

FROM MILAN TO WEST BERLIN: SPATIAL ALIENATION AND THE POST-1945 ANXIOGENIC CITYSCAPE IN ANNA MARIA ORTESE'S *SILENZIO A MILANO* AND INGEBOURG BACHMANN'S 'EIN ORT FÜR ZUFÄLLE'

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Anna Maria Ortese's collection of journalistic reportages and short stories, *Silenzio a Milano* (Silence in Milan, 1958), and Ingeborg Bachmann's speech 'Ein Ort für Zufälle' (17 October 1964). It focuses on their topophobic images of Milan and West Berlin, the anxious representations of these post-1945 urban landscapes. Their pathographies of 1950s Milan and 1960s West Berlin are explored by linking contemporary studies on alienation with the polarity of affective responses to space. The analysis especially resorts to Gaston Bachelard's and Yi-Fu Tuan's discourses of topoaffektive polarities, that is topophobia and topophilia, as a starting point to highlight Ortese's and Bachmann's shared focus on the material, psychic and social character of peacetime Italian and West German societies. While recognising the texts' differences in genre and degree of negativity, the article reads the complex representations of the 'pathological' relationality between the self and the socially constructed world in *Silenzio a Milano* and 'Ein Ort für Zufälle' as topical metaphors for alienation in urban capitalism. It positions Ortese and Bachmann as critics not only of the haunted histories of Nazi-fascism but also of post-1945 European models of growth.

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht Anna Maria Orteses Sammlung von Reportagen und Kurzgeschichten *Silenzio a Milano* (Schweigen in Mailand, 1958) und Ingeborg Bachmanns Rede „Ein Ort für Zufälle“ (17. Oktober 1964). Der Fokus liegt auf den topophobischen Darstellungen von Mailand und West-Berlin, den ängstlichen Darstellungen dieser urbanen Landschaften der Nachkriegszeit. Diese Pathographien des Mailands der 1950er Jahre und des West-Berlins der 1960er Jahre werden durch die Verbindung zeitgenössischer Studien zu Entfremdung mit der Polarität affektiver Raumwahrnehmungen untersucht. Die Analyse greift dabei besonders auf Gaston Bachelards und Yi-Fu Tuans Theorien der topoaffektiven Polaritäten — Topophobie und Topophilie — zurück, um Orteses und Bachmanns gemeinsamen Fokus auf den materiellen, psychischen und sozialen Charakter der italienischen und westdeutschen Gesellschaften in Friedenszeiten hervorzuheben. Es werden zwar die Unterschiede dieser Texte in Bezug auf Gattung und Negativitätsgrad anerkannt, dennoch liest der Artikel die komplexen Darstellungen der pathologischen Relationalität zwischen dem Selbst und der sozial konstruierten Welt sowohl in *Silenzio a Milano* als auch in „Ein Ort für Zufälle“ als topische Metaphern für Entfremdung im urbanen Kapitalismus. Er stellt Ortese und

Bachmann nicht nur als Kritikerinnen der geisterhaften Überreste des Nazi-Faschismus dar, sondern auch der europäischen Wachstumsmodelle nach 1945.

‘I find myself in a big city prison, arisen from the vision of mankind’
Mattafox, ‘Big City Life’ (*Signs of a Struggle*, 2005)

INTRODUCTION

This article examines two texts by Anna Maria Ortese (1914–98) and Ingeborg Bachmann (1926–73), both of which explore the affective meaning of space. Specifically, it looks at the ‘pathological’ relationality between the self and the socially constructed world as a metaphor for alienation in urban capitalism. The analysis focuses on the experience of modern metropolitan spaces, in Ortese’s *Silenzio a Milano* (Silence in Milan, 1958), a collection of journalistic reportages and short stories, and in Bachmann’s speech ‘Ein Ort für Zufälle’ (17 October 1964). Despite their differences in genre, this article argues that the central role of urban space in both texts makes them comparable, particularly in their predominantly negative affective responses to this space.

To understand the spaces examined in this article — the alienating post-1945 cityscapes of Milan and West Berlin — it is crucial to examine how Ortese and Bachmann represent the impact of the late-modern Western social system on individuals. This system commodifies subjects, depriving them of the beneficial effects of physical and mental interactions with space. The article links contemporary studies on alienation¹ with analyses of the polarity of affective responses to space, distinguishing between topophobia (the fear or aversion to space) and topophilia (the love of space). This framework draws on the work of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard and Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Their work on topo-affective polarities, such as Bachelard’s *La poétique de l’espace* (1957)² and Tuan’s *Topophilia* (1974), illuminate twentieth-century relations to urban environments.³

Bachelard defines topophilia as the study of ‘*felicitous space*’ — the ‘space we love’ — a space eulogised (from Ancient Greek ‘εὖ-’ (good) and

¹ Esp. Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. by Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith, ed. by Frederick Neuhouser (Columbia University Press, 2014); Christoph Henning, *Theories of Alienation: From Rousseau to the Present*, trans. by Sylvie A. Martlew (Routledge, 2025); Hartmut Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Northwestern State University Press, 2010).

² English edition published as *The Poetics of Space* in 1964 by Orion Press, trans. by Maria Jolas. Quotations in the article are from this English version.

³ See *Topophilia and Topophobia: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Human Habitat*, ed. by Xing Ruan and Paul Hogben (Routledge, 2007).

‘λόγος’ (word)) in literary language.⁴ Topophobia, by contrast, refers to the experience of a ‘hostile space’, a ‘space of hatred and combat’ that can only be understood through impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images.⁵ The interaction between the self, places and landscapes helps uncover the psychic states and affective responses of individuals to external social realities. Topophilic responses, characterised by openness to space, can generate a sense of well-being, linked to what Bachelard calls the ‘primitiveness of refuge’: the intimacy and protection felt in early life, which is expressed physically through ‘dynamics of retreat’ or ‘movements of withdrawal’ engraved in our animal muscles and linked to our uterine origins.⁶ In contrast, topophobic responses involve a form of closure to space. They show disharmonic and disturbed relationships between the self and the environment, in which anxiety replaces well-being.

Tuan, also according to Edward Relph, provided another indispensable reference for understanding all human beings’ affective ties with the material environment.⁷ In his *Topophilia*, he proposed a phenomenology of sensory and environmental perception. He argued that the human response to environment is primarily aesthetic: such as, in his view, the experience of nature. This response also relates to health, considering that a pleasurable experience of the ‘natural’ landscape induces a sense of well-being and a feeling of wholeness and unity with the world, a fact that is etymologically suggested by the relation between the words ‘health’, ‘wholeness’ and ‘holiness’.⁸ On the one hand, Tuan remarks on how in both Western and Eastern traditions, the countryside, the forest, the seashore, the valley, or the island have been idealised often as environments of persistent appeal. On the other hand, he comments on how human attitudes to cities have been more ambiguous: while the ancient city was a symbol of the cosmos and within its walls people experienced the order of heaven freed of biological necessities and the vagaries of nature that made country life insecure, the modern metropolis has symbolised — beyond order, freedom and glory — worldliness, the corruption of natural virtues, and oppression.

This theoretical perspective allows us to foresee how Ortese’s and Bachmann’s representations of the cityscape align with a broader transcultural reflection that has been present since the nineteenth century. Thinkers from Rousseau to Marx and Engels, Baudelaire to Benjamin, and Freud to Kracauer, Simmel and Sitte have argued that the physical fabric of

⁴ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 19. Italics in the original.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 19–20.

⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁷ Edward (Ted) Relph, ‘Topophilia and Topophils’, *Placeness, Place, Placelessness*, 30 October 2015, <<https://www.placeness.com/topophilia-and-topophils/>> [accessed 18 October 2024]; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 93.

