

“I HAVE RETURNED THERE WHERE I HAVE
NEVER BEEN”: NOSTALGIA AND
DEINDUSTRIALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY
TURINESE LITERARY FICTION

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INTRODUCTION

“The past is a foreign country”

The past is a foreign country by David Lowenthal is built on the premise that the past is the prime source of personal and collective identity. Unlike the disconcerting future and the fast, unintelligible present, the past stands - Lowenthal suggests - as a more delineated and therefore stable and reassuring temporal dimension. Such assumption is not necessarily applicable to the Italian recent past, scattered with episodes of violence and discord at institutional level. Many contrasting accounts of the recent national past, and especially the phase running from the late sixties to the early 1980s - the so-called years of lead¹- do exist. In his book *Italy's divided memory*, historian John Foot summarizes this conflict, which manifests itself at a legal level, as well as at a collective and artistic level, indeed with the expression “divided memory”.

The present work deals with a transitional phase that begins in the late 1970s and therefore, in Italy, coincides with the most dramatic stages of the ‘years of lead’: this is the deindustrialization, defined in John Black’s *Dictionary of economics* (1995) as “the tendency for the industrial sector to account for a decreasing proportion of gross domestic product and employment.” This process has manifested itself in all advanced economies since the late 1970s, causing short and long-term crucial changes at a socio-economic, cultural and geographical level.

Over the past two decades, several scholars (Clingingsmith and Williamson 2008, Rodrik 2016, and others) have drawn attention upon the fact that deindustrialization is a phenomenon that goes well beyond the advanced economies, and whose origins can be traced back to the 19th century. It is therefore important to note that the present research only takes into account a limited time span (the phase running from the early 1970s to the present) and a specific socio-economic setting (the urban community of Turin) within a broader phenomenon. This choice is due to the fact that, as it will be explained in the next sections, the global industrial crisis of the 1970s heavily affected Turinese economy and social life and still stands as a problematic and conflictual memory.

¹ The definition ‘years of lead’ refers to the terrorist incidents of political left and right-wing terrorism which took place in Italy between the late sixties and the early 1980s. The expression originates from the movie *Die bleierne Zeit* by Margarethe von Trotta, released in Italy as *Anni di piombo*.

Since the 1980s, the manifestations and the consequences of deindustrialization in advanced economies have been at the core of a rich international scholarly debate. Whereas, as Roberta Garruccio explains in “Chiedi alla ruggine” (which will be discussed in the next section), the short-term effects of deindustrialization, namely the job losses and the rapid decline of the communities most concerned with it, have been the main concern of the first phase of the debate, the more recent developments of it have witnessed a shift of focus towards the long-term effects. In its turn, this shift has opened a wide and rich conversation that brings together a considerable number of disciplines.

This thesis deals with the long-term effects of deindustrialization in Turin, and more specifically with 1) the changes in the urban landscape following the dismissal of numerous factories and the successive reconfiguration of those areas; 2) the way in which the decline of manual work in favor of cognitive work has affected the relations between the manual workers directly concerned with the process of deindustrialization and their children; 3) the interaction between the working class and other social forces. This set of effects is analyzed through a literary angle.

This thesis revolves around the concept of industrial nostalgia, whose shimmering quality makes it an exceptionally interesting and yet tricky research material. The present work aims to define the features of the memory emerging from a corpus of six literary works published between 2006 and 2017, set in the city of Turin and dealing, more or less explicitly, with the aforementioned effects of the process of deindustrialization on the city and its citizens. The selected works share a nostalgic approach to the industrial heyday and, overall, a critical perspective on postindustrial Turin.

The link between deindustrialization and nostalgia is somehow already embedded in the former's etymology. The prefix de- indicates indeed privation, removal, as well as negation and deduction. As a consequence, the literary production dealing with the process of deindustrialization can be but a literature of loss. Such assumption is made explicit, for instance, in one of the milestones of the literature of deindustrialization in Italy, namely *La dismissione* by Ermanno Rea, published in 2002. The novel describes the process of dismissal of the ILVA of Bagnoli (Naples) in 1990 from the perspective of Vincenzo Buonocore, the skilled worker in charge for coordinating it. In the last pages, the author intervenes and addresses his protagonist.

No, my dear Vincenzo. There won't be any disclosure in the end, except that life is but a muddle of contradictions (big deal!) and a novel necessarily is the story of a loss, the story of something that used to exist and no longer does: a hope, a feeling, a woman, a craft, even a factory. Or even a world, a civilization, an era. Novels are but inventories of lost things. And, since losses are painful, they also are, in general, sad stories, stories of pains (367).²³

This passage is a masterful description of the implications of the process of deindustrialization, which goes way beyond the material dismissal of a factory: on the contrary, deindustrialization marks the end of an era, that is the era of manual work, with its own set of rules. In literary fiction, it also marks the passage from the linear narrative typical of the working-class epic to the fragmented one that dominates the era of flexible capitalism.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the industrial era is looked at with nostalgia. The predominance of nostalgia in the collective remembrance and in the representations of the industrial past has been pointed out by several scholars in a wide range of disciplines (Strangleman 2013, Smith and Campbell 2017 and others). As it will be illustrated in the section “Longing for the past and industrial nostalgia” (12), industrial nostalgia often fosters a simplistic and uncritical account of the past.

This thesis looks at a large urban community, Turin, which experienced a rich and complex industrial phase and which, differently from other former industrial cities, apparently succeeded in constructing a new image of itself, as the city of sport, design, literature and music.⁴ The interest in this topic has three main reasons: firstly, the fact that the discourse on nostalgia for the industrial past has never been made object of research in an extensive corpus of literary works in Italy; secondly, the fact that such research has never been conducted on a city that, like Turin, has apparently been able to overcome its industrial past; thirdly, the fact that the Turinese case

² All the translations from Italian into English are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

³ No, caro il mio Vincenzo. All'ultimo non ti sarà rivelato proprio niente, salvo che la vita è un groviglio di contraddizioni (capirai!) e un romanzo è di necessità la storia di una perdita, la storia di qualcosa che prima c'era e poi non c'è più: una speranza, un sentimento, una donna, un mestiere, perfino una fabbrica. O addirittura un mondo, una civiltà, un costume, un'epoca. I romanzi sono inventari di cose perdute. E poiché, quando si perde qualcosa si prova dolore, essi sono, generalmente, anche storie tristi, storie di dolori.

⁴ Inventor of the slow food Oscar Farinetti opened the first Eataly store in Turin in 2007. Turin currently hosts numerous cultural events that attract people from all over the world. Among the most renowned are Salone del libro, Artissima and Salone del gusto. For an account of Turin's postindustrial afterlife see i.e. the description of Turin provided on the website of UNESCO (<https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/torino>).

proves to be to some extent not in line with the dominant discourse around the passive and conservative quality of industrial nostalgia (which will be discussed in the section “Longing for the past and industrial nostalgia”).

Therefore, from a theoretical standpoint, this thesis revolves around two key concepts: deindustrialization and nostalgia. The following sections provide an overview of the scholarly debate around these terms.

A historiography of deindustrialization

In “Chiedi alla ruggine”, Garruccio explains that the term deindustrialization was at first coined to refer to the policy of the Allies, aimed to reduce the industrial capital of the vanquished territories, especially in Germany (37). Twenty years later, the term was reintroduced in the scholarly discussion on the economic decline of American industry, which marks the end of the extraordinary process of economic growth at work in the US since the late 19th century.

Deindustrialization was soon understood as a transnational process at work in all the countries at advanced capitalist economy. Interestingly enough, thus, the global dimension of the process of deindustrialization was already evident at a time when the term ‘globalization’ had not entered the public discourse yet (42).

As Garruccio illustrates (37-38), in the 1980s this phenomenon gave rise to the first wave of a rich international scholarly debate, aiming to explore the causes of this process and contrasting its devastating short-term effects. The volume *The deindustrialization of America*, published in 1982 by economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, is generally considered to be the foundational text of this first phase of the scholarship of deindustrialization. The volume is openly polemic against the deregulation policy at the core of Reagan presidency’s economic turn and refers to the process of deindustrialization as a blatant case of conflict between the needs of capital and the needs of communities. The first phase of the scholarly debate around deindustrialization is therefore initiated by two American economists who aimed to contrast the short-term effects of the process in the 1980s.

The present work aims to be in conversation with some theoretical contributions emerging from the second and third phase of the debate. The second phase, running approximately from the 1990s to the early 2000s, witnesses an interdisciplinary turn in the debate, which begins to involve historians, geographers, sociologists and urbanists. The temporal distance from the

beginning of the economic crisis allows scholars to evaluate deindustrialization within the framework of capitalism's history: the second phase of the debate chronologically corresponds indeed with the entrance in postindustrial era.

One of the most representative works of this second phase is the volume *The meaning of deindustrialization*, edited by historian Jefferson Cowie and urbanist Joseph Heathcott. As the title suggests, the volume offers a combination of approaches which, all together, describe the multiplicity of effects contingent to this historical transformation. As the authors declare in the introduction, the volume accounts for the devastating social, environmental and political impact of this phenomenon. The closure of a phase of economic growth which had appeared to be permanent was traumatic and is well symbolized by the physical ruins that it left behind. As the authors argue, "what may be most troubling about these ruined industrial landscapes is not that they refer to some once stable era, but rather that they remind us of the ephemeral quality of the world we take for granted" (4).

Cowie and Heathcott consider their work to be the natural development of the debate opened by the publication of *The deindustrialization of America*:

These authors [Bluestone and Harrison] constructed their definition of the problem in the midst of an enormous political and economic crisis two decades ago, but that definition remains the point of departure for launching a reconsideration of twentieth-century industrial history (6).

Whereas the scholars who had animated the first phase of the debate were concerned with the immediate effects of the erosion of industrial capital, the protagonists of the second phase of the debate rather focused on the dissolution of a certain model of society following it.

The third phase of the scholarly debate takes a step further, moving the focus from the phenomenon itself to the representations of it. As Garruccio points out, representations of deindustrialization across different media (literary works, architecture, sculpture, music etc.) play a crucial role in the current developments of the field: firstly, they reflect and at the same time affect the collective memory of the industrial past of a certain geographical area; secondly, they often bring in the discourse not only the people directly concerned with the deindustrialization (the workmen who lost their jobs during the crisis), but also other individuals and elements

affected by it (the workmen's children, the new generations of citizens in post-industrial society, the urban spaces modified after the dismissal of the factories etc); thirdly, they are often aimed to imagine the future beyond the end of the industrial era and therefore reveal which aspects of the industrial heritage are more likely to be valued/neglected/rejected (55).

Industrial society has always been a fertile terrain for artistic inspiration. Over the past two decades, postindustrial societies have found themselves reconsidering, often nostalgically, their industrial roots. A new corpus of poems, songs, documentaries and installations arose in the attempt of preserving this past and making sense of it in the present. The return of the industrial past in the collective discourse was immediately followed by a plethora of contributions from different fields of study offering insights into the way industrial structures have been preserved in tangible and intangible forms within the collective imaginary of specific communities within various urban and regional contexts (see Wicke 2018 and others).

Industrialization and deindustrialization in Italy and in Turin

As Christian Wicke explains in the introduction to the volume *Industrial heritage and regional identities*, despite its international dimension, “deindustrialization is a highly place-dependent phenomenon” (12), that manifested itself at different times and developed at different paces and with considerable differences from one nation to another and from one community to another. As a consequence, it resists any univocal definition and requires instead specific investigations within the communities concerned with it.

Such approach becomes even more urgent when the research concerns Italy, a territory featuring a late national unity and strong regional divides. As Matteo Gomellini and Gianni Toniolo specify in the chapter dedicated to Italy in the volume *The Spread of Modern Industry to the Periphery since 1871*, “regional divides are observed in almost every country, but nowhere else is the phenomenon as deep and persistent as in Italy” (2).

Overall, as Matteo Jessoula and Patrik Vesán explain in their chapter of the volume *Regulating the risk of unemployment*, “industrialization occurred later in Italy than in many other European countries, between 1950s and 1960s” (143). Despite the rapid industrialization of the Northern regions in the post-war period, especially Lombardy and Piedmont, Italian economic growth nevertheless was still lower than that of other north-western European regions.

The city of Turin was, together with Milan, the leading force of the industrial development in the country. In his article “The Fordist city and the creative city: Evolution and resilience in Turin, Italy”, Alberto Vanolo provides an overview of the industrial development of Turin, mainly due to the specialization in the car manufacturing industry. This pattern is similar to that of Detroit. In Turin, car manufacturer Fiat was at the core of the industrial growth and shaped the image of the city, in a quasi ‘total embedding’ where the spatial, institutional and cultural developments of the city and the firm were highly interconnected. The demographic growth of the city during the century, in fact, “was driven by immigration of people willing to work in Fiat from Eastern and Southern Italy, and at the beginning of the 1970s about 80% of industrial workers were involved in car manufacturing” (70).

Like many of the large industries in Europe and in the US, Fiat was struck by the beginning of the Fordist crisis, which “determined both an internal reorganization of Fiat and a rescaling of industrial relations, with delocalization of plants both at national (particularly in Southern Italy) and international levels (Latin America and Eastern Europe). These transformations had visible consequences in Turin: population growth stopped, and employment in the service sector started to rise” (70).

During the 1990s, the Fiat crisis became more acute, to the point that Turinese citizens had to rethink their identity outside the framework of the car manufacturing. A crucial step in this identarian redefinition was played by the award, in 1998, of the Winter Olympic Games of 2006 to the city. In view of the event, “Turin policymakers launched an intensive branding campaign in order to show to the world that the city was no longer a dark industrial city, but rather a ‘new’ vibrant, cosmopolitan and cultural city” (71).

In the early 2000s, though, Turin also heavily suffered from the global economic crisis, that, between 2008 and 2012, caused a “loss of about 20,000 jobs in the industrial sector, and about 5000 in the building sector, not balanced by the growth in the service sector (about 10,000 jobs)” (71). In sum, after a short but shining industrial age (1950s-early 1970s), Turin was struck by the crisis of the Fordist model in the late 1970s, that of Fiat in the 1990s and the global crisis of 2008. This rapid sequence had a strong impact on the social life as well as on the skyline of the city: this thesis investigates how, over the past decade, nostalgia-based fiction has played a crucial role in picking up and reworking the most problematic sides of the process of deindustrialization in Turin.

As anticipated, it is essential to consider that, in Italy and especially in Turin, the industrial crisis chronologically coincided with the outbursts of the ‘years of lead’. Therefore, this work will also focus on the rupture between the student and the workers’ movement and the crisis of the latter, which reached its lowest point with the so-called ‘march of 40000’ in 1980 (to be discussed in chapter 2).

Longing for the past and industrial nostalgia

In *The past is a foreign country*, Lowenthal highlights how “nostalgia is today’s favored mode of looking back” (31). Lowenthal considers nostalgia to be a quasi-pathological condition of our times and, in most cases, dismisses it as an unproductive and paralyzing reading of the past. Such view has recently been problematized and in some cases rejected by scholars in the field of heritage and especially industrial heritage studies. Before looking at this aspect of the current debate on nostalgia, a brief outline of the concept of nostalgia must be provided.

The origin of the concept traces back to 1688, when Swiss medical doctor Johannes Hofer first used the term to refer to a medical disease associated with a desire to return to one’s lost homeland. Over time, the meaning of nostalgia shifted from a mental disorder to an emotion. In the article “Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory”, historian Kimberly K. Smith rejects the widely spread assumption according to which nostalgia has always been a condition intrinsic to human being, “a universal experience, a troublesome but inevitable part of the human condition” (506). On the contrary, she argues, it was invented in the context of the medical discourse and changed meaning when it ceased to be considered as a pathological form of homesickness. In fact, its significance broadened and evolved in the 19th and 20th century, when it was “conceptualized as a longing to return to a former time—and usually a time the patient only imagined to be better” (512).

In general, as Smith explains, nostalgia is still looked at as an irrational and negative force that prevents any critical reading of the past. What is especially interesting about Smith’s argument is that, on the contrary, she considers nostalgia to be not only a paralyzing, pathological feeling, but also a potential mode of resistance against a problematic present.

