marcello Mastroianni) observe the pawn shop from an adjacent building's rooftop and start planning the "big deal.". Screenshot by author.

**Figure 2.** (From left to right) Tiberio (Marcello Mastroianni), Ferribotte (Tiberio Murgia), Mario (Renato Salvatori), Capannelle (Carlo Pisacane), and Peppe (Vittorio Gassman) prepare for the "big deal" on the rooftop, listening to Dante's (Totò) advice on bank robberies. Screenshot by author.

seclusion, privacy, and escape from surveillance; the roof terrace is the largest, most private, and most noise-proof space this strange gang can afford.

## *Terrazza* II: *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*, 1960, Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni)

That Michelangelo Antonioni was particularly attracted to architecture and exploited its potential in the cinematic narrative and aesthetics of his films is no novelty. This northern Italian director studied architecture before turning to the world of theater and then cinema, and he always

displayed a certain fascination with "the built world" in his films, which again often feature architects as characters or portray renowned buildings (Schwarzer, 2000, p. 197). In *L'avventura*, the director plays with architecture alongside altitude: landscapes with deserted buildings observed from above, perspectives from windows, and wide angles from sunlit terraces make up a prominent part of Antonioni's avant-garde shooting.[3] Throughout the film, a number of key scenes involve wide, open, elevated spaces. Halfway through the film, after Anna (Lea Massari) disappeared during a holiday in the Aeolian islands, and has by then been missing for a few days, her friends congregate on their posh acquaintance Patrizia's (Esmeralda Ruspoli) terrace in her luxurious Taormina villa, relaxing and cynically ridiculing the situation, which is a matter of displeasure for Anna's best friend, Claudia (Monica Vitti). This scene is the only one engaging with sociability on terraces in *L'avventura*, which bears some similarity to those in later films, namely Ettore Scola's *La terrazza* and Paolo Sorrentino's *La grande bellezza*.

Throughout *L'avventura*, and in many of Antonioni's films, balconies and windows feature abundantly (Wiblin, 1997). In the scenes shot in the aforementioned Taormina villa, balconies, windows, and terraces are frequently employed to relay a sense of surveillance. We often see Claudia looking out of windows, at times in admiration of the lush Sicilian landscape but more frequently to literally "look down" on other characters. Socially and romantically bored Giulia (Dominique Blanchar) is first seen to flirt with the young (and pretentious) painter-prince Goffredo (Giovanni Petrucci) from the elevated viewpoint of Claudia at the window. In the moment immediately following, when Giulia and Goffredo flirt more explicitly in the atelier, Claudia is made an uneasy witness, and looking out of the window has become for her a much needed diversion to avoid commenting on the unfolding scene. Claudia's turning her back to the camera while observing out of the window has been noted as a sign of both a certain freedom accorded to the female gaze as well as a symbol of resistance to the director's overtly sexualizing male gaze (Brunette, 1998). In the rather limited number of scenes set indoors in *L'avventura*, architecture often enhances the sense of seclusion or entrapment, with characters looking into mirrors or looking out of windows. When characters are looked down at from windows, they turn into "small, isolated, and vulnerable figures" (Wiblin, 1997, p. 105), as when we witness Sandro (Anna's boyfriend; Gabriele Ferzetti) and Claudia's arrival in Schisina, the ghost town they mistake for Noto. The scene is a clear example of Antonioni's typical "architectural commentary" (Chatman, 1985, p. 102), which makes us increasingly aware of the camera's gaze and thus, obviously, of the director's own "presence" (Brunette, 1998, p. 40).

Antonioni's mastery of the architectural landscape also denotes the director's presence. Working as a "visual track" (Brunette, 1998, p. 40), architecture in Antonioni's films enhances and at the same time exacerbates the relationships between characters, thus making his narrative intentions more unequivocal. With Antonioni's tetralogy, architecture becomes less of a mere background and displays more of the director's own interest in how the surroundings can mold the relationships between individuals (Chatman, 1985), also perusing the metaphorical force of the landscape to reveal and enhance the relationships between the characters (Jazairy, 2009). This attitude is particularly evident in two major moments in the film: the Noto episode and the final scene in Taormina, with Mount Etna in the background. The city of Noto is immediately presented as a contrasting landscape to the previous rocky, labyrinthine geography of Lisca Bianca (Chatman, 1985) as well as the lushness and wealth of Taormina: rich with ancient palaces and churches, Noto's "architectural landscape" already exemplifies "a contrast between past and present, emptiness and crowding" (Landy, 2000, p. 300). Marcia Landy (2000) identifies the present moment in the scene when Claudia, briefly left alone by Sandro, is quickly surrounded by a group of Sicilian men who direct menacingly libidinous stares at her. In this scene of high sexualization of the female body, the men already hold a position of physical superiority as they surround Claudia from all sides but especially from above, from the elevated stairs outside Noto cathedral. The interaction between people passing by Noto's cathedral square is one of danger