⁸ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 98.

big cities imposes a systematised alienation.⁹ In Ortese's and Bachmann's portrayals of Milan and West Berlin, we witness the continuation of a political critique of progress and growth, set against the backdrop of post-Second World War Italian and West German development. Additionally, a sense of nostalgia pervades both texts, lamenting a disconnection from the mechanical, mass-oriented, rapidly moving and crowded metropolises.¹⁰ Ortese and Bachmann critique the displaced individualism of late-modern life, using topophobia as a central metaphor for the 'pathological deformation' resulting from a transgression of personal boundaries, as described by Simmel in *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900): it expresses hyperaesthesia, a hyper-sensory overload where every contact with the world causes pain.¹¹

So far, Ortese's *Silenzio a Milano* has received little critical attention. In 1998, Monica Farnetti briefly noted the similarities between *Silenzio a Milano* and Ortese's earlier work *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (1953).¹² She highlighted the melancholic tone of Ortese's Milanese texts, portraying the city as a hopeless place where idleness, contemplation and aesthetic experience have become impractical. In the only English-language monograph on Ortese, published in 2014 and focusing on themes of loss and otherness in her 'visionary' work, Vilma De Gasperin analysed a broad corpus of texts but did not address *Silenzio a Milano* specifically.¹³ More recently, in 2015, Andrea Baldi explored *Silenzio a Milano* and other travel writings by Ortese (in the volume of collected essays *Anna Maria Ortese: Celestial Geographies*), positioning the Italian author as close to Benjamin's and Adorno and Horkheimer's theories of modernity.¹⁴ He connected her work to texts such as Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* (published posthumously in 1982) and Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944), investigating the threats of late capitalism — particularly the disintegration of social connections — as described in Ortese's text, and Baldi also inspired this article's comparison between Ortese and Bachmann.

Bachmann's 'Ein Ort für Zufälle' has received more scholarly attention. Hans Höller compared its portrayal of West Berlin with Bachmann's earlier depiction of Rome in 'Was ich in Rom sah und hörte' (1955), highlighting

⁹ Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (MIT Press, 2000), p. 65.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 66–68.

¹² Monica Farnetti, *Anna Maria Ortese* (Mondadori, 1998), pp. 145–46.

¹³ Vilma De Gasperin, *Loss and the Other in the Visionary Work of Anna Maria Ortese* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Andrea Baldi, 'Cities "Paved with Casualties": Ortese's Journeys through Urban Modernity', in *Anna Maria Ortese: Celestial Geographies*, ed. by Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzi (Toronto University Press, 2015), pp. 78–111, doi:10.3138/9781442619227-005. See also the previous Italian version: 'La metropoli matrigna: "Silenzio a Milano" di Anna Maria Ortese', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 27.59 (2000), pp. 187–209.

a shared ‘archaeological’ approach and themes of illness and death, both rooted in the traumatic histories of the Italian and German capitals.¹⁵ Sigrid Weigel explored Bachmann’s Berliner topography as a symptom of a ‘Schreckensgeschichte’, while Anna Parkinson found in the text an ‘affectless Germany’, where a population suffers from an Adornian ‘Gefühlskälte’.¹⁶ Andrew Webber emphasised the Austrian element of Bachmann’s work, linking it to post-1945 Austrian satire, while Valentina Di Rosa connected the psychopathology of Berlin in ‘Ein Ort für Zufälle’ to Bachmann’s utopian image of Bohemia in her poem ‘Böhmen liegt am Meer’ (1964), an epitome of longing that inspired the celebrated painting by Anselm Kiefer (*Böhmen liegt am Meer*) in 1996.¹⁷

This article argues that both Ortese’s and Bachmann’s texts are not just critiques of Nazi-fascism’s legacies, important as those legacies are. Instead, it suggests that *Silenzio a Milano* and ‘Ein Ort für Zufälle’ share a portrayal of the dominance of topophobia in the human experience of late-modern metropolitan spaces¹⁸: both texts express the desperate need for spaces where the capitalist and materialist logic of Western civilisation is suspended. While Bachmann’s text explores a complex dynamic between alienation and possible dealienation, both texts allow negativity — and topophobia — to prevail. They offer profound aesthetic and political reflections on relational disturbance in Milan and West Berlin — spaces where the ‘good life’ is impeded.¹⁹

ORTESE’S MILAN

Ortese’s *Silenzio a Milano* (1958) must be placed in an Italian historical and cultural context that, after the Second World War, sees a shift of focus from the material, psychic and social consequences of war to those of capitalism

¹⁵ Hans Höller, ‘Ein utopischer Ort im Ich und ein traumatischer: Rom und Berlin bei Ingeborg Bachmann’, *Il confronto letterario: Quaderni del dipartimento di lingue e letterature straniere moderne dell’Università di Pavia*, supplement to n. 14 (1991), pp. 39–50.

¹⁶ Sigrid Weigel, *Ingeborg Bachmann. Hinterlassenschaften unter Wahrung des Briefgeheimnisses* (Paul Zsolnay, 1999), pp. 373–83; Anna M. Parkinson, ‘Taking Breath: The Ethical Stakes of Affect in Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Ein Ort für Zufälle*’, in *Re-acting to Ingeborg Bachmann: New Essays and Performances*, ed. by Cairtriona Leahy and Bernadette Cronin (Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), pp. 65–75.

¹⁷ Andrew J. Webber, ‘Worst of all Possible Worlds? Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Ein Ort für Zufälle*’, *Austrian Studies*, 15 (2007), pp. 112–29, doi:10.1353/aus.2007.0004; Valentina Di Rosa, ‘“In der Situation des Radwechslers”’, in *Ingeborg Bachmanns Berliner Periode als Öffnung zu einer transnationalen Literaturpraxis*, in *Berliner Weltliteraturen. Internationale literarische Beziehungen in Ost und West nach dem Mauerbau*, ed. by Jutta Müller-Tamm (De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 113–34, doi:10.1515/9783110733495-005.

¹⁸ Xing Ruan and Paul Hogben, ‘Architectural Enclosure: A Prologue to Topophilia and Topophobia’, in *Topophilia and Topophobia*, pp. 1–11 (p. 7), doi:10.4324/9781003060758-1.

¹⁹ Understanding of the concept of the ‘good’ life is based on Yi-Fu Tuan, *The Good Life* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); *The Good Life Beyond Growth: New Perspectives*, ed. by Hartmut Rosa and Christoph Henning (Routledge, 2018).

in peacetime. Unlike the partially fantastical representation of Milan in Vittorio De Sica's film *Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan*, 1951), Ortese's *Silenzio a Milano* lacks a 'miraculous' transfiguration of the Milanese space.²⁰ The leitmotif of silence emphasises the rendering of Milan as an utterly topophobic space.

The leitmotif is included in the title of the collection, and in passages such as the one contained in the collection's last text, where silence denotes people's impossibility to shout, call for help, or move. It marks their death: 'Che morte fatta di silenzio, di abbiezione!' (SM, p. 137) (What a death made of silence, of abjection!).²¹ Silence is more of a metaphorical rather than concrete expression of human alienation in the noisiness of Milan. It symbolises the present loss of subjectivity in the metropolitan reality more than reticence about past historical events.

At the same time, although the collection denounces — with documentary intent — the dehumanisation of people in the capital of the 'Italian economic miracle', the collection is pervaded by a persistent lyrical-emotional element that makes its texts 'human' and 'existential' documents.²² Published in 1958 with Laterza and reprinted by La Tartaruga in 1986, *Silenzio a Milano* comprises seven prose works, some of whose titles already reveal Ortese's interest in social criticism: the reportages 'Una notte nella stazione' (A Night in the Station), 'I ragazzi di Arese' (The Kids of Arese), 'Locali notturni' (Night Clubs), 'Le piramidi di Milano' (The Pyramids of Milan) and 'La città è venduta' (The City is Sold), and the short stories 'Il disoccupato' (The Unemployed) and 'Lo sgombero' (The Clearing Out).