The present thesis is built on this assumption and is informed by the work of Svetlana Boym. In particular, it aims to rework the notion of ‘reflective nostalgia’ within the debate on deindustrialization. In *The future of nostalgia*, Boym describes reflective nostalgia as the way of

discovering the virtual of the past: more precisely, through reflective nostalgia, people are able to emotionally and intellectually engage with a time that they have never lived and to reflect on the numerous presents in which the past could have resulted, but never did.

Reflective nostalgia is thus an active and fruitful way of looking back at the past, as opposed to restorative nostalgia. The main difference between the two modes of remembering lies in the fact that restorative nostalgia “evokes national past and future”, while reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory” (50). This opposition corresponds to two distinct forms of narrative, as, while the former “gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture”, the latter “is more oriented toward an individual nostalgia that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself” (50). The concept of reflective nostalgia is at the core of the first chapter of this thesis and constitutes the theoretical premise to the two other forms of nostalgia outlined in the second and third chapter (‘nostalgia for the future’ and ‘Telemachian nostalgia’).

According to Boym, nostalgia can thus function as a constructive and multi-layered analytical tool to reconsider the past. In the wake of this understanding of nostalgia, this thesis will test whether the selected corpus of literary works offers any form of active, militant nostalgia or, on the contrary, is dominated by forms of passive and simplified longing for the past which, as such, cannot effect any change in the present and in the future. For the multiplicity of fields and perspectives that it involves, Boym’s work is very much in line with the interdisciplinary turn of the second and third phase of the scholarship on deindustrialization.

The debate around the nostalgic accounts and representations of the industrial past follows a path very similar to that described by Smith. Nostalgia has been at the core of the debate on deindustrialization from the very beginning. In 2003, Cowie and Heathcott coined the term “smokestack nostalgia” (50) to warn on the risks of the uncritical consideration of the supposed golden era of industrialization that seems to currently dominate the scholarly as well as the public discourse on deindustrialization. And yet, over the past decade, several scholars in the field of deindustrialization have been wondering whether nostalgia might be reconsidered as a potentially positive force rather than simply dismissed as irrational, simplistic and noxious.

In his article “The nostalgia for permanence at work”, Tim Strangleman discusses the main phases of the scholarly debate around the change of the work model that occurred in the shift from modern and industrial to postmodern and post-industrial society. Strangleman focuses on

the theory of the end of work and, in particular, on the work of sociologists Zygmunt Bauman, Richard Sennett, Ulrich Beck and André Gorz. Despite their very different approaches to the topic, these scholars share a common sense of the lost importance of job as a force able to shape the individual as well as the collectivity and to create a spread work ethic. On the contrary, job insecurity corresponds to an impoverishment and decline of human condition. Gorz provides a relatively optimistic reading of this situation, arguing that the current degradation of the labor market finally opens our eyes on the ideological nature of work (86). Gorz, as well as Bauman and Beck, is therefore critical towards the nostalgic idealization of the past and the supposed stable mode of work that characterized it.

And yet, if we look at literary works and later cinema, as well as figurative arts, nostalgia seems to be the main mode of looking back at the stable, linear past, as opposed to the unstable and fragmented present. What is especially relevant about Strangleman's analysis is the recognition that, even though such "nostalgia is characteristic of many discussions of work, the object of nostalgia itself - the type of work performed and the workers themselves - is subject to change over time (89).

After providing an overview on the form of nostalgia which was at the core of the theory of the end of work, Strangleman draws a distinction between an "uncritical idealization of the past and more complex and reflective accounts of it" (94). Provided that fruitful types of nostalgia do exist (94), Strangleman argues that nevertheless most fictional and nonfictional accounts dealing with the topic of work build on very simplistic nostalgic representations of the past, which exclude the role of human agency in the workplace and therefore depict the working class as a homogeneous and passive mass.

In his article "'Smokestack Nostalgia,' 'Ruin Porn' or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation.", Strangleman explains that, as it is the dominant mode of looking at the industrial past, nostalgia cannot be simply excluded or rejected from the scholarly debate on deindustrialization but that, on the contrary, "any researcher who records the lives of working people has to confront the issue of nostalgia in the narratives they elicit", avoiding "the danger of sentimentalizing the past", but, at the same time, without dismissing "the ideas and experiences of ordinary people caught up in the process of industrial change" (18). The latter produce, Strangleman argues, a form of linear narrative, according to which "stable work, even dull repetitive labor, allows people to develop character over time. It allows them to

mature and form powerful bonds with others around them.” (19) Such forms of narrative should not be dismissed as “simply nostalgic” (28), but rather carefully considered and critically analyzed by researchers in a wide range of disciplines.

The article “Nostalgia for the future” by Laurajane Smith pushes this assumption further. The author draws a distinction between progressive and conservative nostalgia towards the industrial past, arguing that “there are progressive forms and uses of nostalgia that frame the way industrial heritage is remembered by those people, their families and the communities who worked in and around such sites” (613). Communities can recur to such forms of progressive nostalgia as ways to “envisage new futures in which their own forms of social values, particularly around organised labour, matter” (614).

All the mentioned scholars agree on the fact that nostalgia permeates our time and the globalized space that we inhabit. It is, in other words, a transnational phenomenon that proves itself to be relevant in constructing the memory of large and small communities: its interest and potential lies therefore in its global character and local influence. This research aims to show how, in the case of Turin, nostalgia functions as a tool to challenge the dominant narrative on the process of deindustrialization in the town. It is very difficult to determine which of the two proposed versions gets closer to the historical truth: what matters, though, is that nostalgia can act as force strong enough to problematize the dominant narrative around a phenomenon as complex and multilayered as deindustrialization. In Boym’s words, nostalgia is in fact an “intermediary between collective and individual memory” (54). This potential is fully expressed in the analyzed corpus of fictional works, where the invented individual stories of the protagonists cross the history of Turin

Industrial and postindustrial literature in Italy and new perspectives on the working class

The topic of work has often been central in Italian literary production. The literary accounts of the passage from the rural to the industrial society and, later on, to the heyday of the industrial growth in the North of the country have been especially numerous since the 1930s, with a peak in the 1950s and 1960s.

In *Industria e letteratura*, the issue of the literary review *Menabò* published in 1961, Elio Vittorini firstly drew attention on the emergence of the narrative genre of industrial literature in Italy. The rapid industrialization following the end of WW2, in Italy as well as in most European

countries and, of course, in the US, had a crucial impact on a social and economic level. In Italy, Vittorini argues, the extraordinary significance of such changes had been immediately recognized by writers and poets and yet still not fully grasped. In Vittorini's words, "even though the industrial world has replaced the natural one at the hand of man, it is still a world that we do not master and that masters us, just like the natural one" (958).⁵

In 2014, historian Giorgio Bigatti and literary scholar Giuseppe Lupo, in the wake of Vittorini, have edited an updated anthology of Italian industrial literature, from the 1930s to present days. The volume consists of two main sections ("Panorami dell'Italia industriale" and "Personaggi in cerca di lettori") and an appendix dedicated to the remaking of the imaginary of the factory and the working class in the postindustrial era.

The first section includes a wide range of literary works dedicated to the passage from a rural model of society to the industrial one and to the working conditions of different categories of workers, ranging from manual workers to industry managers. The second section focuses on a number of especially powerful characters emerging from these narratives, such as the narrator of the autobiographical novel *Tuta blu* by Tommaso di Ciaula (1978) or Max, the manager protagonist of *Il padrone* by Goffredo Parise (1965). A third part of this second section includes works dealing with the 'death' of a factory', that is the crisis and the following process of dismissal of a plant. One of the most noticeable examples of these narratives is Rea's *La dismissione*, mentioned above.

Finally, the appendix "Scritture del presente" seems to be especially relevant for the present work, as it sheds light upon the current canon of industrial literature produced in postindustrial era. As it is usually set outside the factory, most of the literature of precarity (see below), despite its crucial role in the narration of the changes of work modes in the postindustrial era, is inevitably excluded from this section.

Another recent contribution inspired by Vittorini offers a wider perspective on the narratives of the industrial age and of the entrance in the age of flexible work in the postindustrial era. In the chapter "Albeggia una letteratura postindustriale", included in the literary journal *Tirature 2000*, Filippo La Porta wonders whether, four decades after the publication of "Industria e letteratura", a new postindustrial literature was emerging. This is, according to La Porta, the

⁵ "Il mondo industriale, che pur ha sostituito per mano dell'uomo quello naturale, è ancora un mondo che non possediamo e ci possiede esattamente come il naturale."

literary category dealing with the anthropological and sociological changes following the transformations of work within the predominance of the tertiary sector and the ‘disappearance’ of the working class as we used to know it.

In 2013, Paolo Chirumbolo in *Letteratura e lavoro* confirmed this thesis, arguing that indeed “a new literature of work able to recount the new changes dictated from flexible and post-industrial capitalism not only has prospered, but also has established itself as one of the most significant literary tendencies of these past years” (35)⁶. Chirumbolo names (35-36) the most noticeable elements of the current postindustrial literature that yet, as he points out, is still largely *in fieri*.

This corpus includes works published between 1994 (*Mammuto* by Antonio Pennacchi) and 2010 (*Acciaio* by Silvia Avallone). Its main point of interest lies in the variety of topics, narrative forms and figures of authors that it brings in: in fact, it includes narratives of the current working conditions in the less and less numerous factories of the country (i.e. *Nicola Rubino è entrato in fabbrica* by Francesco Dezio) as well as bitter, often ironic and yet never lighthearted accounts of the life in the new ‘hells’ of the tertiary sector, namely the call centers (i.e. *Il mondo deve sapere* by Michela Murgia); the protagonists of these literary works range from employees (i.e. *Pausa caffè* by Giorgio Falco) to managers (i.e. *Volevo solo dormirle addosso* by Sebastiano Nata) and from precarious knowledge workers (i.e. *Un anno di corsa* by Giovanni Accardo) to young manual workers (i.e. *Acciaio* by Silvia Avallone). The literary forms range from reportages (i.e. *Mi chiamo Roberta, ho quarant’anni, guadagno 250 euro al mese* by Aldo Nove) to quasi autobiographical novels, often published by working class children (i.e. *Figlia di una vestaglia blu* by Simona Baldanzi).

These latter are considered by critic and writer Alberto Prunetti to be especially interesting examples of an emergent new working-class literature: in “Nuove scritture working class: nel nome del pane e delle rose”, the writer and literary critic points out the emergence, in the past decade, of a new, international literary category that aims to tell the working-class world from ‘the inside’. Especially popular in the UK (especially thanks to the recent editorial success of *Iron Towns* by Anthony Cartwright in 2016), these narratives are gradually emerging everywhere in Europe and abroad. Prunetti clarifies that he uses the term working class narratives to refer to

⁶ “una nuova letteratura del lavoro in grado di raccontare i nuovi cambiamenti imposti dal capitalismo flessibile e post-industriale non solo è fiorita ma si è affermata come una delle tendenze letterarie più rilevanti di questi ultimi anni”.

those “accounts of the work from an internal perspective, in the deindustrial era, written 1) by manual workers, or 2) by manual workers’ children, raised within the context of the old working class, or 3) by members of the new precarious working class in the sector of services, cleaning, catering, that is from the new working class which includes the working poor, the unemployed with or without a degree, the pieceworkers, also the knowledge workers, those paid poorly and those having an on-call contract”.⁷

Finally, some attention must be devoted to the scholarly debate on the multiplication, over the past two decades, of the representations of current new and often devastating forms of precarity (job precarity as well as individual precarity) across a number of media in Italy. In 2015, Silvia Contarini, Monica Jansen and Stefania Ricciardi have edited the volume *Le culture del precariato. Pensiero, azione, narrazione*, which includes a number of contributions on multiple aspects of the narrative of precarity.

An interdisciplinary approach to literary nostalgia and deindustrialization

Being at the crossroad of the debate on industrial nostalgia in postindustrial societies and that on the emergence of a deindustrial literature in Italy, the present work aims to combine and critically engage with several sources from different fields of study. Several significant and often contrasting contributions on the role of nostalgia in the construction of a collective memory of the industrial past will form the theoretical ground to close-read a corpus of six literary works emerging from the unique geographical and cultural urban context of Turin.

Therefore, this research tries to balance the specific features of the latter and the transnational dimension of the former, with the purpose of bringing a case study based on one city into the transnational and yet ‘highly place-dependent’ debate on the effects of deindustrialization. The present case study based on Turin can indeed open an interesting literary angle in the debate on industrial nostalgia and, at the same time, problematize some of the findings emerged from it.

Nostalgia appears to be especially relevant in a research on deindustrialization, for it not only is the essential narrative feature of most contemporary literary representations of it, but also a performative force that can problematize other narratives around the passage from industrial to

⁷ ...scritture sul mondo del lavoro con un punto di vista interno, in anni di deindustrializzazione, fatte 1) da operai o 2) da figli di operai, cresciuti e socializzati nella vecchia classe operaia, o 3) da membri della nuova classe lavoratrice precaria dei servizi, delle pulizie, della ristorazione: dalla nuova working class a cui appartengono anche i working poor e i disoccupati con o senza laurea, i cottimari dei lavori, anche cognitivi, mal pagati e i precari dei lavori a chiamata.

postindustrial society. For its being the favorite mode of looking back at the industrial past in Western society, nostalgia opens a broad perspective on otherwise geographically limited literary works, and, as consequence, suits the international vocation of the scholarly debate on deindustrialization.

The selected corpus includes six contemporary literary works falling into different literary categories, but also suitable for being included into that of deindustrial literature outlined by La Porta and Chirumbolo. The choice of focusing on literary fiction is due to the publication of a surprisingly large number of novels and short stories set in Turin and dealing with the urban past over the last decade: this fact indicates that literary fiction is currently a fertile ground which thus deserves to be explored over other media.⁸

All the selected works are thus produced in postindustrial era, and deal with one or more of the following long-term effects of deindustrialization: 1) the changes in the urban landscape after the dismissal of factories and/or working-class residential areas; 2) the relation between the workers directly concerned with the deindustrialization and their children; 3) the history of the workers' movement.

The present thesis will show that the authors evoke the changes occurred at these three levels in the passage from industrial to postindustrial society with a sense of nostalgia that yet does not construct an idyllic and uncritical memory of the past. Instead, such complex form of nostalgia seems to be effective in unsettling the dominant narrative according to which Turin stands as a successful example of postindustrial regeneration: therefore, the Turinese case might suggest that, in literary fiction, nostalgia can effectively work as a tool to reject or at least to challenge well-established socio-political discourses.

Besides the three recurrent topics mentioned above, attention will be drawn on some 'knots of memory', in the definition coined by Michael Rothberg, at the core of the selected corpus and, at the same time, the non-less evident removals within it. The fact that the deindustrialization is the *fil rouge* that links novels dealing with such different themes shows to what extent the need to look back at the industrial past is perceived as especially urgent amongst Turinese authors.

The work is divided in three sections, according to the three topics mentioned above. The first one provides a close reading of *Brucia la città* by Giuseppe Culicchia (2011) and *Quello che*

⁸ For an overview of the novels published since the late 1990s and set in Turin/Piedmont see the appendix "Romanzi a carattere nazionale-regionale" in Pellegrini, Franca. *Il romanzo nazionale-regionale nella letteratura italiana contemporanea*. Peter Lang, 2014, pp. 251-255.

l'acqua nasconde by Alessandro Perissinotto (2017). The second one focuses on the novels *La festa è finita* by Lidia Ravera (2002) and *Piove all'insù* by Luca Rastello (2006). The last section provides a close reading of the largely autobiographical short story *La Fabbrica* by Demetrio Paolin (2011) and the novel *La sfuriata di Bet* by Christian Frascella (2011). Each chapter also contains references to other literary works as well as other representations of the industrial memory across other media or cultural events.

The selected corpus lays bare the fact that the process of deindustrialization goes well beyond the economic damage and encompasses multiple aspects of human life, ranging from the perception of the urban skyline to the intergenerational relationships. The analysis of it demands thus the same interdisciplinary approach that animates the current phase of the scholarly debate around deindustrialization. Accordingly, a different perspective (architectural, historical and psychoanalytical respectively) is adopted in each chapter, in order to comply with the variety of issues and actors that the six literary works bring into play.