**Figure 3.** The confrontational moment between Claudia (Monica Vitti) and Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) on a roof terrace overlooking Noto's cathedral square. Screenshot by author.

rather than friendship or even romance: Sandro deliberately spoils the young architect's drawing, for example, and Claudia is chased. The piazza has stopped being a viable scenario for lovers' rendezvous; the modern city is unable to foster and facilitate meetings between people and lovers. Sandro and Claudia thus cannot but meet in the new, romantic alternative that is offered to them, the terrace: detached from the ground, secluded from others, and providing the characters with "aesthetic relief" (Chatman, 1985, p. 109) by way of its stunning historical panorama, this location is the only possible place for private discussions.

Claudia and Sandro are shown the way up to the roof terrace (belonging to the Chiesa di San Carlo al Corso, a church in central Noto) by a nun, who ironically remarks that she has never been up on that terrace herself and immediately leaves them alone. The nun's words cast an uneasy shadow onto the scene. They reveal her lack of indulgence in the architectonical beauty of the vista around her and deny the possibility of her even lingering in such a pleasure-inducing location. Moreover, they also prelude the forbidden relationship that is going to unravel between Sandro and Claudia. After the nun has left, the view from the bell tower's terrace, with the majestic baroque buildings, prompts Sandro to admire the architecture around him. As Giorgio Grassi (1988) acutely notes, all architects feel a compelling urge to scrutinize ancient buildings in order to uncover their "technical secrets" (p. 23). In Sandro's case, however, instead of trying to uncover their technical mysteries, he is drawn to reflect on the past and present state of architecture itself, alongside moments of self-revelation as a failed architect (Landy, 2000; Schwarzer, 2000). In this scene, Claudia feels trapped like "a caged animal" (Schwarzer, 2000, p. 203), physically blocked by the ropes of the church bell, which, suggestively, almost appear to strangle her like a noose (Figure 3). Antonioni had already "trapped" Claudia earlier, with the Sicilian men lasciviously looking at her; however, as the scene shifts to the bell tower's roof terrace, the feeling of entrapment takes a more personal turn. Claudia is a hunted animal not only in the hypermasculine Sicilian square but also in the private, secluded, elevated space of the terrace, trapped this time by her presumed lover, Sandro. While the public nature of the cathedral square allows Claudia a safe way out from the crowd of Sicilian men, the forced intimacy of the roof terrace becomes more of a peril than the square's crowd below: she does not seem to enjoy the view or the architecture around her, and she appears threatened by Sandro's strange propositions. On her, the hedonism of the roof terrace is wasted and rapidly turns into a mixture of confusion and guilt with Claudia saying "Io vorrei essere lucida, vorrei avere le idee veramente chiare; invece . . ." ("I wish I could be alert, I wish my head could be really clear, and yet . . ."), before she gets distracted by the sound of the bells ringing, which she has inadvertently started.

**Figure 4.** The ending scene of *L'avventura*, overlooking Mount Etna, in Taormina, with Claudia (Monica Vitti) and Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti). Screenshot by author.