Except for 'Lo sgombero' — which was published for the first time in the collection — all the texts had previously been published in newspapers between 1955 and 1957. 'Una notte nella stazione', 'I ragazzi di Arese' and 'Locali notturni' appeared in *L'Europeo* on 7 August 1955, 2 January 1955 and 6 February 1955, respectively. 'Le piramidi di Milano', 'La città è venduta' and 'Il disoccupato' appeared in *L'Unità* on 23 August 1956, 7 April 1957 and 12 May 1957, respectively.²³ The collection follows the publication of *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (1953) by a few years. The two books

²⁰ Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (Wallflower, 2006), p. 15.

²¹ Anna Maria Ortese, *Silenzio a Milano* (La Tartaruga, 1998), p. 137, hereafter cited parenthetically as SM. Translations of the Italian in the article are mine.

²² The expression 'Italian economic miracle' refers to the years between the early 1950s and the early 1960s in Italy. They were characterised by strong economic growth, especially in the industrial triangle of Turin/Milan/Genoa, which was subject to strong internal immigration, especially from the southern areas of the country. See Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano: Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta* (Donzelli, 2005). Quoted here: Hartmut Rosa and Christoph Henning, 'Good Life Beyond Growth: An Introduction', in *The Good Life Beyond Growth*, pp. 1–14 (p. 2); see also Giancarlo Borri, *Invito alla lettura di Anna Maria Ortese* (Mursia, 1988), p. 42.

²³ For details on the publication of the texts in newspapers and later collected in *Silenzio a Milano*, see Farnetti, *Anna Maria Ortese*, p. 146.

have a similar layout: both are collections of short stories and journalistic reportages.

Although *Silenzio a Milano* has (at least partially) appeared in German, French and Spanish,²⁴ and although it has recently been popularised in Italian theatres,²⁵ the Milanese collection has not had the same impact as the Neapolitan one. Nonetheless, as Farnetti remarked, it helps to establish Ortese's reputation as a reporter and to define her important relationship with Milan as well as with Naples.²⁶ In *Corpo celeste*, Ortese comments on the writings collected in *Silenzio a Milano*: she describes them as 'melancholic' and explains that they reflect her gaze as an immigrant from the South — she was born in Rome to a Sicilian father and a Neapolitan mother. In Milan, she witnessed the transformation of everything into merchandise:

Vedevo una città dove ogni cosa era in vendita, tutto aveva un cartellino.²⁷

(I saw a city where everything was for sale, everything had a tag.)

The collection's aim is to denounce the phenomenon of alienation in Milan, and the geography of the text does not place 'an idyllic alternative, perhaps of rural solitude' alongside the 'stepmother-like' metropolis: there seem to be no topophilic projections.²⁸ The author does not yet articulate a notion of 'elsewhere' as opposed to the suffocating civilised world, 'ruthless in its ambitions and foolish in its mystifications', as she does in the later novel *L'Iguana*.²⁹ Like *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, *Silenzio a Milano* continues to pursue (neo-)realist aesthetics, prone to what Giorgio Manganelli hermetically defines as the 'patheticism of the wretched', a rhetoric of compassion for the poor and destitute.³⁰

However, while Ortese describes the 'continuous screaming' of the subproletarians in Naples — often reduced to subhuman conditions by extreme poverty — in her Milanese collection, as Ortese herself recalls in a letter to Franz Haas dated June 1990, she records the 'silence' of the proletarians, the agents of Italy's transformation from an agricultural

²⁴ *Stazione Centrale und andere Mailänder Geschichten*, trans. by Barbara Kleiner and Viktoria von Schirach (Hanser, 1993); *Le silence de Milan*, trans. by Claude Schmitt (Actes Sud, 2001); *Silencio en Milán*, trans. by César Palma (Minúscula, 2012).

²⁵ 'Direttissimo delle 20' (8 p.m. Express Train), dir. Gianna Carbonera and Leonardo Bordin (2015).

²⁶ Farnetti, *Anna Maria Ortese*, p. 146.

²⁷ Anna Maria Ortese, *Corpo celeste* (Adelphi, 1997), p. 81.

²⁸ Baldi, 'La metropoli matrigna', p. 188.

²⁹ Caterina De Caprio, 'Anna Maria Ortese o dell'impossibile conciliazione fra io e mondo', in *Paesaggio e memoria: Giornata di studi su Anna Maria Ortese. 26 maggio 2000. Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*. *Cappella Pappacoda*, ed. by Caterina De Caprio and Laura Donadio (Dante & Descartes, 2003), pp. 125–42 (p. 130).

³⁰ Giorgio Manganelli, 'Anna Maria Ortese: Aspra Letizia', in *Concupiscenza Libreria*, ed. by Salvatore Silvano Nigro (Adelphi, 2020), pp. 355–57 (p. 356).

to an industrial country.³¹ Furthermore, *Il mare non bagna Napoli* can be considered a chronicle of Neapolitan society and, at the same time, a document on the 'southern question' — the chronic economic, political and cultural developmental lag of southern Italy compared to northern Italy — in the aftermath of the Second World War, seen from the perspective of the subproletariat, the petty bourgeoisie and the intellectual bourgeoisie. *Silenzio a Milano*, by contrast, appears to be a chronicle on Milanese society with an almost exclusive focus on the proletarian class.³²

A privileged locus of alienation in the collection is Milan's central station, portrayed in the opening text, 'Una notte nella stazione'. Designed by the architect Ulisse Stacchini and inaugurated on 1 July 1931 in the presence of Fascist Minister of Communications Costanzo Ciano, the station replaced the former central station located in what is now Piazza della Repubblica. It became a symbol of the Fascist commitment to modernisation and the city's strategic importance to the national economy.³³ Later, between 1943 and 1945, it also became associated with the deportation of Italian Jews to concentration camps.³⁴

Ortese's reportage does not point at the historical traumas embodied by this place but presents the station as a place of access to the city and its living and working opportunities. The passage from the station symbolically marks the commodification of the person, that is, their incorporation into or exclusion from the capitalist system that the station stands for:

Si entrava in questa città per essere trasformati in cose, in cifre, o respinti.
(SM, p. 35)

(One entered this city to be transformed into things, into figures, or to be rejected.)

The penetrating and critical gaze is that of the reporter (Ortese) who, together with a photographer, sees the building's architecture and the people who pass through this liminal space every day. The movement can be understood in Augéan terms as a transition. Space, too, in this perspective, appears as a temporary rather than a real place.³⁵ Observing

³¹ *Possibilmente il più innocente: Lettere a Franz Haas (1990–1998)*, ed. by Francesco Rognoni and Franz Haas (sedizioni, 2016), p. 43.

³² The debate on the 'southern question' appeared shortly after the unification of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 and continues to this day. The expression refers to the disproportion in development between the north and the south of the Italian peninsula.

³³ Lucy M. Maullsby, *Fascism, Architecture and the Claiming of Modern Milan, 1922–1943* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 69.

³⁴ A Holocaust memorial, named Memoriale della Shoah, was inaugurated in Milan's central station in 2013. It is centred around Platform 21, from which Jews were deported either directly to Auschwitz or via Fossoli and Bolzano. The exhibition space includes a wall listing the names of victims and features cattle wagons on the original track. See Martin Winstone, *The Holocaust Sites of Europe: An Historical Guide* (Bloomsbury, 2024), p. 72.

³⁵ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (Verso, 1995); also see Agata Morka, 'Brief Encounters and Lasting Impressions: Contemporary Train

the station — a place that for Baldi can evoke the futuristic scenarios of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) — provokes 'un senso di disagio, una malavoglia e come una repulsione leggerissima' (SM, p. 5) (a sense of unease, reluctance, like a slight repulsion).³⁶ Objective indications are given about the station's construction, its size and its appearance.