I

Deindustrialized landscape and reflective nostalgia in *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* by Alessandro Perissinotto and *Brucia la città* by Giuseppe Culicchia

1.1 Introduction

Vengo da una città dove ormai sono tutti
artisti

Fotografi, DJ professionisti

Figli di operai sti musicisti alternativi in
bicicletta

E il ricordo della Fiat sparisce in fretta

I'm from a town where now everybody's an
artist

A photographer, a professional DJ

These hipster musicians on a bike are
working-class children

And the memory of Fiat quickly disappears

In the lyrics above, Turinese rapper Willie Peyote depicts the moral and architectural decay of his town, voicing an opinion that has spread across various media over the decade. Oblivious of its industrial past, Turin has, according to numerous artists and scholars, entered the era of creative industries, in which the working class has been replaced by an amorphous crowd of untalented musicians, DJs and photographers. The rest of the song, as well as the literary works analyzed in this chapter, suggests that this passage has determined a change in the urban aesthetics that yet has not been followed by the establishment of a new collective identity.

This chapter focuses on the representation of the deindustrialized Turinese landscape in two fictional works: *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* (2017) by Alessandro Perissinotto and *Brucia la città* (2009) by Giuseppe Culicchia. Despite their considerable differences in terms of style and genre, in both novels the landscape appears to be a crucial element in the construction of the plot, and the personal events in the main characters' life are inextricably linked to the changes following the economic crisis and the end of the industrial heyday of Turin. Both novels are set in the present and convey a negative account of the architectural evolution and supposed regeneration of the city's former industrial hubs. The authors aim in fact to contest the public

discourse around the success of contemporary Turin, and both novels are charged with a sense of discontent and frustration towards a city for which, as one of the characters from *Brucia la città* argues, “now everyone envies us, only because nobody knows how it really is” (11).⁹

The ways in which Culicchia and Perissinotto explore the dark sides of their town, though, differ significantly: on the one hand, Perissinotto looks at the most direct signs of the decline of industry, that is the ruins appearing where the plants used to be; on the other hand, Culicchia focuses on the supposed regeneration of the latter, which, in certain cases, is tied to political interests and led to the exploitation and gentrification of former working-class areas. The main characters are lost in their hometown and discover, as Svetlana Boym argues in *The future of nostalgia* that “the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future” (50).

Perissinotto looks at the most symbolic and emotional side of the process of deindustrialization, whereas Culicchia focuses on another urgent matter, and yet hardly addressed in contemporary Italian fiction, that is the real estate speculation. This double-faced perspective provides the reader with a rich overview of the changes that occurred to the Turinese landscape over the past two decades (especially after the application of *the Piano Regolatore* in 1995, which will be discussed in the second section of this chapter).

The close reading reveals how in both novels the city skyline becomes a mirror of the troubled life of the protagonists. These latter are haunted by the ghosts of their past just like Turin, the supposedly successful city of design, culture and music, is haunted by the ghosts of its industrial past. This chapter argues that the relation between the characters’ personal life and that of their urban community is explored and renegotiated through a form of ‘reflective nostalgia’. As explained in the introduction to this thesis (15), ‘reflective nostalgia’ is a definition coined by Boym to refer to an active form of looking back at the past in which past and present, as well as the individual and the collective level, coexist and interact (51).

Therefore, the interest in these two literary works lies in the fact that the characters portrayed in them rethink and, to a certain extent, long for their past within the larger framework of their urban community. For this reason, it would be incorrect to categorize them as melancholic, for melancholia, as Boym explains, “confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness”. On

⁹ “ora tutti ci invidiano perché non sanno bene com’è fatta.”

the contrary, “nostalgia is about the relation between individuals and the biography of groups and nations” (XVI). Therefore, the past and present of the Turinese community function as a space where the individuals can rethink themselves, and nostalgia is brought into the narrative in order to establish a common ground for past and present, individual and collective and history and memory to coexist.

Besides the focus on urban landscape, the two authors are both concerned with the theme of immigration. As already mentioned (10), internal migration from Southern Italy was the leading force of the industrial era of Turin. Immigration was essential in shaping the Turinese identity, so it should come as no surprise that it plays an important role in two novels dealing with the identity struggle of contemporary Turin. Giuseppe Culicchia is a second-generation immigrant, as his father was born in Marsala (Sicily). The author often mentions his Sicilian roots, which are also the topic of his most autobiographical work, *Sicilia, o cara. Un viaggio sentimentale* (2010). In his work, as well in interviews and broadcasts, Culicchia has always drawn attention on the commonalities between the difficult process of integration of the Southern immigrants and that of the groups of immigrants that have come in succession over the years.

The themes of immigration and homecoming are also central in *Quello che l'acqua nasconde*: one of the main characters (Edoardo Rubessi) is in fact the son of two immigrants from Trieste and, having moved to the U.S. in his early adulthood, he is also an immigrant himself. *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* is therefore first of all the story of an emigrant's homecoming, in which the “home” Turin has changed to the point of being unrecognizable.

The present chapter is divided in three main sections. The first one is dedicated to the theoretical ground informing this chapter, and especially the notion of urban landscape, and draws attention on the role of nostalgia-based fiction as a space where the deindustrialized landscape can be rediscussed. The second section features the close reading of *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* and *Brucia la città*. Finally, an overview of the history of the main industrial buildings of Turin is provided in the appendix, in order to set a ground of comparison between the main examples of deindustrialization and postindustrial regeneration in the town and the way in which they are represented in the novels. Overall, this first chapter aims to show how, through reflective nostalgia, fiction allows the industrial and postindustrial landscape to coexist and to be renegotiated and critically discussed.

1.2 Landscape and industrial landscape - ruins, ruination and real estate speculation

Any approach to the representations of the urban postindustrial landscape in literary fiction demands firstly a general definition of industrial landscape. In the passage from a rural to an urban form of society, the landscape is progressively less understood as a combination of natural elements. As it is described in the *Wiley-Blackwell companion to human geography*, a working country, and especially a country whose economy is driven by industrial production, is barely even a landscape, as its being entirely shaped by human beings according to their needs has turned it into a commodity. As such, it is “highly fetishized, and largely alienated from precisely those who have made it” (212).

The citizens of a working country are for the most part also members of an urban community. As Svetlana Boym explains, urban identity is a unique way of experiencing a sense of belonging. Differently from nations or even families, urban communities are in fact rooted in an entirely man-made place (76).

Urban identity does not legitimize itself in the exclusivity of blood or nationality. On the contrary, it is rooted in a landscape shaped by human generations over the centuries and, as such, is defined by the alienation embedded in a man-made landscape. The citizen inhabits urban space as a master and an exile at once, for whom the city becomes the “ideal crossroads between longing and estrangement, memory and freedom, nostalgia and modernity” (76).

Therefore, this analysis focuses on the way in which fictional characters interact with the mutating landscape and on the way in which they recall the past and reflect on the present through the lens of urban space. The notion of psychogeography might be of significant help to give a better understanding of the way nostalgia and deindustrialized landscape will be looked at throughout the present analysis.

The term ‘psychogeography’ was coined by Marxist theorist Guy Debord in 1955 to refer to “the study of the precise laws and the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviours of individuals” (23). Debord specifically refers to the urban environment and calls the citizens to become explorers and to find unconventional coordinates to navigate their city. The main characters in the two selected novels are indeed urban explorers, who look around Turin with a precise scope, either to solve a mystery or to find someone.

Such need for exploring and rethinking urban space becomes even more urgent in the context of deindustrialization. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, as geographer Alastair Bonnett has pointed out, psychogeography has reemerged during the past two decades. In his article “The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia in British Psychogeography”, Bonnett draws a connection between the renewed interest in psychogeography and nostalgia, which is the defining emotion of our epoch. The changes in urban spaces are especially evident and dramatic when it comes to the process of deindustrialization. As the author points out, deindustrialization brings along feelings of loss and redemption, and the sense of Bonnett is that psychogeography is especially suitable to rework and renegotiate such complex feelings.

The two analyzed narratives are indeed based on the theme of loss, that of one's identity, of a loved one as well as of a town. Personal identity is thus inextricably linked to that of an urban community that was built around the factories and now finds itself lost in an utterly disorienting postindustrial anonymity. By exploring Turin, the characters trace back their past and that of their town: this dialectic between past and present, as well as individual and urban community, is established through a form of nostalgia that functions as a tool to open new perspectives on the present.

The exploration of the protagonists' individual past develops *pari passu* with that of their urban community, once built around car manufacturing industry and now lost in a universe of presumptuous contractors, frivolous designers, deluded activists from the 1970s and DJs and artists of questionable talent. The working class is the most noticeable absence in these two narratives, for none of the characters are a member or children of the working class, except for the minor character of Ozzy in *Brucia la città*. And yet, the main characters constantly look back on the Turinese industrial past. Both Culicchia and Perissinotto seem to suggest that, although far from being ideal, the past is nevertheless rooted around social values and a sense of communal belonging that is worth remembering in the present.

1.3 Reflective nostalgia in *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* by Alessandro Perissinotto

Looking at the urban landscape in the age of deindustrialization means, first of all, looking at ruins. The fascination for industrial ruins in postindustrial society has been and still is object of scholarly debate (Mackenzie 2001, Clemens 2011, Mah 2013, Strangleman 2013). In his book *Punching Out: One Year in a Closing Auto Plant*, Paul Clemens inveighs against this

contemporary cult for ‘ruins porn’ and its effects in Detroit, whereas in “‘Smokestack Nostalgia,’ ‘Ruin Porn’ or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation.” Strangleman argues that this phenomenon should be carefully considered and analyzed in all its nuances rather than simply dismissed as immoral and charged with a form of ready-made sentimentalism.

In her article “The Dereliction Tourist: Ethical Issues of Conducting Research in Areas of Industrial Ruination” Alice Mah draws attention on the ethical implications of the voyeurism which is at the core of the phenomenon of dereliction tourism, that is the act of seeking out industrial ruins for aesthetic pleasure. Ethnographic research in areas of deindustrial ruination share some of these issues, but, Mah suggests, such as any other form of dereliction tourism, it can open to “more positive ethical possibilities through offering alternative ways of imagining places and raising social justice awareness of issues related to deprivation and blight” (1.3).

The scholarly discussion around dereliction tourism is relevant for the analysis of *Quello che l’acqua nasconde* by Alessandro Perissinotto, because industrial ruinations are the main setting for the novel, and one of the character (Susan) is, in Mah’s definition, a ‘dereliction tourist.’ Nevertheless, not only does the way in which the ruins are described resist any sentimentality, but the industrial crumbling buildings are an essential element in the plot development. Dereliction tourism is in this case functional to the narrative, and, as the following section will show, is at the same time charged with strong symbolic individual and collective meanings.

The Turinese and Italian controversial recent past is at the core of the literary work of novelist and university professor Alessandro Perissinotto. Born in Turin in 1964, he is the author of four essays and fifteen novels, these latter translated in several European countries and in Japan. The majority of his novels, most of which are thrillers, are set in Turin and deal with controversial events of the past, that somehow still affect the present. Given this premise, it does not surprise that the years of lead are the main narrative line of one of Perissinotto’s latest thrillers, *Quello che l’acqua nasconde*.

Published in 2017, it tells the story of Edoardo Rubessi, an Italian geneticist emigrated to the US in the late 1970s who comes back to his hometown, Turin, for research purposes. A few days after his arrival, Edoardo and his American wife, photographer Susan, start to be harassed by an old man who claims to know a dark secret from his past. The story is narrated by an old friend from Edoardo’s youth, who is asked by Susan to help her to unveil Edoardo’s real identity. It is

in fact evident that the latter is trying to hide something: in the end, it turns out that Edoardo was indirectly involved in the death of the young daughter of Giovanni Balistrieri, a psychiatrist who used to work for doctor Giorgio Coda.

Coda is a real existent figure¹⁰, director of Villa Azzurra, a mental health facility where patients were treated with a method called “electro-massage”, consisting in the application of long-lasting electric current on the genitals or the head. In 1974, after four years of trials, Coda was sentenced to five years in prison, to the payment of court costs and to the interdiction from the medical profession for five years. Edoardo, the son of two immigrants from Trieste, was one of the kids treated in Villa Azzurra. As an adolescent, he joined the student movement, although never playing an active role in it.

After a long and painful investigation and a partial confession by Edoardo, Susan and the unnamed narrator eventually unveil the identity of Giovanni Balistrieri, the assistant of doctor Coda who was seeking revenge for the murder of her daughter. This latter had been kidnapped by three of Edoardo’s *compagni*. The idea of damaging Balistrieri was suggested by Edoardo, who yet moved to the US shortly after and forgot about the whole plan, unaware that his *compagni* had decided to actually kidnap Balistrieri’s daughter. She suffocated in the back of her kidnappers’ car, who did not mean to kill her in the first place. After throwing the dead body in a lake nearby, the three students moved away from Turin, leaving Balistrieri to a life-long investigation to find out the names of his daughter’s murderers.

Therefore, *Quello che l’acqua nasconde* is first of all the story of an impossible homecoming. Edoardo is lost in present Turin and at the same time is haunted by his past, which he does not long for and yet is forced to recall in order to unveil the mysterious old man’s identity. While Edoardo reluctantly retraces his youth and, with it, Turin’s recent past, Susan and the narrator conduct their parallel investigation among crumbling buildings and industrial ruins somehow linked to Edoardo’s childhood and youth. As anticipated, the novel is a noir fiction, which is traditionally one of the preferred genres in the fictional narratives of the years of lead in Italy. In *L’album di famiglia: gli anni di piombo nella narrativa italiana*, Gabriele Vitello points out that the fictional production on the 1970s in Italy has always been dominated by two genres, namely

¹⁰ For an account of the figure of dr. Coda see Papuzzi, Alberto. *Portami su quello che canta*. Einaudi, 1977. An a history of psychiatry in Italy before and after Coda’s trial see Foot, John, *The ‘Republic of the Mad’. Franco Basaglia and the Radical Psychiatry Movement, 1961-197’*. Feltrinelli, 2014.

the conspiracy fiction (360) and the family novel (522), which, overall, have proven themselves to be ineffective in dealing with the divided national past.

On the one hand, *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* seems thus to be another example of this negative narrative trend, and a typical example of noir fiction. The narrator belongs to the popular category of those disenchanted, slightly cynical detectives, unhappy with their work as well as with their romantic life. Moreover, in accordance to another trope of noir genre, he has feelings for Susan, the main female character in the novel.

And yet, surprisingly, the novel also proves itself to be a relevant source in the analysis of the perception of the industrial past in present Turin. In fact, while investigating Edoardo's past, the main protagonists explore several former industrial areas in the city and several dismissed buildings, including the now dismissed Villa Azzurra. By exploring the urban landscape, Susan and the anonymous narrator retrace their past, that of their city and that of Edoardo: in the novel, the figure of the urban explorer described by Debord (25) is thus adapted to the deindustrial landscape and reinvented according to the aesthetics, the structure and the themes of noir fiction.

Moreover, besides investigating her husband's dark past, Susan is also working on a reportage on urban ruinations and considers Turin to be especially suitable for such project. Susan is thus a 'dereliction tourist', captivated by the abandoned buildings of a city that she barely knows. By exploring the ruins, she dives into the past of her husband and unveils the secrets and lies on which her marriage has been build. The link between the physical ruins and those left behind by the unsolved, dark national and individual past is evident

In sum, *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* is a typical noir. Nevertheless, its interest for the purpose of the present work lies in its social dimension and in the link that it draws between the industrial ruination and the moral/ethical ruinations of a whole community. When firstly asked about Turin by Susan, the narrator cares to immediately deny the common assumption that Turin is still the city of Fiat: "I'm afraid that even Italian people know very little about it [Turin]; whoever visits it has the same reaction you had, but for everyone else we are just the city where Fiat is, even though by now Fiat barely exists" (279-280).¹¹ The industrial heyday is in fact nothing but a faint memory, only preserved in the names of the once working-class neighborhoods. The industries that once were at the core of these areas' social life, are now ghosts in a haunted town.