The contradictions of affection, pain, and guilt inherent in the relationship between Claudia and Sandro are sublimated in the very final scene of the film, where we meet the two again on an elevated terrace (albeit technically not on a roof). In Taormina, after Claudia's wearying night spent awake waiting for unfaithful Sandro, the two eventually meet on an open terrace just outside Patrizia's villa: Claudia slowly moves toward Sandro, who is seated on a bench in apparent psychological and emotional turmoil. The two lovers, in a slow syncope of sobs and sighs, will not even manage to look each other in the eyes to the very end of the film. As the camera exacerbates Claudia's difficult movements with extreme close-ups fragmenting her body, the final shot shows Claudia from behind, caressing Sandro's head with her hand, both looking into the landscape of Mount Etna. Many critics have commented on the beautiful symmetry of this final shot (Figure 4) and on its lacking some conventional sense of narrative finality (Bondanella, 1999), but the specificity of the encounter's location has been largely overlooked. In the first part of this shot, the wide, empty space of the terrace overlooking Taormina's ancient architecture is evocative of the emotional conflict between Claudia and Sandro, reminding us of their other conflictual moment on the roof terrace in Noto, surrounded by stunning baroque architecture. In the second part of the sequence, when Claudia walks over to Sandro and then stands beside him, the final shot's perspective from behind and the wider angle help sublimate the returned feelings of intimacy between the two. Claudia and Sandro still cannot face looking at each other directly, yet their gazes lost in the beautiful vista of Mount Etna suggest a reconciliation and a sense of resurfaced intimacy between the two lovers. The terrace thus provides a battleground for confrontation first and a cradle of intimacy afterward, which the enclosed space of the square or the street would have been less likely to offer to the viewer. In the ending scene of *L'avventura*, Antonioni returns to intimacy and an elevated vista.

## *Terrazza* III: *Una giornata particolare* (*A Special Day*, 1977) and *La terrazza* (*The Terrace*, 1980, Directed by Ettore Scola)

Ettore Scola's masterpiece *Una giornata particolare*, as it was saluted by critics for its multiple nominations at the Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Awards (De Santi & Vittori, 1987), pictures a day in the lives of an uneducated and frustrated housewife, Antonietta (Sophia Loren), and a confined homosexual intellectual, Gabriele (Marcello Mastroianni), during Adolf Hitler's visit to Rome in May 1938. Because of its historical and pre–World War II setting, the film's architectural landscape is employed by Scola to underline issues of surveillance and dictatorial control in the fascist state. The Roman building, where the plot unfolds, is inescapably of fascist

**Figure 5.** Gabriele (Marcello Mastroianni) in a moment of euphoria with Antonietta (Sophia Loren), preceding the revelation of his homosexuality, on the building's roof terrace. Screenshot available at https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Una_giornata_particolare_003.jpg.

design and is presented to us in all its bleakness at the start of the film, in a long sequence without cuts, with the camera moving all around the inner space of the courtyard, then upward to the porter's balcony and consequently to Antonietta's window facing the courtyard. The fascist "housing project in the San Giovanni district" (Bondanella, 1999, p. 368) is the only actual physical space we encounter in *Una giornata particolare*, in its declinations of the courtyard, the caretaker's lodge, Antonietta's flat, Gabriele's flat, and the roof terrace. Scola's camera visits, inspects, and peers into these interiors as voices from the radio, following Hitler's visit, protrude aggressively into the space over the course of the parade day. In Scola's depiction of a microcosm increasingly preoccupied with surveillance, the terrace becomes the only space that allows relief from the citizens' public lives under fascism. Millicent Marcus (2006) defines *Una giornata particolare* as an "exposé of Fascist mind-control" (p. 55), reflected not only in the examples of fascist self-indoctrination but also in a certain filming of the architectural space. The terrace, with its open, elevated position, far from the madding crowd of the fascist parade and away from the fascist caretaker's (Françoise Berd) prying looks, proves to be a suitable space for intimacy and revelations. It is precisely on the terrace that Gabriele and Antonietta first cross the threshold of being just formal acquaintances and neighbors. As the scene progresses, the two move across the terrace, in a maze of laundry hanging there to dry, exchanging the first, forced intimacies and revealing their characters for what they are (Figure 5). During the terrace scene's climatic end, Antonietta is violently confronted with the reality of Gabriele's homosexuality (De Santi & Vittori, 1987) and Gabriele, equally, comes to terms with Antonietta's own craving for love and affection.

Throughout the film, Scola portrays a "porous" threshold between "the official public arena," exemplified by the radio transmitting the parade, and the private space of the block of flats (Marcus, 2006, p. 57), enhanced by the crisscrossing of the camera's movements, in and out of the building. The porous nature of this boundary is further complicated by the presence of the terrace as an additional relevant space in the development of the film's plot. In the scene on the roof terrace, the perspective of the camera's gaze, on occasions even from above, is nuanced by the tiled floor and the hanging laundry as a visual backdrop—which becomes particularly suggestive in the deliberately de-saturated aesthetics of *Una giornata particolare*—and by the aggressive, returning voice from the radio, broken by the wind blowing over the terrace. Although Scola clearly intends to re-create a situation of fascist surveillance, he is looking back at his predecessors Monicelli and Antonioni: the roof terrace is a synonym for intimacy between the two characters, which would not have been possible anywhere else in the block of flats, monitored as