At the same time, recalling stylistic models that Ortese also employs in her travel writings, collected in 1991 in *La lente scura* (The Dark Lens), the documentary intent merges with an intensely subjective and introspective tone. This casts a negative light on the observed dystopian reality.³⁷ Milan's central station is described as a disquieting organ of modern industrial civilisation. The vocabulary used recalls that of Dante when he describes the structure of Hell in the *Comedy*, describing through the image of rings the sectors in which sinners are punished:

Guardandola, si ha l'impressione di toccare il polso alla vita moderna, all'uomo preso nel *giron*e della civiltà industriale, che restituirà alla fine, dopo trent'anni, un automa o un rottame. (SM, p. 11; italics mine)

(Looking at it, one has the impression of touching the pulse of modern life, of man caught in the *ring* of industrial civilisation, which in the end, after thirty years, will give us back an automaton or a wreck.)

But the 'hellish' dimension of the Milanese station is reconnected with a civilisation that Richard Schacht, in a fundamental historical study of alienation, has already reconnected to the logic of 'inhuman power' that dominates market economies and is responsible for processes of 'dehumanisation' — what Marx called 'Entmenschung'.³⁸ The station's threshold symbolically introduces us to a civil society that detracts from the quality of people's lives through work, exploitation and globalisation. Ortese's 'Una notte nella stazione' reveals an explicit critique of the ideology of progress embodied by Milan's central station.

This happens not only through her emphasis on the sheer size of the structure — in any case one of the largest in Europe at the time — but also through her analysis of the depersonalised, levelling and primitive crowds: the epitome of the loss of differential subjectivity in modern society. They pass through this 'funerary' building every day (SM, p. 12).³⁹ In order to describe them, the reporter uses the cinematographic technique

Station Architecture', in *Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails*, ed. by Benjamin Fraser and Steven Spalding (Lexington, 2012), pp. 171–204 (p. 176).

³⁶ Baldi, 'La metropoli matrigna', p. 190.

³⁷ Cristina Della Coletta, 'Scrittura come utopia: La lente scura di Anna Maria Ortese', *Italica*, 76.3 (1999), pp. 371–88 (p. 376), doi:10.2307/479911.

³⁸ Richard Schacht, *Alienation*, introd. by Walter Kaufmann (Allen & Unwin, 1971), pp. 87; 101.

³⁹ Vincenzo Mele, 'Before and Beyond the Masses: Simmel, Benjamin, and the Sociology of Crowds', *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, 39.1 (2018), pp. 119–40 (pp. 120; 123), doi:10.3138/tr.39.1.119.

of zooming, that is, she brings the observation lens progressively closer to the 'objects' examined.

This technique is comparable to the one used to observe the building complex of the Granili in the fourth text of *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, 'La città involontaria'. The magnifying lens initially focuses not on the dehumanised lives of the tenants of the dilapidated building complex opposite the Bay of Naples, but on those of the transiting Milanese crowds, first observed from a distance and compared to streams of water: 'Osservate le correnti umane che scorrono come rigagnoli neri per ogni dove!' (SM, p. 12) (Watch the human streams flowing everywhere like black rivulets!). Their anxiety is noted: 'qui interminabili colonne di uomini logorati dall'ansia si muovono interminabilmente' (SM, p. 12) (here endless columns of anxiety-ridden people move endlessly). Anxiety is a symptom of a more than heteronomous life, one subject to an 'alien' power and in which the 'cosmic self' — the essential quality of a person, the centre of feeling and worth, crying out for expression — has been systemically damaged.⁴⁰

Next, the lens zooms in on the people who make up these crowds. Their anatomical details and 'mechanised' kinesics are observed. In this way, the reporter can assess the contemporary reality she witnesses, characterised by a 'contrazione progressiva della personalità, automatismo, fine della parola' (SM, p. 13) (progressive contraction of personality, automatism, end of speech). It is apparent from the text that this reality is additionally characterised by the migration of the category of the sacred from the religious sphere to the economic one, in which the 'new gods' are 'la produzione, il guadagno, una felicità apparente' (SM, p. 14) (production, profit, an illusion of happiness). In other words, the reality observed is characterised by what Weber — reflecting on progress in post-secular Western societies — called the 'disenchantment of the world', a restriction of the sphere of human values due to the increasing technical mastery over life, even in countries like Italy.⁴¹

'Una notte nella stazione' draws our attention to the place where the proletarian masses — often from the Italian South — enter the efficient disenchantment of Milan. The other texts in the collection, by contrast, offer examples of alienation and social marginalisation in other parts of the city: minors spending Christmas Eve in re-education centres ('I ragazzi

⁴⁰ I encountered Diane Margolis's insightful concept of the 'cosmic self' while reading Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation* (pp. 47; 228). Margolis defines the concept in her book *The Fabric of Self: A Theory of Ethics and Emotions* (Yale University Press, 1998), particularly in the chapter titled 'The Cosmic Self' (pp. 86–107), where Margolis employs Hermann Hesse's character Siddhartha to explore the characteristics of a self deeply longing for unity with the universe.

⁴¹ Richard Jenkins, 'Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium', *Max Weber Studies*, 1.1 (2000), pp. 11–32 (p. 12). Weber introduces the concept of 'disenchantment' in relation to the growth of scientific rationality in Western civilisation in his essay 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', in *Geistige Arbeit als Beruf: Vier Vorträge vor dem Freistudentischen Bund* (Duncker & Humblot, 1919).

di Arese'), prostitutes in nightclubs ('Locali notturni'), the tenants of the *case albergo* ('Le piramidi di Milano'), and the inhabitants of the suburbs, including Ortese herself ('La città è venduta'). In a way, the reality observed is 'the same world of wrecks, of outcasts, at the extreme limit of the human and the subhuman' described in *Il mare non bagna Napoli*.⁴² The difference is that the reality of these individuals no longer clashes with the romantic and sweetened image of southern Italy, but with the optimistic image of the metropolis of business technology and economic growth.

As Ortese writes in 'I ragazzi di Arese', the individuals presented in the collection are an 'esercito di perduti' (SM, p. 50), an 'army of the lost', portrayed in all their sadness and loneliness. The negative image of the minors in the re-education centre in Arese, a prison located a few kilometres from Milan, is identified not so much with the deviation of these subjects from legality but with their original abandonment by their families. By contrast, the negativity that emerges from the reportage 'Locali notturni' derives from the squalor of the metropolitan club culture, marked by a state of transience, 'Otherness' and distance from everyday working life.⁴³

The glance at the various Milanese nightclubs, characterised by the orientalisising design of venues such as the Shanghai, and a diverse clientele always in search of 'after-work' (SM, p. 64), enables Ortese to reflect on the working conditions of sex workers, another category of outcasts. That of the prostitute is a trope of the social representations of post-1940 Italian reality, as recently remarked by Danielle Hipkins.⁴⁴ Ortese resorts to the trope, emphasising the deep-seated desperation in the lives of Milanese sex workers. One of them is observed while sitting in the vestibule, under a mirror. The reporter focuses on the smile of this drunken woman. She watches how her foot moves to the rhythm of live covers of melancholic songs such as Peggy Lee's 'Johnny Guitar' (1954). In so doing, she insinuates a melancholic note in her depiction of liminoid Milanese spaces.⁴⁵

Alienation and social marginalisation are thematised in a symbiotic relation to the spaces depicted. As Baldi also notes, the dysphoric quality of life offered by the metropolis is always mediated, throughout Ortese's

⁴² Ines Scaramucci, 'Anna Maria Ortese: Autobiografia, favola, reportage mordente e surrealmagico, tra immediatezza testimoniale e letteratura, ideologia socialista e cadute', in *Novecento: Gli scrittori e la cultura letteraria nella società italiana*, ed. by Gianni Grana, 10 vols (Marzorati, 1979), VIII, pp. 7658–72 (p. 7664).

⁴³ Silvia Rief, *Club Cultures: Boundaries, Identities, and Otherness* (Routledge, 2009), pp. 13; 17.

⁴⁴ See Danielle Hipkins's study on Italian cinema: *Italy's Other Women: Gender and Prostitution in Italian Cinema, 1940–1965* (Peter Lang, 2016).