¹¹ "temo che anche gli italiani la conoscano poco; chi la visita ha le tue stesse reazioni, ma per gli altri rimaniamo la città della Fiat, anche se la Fiat non c'è quasi più."

In the memory-map of cities like Turin, Milan, Genoa and even Florence, the neighborhoods are still named after factories that do not exist anymore or are about to disappear: Leumann, Vigorelli, Nuovo Pignone. Factories that have swallowed up humans lives, hopes, bitter-cold mornings, spring afternoons with a tepid sun outdoor and the bombardment of the presses indoor. Factories that have swallowed up men and then have suddenly disappeared; it's like they said, "we were just kidding"; "we have other things to do" (846-849).¹²

The names of the streets do not match their industrial identity anymore: the plants have been dismissed and, with them, the memory of the lives of men and women working in them has been obliterated. And yet, the names of the streets are still there, a sad memorandum of Turin's industrial heyday. Although the description of the industries is far from romanticized, the reader nevertheless feels a pang of nostalgia for that time of industries, "hopes" and "bitter-cold mornings".

Like most descriptions of the industrial past in the book, this one is rather generic and seems to address people who have never experienced, or only have an indirect experience, of the industrial heyday, such as most characters in *Quello che l'acqua nasconde*, as well as the author himself, who was born in the mid-sixties. For this reason, a bitter nostalgia appears to be the only medium, for the characters as well as for the readers, to access a history that they have never lived and that their city has tried to erase.

Although skeptical, the narrator agrees to show Susan around the ruins, mostly industrial ruins, of the city. The narration provides thus some significant descriptions of the iconic deindustrial landmarks of Turin.¹³ Especially interesting is the description of Scalo Vanchiglia:

Scalo Vanchiglia, long and narrow, expands parallel to the endless wall of the monumental cemetery; they are separated by Corso Regio Parco, that in that point has

¹² Nello stradario della memoria di città come Torino, come Milano, Genova e persino Firenze, i quartieri hanno nomi di fabbriche ormai scomparse o sul punto di andarsene: Leumann, Vigorelli, Nuovo Pignone. Fabbriche che hanno inghiottito vite, speranze, mattine di gelo, pomeriggi di primavera con fuori il sole tiepido e dentro il bombardamento delle presse. Fabbriche che hanno inghiottito uomini e poi, da un giorno all'altro sono andate via; come dire "abbiamo scherzato"; "abbiamo altro da fare".

¹³ For an outline of the main architectural interventions in former industrial area in Turin see the Appenix at the end of this chapter.

nothing regal,¹⁴ and the pipeline crossing of the old urban rail. On the borders of that pipeline, where brambles and bushes have corroded even the train tracks, dozens of shacks have risen up. Metal sheets, planks, tarpaulins, car doors; anything that can offer shelter was brought there, where the urban invisible live (2342-2346).¹⁵

In this case, nature participated in the process of erasure of the industrial past. It is interesting that Perissinotto only describes this part of the area around Scalo Vanchiglia and omits to describe the rest of Vanchiglia and the process of gentrification at work in the area. As a result, the image described by the narrator is very different from the one emerging in other media, as well as in the public discourse.

Quello che l'acqua nasconde excludes a side of the story, that of postindustrial regeneration, and brings instead in the hidden side of the story, that of postindustrial ruination, usually excluded from the public discourse. In other words, fiction serves in this case as a tool to draw attention on the moral defeats of Turin and succeeds in this purpose by recurring to a form of reflective nostalgia.

The feeling of nostalgia permeating the novel brings the reader back in time and keeps together three different and yet interconnected layers of the past: the industrial heyday, the outburst of terrorism and the youth of the main characters. In Boym's words, nostalgia therefore works as an intermediary between collective and individual memory (54). Moreover, it serves Edoardo as a tool to access another past of which he was unaware, marked by the kidnapping and murder of Balistrieri's daughter. And yet, Edoardo has constructed his present on the basis of another version of the past, in which Balistrieri's daughter had never died. Edoardo has therefore lived according to a virtual version of the past, which could have happened, but did not. As a consequence, the homecoming that he was projecting was a homecoming in a negative space, a space where his ex *compagni* have not killed Balistrieri's daughter and this latter did not spend his entire life seeking revenge. In *Quello che l'acqua nasconde*, then, reflective nostalgia not only allows past and present and individual and collective memory to coexist, but also serves as

¹⁴ Wordplay with the name Regio Parco, that translates as "Royal Park".

¹⁵ Lo scalo Vanchiglia, stretto e lungo, si sviluppa parallelamente al muro infinito del cimitero monumentale; a separarlo da questo sono il corso Regio Parco, che in quel punto non ha nulla di regale, e la trincea del vecchio ramo urbano della ferrovia. Proprio sui bordi di quella trincea, dove rovi e piante selvatiche hanno mangiato persino i binari, sono sorte decine di baracche. Lamiere, tavole di legno, teloni, portiere di auto; qualunque cosa dia riparo è finita lì, nella città degli invisibili.

a tool to explore different possible versions of historic development or, in other words, to access the virtual.

For its nostalgic and yet not sentimental fascination for ruins and its low-key tone, the novel is at the same time in line with a widespread trend in postindustrial representations and representative of a certain specifically Turinese aptitude. The tone of the narrator resembles an uninterrupted mumble, that perfectly fits with the sense of the story itself: the narrator's life, as well as those of Edoardo's and Susan's, crumbles, slowly but inexorably, within a ruined city. The low-key tone of the narration also reveals an exquisitely 'place-dependent' anthropological feature. This is a certain low profile so specific of the Turinese citizens, the so-called 'understatement torinese': this is the tendency to always underestimate, to minimize everything that concerns the city itself. When Susan asks him to show her around the city, the narrator makes indeed explicit reference to this 'Turinese understatement'.

All the restraint, all the understatement [in English in the original], all the pessimism of the true Turinese came out: "You are spoilt for choices: the whole city is falling apart, but do you think that the American audience can be in any way interested in our crumbling buildings?" (2249-2251).¹⁶

I would argue that any research on the perception of the past in Turin should keep this 'understatement' into account. Although irrational and not empirically demonstrable, this collective feeling in fact plays a unique role in shaping the understanding of the past in the present and has thus a main role in the process of remembrance of the place-dependent deindustrial phase. Such collective, city-based feature tends to naturally exclude any epic account of the industrial heyday, for epic is a narrative strategy that simply does not suit the city. The strong feelings that drive any epic account of the past, including 'smokestack nostalgia', simply do not fit the city imaginary.

Through the bitter memories of his youth, the narrator provides the reader with an account of the industrial decline of Turin and the supposed transformation of the identity of the city over the past two decades that largely differs from the one that dominates the public discourse. In general,

¹⁶ mi venne fuori tutta la modestia, tutto l'understatement, tutto il pessimismo del vero torinese: «Non hai che l'imbarazzo della scelta, c'è un'intera città che sta cadendo in pezzi, ma credi che al pubblico americano interessi qualcosa dei nostri palazzi fatiscanti?»

the life of the narrator and, with it, that of Turin, might in fact be described as a progressive loss of agency. In conclusion, by recurring to the narrative device of reflective nostalgia, *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* outlines a dark counter-version of the city's recent past and oppresses the reader with a disorienting sense of identity loss, in the private as well as in the public sphere.

1.4 Reflective nostalgia in *Brucia la città* by Giuseppe Culicchia

Giuseppe Culicchia was born in 1965 in Turin. He is a member of the generation of writers known as 'cannibali', pioneers of the pulp tradition in Italy (Sinibaldi 1997). He is the author of more than twenty literary works, including novels, collections of short stories, essays and the theater piece *Il ritorno a Torino dei signori Tornio* (2007). His works have been translated in several European languages.

One of his early works, *Tutti giù per terra* (1994), is considered the first novel on work precarity. Like most of Culicchia's literary production, *Tutti giù per terra* is set in Turin and deals with the identarian crisis that, according to the author, the city has been experiencing since the industrial crisis in the late 1970s. Interestingly enough, Culicchia, as Perissinotto, also wrote a novel set in Piedmont during the years of lead (*Il paese delle meraviglie*, 2006). Several of his works are therefore suitable for a research on the representations of the economic crisis and the process of deindustrialization in Turin.

For this work, I will close read *Brucia la città*, a bitter and profoundly pessimistic fictional account of contemporary Turin that has been object of much debate and criticism among his readers and the well-known personalities who have inspired some of the most grotesque characters in the novel.

Published in 2009, *Brucia la città* depicts Turin as a pathetic Italian Las Vegas, where everything seems to revolve around parties, heavy drugs, fatuous cultural events, and in which nobody seems to succeed in creating and cultivating stable and sincere human bonds. Most of the landmarks of post-Olympic Turin are represented and ridiculed in the novel, and only very few of the numerous characters arouse the reader's fondness, or at least empathy. The narrative is characterized by a satirical and grotesque tone, often pushed to an extreme, that evokes Culicchia's early 'cannibalismo' and his literary affinity with Bret Easton Ellis.

Brucia la città tells the story of DJ Iaio, a sort of contemporary *picaro* who finds himself involved in the most absurd adventures around Turin. Iaio is the 28-years-old son of a Turinese

family, whose members are as wealthy as they are unhappy. He has recently dropped out the university and now spends his time attending glamour events in town, occasionally working as a DJ and participating in the endless meetings of his cultural association, eloquently called F.U.F.F.A. ('crap'). The fact that he is constantly on heavy drugs makes him an untrustworthy narrator, and the reader is often led to doubt the events that Iaio recalls and even his relationship with his ex-girlfriend Allegra. Allegra's disappearance is the driving force of the story, as Iaio begins to wander around Turin with the purpose of finding her and winning her back.

Overall, the novel is dominated by the theme of loss. The disappearance of Allegra constantly brings Iaio back to the death of his brother Ludwig. Iaio's beloved brother is dead, his girlfriend is missing, and Turin has changed: this latter is unrecognizable to the point that it looks like an anonymous version of Milan (94), far from the industrial city that Iaio obviously has never seen, but still recalls with a confused feeling of nostalgia. What Iaio longs for is the capacity to project the future, to think beyond the absolute present in which he, as well as Turin, is stuck.

The lack of projectuality that prevents Iaio and Turin from creating their own identity is reflected by the fragmented narrative structure, characterized by short chapters, repetitions and broken sentences. As Manuela Spinelli has pointed out in her article "Schegge di vita quotidiana", the use of a fragmented structure is typical of the work of Culicchia and reflects the chaotic and incohesive way in which his characters look at things (7).

Iaio longs for his brother, for his relationship with Allegra, for past Turin: he is, in sum, nostalgic for a time that was not happy, but certainly not as miserable as the present. The narrative revolves around the axes of collectivity and solitude, solidarity and individualism. Iaio recalls the time when he could share his feelings with his brother and his girlfriend, when he did not feel as lonely as he feels now, lost in a city in which himself, wealthy, young, surrounded by celebrities, feels completely out of place. Iaio laments his loneliness, but at the same time is completely detached from his urban community. Especially significant in this regard is his reading of the main national newspaper *La Stampa*, reporting the fire in Thyssenkrupp plant of 6 December 2006, that caused the death of seven steelworkers.

Jesus Christ, how boring! What's on the front page? TURIN, SLAUGHTER OF WORKERS IN THE STEEL MILL. THE NUMBER OF DEATHS HAS INCREASED

TO SEVEN PEOPLE. Whatever, I put down ‘La Stampa’ and pick up ‘La Repubblica’.

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- London. The new rich go on the offensive: the world is running out of champagne.

There isn’t much water left, the same goes for oil and now even champagne is running low. [...]

I look around, in shock. But the place is still empty, and I can’t find anyone to share the news with. Damn that’s crazy! (198-199)¹⁸

Iaio looks for someone to share the shocking news of the champagne shortage. The reader is already aware of the ‘someone’ that Iaio is looking for: a member of the shapeless crowd of grotesque constructors, self-styled artists and creatives, who seem to be the only citizens left in Turin. The circumstances in which Iaio can run in these figures are numerous: parties, art exhibitions, the F.U.F.F.A. meetings... The description of this crowd gathered for all the events that Iaio attends recurs as a leitmotiv throughout the whole book. The only missing element is always Allegra.

But as far as I can see Allegra is not here. Yet all the Turinese people who matter are there. Boosta and Lessa are there, as well as Marsiaj with Herzigova and Buffon with Seredova, [...] actress Stefania Rocca, writer Giuseppe Culicchia, Luciana Littizzetto” (69).¹⁹

All the mentioned characters are existing popular figures in Turin, ranging from footballers to actresses. Especially interesting is the meta-narrative element, for which the author mentions himself among these habitués. This is one of the numerous ironic elements of the narration, which prevent nostalgia from drifting towards sentimentalism. In fact, as Boym points out, reflective nostalgia distinguishes itself from restorative nostalgia for its capacity to be ironic and humorous (50).

¹⁷ ‘La Stampa’ and ‘La Repubblica’ are two national newspapers.

¹⁸ Diosanto che palle. Che dicono in prima pagina? TORINO, STRAGE DI OPERAI NELL’ACCIAIERIA. SALITO A SETTE IL CONTO DEI MORTI. Vabbè, chiudo ‘La Stampa’ e apro a caso ‘La Repubblica’. Londra. L’assalto dei nuovi ricchi: sta finendo lo champagne. L’acqua è poca, il petrolio anche e perfino lo champagne scarseggia.

Mi guardo intorno sbigottito. Ma il locale è ancora vuoto e non trovo nessuno con cui condividere la cosa. Cazzo, è pazzesco!

¹⁹ Ma da quel che vedo, Allegra non c’è. In compenso c’è quasi tutta la Torino che conta. [C]i sono Boosta con la Lessa, Marsiaj con la Herzigova, Buffon con la Seredova [...], l’attrice Stefania Rocca, lo scrittore Giuseppe Culicchia, Luciana Littizzetto.

Irony is also central in the description of the endless and purposeless meetings of F.U.F.F.A. Iaio's cultural association has been recently put in charge by someone from Milan for finding a new name for Turin, a name which must be "hip, cool, young, a name which is charming, successful, friendly, a name which is brand-new, up-to-date, yé-yé: or, if you like it, a name which is hot, oh yeah". In fact, as the creative director of F.U.F.F.A. explains, "Turin smacks of old-fashioned, industrial, boring, grey city. It could have worked in the past, but not now. We need to find something else, something which is up to date! Something fresh, young, captivating "(39).²⁰ This description not only is ironic about the complete lack of strategy of F.U.F.F.A., but also points out the inability of Turin to appropriate a new identity outside the industrial framework. On the one hand, Turin seems willing to get rid of its grey, boring industrial past, but on the other hand it cannot but refer to itself on the basis of its industrial identity: in other words, the industrial identity seems to be the only one that Turin has ever had.

The working class has disappeared, replaced by a new class of artists, designers and DJs. Now that industries are not the defining element of the city anymore, the working class has been exiled from the neighborhood that traditionally belonged to it. The issue of the real estate speculation and gentrification following the dismissal of some of the main factories in town is at the core of the novel, and is raised by a secondary character, Ozzy.

Ozzy is a broke performing artist, the son of a barber and a manual worker, born and raised in an area of Turin, currently known as the Quadrilatero Romano, which at the time was a traditionally working-class neighborhood. Ozzy urges Iaio to stop dating Serenella Deturpi, the youngest daughter of the constructor who, according to Ozzy, is responsible for the gentrification of Quadrilatero Romano and, with it, the transfer of all the working-class families to another area of the city center (96). Nevertheless, Ozzy has been recently forced to move again from his house in the city center to a warehouse the Docks Dora, as "the Deturpi sisters, who have taken over their father in the family business, managed to get their hands on that building, that was owned by the municipality, and want to turn it into a casino, like in Las Vegas" (97).²¹

The descriptions of the Deturpi²² sisters and their father are deliberately ridiculous, beyond kitsch: their family house reminds of a Disney castle, their beach house imitates a chalet, and

²⁰ Torino sa di vecchio, di città industriale, grigia, noiosa. Funzionava una volta, oggi non più. Ecco dunque l'esigenza di trovare un'alternativa al passo coi tempi. Fresca, giovane, accattivante.