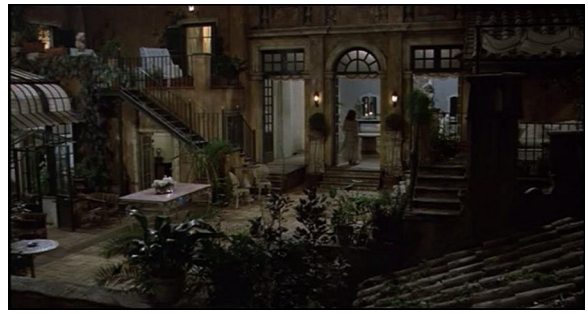

**Figure 6.** The opening scene of *La terrazza*, with the Roman terrace presented to us in all its beauty before the guests arrive.

it was by the caretaker's constant presence. In an interview published in 1996, Scola commented on his decision to shoot this particular scene on the roof terrace, as it was a place where both characters would be able to act more freely: "lì, all'aperto, [Gabriele] trova meglio il coraggio di gridarle la verità. E anche lei si sente più libera, sul terrazzo, mentre lui l'aiuta a piegare il lenzuolo, di parlargli, di baciarlo" ("There, in the open, [Gabriele] finds courage to scream out the truth about him to her. Plus, on the terrace, as he helps her fold the sheets, she feels freer to talk, to kiss him"; Scola & Bertini, 1996, p. 144). This escalation in the intimacy between Antonietta and Gabriele rapidly translates into a pleasurable temptation, at least on Antonietta's part, who, seduced by Gabriele's friendly display of attention, attempts to seduce him in return. The roof terrace, in its invitation to intimacy and pleasure, lays the ground for Antonietta and Gabriele's "special day" together.

Scola frequently gives intimate portrayals of Italian society to comment on its discontent more widely, which makes a thematic thread through all his films, showing his debt to French cinema (Testa, 2002). If *Una giornata particolare* should be read as a social and private commentary on fascist ideas of misogyny and homophobia, while at the same time betraying late-1970s concerns with gender awareness and feminism in Italy (Dunnage, 2014; Marcus, 2006), with *La terrazza*, Scola turns to filming the grumbles of contemporary Italian bourgeoisie at a time of increased affluence and sociocultural change (Dunnage, 2014). Both films are, in different ways, representative of the "intricate psychological, social and political make-up" of the 1970s in Italy (Cento Bull & Giorgio, 2006, p. 1). *La terrazza*, as the title implies, has a terrace as its main scenario. Although the film is not shot exclusively on this luxurious Roman terrace, it does constitute its main architectural and cinematic setting. As Scola himself explained, he chose the terrace as the space where Roman intellectuals come together to have dinner and to share their cultural, artistic, and middle-class preoccupations (De Santi & Vittori, 1985). Throughout the film, the terrace dinner party is repeated five times, using five different visual angles: each time we return to that scene, and then we are made to follow different characters and their story (Scola & Bertini, 1996).

Like *Una giornata particolare, La terrazza* commences with the camera (this time on a crane; Bondanella, 1999) slowly panning across the terrace in a long-sequence shot, which purposefully intends to make the viewer aware of the cinematic space: in the earlier Scola film, the fascist building; here, a lush, extravagant Roman terrace that appears almost like a square about to come to life (Figure 6). The numerous chairs, plants, flowers, dinner tables, and coffee tables fill up the space of the terrace alongside stairs leading to other elevated spaces (a telescopic vision of smaller terraces within the larger terrace), lamps of various kinds, statues, busts, curtains, rustic

roof tiles, and elegant glass windows. Only the guests are missing—another empty architectural space filmed in slow motion by Scola, which at any rate already appears as an even richer and more complex microcosm than the previous fascist building in all its rigid grandness. Unlike the previous instances in this article, where the roof terrace was technically shared by all of the building's various residents, in *La terrazza* the terrace has become private. It is now a place where others need to be invited in order to access it, exemplifying the image of the specific social and cultural stratum Scola is openly criticizing (De Santi & Vittori, 1987; Scola & Bertini, 1996) and its hedonism.