⁴⁵ Turner uses the term liminoid to describe an individualised expression of creative and alternative expressions in industrialised societies, where varied leisure time activities are more accessible than in traditional, pre-industrialised societies. D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Sage, 2005), p. 158.

collection, by looking at the concrete places where this life takes place.⁴⁶ Like the central station that is the subject of the collection's first reportage, the gargantuan *case albergo* (hotel houses) become a symbolic image of Milan's post-war architectural dystopia.⁴⁷ The *case albergo* built by Luigi Moretti — three tall buildings referred to in Ortese's text as 'pyramids' — were part of the project to rebuild the city after heavy bombing, particularly that of August 1943.⁴⁸ These buildings were meant to provide low-cost accommodation for the growing masses of small families, office workers, labourers and students after the war on a short- to medium-term basis, but in Ortese's reportage, they become the privileged place to observe the alienation of men and women. These men and women are compared to monks and nuns in the cells of a monastery or goldfish swimming in their bowls: 'nuotano nella pulita e disperata atmosfera di quelle stanze' (SM, p. 78) (they swim in the clean and desperate atmosphere of those rooms). These examples of contemporary houses are not metaphors for safety and protection but synecdoches for death.⁴⁹ They are 'un monumento funebre in memoria dell'uomo moderno' (a funeral monument in memory of modern humankind) and a complex of coffins for 'corpses' (SM, p. 79).

It is a paradox: while ever more people move from other parts of the country to Milan to improve their living and working conditions, and while there is relentless construction in the city, with the constant expansion of the urban grids and the renegotiation of the city centre, *Silenzio a Milano* presents the image of a dying city. It is a 'sold city', as the title of the last reportage suggests, in which Ortese portrays herself as she moves from one suburb of Milan to another. The manner of her movement is seemingly apathetic:

Non lascio Milano, solo mi trasferisco da una periferia all'altra. Non sono triste né allegra. (SM, p. 81)

(I'm not leaving Milan, just moving from one suburb to another. I am neither sad nor cheerful.)

She contrasts the different Milanese suburbs and continues to think about the impact that inhabited space has on the subjective quality of life. She notes that there are 'open' or 'closed' suburbs. The open ones are centripetal peripheries, which allow good living conditions and relations with the city centre ('periferie per uomini', SM, p. 86; peripheries for

⁴⁶ Baldi, 'Cities "Paved with Casualties"', p. 96.

⁴⁷ On the *case albergo*, see also Antonio Romano, 'Le Case albergo di Luigi Moretti: Frammenti di un'utopia', in *Luigi Moretti: Architetto del Novecento*, ed. by Corrado Bozzoni, Daniela Fonti and Alessandra Muntoni (Gangemi, 2011), pp. 481–82.

⁴⁸ Matthew Evangelista, *Allied Air Attacks and Civilian Harm in Italy, 1940–1945: Bombing Among Friends* (Routledge, 2022), p. 192.

⁴⁹ See Emanuele Coccia, *Philosophy of the Home: Domestic Space and Happiness*, trans. by Richard Dixon (Penguin, 2024), p. 6.

people). The closed ones are centrifugal peripheries, where people live and die in subhuman conditions ('periferie per non-uomini', SM, p. 86; peripheries for non-people). These closed peripheries signal a lower socio-economic level and constitute the space inhabited by what is described in terms of violated forms of human subjectivity.

In *Silenzio a Milano*, the change of narrative voice from the first to the third person, which signals the transition from reportage to short story, does not change the analytical focus on outcasts and their spaces of social exclusion. What is still constant despite the internal genre change is the alienation of the Milanese individuals. They have transformed from documented people to characters, with respect to both the industrial reality that surrounds them and themselves. The thoughts and existential anguish of Antonio, the unemployed Calabrian immigrant protagonist of 'Il disoccupato', offer a meditation on social exclusion more broadly, not limited to Milan, during the boom and takes on a more universal character:

era la nuova vita degli uomini, la vita dei paesi e delle metropoli, la vita di tutto l'universo umano, da cui lui era escluso. (SM, p. 97)

(it was the new human life, the life of towns and metropolises, the life of the whole human universe, from which he was excluded.)

Borrowing from the title of Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, the narrative renders the image of an 'invisible man' who wonders why his existence goes unnoticed:

perché non mi vedono? Perché non hanno occhi, e io non più voce per farmi capire, né mani? Perché muoio, perché sono escluso, perché? (SM, pp. 97–98)

(why don't they see me? Why don't they have eyes, and why do I have neither a voice to make myself understood, nor hands? Why am I dying, why am I excluded, why?)

The allusions to the symbolic loss of bodily parts and voice express the deterioration of a relationality between his self and the social world. This serves to reinforce the inhuman image of a civilisation that discards human beings if they are not productive or do not conform. Those who are left out and annihilated according to this logic, like Antonio, manifest the symptoms of their mental suffering on a psychosomatic level. His friend Berto tells him: 'ti voglio vedere *guarito*, senza quella faccia di barbone' (SM, p. 91; italics mine) (I want to see you *healed*, without that tramp's face).

By focusing on the human scraps of the new Milanese civilisation, Ortese's collection documents and narrates the disastrous effects of the post-War Americanisation of Europe. This is clear if one reads again from *Corpo celeste*, where Ortese explains how this model has also emerged in Italy,

speaking of 'il tragico volto urbano; le armi; la vita come un nulla'⁵⁰ (the tragic urban face; weapons; life as a void).

In the last text of *Silenzio a Milano*, 'Lo sgombero', the narrator observes the new generations of Milanese citizens. Through the siblings Masa and Alberto Sinopoli, she describes not only the progressive loss of subjectivity embodied in their unexpressed tears and words, but by showing them as they are forced to move from their parents' house to a council house, she also describes their ideological and political disillusionment after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution — the brutally repressed 'revolution of human dignity', which in Italy revealed the violent face of the Soviet model as well as the American one.⁵¹

Possibly reflecting Ortese's own disillusionment with this historical event, her narrator looks at the resigned youth 'della dura vita, della fosca e scialba Milano' (SM, p. 112) (of a hard life, of the bleak and dull Milan). She diagnoses their entering a passive or lethargic state and their inability to live by dreams of revolutions. The narrator says that they continue to live by inertia, like the earth revolving around its axis (SM, p. 116). In the exclusively topophobic dimension of the new industrial life of Milan, as already shown in the collection's first text by the hands of the two hundred clocks that mark its rhythms in Milan's central station, individuals have become nothing more than mere 'cogs in the machine'. They do not realise their human capacities and their possibilities of expression.⁵²

BACHMANN'S WEST BERLIN

Bachmann's 'Ein Ort für Zufälle' was written six years after Ortese's *Silenzio a Milano*. Similarly, it denounces the rapid deterioration of our material, social and spiritual world brought on by the economic expansion of post-1945 Western societies, while more explicitly denouncing the ongoing collective repression of historical trauma. It does so starting with its original title, 'Deutsche Zufälle'⁵³, making an explicit connection between Germany and Berlin: representative places of the correlation between modernity and psychosis.⁵⁴ Bachmann delivered the text in Darmstadt on 17 October 1964, when she received the Georg-Büchner Prize. She later retitled and

⁵⁰ Ortese, *Corpo celeste*, p. 26.

⁵¹ Árpád Göncz, 'Preface', in *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, ed. by Csaba Békés and others (Central European University Press, 2002), pp. xiii–xiv (p. xiv), doi:10.7829/j.ctv10tq5rq.3.

⁵² Jaeggi, *Alienation*, p. 5.

⁵³ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Todesarten-Projekt*, critical edition edited by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Götsche, under the direction of Robert Pichl, 4 vols (Piper, 1995), 1, p. 560, hereafter cited parenthetically as TKA 1.