²¹ le sorelle Deturpi, nel frattempo subentrate al padre nella gestione della ditta di famiglia, sono riuscite a mettere le mani anche su quel palazzo, che era di proprietà della città, con l'idea di farlo diventare un casinò in stile Las Vegas.

²² In Italian "Deturpi" translates as the second person of the verb "to deface"

their chalet in the mountains is built in the style of a beach house. Moreover, as the richest citizens in town, they also are the springboard for the success of that crowd of artists and ‘creatives’ who, such as Ozzy, are not economically supported by their families.

Significantly enough, these latter all wander around the once industrial landmarks of Turin, such as Lingotto. Iaio and his friend Zombi attend Artissima (295), Italy’s most important contemporary art fair, which takes place once a year in Lingotto. In the crowd, Iaio and his friend Zombi recognize a considerable number of former waitresses from the once working class Quadrilatero. They all quit their job as waitresses, Zombi explains, to pursue a career as artists, to the point that the clubs’ owners in Quadrilatero are now forced to give up their enterprises. Iaio and Zombi’s irony towards this crowd of artists is paradoxical, for they are the primary consumers of the town’s art business. Iaio and his crew are in fact the ultimate outcome of the advanced phase of capitalism: they live to consume intangible commodities, within a market that is saturated.

And yet, Iaio seems to be naively unaware of his role and that of his circle in the decline of Turin. He is certainly not a social climber: even more disturbingly, he experiences a progressive estrangement from reality, partly caused by his abuse of heavy drugs and partly by the complete lack of human solidarity that characterizes his circle and, as it seems, the whole town. One episode is especially meaningful in this regard. Iaio attends a party on the terrace of the Deturpi’s Disney-shaped villa in the hills above Turin. The guests are Mr. Deturpi’s partners, gathered together to celebrate the birthday of their friend, Mr. Denaro (Money). The grotesque gang symbolically shares a cake garnished with a map of Turin.

Mr. Minfischio [I-Don’t-Care] cuts with care a slice of cake, and of city. [...] He places it on a gold border plate. He hands it out to engineer Deturpi [You-deface]. He cuts another slice, places it on another place and hands it out to mr. Denare [Money]. Then he cuts a slice for Depredo [I loot]. Finally, it is Mr Mincenso’s [I flatter myself], mr. Mintasco’s [I pocket] e mr. Marrangio’s [I get by] turn (213).²³

²³ Minfischio [...] taglia con cura una fetta di torta, e di città. [...] Mette la fetta che ha tagliato in un piatto per dolci bordato d’oro. La porge all’Ingegnere Deturpi. Ne taglia un’altra, la mette in un secondo piatto e la porge a Denaro. Poi ne taglia una per Depredo. Poi una per Divoro [I devour]. Infine tocca a Mincenso [I flatter myself], Mintasco [I pocket] e Marrangio [I get by].

The distribution of the cake symbolizes the partition of the city among the powerful members of a small elite, responsible for the banishment of the working class from its neighborhoods and the corruption of the city's industrial landmarks, such as the Docks Dora, where Ozzy is currently living and working. While visiting Ozzy, Iaio recalls the time when, as a DJ, he started playing there.

It was during the late 1990s, techno was pumped up everywhere and some people had even begun listening to drum'n'bass. One of these old railroad loading docks even hosted a rave party, once (152).²⁴

Again, the tone is too bitter for 'smokestack nostalgia' to find a place in the narration: instead, in Boym's words, a form of reflective nostalgia is evoked. Iaio constantly comes back to his childhood and early youth and savors every tiny detail of his days in Turin and in their holiday houses with his brother, and then with Allegra. What emerges from these descriptions spread throughout the book is a heart-breaking longing for an unhappy and yet less lonely time.

In Iaio's perception (and, perhaps, in that of Culicchia), the end of his childhood corresponds to the end of the time when Turin and its citizens were still willing and able to project a future. Especially significant in this regard is the description of the dismissed Michelin plant.

I look up to the sky crowded with the profiles of the condominiums that, according to Ozzy, the Deturpi sisters have built where the factories used to be. Somewhere around here was Michelin, if I'm correct. [...] It was like a village. Instead of building something cool as they would have done in Zurich or Berlin or London or New York, they tore it down. What a shame. I used to wander around a lot around here, a dozen years ago. Clubs, aperitifs, parties, exhibitions, art installations. It was such a great location. They could have made something good out of it. They have built these things full of balconies. Hurray (152-153).²⁵

²⁴ Era la fine degli anni Novanta, la techno andava a palla e qualcuno aveva perfino cominciato a ascoltare il drum'n'bass. In uno in questi vecchi magazzini ferroviari c'era anche stato un rave

²⁵ Guardo il cielo invaso dalle sagome dei condomini edificati stando Ozzy dalla ditta Deturpi al posto delle fabbriche. Qui nei dintorni c'era la Michelin, se non sbaglio. [...] Era una specie di villaggio. Anziché metterci qualcosa di figo come avrebbero fatto a Zurigo o Berlino o a Londra o a New York, l'hanno rasa al suolo. Che spreco. Bazzicavo sempre da queste parti, una decina di anni fa. Locali, aperitivi, feste, mostre, installazioni. Era una location pazzesca. Potevano farci qualsiasi cosa. Ci hanno costruito questi così pieni di balconi. Evvai

The nostalgia that connects past and present is charged with resentment for all the mistakes that have been made, both by Iaio's loved ones and by the city administrators: as a consequence, this is a form of nostalgia that goes beyond the personal sphere and acts as a denouncement against the policy undertaken in the passage from the industrial to the postindustrial phase in Turin.

Despite the social critique that it arouses, *Brucia la città* remains exclusive in many regards, for it describes a very limited area of the city and, with it, a lifestyle which is fully understandable only for the few who actually lead it. Nevertheless, the form of nostalgia that connects past and present, as well as the fictional and real characters and their city, is of great interest for the purpose of this research. By exploring the urban landscape, by car and by foot, Iaio comes across as an original combination of a contemporary *flâneur* and an absent-minded detective, who, although involuntary, draws attention on the social injustices and the loss of solidarity among Turinese citizens.

1.5 The potential of nostalgia-based fiction in the representation of deindustrialized landscapes

This chapter explores the role of nostalgia in the process of renegotiation of postindustrial urban identity. A crucial point is that nostalgia is a multilayered notion which is defined precisely according to the inseparability of its components: past and present, home and abroad, daydream and everyday life. Similarly, a town is the result of layers of history, often hidden or erased in the irresistible advance of progress. The coexistence of these layers is effectively summarized by the term 'porosity', coined by Walter Benjamin in his essay "Naples" to refer to the accumulation of layers of history reflected in the unfinished urban geography, resulting in a coexistence of ruins next to modern buildings.

The term porosity applies to the Turinese case as well: the urban landscape appears in fact to be a conglomeration of old and new, of industrial ruins and modern buildings. The Piano Regolatore, launched in 1995 with the purpose of reconstructing the identity of postindustrial Turin, was in fact subjected to uncountable modifications, that all together resulted in a rather discordant skyline. In this unfinished or, in Benjamin's words, porous urban landscape come to life the likewise 'porous' characters of Culicchia and Perissinotto.

Therefore, Turin is a space where multiple layers of history and socio-political conflicts interact, and literary fiction proves itself to be a powerful tool for exploring these conflicts. As mentioned above, the necessity for these conflicts to emerge lies in the absence of a critical approach to the process of deindustrialization in Turin within the public discourse. For this reason, several scholars in a wide range of disciplines are currently exploring the potential of artistic representations to critically engage with the deindustrial phase, and especially with the long-term effects of it. In that regard, the mutating deindustrialized landscape is understood as an especially fruitful source to explore the impact of the industrial crisis on those urban communities whose identity had been built around a factory.

An example of this scholarly trend is the workshop “Deindustrial Landscapes: the (more-than) representations of industrial decline”, launched in November 2017 by Garruccio and architect and heritage specialist George Jaramillo. The idea of the workshop, the organizers explained in the call for papers, originates from the assumption that “the study of postindustrial landscapes also offers insights into the continuing struggle over the meaning of industrial work and its loss, revealing unresolved social, cultural and political tensions.” At the same time, the organizers acknowledge that numerous current representations of deindustrialization across various media are dominated by the simplistic longing for the past that Cowie and Heathcott had summarized with the term ‘smokestack nostalgia’.

It is therefore necessary to chart the main artistic representations of deindustrialized landscapes in order to distinguish those offering a more nuanced and thus constructive account of the past from those limiting themselves to a simplistic, smokestack account of it. If on the one hand researchers in the field of deindustrialization must be aware of the existence of a large production of ‘smokestack nostalgia-driven’ representations of this historical phase in Western literature, on the other hand they should focus on the potential of the former to critically engage with the lost industrial identity of a community and to use it as a starting point to project the community’s future.

In “Narrating Past and Future: Deindustrialized Landscapes as Resources”, Sherry Lee Linkon discusses two novels set in two once industrial cities, Youngstown and Detroit. Both towns never fully overcame the industrial crisis, and because of this they not only “continue to struggle with high rates of unemployment and crime, vacant properties and empty lots, and the challenges of redefining their identities and rebuilding their economies”, but also “have become

identified as sites of failure, decay, and struggle” (38). Linkon points out how literary fiction proves itself to be an especially interesting mode of representation of the deindustrialized landscape, as it enables the writers to present “these landscapes in the context of stories, using landscape as the setting rather than the focal point of the text” and to construct narratives that “show how people draw upon memory—their own and those inherited from their communities—to construct complex meanings about places and their history” (51).

In postindustrial urban landscape, the traces of the industrial heyday either are erased under layers of new buildings and reinvented urban geographies or still survive as ruins and crumbling factories. It is precisely in this multilayered landscape that, as Linkon suggests, fiction can function as a space of coexistence of the industrial past and the postindustrial present: the dialectic between the different phases of urban architectural development corresponds to different stages of the characters’ life, who, by looking back at their individual past, retrace and renegotiate that of an entire urban community. In the novels analyzed by Linkon, as well as in *Quello che l’acqua nasconde* and *Brucia la città*, the deindustrialized landscape presented in a fictional context becomes thus a creative space where past and present, visible and invisible, and individual and collective, are tied together.

Quello che l’acqua nasconde and *Brucia la città* are nostalgic in a militant and proactive way and provide an account of the Turinese industrial past which falls under the category of reflective nostalgia, as described by Svetlana Boym. It is crucial to highlight that neither Culicchia nor Perissinotto strives to write an account of the deindustrial phase in Turin from the perspective of the working class. Rather, they aim to unveil the dark sides of this process and its impact on the Turinese community. Both novels are thus forms of social critiques which incorporate the urban landscape into a fictional scenario in order to draw the general audience’s attention on an urgent matter of collective interest, that is the architectural and moral decay in postindustrial Turin.

At first glance, neither *Brucia la città* nor *Quello che l’acqua nasconde* appears to fit in the literary category of postindustrial literature outlined by La Porta (17), that is the whole of fictional and nonfictional literary works dealing with the mutated work model in post-industrial capitalism. In general, they cannot be classified as narratives on secondary or tertiary- sector work. Moreover, since not only the working class, but also the members of the new class of precarious workers are most noticeably absent from both narratives, *Brucia la città* and *Quello*

che l'acqua nasconde are also excluded from the new working-class literature described by Prunetti and outlined in the introduction to this thesis (18).

They are part, though, of those fictional works crossing a wide range of literary genres and describing the long-term effects of the industrial crisis on cities that, such as Turin, had shaped their identity around their industrial capacity. The two novels explore the loss of identity of their community through the landscape, mutated to the point of being unrecognizable. And yet, the hard and still worth remembering industrial past is still there, visible in the ruins explored by Perissinotto's characters and hidden under the foundations of the architectural monstrosities and the ridiculously pretentious buildings described by Culicchia. The industrial past is looked at with a bitter and unromantic sense of nostalgia, that shares most of the features that Boym attaches to the definition of 'reflective nostalgia': the golden age of the industries, the economic crisis and the years of lead are charged with painful memories and injustices.

The characters lament their loneliness and their loss of identity in contemporary Turin and share the inability to imagine the future: they look back at past Turin in quest of someone or something they have lost. While recalling painful memories, the characters also unveil the dark sides of the apparently successful process of deindustrialization in Turin: therefore, the nostalgic exploration of the urban landscape in these two literary fictions bridges the individual and the collective levels and serves as a tool to subvert the largely spread account of the Turinese postindustrial regeneration.

1.7 Appendix – A guide to postindustrial Turin

Differently from towns like Detroit or Youngstown, Turin is generally praised for having successfully overcome the industrial crisis by appropriating a new identity outside the industrial framework. The physical evidences left behind by the industrial crisis are indeed less blatant, if compared to other 'rust belts'. Therefore, fictional accounts prove themselves to be especially powerful tools in renegotiating the process of deindustrialization in Turin, for they allow writers to bring in the narration traces of the past which would be otherwise invisible, or at least not accounted in the mainstream discourses around the postindustrial era of the city.

The apparently successful invention of a new Turinese identity outside the industrial framework was at the core of the Piano Regolatore (PRG), the whole of interventions on the industrial area of the city launched by the local authorities in 1995. The Piano Regolatore was

led by Milanese architects Vittorio Gregotti and Augusto Cagnardi. It was aimed to foster the expansion of the tertiary sector in the city and concerned an industrial area of more than 9 million m², whereof about 3 million m² located in an area known as ‘Spina Centrale’. At the core of PGR was a strong valorization of real estate in the former industrial areas: as it emerges from the close reading of *Brucia la città*, this project is made object of strong critiques by Culicchia.

The Piano Regolatore was designed in order to adjust to the turn towards the service sector at work in most European countries since the late 1970s/1980s. It was, in other words, rooted in an understanding of the passing of time as a linear movement aiming towards progress. It thus comes as no surprise that the critiques against the outcomes of the PRG carried on by the two analyzed novels are charged with nostalgia, for nostalgia necessarily is, in Boym’s words, “rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition” (XV). Nostalgia consists in the superposition of two images which cannot coexist within the way humanity experiences time and space: past and present; home and abroad; childhood and adulthood.

This appendix provides an outline of the history of the principal areas concerned with the PRG, most of which are described in the two analyzed novels.

1)Dora Park

Dora Park is the most ambitious example of post-industrial metamorphosis in Turin. It is located at the heart of ‘Spina 3’, an area of more than 1 million m² situated close to the historical city center. The park was built around Dora Riparia river, where most of the main factories were located.

The project for the park was designed in 2004 by a working group managed by Peter Latz, creator of the Landschaftspark in Duisburg Nord, in the Ruhr basin. The first parcels of the park were inaugurated in 2011.²⁶ The project followed a sustainable approach which at the same time aimed to preserve the industrial heritage: the ex-factories were thus partly preserved and integrated in the park and partly demolished in order to leave space for green area and

²⁶ For an overview of the Parco Dora project see <https://rmitallchange.weebly.com/dora-park.html>

revegetation. Dora Park is currently used as a location for concerts and public events, and periodically hosts music festivals, such as Kappa FuturFestival.²⁷

If on the one hand Dora Park can be considered in many regards a very successful example of post-industrial regeneration, on the other hand the administration of the area surrounding it has been the object of some critiques. In that regard, Lucia Marinelli and Marta Perroni have conducted in 2017 an investigative reportage aimed to draw attention on the dark sides of the process of deindustrialization in Turin, and especially in the area of 'Spina 3' and on its impact both on the environment and the everyday life of the urban communities living in the area.

2) Ferriere Fiat

Built in 1907 on a surface of 40000 meters, the edifice was originally part of the Piedmont-based branch of a French industry, the Vandel & C. During WW1, the building was taken over by Fiat, that was starting to operate in the iron and steel sector and thus needed to have its own foundry. By 1920, the Ferriere Fiat grew to an area of 40 000 meters, with more than 3000 workers. During WW2 the Ferriere were bombed, yet not irremediably damaged, by the Allies, and were the scene of rough battles during the Resistenza. The foundry continued to produce until the late 1970s. After a series of transfers to other industries, following the Fiat crisis, the foundry was closed in 1992 and mostly teared down in 2005. Some of the edifices have been integrated in Dora Park (i.e. the pillars in the image above).