## *Terrazza* IV: *La grande bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*, 2013, Directed by Paolo Sorrentino)

The display of intellectual and social pretense on the terrace à la Scola is pushed to the extreme in Paolo Sorrentino's Academy Award–winning film *La grande bellezza*. Sorrentino borrows from *La terrazza* considerably, particularly with regard to the employment of the terrace. In an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* shortly after Ettore Scola's death in January 2016, Sorrentino acknowledged his debt to *La terrazza* and to *Una giornata particolare* in his own films: "*La terrazza* è un film che mi è piaciuto davvero, ovviamente l'ho guardato con grande attenzione quando ho dovuto fare cose mie, questo è evidente. E poi *Una giornata particolare*, struggente" ("I really, really liked *The Terrace*; obviously, I have watched it very carefully when I had to direct my own films; this is obvious. And then *A Special Day*—simply heartbreaking"; Finos, 2016, para. 4). Sorrentino's borrowings from Scola also include his own peculiar blend of irony and melancholy, which he considered the earlier Italian film director to be a master of (Finos, 2016). One of Sorrentino's most visible borrowings from Scola is precisely the terrace, whose potential as a cinematic and figurative space Sorrentino explores in *La grande bellezza*, continuing to use it as a *locus* for the main character's reflection and self-discovery and as one for hedonistic sociability and entertainment.

Romans are well known in Italy for their summer parties on roof terraces (D'Orazio, 2014). Sorrentino clearly exploits this stereotype throughout the film as Jep Gambardella (Toni Servillo) organizes a series of parties and dinner gatherings on two different roof terraces. Jep Gambardella's birthday party takes place on a roof terrace, which is presented to us by the camera as labyrinthine, crowded, full of glasses and lights, and a much larger space than Jep's own dinner terrace. This particular birthday party scene was shot on the roof terrace of a late-1930s building of fascist design, situated between via Bissolati and via Sallustiana in central Rome, arguably chosen for its modernist feel but also for its proximity with the Martini sign dominating the cityscape in the final sequence (D'Orazio, 2014). The presentation of this early terrace scene is reminiscent of postmodern "displacement[s] of architectural space" (Jameson, 1992, p. 117), where the difference between the indoor and the outdoor is blurred, with little demarcation between one and the other (Jameson, 1992). The terrace, confusing in its presentation of space, is finally presented as detached from everything else around it, appearing from the dark (Figure 7), almost as a piece of "oneiric architecture" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 14). With only the Martini sign suggestive of Rome, these Roman socialites appear unaware of the eternal city's beauty from the terrace (D'Orazio, 2014), while they themselves are enjoying an architecture of hedonism, with strip-tease moments behind glassed walls and sensual dancing in secluded, yet open, spaces.

The terrace adjacent to Jep's flat is used repeatedly throughout the film for his own get-togethers, whether wild parties with music or smaller dinner gatherings with only a select number of his old friends. What is perhaps most striking about Jep's own terrace is its location: his flat is in a prime position to contemplate the beauty of the Colosseum, yet this pure admiration of the architectural sublime (indeed, Rome's "great beauty") hardly ever happens during his parties


**Figure 7.** The lit up terrace, the party, and the unmistakable Martini sign: the scene of Jep Gambardella's birthday party. Screenshot by author.

(D'Orazio, 2014, p. 15). More than 50 years have elapsed since Monicelli's thieves were looking out of roof terraces in Rome, uninterested in the beauty below them as they were not able to afford it; for Sorrentino's wealthy socialites, on the other hand, being idly unaware of Rome's majesty, too busy with their frivolously self-absorbing preoccupations, has become a mark of their own privilege. In the other party scene, taking place on his actual terrace, and in the three more dinner parties occurring in the film, we are hardly made aware, as viewers, of the extraordinary panorama this group of privileged, debauched socialites view on a regular basis. The set-up of the dinner parties is a clear tribute to Scola: Jep's friends represent Rome's microcosm of the 21st century—decadent, middle-class intelligentsia, discussing their dissatisfactions and concerns. As Jep chats with his friends, his neighbor appears on the balcony just above them, accompanied by a tall, blonde woman and a shorter, darker man. The scene reminds us of how the terrace, filmed as if it were a private salon, fails to be such a space as it allows observation from above and from below.