⁵⁴ *Büchner-Handbuch. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Roland Borgards and Harald Neumeyer (J. B. Metzler, 2015), p. 338.

expanded the speech, and in March 1965 she had it printed with thirteen drawings by Günter Grass in the Wagenbach 'Quartheft' series.⁵⁵

Bachmann wrote the speech in West Berlin between June and October 1964, following her trip to Africa with Adolf Opel, her partner at the time, between April and May 1964. The speech establishes a dichotomy between Berlin and the desert, interpreted as the place of 'illness' and 'healing' respectively (TKA 1, pp. 549–50). It is, therefore, clear that the speech was strongly influenced by Bachmann's first-hand experiences. Indeed, the trip to Africa distracted the author from the difficulties she encountered in West Berlin, where she stayed from April 1963 to the end of 1965, initially as a fellow of the American Ford Foundation in the 'Artists-in-Residence' programme, which included personalities such as W. H. Auden, Ruth Francken, Michel Butor, Witold Gombrowicz and Mário Cavo.⁵⁶

Bachmann's Berlin years were extremely important from an intellectual point of view, given also the renewed relationships with other members of Gruppe 47, and the collaboration with the intellectuals planning a never-to-be-published Franco-German-Italian journal, *Revue Internationale* or *Gulliver* (1960–65), proposing literature as a critical tool to investigate issues such as industrialisation or mass tourism transculturally.⁵⁷ These years were marked, however, by psychophysical precariousness, following her separation from Max Frisch in 1963, the development of an addiction to drugs and alcohol, and numerous stays in psychiatric hospitals and clinics in Zurich, Berlin, Vienna and Baden-Baden.

The award of the Büchner Prize was an opportunity for Bachmann to transfigure her personal suffering through the sublimation of illness. According to Bartsch, this 'poetic' and 'grotesque' prose text, belonging more to the genre of the fictional text than to that of speech, is immediately striking for its radically unhinged, upside-down, alienating image of historical Berlin.⁵⁸ Similar to the subversive manner of the post-1945 Austrian satirical tradition, 'Ein Ort für Zufälle' creates a kaleidoscope of visual elements that refer back haphazardly to the National Socialist past, the Holocaust, and the building of the Wall as paradigmatic elements of a

⁵⁵ On the success of this edition, see Julia Frohn, *Literaturaustausch im geteilten Deutschland. 1945–1972* (Ch. Links, 2014), p. 323. Bachmann's speech was also successfully translated into multiple languages, including English ('A Place for Coincidences', trans. by Agnes Rook (John Calder, 1978)), Italian ('Luogo eventuale', trans. by Bruna Bianchi (Edizioni delle donne, 1981)) and French ('Berlin, un lieu de hasards', trans. by Marie-Simone Rollin (Actes Sud, 1987)).

⁵⁶ For a recent perspective on, for example, the encounter between Bachmann and Gombrowicz, see Till Greite, 'A Place of Disturbance: Ingeborg Bachmann and Witold Gombrowicz in Postwar Berlin', *Austrian Studies*, 32 (2024), pp. 190–207, doi:10.1353/aus.00014.

⁵⁷ Di Rosa, 'In der Situation des Radwechslers', pp. 113–28.

⁵⁸ Kurt Bartsch, "Ein Ort für Zufälle". Bachmanns Büchnerpreisrede, als poetischer Text gelesen', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 18.3–4 (1985), pp. 135–45; Werner Rhode, 'Am Büchnertisch. Zitate und kritische Hinweise', in *Sender Freies Berlin III*, aired 2 April 1965, as cited in Christian Däufel, *Ingeborg Bachmanns 'Ein Ort für Zufälle'. Ein interpretierender Kommentar* (De Gruyter, 2013), p. 8.

damaged (civilised) world. The intention is to make us sensitive and critical to the observed reality of oppression.⁵⁹

Bachmann portrays the metropolis, divided into two halves by a wall on 13 August 1961, in its western sector as an embodiment of the hysteria of modern capitalist civilisation. West Berlin becomes a 'city of the sick' whose face seems to repeatedly build itself and dissolve, remaining ambiguous and elusive.⁶⁰ The psychopathogenic reading of the text is underpinned not only by the frequency of terms pertaining to the semantic field of neurosis, but also by the very word 'Zufälle' in the title, an homage to Büchner's novella *Lenz* (c. 1835).

Bachmann's fulfilment of the formal requirement, communicated to her by Jury President Hanns Wilhelm Eppelsheimer, to pay homage to the figure and work of Georg Büchner — the Hessian playwright and a revolutionary member of the *Junges Deutschland* movement, who died aged twenty-three in 1837 — allowed her to take up the mythologised portrait of *Sturm und Drang* author Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz that Büchner's novella offered. In the novella, one of the most important portrayals of madness in German literature, Büchner uses the word 'Zufall' to refer to the fits of madness: those physical and spiritual events in which the unbridgeable gap between the individual and their world becomes visible ('die Kluft unrettbaren Wahnsinns', TKA 1, p. 205).⁶¹ Unlike Büchner's text, however, Bachmann's no longer presents madness as a specific individual case. Instead, madness takes on a collective dimension.

West Berlin, both because of its economic development in the years of the 'Wirtschaftswunder' — the economic miracle following the introduction of the Deutsche Mark in 1948 and the economic measures of Konrad Adenauer's government — and because of its tragic history, becomes the perfect setting for a reflection on the madness of modern Western societies, in which the race for money clouds critical consciousness and historical awareness.⁶² West Berlin ends up being depicted as a 'schizophrenic' and

⁵⁹ Webber, 'Worst of all Possible Worlds?', p. 112; Judith S. Ulmer, *Geschichte des Georg-Büchner-Preises. Soziologie eines Rituals* (De Gruyter, 2006), p. 196; Elke Schlinsog, *Berliner Zufälle. Ingeborg Bachmanns 'Todesarten'-Projekt* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), p. 131.

⁶⁰ Ferruccio Masini, 'Il geroglifico d'anima di I. Bachmann', in Ferruccio Masini, *Il travaglio del disumano: Per una fenomenologia del nichilismo* (Bibliopolis, 1983), pp. 179–82 (p. 180).

⁶¹ Micaela Latini, 'Attraverso la violenza: Due forme di "vita offesa" nella cultura di lingua tedesca', in *La grammatica della violenza: Un'indagine a più voci*, ed. by Alessandra Sannella, Micaela Latini and Alfredo M. Morelli (Mimesis, 2018), pp. 45–55 (p. 45).

⁶² Work and prosperity were the fundamental tropes around which life in West Germany and the western half of Berlin revolved during the 'Wirtschaftswunder' period. Forms of prosperity were the matrix of West German identity and a viaticum for the eradication of the past and the alleviation of fears of chaos and 'filth'. John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 235–36. On the 'Wirtschaftswunder', see Lindlar, who nevertheless relativises the miraculous narrative of West German economic growth between the 1950s and 1960s, arguing that the perception of growth was distorted by the devastation from which the country was

noisy place,⁶³ where planes, trains, cars and trucks rage and images of alcoholics, disabled people and psychiatric patients are superimposed. It is a topographical reality symptomatic of the crisis of Western systems of life: West Berlin instantiates a negative figure of the destruction caused by a logic of reasoning, which constantly alienates people from their environments.⁶⁴

In the preamble to her speech, Bachmann explains that the object of her observation is the ‘crack’ that Büchner’s Lenz already found between himself and the world. As the text goes: ‘im Verfolgen des Risses — eines Risses, der für Lenz durch die Welt ging’ (TKA 1, p. 229). This non-original separation between Lenz and the world lead him to act in an ‘inconsequential’ manner, an unconscious attempt to alleviate his pain, to free himself and to live (TKA 1, p. 228). According to Bachmann, the feeling of this painful separation, or alienation, is not just the product of an individual psychophysical impairment of an endogenous nature — resulting from factors internal to the individual. On the contrary, Lenz’s illness is thought to be due to external factors of social origin, and therefore of an exogenous nature. Bachmann explains that, in her present day, it has become commonplace for factors of this kind to cause forms of insanity comparable to that of Lenz. She connects this to the meaning of the speech she is about to develop, full of images of madness intricately linked to a city — West Berlin — whose historical circumstances make it the privileged place to observe the ‘abyss’.