Dora Park, Turin

3) Michelin plant

In 1906, the French industry Michelin opened its first Italian plant in Turin, which quickly became a crucial industry hub. Heavily damaged during WW2, Michelin nevertheless expanded

²⁷ Official website of the Kappa FuturFestival (<https://www.kappafuturfestival.it/>).

between the sixties and the early 1970s, inaugurating three new plants in Piedmont. During the 1970s, the Torino Dora plant was progressively abandoned in favor of the new ones, equipped with more modern technologies and eventually shut down in 1997. A supermarket has been built on the field.

4) Docks Dora

The Docks Dora were built between 1912 and 1914 and served for the storage of dutiable wares entering the city. Between the 1980s and the 1990s, they became a landmark for the Turinese underground culture. The Docks Dora were dismissed in the sixties and currently host several cultural and entertainment businesses.

5) Scalo Vanchiglia

The Torino Vanchiglia railway station, known as Scalo Vanchiglia, was a rail yard active between 1926 and 1996. It was built to serve the industrial area located between Vanchiglia district and the north-eastern zone around Dora Riparia river. As it is described by Perissinotto in *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* (2342-346), the station has been completely abandoned for more than a decade. In May 2016 the demolition works have started.

6) Lingotto

Designed by architect Matté Trucco and inaugurated in 1923, the Lingotto building, owned by Fiat, was the largest car factory in the world at the time. Lingotto was closed in 1982, at the beginning of the Fiat crisis, and, having won a contest launched by FIAT, architect Renzo Piano was appointed for the renovations of the building, which was eventually completed in 1989. The building was turned into a modern complex, which currently hosts a theater, a convention center, several concerts hall, shopping arcades, a hotel and the headquarters of the automotive engineering faculty of the Polytechnic University of Turin.

II

Worker-student unity and nostalgia for the future in *Piove all'insù* by Luca Rastello and *La festa è finita* by Lidia Ravera

2.1 Introduction

Buongiorno, grazie Avvocato,
sono del Manchester Guardian.
Non le farò perdere tempo;
questa la prima domanda:

Goodmorning, thank you Mr. Lawyer,
I am from the Manchester Guardian.
I won't waste your time;
This is my first question:

La Fiat nella sola Torino
ha centoventimila operai,
quindicimila le industrie
legate allo stesso destino.

Just in Turin, Fiat
Has got a hundred twenty thousand workers,
fifteen thousand industries
(are) tied to one fate.

L'aria dell'intera città
tanto densa da fare pietà...
Ora sbaracca Volvera,
la fabbrica dei ricambi,
la fonderia a Crescentino.

The air of the whole city,
(is) thick to the point of being pitiful.
Now Volvera is being cleared out,
(as well as) the spare parts factory,
(as well as) the Crescentino foundry.

As it has been discussed in chapter 1, factories have been determining in shaping the skyline and, with it, the collective identity of Turin. Having been the largest and the most politically relevant industry in town (and in Italy), Fiat occupies a privileged position within the urban imaginary, firstly as the protagonist of the industrial heyday and, later, as the scene of an intense season of workers' struggle.

The lyrics above come from a song by Lucio Dalla, written in 1976 in the context of the Fiat crisis of the mid and late 1970s. The abundance of specific references to the events in the Turinese factory, as well as those to the plants concerned with the crisis (“Volvera”, “la fonderia a Crescentino”) are symptomatic of the resonance that the uncertain future of Fiat had for the Italian citizens at the time. The song is an imaginary interview to head of Fiat Giovanni Agnelli, conventionally known as ‘l’Avvocato’ (‘the Lawyer’), who is asked by a British reporter to

answer some questions concerning the future of the factory and its workers. The song brings up several clichés of Turin, such as the relevant presence of immigrants among the Fiat workers and the grey air of the city, thick with the black haze of the factories and car smoke. The song was written four years before the march of 40000, the clamorous protest of 40000 white collars and private citizens who marched in Turin to ask the interruption of the strikes and protests, and to reenter the Fiat factory to resume production. As it will be discussed in the third section of this chapter, for 35 days thousands of blue collars had in fact been protesting in front of the gates with the purpose of forcing Fiat executives to reconsider the downsizing plan which established the layoff of 14 469 manual workers and employees. The march of 40000 had, and still has, a strong impact on the Turinese collective imaginary, as it is demonstrated by the numerous representations of it within various media, including television, cinema and literary fiction.²⁸

The present chapter focuses on the ways nostalgia is used to reconsider the wave of protests in the late 1960s and 1970s and, subsequently, the collapse of the student-worker unity during the deindustrial phase in Turin in two contemporary literary works, *Piove all'insù* by Luca Rastello (2006) and *La festa è finita* by Lidia Ravera (2002). Both Ravera and Rastello experienced this historical phase as activists and therefore provide two narratives which are largely informed by their participation in the Italian '68 and in the Movement of '77 respectively. The two analyzed literary works reveal how the collapse of the worker-student unity and the march of 40000 are still a burden to contemporary Turin.

Lidia Ravera was born in 1951 in Turin. Activist in the student movement of '68, journalist, writer and later politician, she reached a considerable popularity in 1976 after the publication of *Porci con le ali* (*Pigs have wings*), co-authored with Marco Lombardo Radice. She is the author of several novels dealing with the memory of the late sixties and the years of lead from the point of view of old activists and, often, their families. As Anna Serkowska explains in "Dopo il romanzo storico", Ravera has attributed to the students' revolts the main characteristics of youth (243). According to Serkowska, Ravera glances at the '68 with disenchantment and lucidity, but, in doing so, also rediscovers the mobility and creativity that were intrinsic to the movement and that have a hard time emerging in present society (247).

The second analyzed author, Luca Rastello, was born in 1962 in Turin, where he died in 2015. Trained as a journalist, he was the author of several reportages dealing with highly

²⁸ See the movie *Signorina Effe* (2007) and the TV series *Gli anni spezzati* (2014)

contested matters of Italian and international politics, ranging from Italian support to military intervention in former Yugoslavia (*La guerra in casa*, 1998) to the Turin-Lyon high speed travel project (*Binario morto*, 2012). After *Piove all'insù* (2006), Rastello published a second novel (*I Buoni*, 2014), therefore pursuing his career as a fiction author along with that of journalist and reporter.

An outline of the development and the decline of the students' and the workers' movement is essential in order to close read of *La festa è finita* and *Piove all'insù*. The defeat of the workers' movement during the phase of deindustrialization in Turin is in fact inextricably linked to that of the student movement and culminated in the rupture of the worker-student unity established in the late sixties.

As Sidney Tarrow notes in *Democracy and disorder*, the conflict that arose in many Italian plants since the late 1960s began in fact simultaneously to the students' movements (193). The timeline and the outcomes of these two forms of mobilization must thus be analyzed in parallel. This premise is especially compelling in the Turinese context, in which the students' movement and extremist (mostly) left-wing groups²⁹ were especially influential and maintained a close relationship with the workers' movement in Fiat. In what follows, the mutations of the industrial relations that followed the end of the 'hot autumn' in Mirafiori plant are discussed in the light of the history of the students' movement and the worker-student alliance in Turin.

2.2 Student movement and workers' revolts in Italy (1960s-1970s)

Abolished during the Fascist regime, Italian unions were reconstructed in the context of the anti-fascist struggle. Nevertheless, the resurgence of the working-class organizations was short-term, as the defeat of PCI (Italian Communist Party) in the elections of 1948 initiated a decline that lasted until the late 1950s. During this decade, not only the PCI was excluded from political participation, but all the main trade unions³⁰ were banned from most factories. This period was also characterized by a radical reorganization of the industrial process, featuring the massive

²⁹ This chapter focuses mostly on the elaboration of the worker-student unity in the universities and in the plants, with specific reference to the Turinese case. For a more in-depth analysis of organizations like Lotta Continua or Potere Operaio see Part three in *Democracy and disorder*.

³⁰ The three main Italian unions are CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour), CISL (Italian Confederation of Trade Unions) and UIL (Italian Labour Union). The three trade unions were linked to the Communist Party, the Christian Democracy and the Italian Democratic Socialist Party respectively.

introduction of advanced technology in the factories and the subsequent decreased request for skilled workers.

In 1990, Robert Lumley published *States of emergency*, a pivotal analysis of the rise of social movements in Italy between 1968 and 1979, with a focus on the case of Milan. The British scholar explains how the reorganization of the unions in the 1950s played a decisive role in the erosion of the old working-class structures, as “the nucleus of the unionized was based on the skilled section of the workforce who had been the leading protagonist in the anti-fascist movement” (23). A new class of unskilled workers, mainly women and young people, often immigrants from Southern Italy, had thus emerged, whose interest and needs were not represented by CGIL and the other trade unions. Moreover, as Lumley notes, this new working class was also involved in a radical process of rearticulating class relations, based on a non-antagonistic relation between employer-employee aimed to replace collective working-class identity with the individual generic figure of “the worker” (22).

The situation evolved between 1960 and 1963, during the economic miracle: the decline of unemployment empowered the workers, who now found themselves “in a position to bargain with their employers” (27). Rebellions started to arise in the factories, that caught by surprise the Communist and the Socialist parties, who were increasingly extraneous to the workers’ struggles.

In sum, the revolts that animated the late 1960s in Italy originated from the same factors that had weakened the old trade unions: immigration, the reinforcement of the unrepresented category of unskilled workers, the spread depoliticization of the working class. The combination of these factors is, in Lumley’s understanding, at the core of the “highly radicalized revolt” (29) that exploded during the so-called ‘hot autumn’ of 1969 in Italy.

Another social group was emerging alongside the manual workers: for the first time, in fact, university and high school students were numerous enough to gather in a group that was not merely in support of other social organizations but claimed its own rights. The increase in the number of students had been determined by the commencement of the education reform of 1962, that established mass secondary school education in Italy.

With the reform came a new wave of expectations towards the social and economic benefits of a mass higher education, that yet were soon disappointed by overcrowded teaching rooms, a high rate of dropout among the less wealthy students (who were not economically supported by the state) and a work market which started to seem saturated. It is precisely in this hiatus between

the expectations of the students accessing universities and the opportunities actually provided by these diplomas that, according to Lumley, the main reasons for the explosions of the protest have to be found (64).

The beginning of the students' and workers' struggles in Italy must of course be discussed within the larger framework of the rise of social conflicts that spread over Western Europe and the United States in the mid-60. Yet, as Tarrow explains in *Democracy and disorder*, the Italian *sessantotto* distinguishes itself from other waves of protests both for its precocity and for its longer and more profound echo in society and politics (3).

In Lumley's analysis, the developments of the student movement in Italy followed two clearly distinct phases. During the early and mid-1960s, the students had their spokespeople in the national student organizations connected to the main political parties: UGI (Unione Goliardica Italiana), linked to PSI (Italian Socialist Party) and PCI; and Intesa, linked to DC (Christian Democracy). In a second phase, though, these organizations were increasingly marginalized, and the protests were mostly led by groups of activists with different political backgrounds. This second phase of the conflict exploded with the occupation of the Sociology Faculty at Trento in January 1966. This was the first of a series of demonstrations and occupations across the country. In February 1967, in the university of Pisa, a group of students clashed with the police and then gathered in assembly in the occupied university buildings. During this protest, the students started to elaborate the so called 'Pisan Thesis', a sort of manifesto defining the guidelines of the newly emerged student movement that was later presented at the Rimini Congress of UGI³¹.

What is especially interesting for the purpose of this chapter is the fact that, as Lumley points out, in the 'Pisan thesis' the students offered an analysis of the current socio-political context which was rooted in the principles of operaism (65). Adapting the claims of the operaist tradition to the mass schooling system, the students started to consider themselves as members of the oppressed working class rather than an elite. In fact, they were trained as highly skilled cognitive workers in the universities in order to meet the needs of the advanced technological production which drives the new capitalist system. Thus, students and workers had to join forces in the fight against their common enemy, capitalism (65).

³¹ For an in-depth analysis of the events at the University of Pisa see Tarrow, chapter 9.

The worker-student unity was one of the main points of debate within the student movement in Italy. The call for everybody's right to receive an education and the dream of a mass university were carried on in the name of working-class values and the rejection of the bourgeois environment in which most of the students had been raised. It is of the utmost importance to consider that the worker-student unity was not built on utopia but, on the contrary, rooted in a specific political vision.

The definition of this alliance was a crucial step in the project of autonomy that, as the works of Rastello and Ravera reveal, the activists were carrying on. As Tarrow explains, “[d]efining students as workers had two strategic functions: first, opposing the traditional left-wing opinion that they are nothing but *petit bourgeois* dilettantes; and second, affirming that they were an autonomous social subject in their own right” (149).

Nevertheless, the way in which the worker-student unity was framed consistently changed over time and eventually proved itself to be unsuccessful. In fact, as Lumley recalls, the student movement never really managed to “open up further education to the working class”, as “the percentage of students from working-class backgrounds increased by only a small amount and remained lower than in other industrialized countries” (102).

Lumley identifies three main phases of the theorization of the student-worker unity. In the first phase, between the early and mid-1960s, “student unity with the working class was mediated through institutions” (109): students looked at the left-wing parties and the trade unions as the mediators in their relationship with the manual workers, or, in other words, the link between the universities/schools and the factories.

Things changed in the late 1960s, with worker-student alliance being theorized “in terms of a direct, unmediated relation between students and workers” (109). Students became progressively intolerant to the mediation of unions and parties, perceived as authoritarian and hierarchical. They seek a direct link with the workers and often drop out of university to take up jobs in factories. For the purpose of this thesis it is interesting to point out that in Turin, and especially in Fiat, students and political activists played an especially relevant role in providing networks for the workers, mostly Southern immigrants. These networks were essential to the development of the workers’ movement in Turin (210). The progressive marginalization of the unions from the workers revolts had a strong impact also on the development and decline of the worker-student unity between 1968 and 1978.

Another crucial change happened within the working class, with white collar workers joining the strikes alongside manual workers. If on the one hand the trade unions were more and more consulted by political parties, on the other hand they turned out to be unable to understand the needs and to support the struggles of the emerging working class, which found in the student movement a more receptive interlocutor.

This second phase of the worker-student unity must be situated within the explosion of the workers' movement all over Europe. Differently from their British and French fellow workers, though, the protagonists of the 'hot autumn' in Italy not only "withdrew their labour on a massive scale but challenged the organization of work and the system of authority within the factory" (167).

In the third phase, the factory became the only scene of the student-worker alliance and "unity came to be interpreted as student mobilization and organization against the exploitation and oppression in the factories and workplaces rather than in the universities and schools" (109).

Lumley's analysis does not fully cover the collapse of the worker-student unity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The oil crisis of the 1970s had a dramatic impact on the Italian economy and played a decisive role in exacerbating a spread feeling of discontent in civil society and in worsening the political crisis. The historic compromise³², launched in 1976 by secretary of the PCI Enrico Berlinguer, alienated even more students from the institutions. At the same time, the student movement was more and more divided and weakened by the outburst of terrorism. When, in the late 1970s, the economic crisis exploded in Fiat, as it will be illustrated in what follows, the alliance between students and workers was as well coming to an end.

As anticipated, this chapter focuses on two novels that deal with the cultural heritage of the student movement and the development and later on progressive disappearance of the working-class between the late 1960s and the late 1970s. Both Rastello and Ravera participated in the student movement and witnessed in person the three phases mentioned above as well as the Fiat crisis, which will be discussed in the following section. The memories of these events are therefore those of two former students who cannot but provide a limited perspective of the workers' struggles. Nevertheless, as the following sections will show, Rastello and Ravera offer two rich and complex fictional accounts of the modes of remembering of their generation of

³² The historic compromise was a political alliance between the Communist Party and the Christian Democracy. In November 1980 Berlinguer announced the end of the historic compromise.

activists and of the aspects of their attempted revolution that are worth remembering in contemporary society.