Only on rare occasions do Jep and his entourage get to properly enjoy this incredible panorama: when, after his birthday party, Jep relaxes, swinging on a hammock on his terrace, we get a brief glimpse of the Colosseum, although Jep's (and the director's) interest quickly moves to the nun playing with the children in the convent next door, perhaps intended to prelude the figure of Sister Maria (Giusi Merli) in the latter part of the film. The terrace, in fact, maintains elements of privacy, self-discovery, and the mystical sublime only in the interactions with Sister Maria; after all the guests have left, the "great beauty" becomes manifest with the host of migratory birds stopping on Jep's terrace and somewhat stealing the scene from the lit up Colosseum, once again half-hidden away as part of the background (Figure 8). As Giuseppina Mecchia (2016) comments with regard to this scene, Jep (and the viewers with him) is taken "away from the decadent vulgarity that is . . . a sure marker of the city of Rome and its inhabitants" (p. 189). In *La grande bellezza*, the terrace surpasses its architectural function for social, mundane, and sensual interactions and is no longer simply the quintessentially Italian backdrop against which a frivolous, postmodern *dolce vita* ("sweet life") should unfold. Instead, traversing the film as a *fil rouge* ("red thread") in the protagonist's life, the terrace encourages Jep Gambardella's own moments of self-discovery. With Sorrentino's film, the space directly above Rome's urban bustle and architectural splendor carries over its ambivalence of hedonism and intimacy into the 21st century.

## Conclusion

Lefebvre's own considerations on architecture as a space of enjoyment are helpful to make some concluding remarks. Lefebvre (2014) distinguishes between the ideas of "enjoyment of

**Figure 8.** Sister Maria (Giusi Merli), her migratory birds on Jep's terrace, and the Colosseum in the background.

architecture" and "architecture of enjoyment," the latter indicating a space that encourages and stimulates *jouissance*, or "enjoyment," rather than simply admiring beautiful architecture. While both sentiments can, of course, coexist, as in the character of Sandro in *L'avventura* and in some of Jep's wanderings about Rome, over the course of these films, the terrace itself has developed into an architecture of enjoyment. For Lefebvre, *jouissance* or "enjoyment" signifies enjoyment of life and taking pleasure in its various nuances, including a search for "delight," "serenity,", and "contemplation" (pp. 26, 32, 38). In *La grande bellezza*, Jep's friends only really understand the terrace as a place where they can seek out pleasure: a place for never-ending, sensual parties, with barely any enjoyment of the space itself or the space surrounding it. As Lefebvre argues, however, "the spatial relationship reunites . . . all the sensations" (p. 41). This reunification of all sensations via a terrace of enjoyment is sublimated in the scene with Sister Maria and the migratory birds; there, the mystical and aesthetic essence of the scene is gathered in its pure form, and Jep can take a look at the great beauty around him and even consider writing again. The *terrazza*, for Sorrentino, has become an architectural space of enjoyment that invites both pleasure and contemplation.

In the earlier films *I soliti ignoti* and *Una giornata particolare*, the roof terrace is a shared, communal place where the characters express their desire for intimacy and find relief from surveillance—whether by the police or the regime. In *L'avventura*, the bell tower's roof terrace creates a sense of forced intimacy between the two characters; for Claudia, the space becomes one for enjoyment only until she accidently pulls the bells' ropes, whereas Sandro at once experiences delight in the space around him and contemplative self-discovery. Finally, *La terrazza* exploits the terrace as an enclosed reproduction of the square, representing the "crowd" of Rome's intellectual bourgeoisie. These various declinations of the terrace converge in Sorrentino's 21st-century representation, where the *terrazza* has become a place for parties and hedonism, revelations and self-discovery, and has effectively taken over the piazza in importance, whose existence, down below, we have easily forgotten. The five films analyzed in this article are, by no means, exhaustive in displaying the social and cultural complexities of the terrace in post-war and contemporary Italy; at the same time, they do exemplify key moments in the history of Italian cinema. Through this analysis, I have attempted to explore a historical and spatial line of progression in the development of the terrace as a relevant cinematic space in Italian films. This elevated architecture provides film directors with an aesthetic alternative to the open piazza and enclosed interiors, looking "above," at the very top of Italy's beautiful buildings and bustling squares.

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## Notes

1. The English translation of the title is not quite faithful to the original Italian expression, which literally means "The Usual Unknown Suspects" (Fournier-Lanzoni, 2008, p. 37).
2. All translations from the Italian are mine unless otherwise stated.
3. *L'avventura* is the first film in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960s tetralogy, together with *La notte* (*The Night*, 1961), *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, 1962), and *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*, 1964). For the purpose of this article, I have considered only *L'avventura* as exemplary of Antonioni's relationship to architecture "above" and for its meaningful scenes on *terrazze*.

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