At the time of the speech, Berlin was literally divided and fractured: it was ‘a vast urban wasteland’, divided by the more impenetrable steel and concrete of the Berlin Wall.⁶⁵ Bachmann explains that this division calls to mind the result of a medical operation and, through an analogical procedure, suggests that the ‘attacks’ of madness observed here are a consequence of this operation: they are postoperative pain (‘postoperative Schmerzen’, TKA 1, p. 231). At the same time, however, if the madness observed in 1964 can be compared to the madness that Büchner portrayed in his nineteenth-century novella, it is believed that such psychic dysfunctions have far more distant roots: ‘Es muß also, wenn es um Zufälle geht, etwas weit zurückliegen, intermittieren, konsequent aber wiederkommen mit neuen Zufällen’ (TKA 1, p. 231). These roots

emerging at the end of the Second World War; Ludger Lindlar, *Das mißverstandene Wirtschaftswunder. Westdeutschland und die westeuropäische Nachkriegsprosperität* (Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

⁶³ *Bachmann-Handbuch. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Götsche (J. B. Metzler, 2020), p. 239.

⁶⁴ Di Rosa, ‘In der Situation des Radwechslers’, p. 131. Di Rosa reprises an expression from Bachmann’s ‘Tagebuch’ (1964), in which Bachmann associates Berlin with the idea of a ‘zerstörte[] Vernunft’. Ingeborg Bachmann, *Kritische Schriften*, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Götsche (Piper, 2005), p. 395.

⁶⁵ Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake, ‘Introduction’, in *Berlin Divided City, 1945–1989*, ed. by Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake (Berghahn, 2010), pp. 1–7 (p. 1), doi:10.1515/9781845456573-003.

result in 'fits' similar to Lenz's, always returning at regular intervals as anthropological constants, complexly interwoven with modern economic and industrial developments. They are not merely the result of a recent geopolitical situation or the legacy of a historical catastrophe such as the Nazi regime.⁶⁶

The reflection on the 'Beschädigung von Berlin' (TKA 1, p. 231) — the contingent result of the division of the German city between the victorious powers of the Second World War and the erection of a wall — allows the author to pursue a more topographically anchored analysis of what Foucault called the 'maladies de l'âme', the nervous imbalances not necessarily caused by an organic lesion in the subject but by its relationship with the social world.⁶⁷ To this end, Bachmann explains that, in observing 'eine Konsequenz von variablen Krankheitsbildern, die Krankheit hervorruft' (TKA 1, p. 232), she takes the point of view of a witness from outside the city, who — like Büchner's Lenz — walks on one's head. The point of view of this witness can be assimilated to that of the third-person narrator, who generates an aesthetically 'radical' exposition (TKA 1, p. 232) and a scarred landscape of affective distortion akin to the Milanese landscape depicted by Orteze in *Silenzio a Milano*.

The topography of West Berlin, a 'disturbed' and 'distracted' place,⁶⁸ is charged with a clearly negative symbolic meaning, given that the first place observed in this 'frenzied and feverish' text is a shore of the Wannsee.⁶⁹ This place immediately evokes the conference where — on 20 January 1942 — the leadership of the Nazi regime defined the 'Endlösung der Judenfrage', the systematic extermination of the Jewish population in the territories controlled by the Wehrmacht. The temporal focus on the present hides the past represented by this place, now crowded by water buses and polluted by numerous beer bottles. The negative symbolism is reinforced by the observation of psychiatric patients disembarking on the shore of the Wannsee, in the company of men holding beer bottles and women wrapped, not unlike the men, in greaseproof paper ('in den Fettpapieren', TKA 1, p. 206).

The sudden shift of the observer's gaze from the shores of the Wannsee to a psychiatric hospital at night, as a nurse pulls wet and trembling patients dangling from the railing of the balcony, sedating them and tying them to

⁶⁶ Masini, 'Il geroglifico d'anima di I. Bachmann', p. 181.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961), as cited in *Psychologie clinique et psychopathologie: Cours, documents, exercices*, ed. by Robert Samacher and others (Bréal, 2005), p. 113.

⁶⁸ In an interview with Alois Rummel on 25 November 1964, Bachmann states: 'Ich habe in der Büchner-Rede über Berlin gesprochen, das ist einfach so zu verstehen, daß es für mich nahelag, daß es mir richtig schien, in Deutschland über Berlin zu sprechen, nachdem ich dort eineinhalb Jahre verbracht habe, an einem gestörten Ort, in einer Verstörung, die von diesen Störungen einiges aufzunehmen fähig war' (Ingeborg Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews*, ed. by Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum (Piper, 1983), p. 49).

⁶⁹ Schlinsog, *Berliner Zufälle*, p. 113.

the bed, intensifies the negative symbolic charge of the text. It emphasises the noises that disturb the silence of this and other hospitals in the city. The metropolitan noises are an acute menace and a clear symptom of a world out of joint. Here, a chief physician goes out into the street — with psychiatric reports in his hand — to protest against the planes flying over the city and the church bells ringing, because this noise makes his patients cry, flee their rooms and cut out their tongues.⁷⁰

Using the strategy of visual and auditory estrangement, which we have also seen in Ortese's *Silenzio a Milano*, Bachmann's text establishes symbolic relationships between the rise of the Nazi dictatorship in the interwar period and the capitalist development. The contrast between the dystopian image of Lützowplatz where Adolf Hitler became a German citizen in 1932⁷¹ still smouldering after fire and that of the historic department store Kaufhaus des Westens (KaDeWe) being stormed by consumers implies a connection between the violence of the society that enabled Hitler to become chancellor and that of the society that emerged from the rubble of war. Bachmann, who critically stated elsewhere that she does not believe 'an diesen Materialismus, an diese Konsumgesellschaft, an diesen Kapitalismus, an diese Ungeheuerlichkeit, die hier stattfindet',⁷² offers a portrait of a post-war society interested in palmistry, astrology, gambling, drugs and compulsive shopping.

The grotesque nature of this portrayal is made explicit in the image of people tearing and throwing down KaDeWe decorations from the upper floors, in the image of jammed escalators and lifts bursting with scarves, dresses and coats, and of 'plump cashiers' who shout themselves hoarse to ensure that customers have paid for all the goods. This mass of 'sane' people is also convinced that they are living in the 'best of all possible worlds' ('besser ist es sonst nirgends', TKA 1, p. 214). They follow the fashions of Kreuzberg and are amazed by the music of the city's night bars ('Es sind lauter Orte, von Musikstößen erschüttert, von Beben, die in der Nacht ausbrechen', TKA 1, p. 217). Yet, as portrayed by Bachmann, what the entire population of West Berlin experiences is only the illusory happiness and the widespread melancholy that come from consumption and that alienate every individual in 'insane' societies.⁷³

Sequences such as the one in which people associate the noise of the train with that of an air raid, consequently seeking refuge under the tables of a restaurant, indeed show that even the 'sane' subjects referred to in

⁷⁰ Dieter Burdorf, "Jetzt fliegt jede Minute ein Flugzeug durchs Zimmer". Ingeborg Bachmanns Büchner-Preis-Rede im Kontext der modernen Großstadtdichtung', in *Verbindungen. Frauen — DDR — Literatur. Festschrift für Ilse Nagelschmidt*, ed. by Torsten Erdbrügger and Inga Probst (Frank & Timme, 2018), pp. 107–26 (p. 122).

⁷¹ Áine McMurtry, *Crisis and Form in the Writing of Ingeborg Bachmann: An Aesthetic Examination of the Poetic Drafts of the 1960s* (Modern Humanities Research Association, 2012), p. 127.

⁷² Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, p. 145.