2.3 From the beginning of Fiat crisis to the march of 40000

The collapse of the worker-student unity happened simultaneously to the Fiat crisis. As the socio-economic impact of the Fiat crisis in Turin is a dominant recurring theme in *Piove all'insù* and *La festa è finita*, an overview of this period will be provided in this section.

In *Lavorare in Fiat* (1989), Revelli reconstructs the main phases of the Fiat crisis. Since the early 1970s, the atmosphere in the Fiat buildings had been extremely tense (63). The seriousness of the situation became evident on 9 October 1979, when the factory announced the layoff of sixty workers suspected of terrorism (one of them is Angelo Cugno, one of the main fictional characters in *La festa è finita*).

The tension grew stronger in September 1980, when the directorate notified the beginning of the *cassa integrazione*³³ for 24 000 workers, half of whom to be reintegrated in the factory (100). This decision had been taken by Fiat managers to contrast the effects of the oil crisis: in fact, the regression of the absorption rate of the global market had caused a surplus of products which had convinced the factory to activate the unemployment benefits for thousands of its employees. Moreover, foreseeing a strenuous opposition from the unions, Fiat had brought the machineries necessary to contrast the arrest of production that would have been caused by the workers' strike: this decision is indicative of the attitude that the industry was inclined to keep (101).

The negotiations with the unions had just started when, on 11 September, Fiat suddenly announced the layoff of 14469 employees. Two days later, FLM (Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici) announced a general strike. In the beginning, public opinion was largely supportive with the manual workers on strike. The PCI general secretary Berlinguer expressed solidarity on behalf of his party (106). This wave of solidarity rushed Fiat in submitting to the unions a new proposal that reconverted the 14469 layoffs in unemployment benefits for 23000 workers (108).

Even though the national secretaries of the unions declared to be open to accept the new conditions, the local delegates decided to continue the strike. This decision costed the workers

³³ Unemployment benefits in Italy.

the progressive alienation of a part of the public opinion and the declared hostility of their white collars colleagues..

On 14 October, after 35 days of strike, the leader of the white collars' movement Luigi Arisio called an assembly for Fiat workers and citizens embittered about the interruption of production. After a tense assembly, the participants gathered in a crowd that marched in silence in the city center, going down in history as the 'march of 40000' (114). The number of the participants has never been determined but is estimated to be between 20000 and 40000. After the march, the unions rushed to sign an agreement with the factory, very similar to that proposed by Fiat at the very beginning of the strike (123).

2.4 Forms of remembering and objects of longing in Rastello and Ravera

When discussing the works of Rastello and Ravera, several critics and scholars have raised questions on nostalgia and melancholy (Belpoliti 2006, Kleinert 2009, Revelli 2006). The numerous references and the different understandings of these two concepts in their contributions not only reveal how melancholy and nostalgia are indeed at the core of *Piove all'insù* and *La festa è finita*, but also how they are difficult to frame.

La festa è finita is a novel about the modes of remembering, and more precisely a quasi-anthropological analysis of the impact of the past on a whole generation, disappointed with the outcome of the 1970s and incapable of living in the present. The invented characters embody attitudes towards the past ranging from rejection to symbiosis with it. Fiction is therefore used as a means to discuss the discontents and nostalgia of a generation. As a protagonist of that generation, Ravera shares her characters' past and yet, through the fictional meaning, manages to critically engage with nostalgia, without surrendering to it, but without denying its potential either.

In other words, the significance of *La festa è finita* in the context of the present analysis lies in the fact that the risks and the potential of nostalgia coexist in the narrative. Differently from her characters, Ravera uses in fact nostalgia as a creative force, finding in it the source for her narrative invention.

More complex is the case of *Piove all'insù*, a novel of exceptional richness and originality for both its narrative structure and style. The novel is based on the dialectic between past and present, as, by recalling the memories of his childhood and adolescence in Turin, the protagonist

of *Piove all'insù* reflects on his present and that of his hometown. Rastello offers a lucid, critical and yet touching account of the rise and fall of the 1960s and 1970s in Italy, from the 'hot autumn' to the industrial crisis in Fiat.

This account can be looked at as nostalgic, as, like Ravera, Rastello laments the progressive loss of solidarity and projectuality in the era of deindustrialization and postindustrialization. These two qualities were in fact at the core of the two groups that led the revolts of the late 1960s and 1970s, that is the students and the workers. The student movement was torn apart by its ideological internal divisions and the outburst of terrorism, while the manual workers were permanently defeated by postindustrial capitalism and the new influential group of the white-collars that has emerged from it.

Rastello counterposes the ability and the will of imagining a different society that had driven the students' and the workers' struggles with the spread individualism of postindustrial society that triumphed after the late 1970s. From this contrast arises the feeling that, as the next section will show, Marco Belpoliti has summarized in the expression "melancholy of the future."

Ravera and Rastello construct thus two forms of narrative that, despite their manifest structural differences, are both aimed to rescue the best part of the last two decades of the Turinese past. Therefore, nostalgia becomes a practice that, through the fictional medium, enables the inclusion of solidarity and projectuality in the socio-political agenda for the future.

Such sense of nostalgia seems to correspond to the definition of 'progressive nostalgia' given by Laurajane Smith in "'Nostalgia for the future': memory, nostalgia and the politics of class":

What we see as 'progressive nostalgia' is a particular and unashamedly overtly emotional way of remembering that actively and self-consciously aims to use the past to contextualize the achievements and gains of present day living and working conditions and to set a politically progressive agenda for the future (613).

Rastello and Ravera focus on the heritage of the industrial era in Turin, that is a model of society organized around social classes. They do it as former activists in that attempted revolution in which the dream of the worker-student unity had been contemplated. Even though, in Smith's words, "hard, difficult and inequitable", the industrial past and the struggles of workers and students were built on a set of values that are worth reaffirming in the present (613). Moreover,

Smith's analysis is rooted in the specific context of deindustrialization and therefore is especially suitable for the analysis of these two novels.

That which is remembered is done so with a sense of loss tempered with overt pride, empathy and gratitude, which is in turn underlined by a desire to assert a sense of communal belonging and sense of place in the context of rapid deindustrialization and social change. It is also often about valuing the achievements of the past in terms of a set of political and social values that are seen to have underpinned those achievements – habitually a sense of hard work, collective action and progressive politics (613).

Differently from the protagonists of *Culicchia* and *Perissinotto*, the characters portrayed in *Piove all'insù* and *La festa è finita* have played an active role in the students' and workers' struggles in the 1960s and 1970s (and so did Rastello and Ravera). In these two novels nostalgia is thus not a way of accessing a past that has been never lived, but rather a tool to select among one's own memories those that are worth remembering and reaffirming in the present.

2.5 Nostalgia for the future in *Piove all'insù* by Luca Rastello

Piove all'insù is a long autobiographical account of the childhood and adolescence in Turin of fictional narrator Pietro Miasco, activist in the Movement of '77. Through the character of Pietro, Rastello reworks some personal memories and family events. In a contribution to the anthology *Narratori degli anni zero*, Rastello declared that fiction allowed him to renounce to his obligation, as a journalist, to be objective and, therefore, to “take on personal responsibility” for what he wanted to narrate (504).

As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis (13), in *L'album di famiglia*, Vitello points out that the fictional production on the 1970s in Italy has always been dominated by two genres, namely the conspiracy fiction (360) and the family novel (522). The latter is especially typical of the plethora of novels on this topic published since 2000 (530). In his chapter of *Stranger than facts* dedicated to Rastello, David Ward notices how *Piove all'insù* stands as a hybrid in this sense, as it “offers us examples of both conspiracy theory type and the personal narrative form” (103).

The personal narrative form seems to be preponderant in the first part of the book, mostly dedicated to the conflictual relation between Pietro and his parents. Nevertheless, the classification of *Piove all'insù* within this trend turns out to be rushed: the figures of the parents are in fact progressively put aside and, what is most important, nor them or Pietro become personally involved with episodes of terrorism.

The conspiracy theory-type model enters into play at the end of the novel, when we learn that the protagonist's father found himself involved in Operation Gladio³⁴ and contributed in denouncing it (240-257). Nevertheless, this episode is only mentioned at the very end of the book and remains independent from the rest of the plot.

Finally, it is important to point out that *Piove all'insù* brings in a third narrative model not linked to the fictional works on the 1970s, namely the labor narrative. *Piove all'insù* begins in the early 2000s, when the narrator's partner is unexpectedly fired from her job. Pietro, who is out of town at that moment, begins to write her a long account of his childhood and adolescence in Turin, between the late 1960s and the 1970s. Therefore, the novel opens with a bitter reflection on the uncertainty that most Italian workers experience nowadays, but immediately moves to another narrative scenario.

As it emerges from this overview of the book, *Piove all'insù* brings into play different genres, but at the same time resists any univocal collocation within any of them. In the article "Fatti, politica, fantasia. L'impegno narrativo contemporaneo attraverso due casi di studio: *Presente e Piove all'insù*", Carlo Tirinanzi de Medici considers this rejection as a sort of meta-narrative trial aiming to condemn the "modes of writing that recently have characterized our literary production and socio-political context"(21).³⁵ Thus, Rastello seems to suggest that, if none of these strategies had succeeded in effectively contrast the simplistic discourse on the 1970s spread in Italian contemporary literature it is because the key to rethink the collective memory of this phase has not to be found in a specific literary genre

Pietro begins to tell the story to her partner not only in order to distract her from the thought of her job loss, but also to show her the roots of the present that they are experiencing, so different from the future that Pietro had projected. As well as the social and cultural relations, the

³⁴ The name Operation Gladio refers to a post-war clandestine stay-behind operation projected by NATO with the purpose of preventing any possible communist invasion/influence in Italy (see Willan 1991 and others).

³⁵ "prassi scritte che di recente hanno configurato il nostro spazio narrativo e politico-sociale."

urban geography has evolved very differently from the project of inclusiveness and collective spaces that the activists in the 1970s were projecting.

In his article “Passione Torino”, Marco Belpoliti argues that Rastello not only tells the story of the Turinese citizens, but also that of the city itself, portrayed as “serious, but also cheerful, somber at times and yet shivering, a fevered city”.³⁶ According to Belpoliti’s analysis, Rastello “uses melancholy as a key to get access to the past: melancholy of the future”.³⁷

Interestingly enough, in his analysis Belpoliti refers to a sense of “melancholy of the future”, an expression that recalls Smith’s “nostalgia for the future” discussed above. Belpoliti considers melancholy to be the sense that permeates the narrative and allows access to the past. Therefore, he suggests that melancholy is the tool that allows Rastello to bridge his personal memories (remediated through those of the protagonist) and the collective past of Turin (the students’ struggles, terrorism, the movement of ‘77).

This understanding of the notion of melancholy echoes the definition of nostalgia outlined by Svetlana Boym in *The future of nostalgia* and discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. According to Boym, the difference between nostalgia and melancholia lies in the fact that the former is “about the relation between individual biography and the biography of groups and nations”, while the latter “confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness” (16). Therefore, despite his inverse understanding of the notion of melancholia, Belpoliti stresses the dialectic between collective and personal memories in the process of remembering of the Turinese industrial past which is at the core of the present thesis. In what follows, I will continue to rely on Boym’s definition of nostalgia as opposed to melancholia, yet bearing in mind that the former is in line with Belpoliti’s understanding of melancholy.

In another praising review of *Piove all’insù* published in *Il manifesto* in 2006, Marco Revelli mentions nostalgia, which yet takes a negative connotation in his analysis. According to Revelli, by rejecting a linear temporality in favor of a constant dialectic between past and present, Rastello manages to avoid the trap of nostalgia.

It is perhaps because of his capacity to play with the calendar as if it were made of mosaic tiles that he manages to avoid the risk of turning the past into a closed room in

³⁶ “seriosa, ma anche allegra, a tratti cupa e tuttavia attraversata da brividi continui, città febbricitante.”

³⁷ “usa la malinconia come chiave d’accesso al passato: malinconia del futuro.”

which we are trapped (nostalgia) or, on the contrary, into an empty space in which one we lose ourselves (repression).³⁸

Despite the discordant definitions of nostalgia and melancholia in the two mentioned reviews, then, the hypothesis that Rastello manages to open a fruitful and original perspective on the Turinese past through the fictional medium appears to be well grounded.

For its richness and complexity, *Piove all'insù* can be approached from a multiplicity of points of view. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the account of the progressive rupture between students and workers and on the use of nostalgia in the narrative as a way of rescuing the best aspects of the worker-student unity.

In the early 1970s, for the first time a new relation between workers and students based on solidarity and mutual help appeared to be possible. Pietro recalls a circumstance in which he himself and other students, while being chased by the police during a protest, had been protected by the residents of a working-class neighborhood:

The getaway becomes a party, with us dispersed through neighborhoods and markets in the south of the city, through those large boulevards that brush against Fiat's womb, and the families of the workers swallowed by the devil open their houses and welcome us in to protect us, they still think of us as their children during that last winter of peace (48).³⁹

Not only the students are offered shelter from the police, but they are warmly welcomed by the workers and their families:

It sounds odd now but the women with their grocery bags would put those bags down, and would hug us, one of them gave me a mandarin, a perfect one, with the peel detached from the slices, and it was a party over and over, and you would dry the rain off and feel

³⁸ "Forse è per questa capacità di giocare col calendario come con le tessere di un mosaico, che riesce a sfuggire al rischio di trasformare il passato in una stanza chiusa in cui si resta imprigionati (la nostalgia) o, all'inverso, in un luogo vuoto in cui non ci si riconosce (la rimozione)"

³⁹ "...e la fuga diventa una festa, sparpagliati per quartieri e mercati a sud della città, lungo quei corsi grandi che sfiorano il ventre della Fiat e le famiglie degli operai inghiottiti dal diavolo che aprono le loro case per proteggerci, ancora ci tengono per figli in quell'ultimo inverno di pace."

strong, it looked like the beginning of something, we were hidden in the crowd, pieces of the crowd and made confident by that crowd (49).⁴⁰

The reference to the mandarin tickles the reader's sense of smell and taste, making the narration incredibly vivid. This perception resonates with Boym's intuition of the importance of the details in constructing forms of reflective nostalgia in literary works (50). Through the detail of the mandarin, Rastello manages to evoke the sense of intergenerational and inter-class solidarity that still animated the mid-1970s in Turin, even though now "it sounds odd" to imagine it.

The solidarity between students and workers, the urban feast, the glee that from time to time exploded among the black smoke of the factories and the austere boulevards in Turin, the spread hope in a revolution yet to come: this is what Rastello feels nostalgic about and aims to rescue from oblivion.

This phase of creativity and collective hope was nevertheless brief, and, over time, the memory of it was erased by the outburst of terrorism and economic crisis. The painful closure of this phase is captured in some of the most powerful pages of the novel, charged with a sense of loss of the ability to foresee and project a different future. The ultimate disappointment comes from the renounce from the PCI to oppose the DC at the government. The beginning of the historic compromise is recalled by Pietro with bitterness, and deep delusion (80). At this point, the conflict between the student movement and the PCI (and, as a consequence, the working-class culture that was at the core of the party's policy) has reached a point of no return. A description in the book stands as especially representative of the rupture between students and workers.

It is 1977 and Pietro is taking part in a protest. Pietro encourages his *compagni* to follow him in a working-class area, where he is sure he will find solidarity and protection. Instead, the residents come across as openly hostile towards Pietro and his *compagni*.