⁷³ Peter Morrall, *Insane Society: A Sociology of Mental Health* (Routledge, 2020), p. 160.

the speech actually suffer from forms of collective psychosis, in this case the trauma of the bombing of Berlin during the Second World War, of which the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche also mentioned in the text is a symbol (TKA 1, p. 222). The text denounces how all the inhabitants of West Berlin suffer from an 'inward' state of disability, not just war amputees and disabled people with limbs 'oben oder unten zu kurz' (TKA 1, p. 210), paralysed faces, and crooked corners of the mouth and eyes seen at the elevated Bellevue station. Even the mass of healthy people, indifferent or unable to critically confront the dystopian reality, are similarly impaired: 'Die meisten sind auch im Halbschlaf' (TKA 1, p. 211). This condition is linked to the idea of a West Berlin 'disharmony' or 'Verstimmung',⁷⁴ a collective disturbance reflected in the representation of the city:

Es muß eine 'Disharmonie' sein. In der ganzen Stadt sickert etwas durch, alle wollen 'Disharmonie' gelesen oder gehört haben, manche haben es sich schon gedacht. (TKA 1, p. 211)

On the one hand, disharmony and disturbance are symbolically expressed in the unlikely distortion of the observer's gaze, who describes the streets of West Berlin as they rise by forty-five degrees, resulting in a series of car and bicycle accidents and the flying of buckets, spittoons, trolleys and stretchers through the air, the instability of the TV Tower restaurant, or the skidding of the Potsdam houses into the Tegel houses. On the other hand, they are expressed in the textual concentration on psychiatric conditions.

Notably, it is in diagnosed psychiatric subjects and not in 'healthy' subjects that the text identifies the desire to escape from the divided metropolis. This occurs through the images of the desert and camels that then return insistently in the 'Wüstenbuch' and *Das Buch Franza*. This image is not yet closely related to the Egyptian, Libyan and Sudanese space of these later fragments, where it carries an ambiguous connotation as a place of colonial violence and oppression. Yet it has already taken on the affective function corresponding to topophilic sentiment and utopian longing. It is the subjunctive mood that introduces this mental image in its first textual appearance:

der Plan ist ein Tunnel, oder man *müßte* direkt hinaus in die Wüste, *müßte* das Kamel aus dem Zoo befreien, es lospflocken, anschirren, damit reiten durch Brandenburg. Auf das Kamel *wäre* Verlass. (TKA 1, p. 210; my italics)

The mood of desire is related to the need of the hospital's patients for a spatial alternative to West Berlin, as they 'husten und hoffen und haben die Fieberthermometer in der Achselhöhle, unter der Zunge, im After, und die zehn Zentimeter langen Nadeln im Fleisch' (TKA 1, p. 210).

⁷⁴ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Das Wesen der Stimmungen: Schriften*, 12 vols (Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 1, p. 34.

In its second textual appearance, the image returns during the transfigured observation of the zoo and the Victory Column ('Niemand ist gefaßt auf das Kamel. Auf seinem Höcker steht jetzt die Siegestsäule', TKA 1, p. 222), and then of a circus. The observer explains that, although the circus director celebrates — over the loudspeaker from an open car — his lions and monkeys but not his camels, which are the last animals to enter the Allee escorted by the Allies, the psychiatric patients released from the hospital are only interested in the camels, from which they seek protection: 'Die Kranken haben nur auf die Kamele gewartet, gehen auf die Kamele zu, stellen sich unter ihren Schutz' (TKA 1, p. 223). These animals, acting as the 'vehicle' of a departure from West Berlin and an arrival in the utopian space of the desert, symbolise liberation from Western civilisation.

In the patients' imaginary flight, the camels offer a safe and imperturbable movement through fields, forests and water, leading them to the desert sands. As Schlinsog argues, echoing Bachelard's insights into the poetics of space, for Bachmann this produces a topophilic image '*de l'espace heureux*' (of the *felicitous space*).⁷⁵ The camels act as a shield for the sick against a 'hellish' city in which whistles, sirens, bells and gunshots are heard and where pyres are erected, such as the one at the intersection of Kurfürstendamm and Joachimsthalerstraße. The pyres are symbolically linked to primitive solstice cults, on the one hand, and to certain episodes of violence, on the other: the book burnings of 1933, the burning by SS soldiers in 1945 of the former department store of the Grünfelds (a Jewish merchant family who emigrated to Palestine in 1939), and perhaps the protests against the division of the city in June 1964.⁷⁶ Camels provide an escape from a surreal city in which people gather logs from the fire to carry them home under their overcoats or carve with their pocket knives 'Sonnenzeichen, Lebenszeichen' (TKA 1, p. 224) — contrasting symbols to the western wasteland of Berlin.

However, the disillusionment caused by the evanescence of the image of the desert and the camels as animals that transport the subject and their world into a hallucination, and the circular return of the gaze to psychiatric-hospital environments at the end of the speech, highlight how 'Ein Ort für Zufälle' allows the topophobic moment to prevail over the topophilic one.⁷⁷ West Berlin, with its historically negatively stratified places and the relationships they establish with people from a 'Wirtschaftswundergesellschaft' accustomed to repression and indifference ('Der Schmerz wird niedergehalten', TKA 1, p. 225), ultimately reveals itself as a 'haunted city'. Its inhabitants, whether manifest or latent

⁷⁵ Schlinsog, *Berliner Zufälle*, p. 174. See also Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 19; italics in the original.

⁷⁶ Däufel, *Ingeborg Bachmanns 'Ein Ort für Zufälle'*, pp. 509–10.

⁷⁷ Webber, 'Worst of all Possible Worlds?', p. 124.

psychiatric subjects, remain bound by the pain of both past and present traumas and can only somatise their distress.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

Ortese's and Bachmann's focus on the absence of a beneficial relationship between humans and space in the Milanese and West Berlin cityscapes highlights a radical critique of the late-modern Western social system, which commodifies and traumatises the individual on a psychophysical level. The disquieting condition of inner woundedness expressed in the Milanese collection is expressed through the insistence on silence amid the metropolis's cacophony. This resonates with the intensified Büchnerian or Lenzian 'crack' between the individual and the social world, as epitomised in the Berlin text.

In Ortese's work, the topophobic moment prevails entirely, without the articulation of counteracting reveries or wishful displacements in idyllic natural landscapes. While this marks a difference in the degree of negativity compared to Bachmann's text, both works explore what Vidler describes as landscapes of fear and topographies of despair, created by modern technological and capitalist development.⁷⁹ The uncanny representations of post-1945 Milan and West Berlin reveal a psychoanalytic reading of urban space, with these great cities sheltering nervous and overexcited populations whose mental lives are relentlessly antisocial.⁸⁰ These urban spaces announce the arrival of neoliberal psychopolitics, with its imperatives of self-optimisation and consumption, while also bearing the weight of deep historical traumas embedded in their pasts.⁸¹ The two texts, therefore, evidence an epochal shift of interest from war to peacetime capitalism and from a legacy of trauma to a confrontation with the present.

Bachelard's and Tuan's thinking helps uncover Ortese's and Bachmann's metaphorical treatment of space. Both theorists highlight how human beings long for unity with the environment and they 'heal' in soul and body through positive interactions with space. While, as Tuan acknowledges, landscapes of fear have existed in the human imagination since ancient times, the technical developments reshaping lived space since the industrial revolution, up to the years of Ortese's and Bachmann's collections and beyond, make it difficult to compare contemporary fears of space and human hubris with those in earlier historical periods.⁸² Bachelard once

⁷⁸ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁷⁹ Vidler, *Warped Space*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸¹ Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (Verso, 2017), p. 32.

⁸² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (University of Minnesota Press, 1979), p. 213.

described himself as a philosopher indulging in the ‘right to dream’.⁸³ His focus on space reflects his desire to retrieve, as he borrows from Rainer Maria Rilke, ‘light and consolation’ when surrounded by ‘night and suffering’.⁸⁴ The philosophies of spatial alienation illuminate the negativity of Milan and West Berlin as depicted by Ortese and Bachmann — authors shocked by the cities’ sensory violence and hindered in their spatial dreams.

⁸³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Right to Dream*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (Dallas Institute Publications, 1988), p. 84.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.