There's a crowd in front of the bar, they look at us: they have the windows on the ground floor here, I go eh, it's a working-class neighborhood, let's turn here, let's immerse ourselves in the crowd, they have our back. They (the *compagni*) listen to me: we run into

⁴⁰ "e adesso sembra strano ma le donne con la borsa della spesa la posavano la borsa, e ci abbracciavano, a me una diede un mandarino di quelli perfetti con la buccia staccata dagli spicchi, e di nuovo era festa e ti asciugavi via la pioggia e ti sentivi forte, sembrava un inizio, eravamo nascosti nella folla, pezzi della folla e forti di quella folla."

the Borgo San Paolo's people arms. But people move. They sway, inflate and grab us: "Are you done burning our cars, you bastards?" "Bastard" must be an effective word, as the moment someone says it everyone else takes it and lets it roll in their mouth and it feels like they enjoy the taste of it more every time they throw it out: "You bastards".⁴¹ (148)

The whole situation gets more and more confusing, as Pietro is rescued by a group of *tamarri*, a generic definition for young people, usually from peripheral area of the city, who refuse any intellectual and political engagement, go to discotheques and wear eye-catching and yet generally inexpensive clothes. In the 1970s, they were usually in conflict with their political activists.

He asks the guy at the kiosk for a mint lemonade, he gestures towards him, "it's on me", and I think that either he's going to skin me alive and he wants to have some fun before that or I just don't know what the fuck is going on anymore. What the hell? The workers want to hang me and the *tamarro* buys me a drink?⁴²(151)

Not only the student movement has lost his main allies and is alienated from the communist party, but it is also divided within itself. From now on, the memory of the interactions between students and workers the progressive marginalization of the working class in Turin become more and more bitter.

The decline of the workers' movement is embodied by the character of Mauro, a metalworker in Fiat and later one of the workers fired in 1980. Pietro reveals that, as many other former workers in Fiat, Mauro eventually committed suicide in 1984 (that is after the time of the narration), at the age of 25.

⁴¹ Davanti al bar c'è folla, ci guardano: qui hanno le finestre anche a pian terreno, eh dico io, quartiere operaio, giriamo di lì, c'immergiamo nella folla, quelli ci coprono. Mi ascoltano: corriamo in braccio alla gente di borgo San Paolo. Ma la gente si muove. Fa le onde, si gonfia e ci prende: "Avete finito di bruciarci le macchine, bastardi?". Bastardi dev'essere una parola che funziona, perché appena uno la dice la prendono tutti gli altri e se la fanno rotolare in bocca e si sente che gli cresce il gusto ogni volta che la buttano fuori: "Bastardi".

⁴² Ordina una menta al ragazzo del chiosco, con la mano gli fa segno "pago io", e io penso che o sta per farmi la pelle e prima vuole divertirsi un po' oppure non capisco più un cazzo di niente. Come? Gli operai vogliono impiccarmi e il tamarro mi paga da bere?

Pietro meets Mauro in the summer of 1976, when his father finds for him a seasonal work in a fruit warehouse. Mauro welcomes Pietro in the warehouse and helps him integrating in a place so new to him. Pietro runs into Mauro four years later, during a picket line. He describes a feeling of defeat: there are few students, and they are there partly to manifest their solidarity to the workers and partly for the nostalgia for an era of struggles and utopias, which, suddenly, seems to be over.

Pietro mentions a sense of nostalgia for the luminous heyday of the student movement, and this is especially surprising considering that the moment Pietro and his *compagni* feel nostalgic about is so close in time. That piercing nostalgia reveals to what extent the passage from the mid-1970s to the 1980s was sudden. The traumatic nature of this shift was perceived as especially dramatic in Turin, where, along with the dreams of the student movement the working class disappeared as well, while Fiat survived. The imaginary that Pietro has of Fiat is still rooted in that working-class epic narrative that is about to disappear.

I have never been inside Fiat, I imagine it as a sleeping demon with a constant pain in its stomach, curbed (Fiat) by the living army of solderers, welders, auto body workers, varnishers, pole-lathe turners (133).⁴³

The heartbreaking and nevertheless exceptionally lucid and realistic description of the last days of picket line at Fiat, right before the march of 40000, resonates with the words of Svetlana Boym:

The object of longing is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world: it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia. (251).

It is this ability to look at the future that needs to be brought back in the present. Through his extraordinary novel, Rastello sets thus a socio-political agenda for the future, proving Smith's trust in the performative power of nostalgia to be right.

⁴³ Non sono mai entrato nella Fiat, la immagino come il diavolo che dorme, con un dolore sordo nel ventre, tenuta a bada dall'esercito vivo dei fonditori, saldatori, carrozzieri, verniciatori, tornitori.

2.6 Nostalgia for the future in *La festa è finita* by Lidia Ravera

La festa è finita was published in 2002 and is in many regards representative of Ravera's artistic perspective on the late 1960s and 1970s in Italy: as Susanne Kleinert points out in her article "I fantasmi del passato", differently from other writers from the same generation, Ravera is interested in the memories of the events rather than in the accounts of the events themselves. For this reason, Kleinert continues, Ravera has always favored fictional narratives over reportages or non-fictional novels (1).

The novel is set in Turin in the late 1990s. Alexandra, a woman who was involved in the student movement in the 1970s, receives a phone call by Carlo, her partner at the time and now a conductor in New York. Carlo, who is back in Turin to conduct Falstaff, proposes Alexandra to have dinner together. To surprise him, Alexandra gathers together their old group of *compagni*, now all professionals in different fields and all equally incapable of facing their past and their defeats. However, Carlo misses the appointment, as he is kidnapped by another old *compagno*, Angelo.

A young immigrant from Basilicata, Angelo arrived in Turin in the late 1960s and found a job as a manual worker in Fiat. Carlo convinced him to join the student-worker movement. Angelo was fired in 1979 with sixty other workers suspected of having links with terrorist groups and, from that moment, has led a miserable life, stuck in the dream of a revolution that was never accomplished. Abandoned by Carlo and Alexandra and progressively pushed to the edge of society, Angelo represents, in Kleinert words, "the social evolution that leads to an increasingly profound crisis of the industrial worker" (6).⁴⁴

Both in its content and form, the novel revolves around the idea of symphony. *La festa è finita* is a coral novel, which is yet charged with a sense of intolerable solitude: the absence of a main character allows Ravera to multiply the perspectives in the narrative and to reflect on the modes of looking back at the past (or, in Carlo's case, of removing it). The dream of building a new coral, harmonious society that would have been guided by students and workers had been cultivated during the late 1960s and early 1970s by Alexandra, Angelo and the other *compagni*, inspired by their leader Carlo. A charismatic speaker and an ambitious man, Carlo has renounced the utopia of conducting this living symphony and ended up conducting a professional orchestra instead.

⁴⁴ "l'evoluzione sociale che conduce a una crisi sempre più profonda dell'operaio industriale."

Alongside this elaborate analogy and the topic of the decline of the worker-student unity (which will be illustrated later), Ravera also brings two delicate themes in the narrative. The first is that of the working and life conditions of the new manual workers, represented in the novel by Angelo's girlfriend and accomplice Giorgia. She is, in Prunetti's definition, a member of the new working class that is finally making room for itself in the Italian literary landscape. In Angelo's perspective, she is part of that crowd of "boys different from the boy that you had been (ugly shoes, yet polished with wax and a tiny jacket), younger than you, more similar to students. Confident and arrogant boys, who did not protest, but were not willing to work either. (2705-2707).⁴⁵ The character of Giorgia is heartbreaking in her naiveté and vulnerability. She does not feel any sense of belonging to any social group and considers the workers' struggles to be obscure "divinations" (1259).⁴⁶

The second topic is the difficult integration of the Southern immigrants in Turin during the fifties and the 1960s. Partly raised also in the works of Culicchia and Perissinotto, this topic is central in *La festa è finita* and emerges through the character of Angelo who, just arrived in Turin, found in Fiat and in the student movement his only reference points. The Turinese and aristocratic young musician and charismatic leader of the student movement Carlo and the Southern, poor manual worker Angelo are somehow a mirror of the composition of the intellectual class and the labor force in the 1960s in Turin.

As Baldissera points out in "La marcia dei quarantamila" most of the manual workers in Fiat were in fact immigrants, whereas the rate of workers from Piedmont was predominant among the white collars. Consequently, as Lumley notes, the workers' movement that dominated the socio-cultural Italian scene from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s was mainly formed by Southern workers, who transferred the traditions of resistance of the southern proletariat, which included violent demonstrations and attacks to municipality buildings, to the North (209). In the first stages of formation of this oppositional force in Fiat, Lumley continues, "it was the students and political activists who played a more important role than the unions in providing the network of communications (leaflets, factory gate presence, meetings in bars) which enabled workers simply to get to know kindred spirits and to organize" (210). The first encounter between Angelo, Carlo

⁴⁵ "ragazzi diversi da com'eri stato ragazzo tu (scarpe brutte ma lucidate con la cera e giacchetta striminzita), più giovani di te, più simili agli studenti. Ragazzi senza timidezze e strafottenti, che non lottavano, ma neppure lavoravano volentieri

⁴⁶ "Sarà un cimelio del suo passato, gli espropri proletari o che cosa si inventavano, il settantasette il sessantanove tutte le loro cabale."

and Alexandra is perfectly in line Lumley's description, as it takes place in front of the gates, where Carlo and his *compagni* distribute leaflets. Angelo evokes it with a bitter sense of nostalgia, made especially powerful through the vivid memories of the former's first spring in Turin.

It was out of the gates of the door 18 that he felt the Turinese spring for the first time, he hadn't feel anything until that moment [...] It was a whiff of that scent, the flowers fighting with the carbon monoxide, that imposed a sense of nostalgia on him (897-901).⁴⁷

The way in which Carlo approaches the workers (directly at the gates, thus bypassing the unions delegates) and the way in which he describes the project of the student movement to Angelo is representative of the theorization of the student worker movement between the late 1960s and the early 1970s as it is described by Lumley.

We have a wide vision of the proletariat, a...spacious vision, one that includes the unemployed people, the employees and the students. We don't let Marxism dragging us down, even though we use it as a method, as a lever to lift the world up, as a language that gathers people together (930-932).⁴⁸

Carlo distances himself from Marxism, which was at the core of the PCI policy and expresses his faith in the construction of an inclusive society. Ironically, the model of society described by Carlo is the opposite of the solitude in which all the characters seem to have plunged.

Past and present play an equally important role in the novel: *La festa è finita* is in fact a reflection on the different ways in which the members of the '68 generation look at their past. Kleinert distinguishes three approaches to the past, embodied in the three main characters. Carlo is the 'open present', oblivious of the past, with its ideals and utopias. On the contrary, Angelo is an endless past, immobile and still attached to the dream of a revolution that has never happened.

⁴⁷ È stato fuori dai cancelli della porta 18 che ha sentito per la prima volta la primavera torinese, fino ad allora non aveva sentito niente. [...] Fu una folata di profumo, fiori che lottavano con l'ossido di carbonio, a imporgli un sentimento di nostalgia.

⁴⁸ Noi abbiamo un'idea vasta del proletariato, un'idea... spaziosa, che include i disoccupati, gli impiegati e gli studenti. Non ci facciamo ingessare dal marxismo anche se lo usiamo come un metodo, come una leva per sollevare il mondo, come una lingua unificante.

Finally, Alexandra is the one who has been taking care of the shared memories of the group. Differently from Angelo, she has never tried to bring the past back in the present but has turned herself in a living memento of it: she has never left the house where she used to live with Carlo, she has kept their diaries and still wears the parka that she used to wear in the 1960s.

Whereas Angelo is a completely tragic character, Carlo and Alexandra are almost farcical. As an activist and student at the time and an engaged intellectual nowadays, Ravera looks back at her past and that of her generations with a sense of bitter irony. As Serkowska points out in her contribution of *La forma del passato* dedicated to Lidia Ravera and Sebastiano Vassalli, Ravera is extremely lucid towards the failure of the project of the unity between intellectuals and workers and the way it has damaged many of its protagonists. At the same time, though, she wants to bring back to the present a sparkle of the collective optimism towards the future that had animated Turin during the revolts at Fiat. This feeling permeates the narration and is evoked by tiny details, such as the diaries that Alexandra and Carlo used to write, the shared meals with their *compagni* or the vivid description of the spring mentioned above (21-22).

Therefore, Serkowska suggests, Ravera does not evoke nostalgically the actual content of the attempted revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s, but the projectuality that it entailed. The dreams of that revolution belong to the past, but the active desire that drove it is worth remembering in the present. It is, in Serkowska's words, the "active mental mobility"⁴⁹ that the '68 emanated that should survive in our postindustrial society, in which the notion of class does not exist anymore, but social divisions are more and more dramatic: just like Culicchia, Perissinotto and Rastello, Ravera uses literary fiction to warn her readers on the disappearance of the desire and the ability to project the future in contemporary society.

In *La festa è finita* not only the characters, but also Ravera herself is dealing with her past and that of her generation. As anticipated, Carlo and Alexandra fulfill all the negative stereotypes of the deluded intellectuals incapable of facing their past, while Angelo is a broken man who has refused to let the past go.

Unexpectedly, though, in the very last pages Ravera accords Carlo and Angelo a dignified end, which also sounds like a closure with her personal past and that of her generations. Carlo, who was expected to be killed by Angelo survives instead, while Angelo is stabbed to death in the house that used to belong to Carlo's family. Symbolically, the manual worker dies and the

⁴⁹ "mobilità attiva e mentale"

intellectual lives. During Angelo's funeral, Carlo thanks him for having reminded all of them of the ideals that they used to share. After his speech, Carlo plays *The International*. Nobody dares to sing, but a deep sense of solidarity spreads among the characters, finally close to each other. This closure concerns not only the personal stories of the fictional characters, but also Ravera herself. In the end, the past and the ideals of former activists in the student movement cannot be changed, but they must be remembered: nostalgia is precisely about the awareness of the irrevocability of the past and the responsibility for bringing those aspects of it that are worth remembering at the core of the socio-political agendas for the future.

The defeat of the working class in Turin, culminated in the march of 40000, is an open wound in the collective consciousness of the city. The relevance of this event is proven by the numerous contemporary representations of it across a variety of media. The present chapter contextualizes and analyzes two especially interesting and, I believe, effective examples of the potential of fiction, in this case literary fiction, to renegotiate one of the most traumatic phases of the process of deindustrialization in Turin.

Despite their considerable differences in terms of style and tone, *Piove all'insù* and *La festa è finita* are permeated by a common desire of rescuing from oblivion the aspects of the revolts of the late 1960s and 1970s that are worth reaffirming in the present. Both Rastello and Ravera are aware of the irrevocability of the past and use nostalgia as a practice to bring the past in conversation with the present. They look at the collapse of the workers movement from their perspective of activists from the Left. Nevertheless, from this limited perspective, they reaffirm values such as solidarity and projectuality, which were at the core of both the workers' and the student movement.

This use of nostalgia resonates with Smith's definition of 'nostalgia for the future', that is a mode of looking back on the past, and on the possibilities that the past carried in itself, which is projected to the future. Through a lucid, emotionally charged and yet never indulgent fictional account of the dreams and discontents of their generation, Rastello and Ravera thus state the necessity of bringing solidarity back to our socio-political agendas.

III

Intergenerational conflict and ‘Telemachian-nostalgia’ in *La fabbrica* by Demetrio Paolin and *La sfuriata di Bet* by Christian Frascella.

3.1 Introduction

Hai finito il tuo lavoro
 hai tolto trucioli dalla scocca
 è il tuo lavoro di catena
 che curva a poco a poco la tua schiena
 Neanche un minuto per ogni auto
 la catena è assai veloce
 e il lavoro ti ha condotto
 a odiare la 128
 Ma alla fine della settimana
 il riposo ci fa bene
 noi andremo senza pensieri
 dagli amici a Moncalieri
 [...]
 sei già pronto per partire
 spegni tutte le luci di casa
 metti il tuo abito migliore e pulito
 lasci al gatto la carne per tre giorni
 e insieme a una Torino abbandonata
 trovi la tua macchina bruciata
 . . . la 1100, la 1100, la 1100. .

You finished your work
 You have removed the shavings of wood from
 the car body
 This is your work on the assembly line,
 Which bends your back little by little
 Not even one minute for each car
 The assembly line goes rather fast
 And the work made you hate the 128
 But during the weekend
 Some rest is good for us
 We'll spend a carefree day
 At our friend's place, in Moncalieri
 [...]
 You're ready to leave
 You turn all the lights off,
 Wear your best and cleanest suit
 You leave meat for three days for your cat
 And, together with an abandoned Turin,
 You find your car on fire
the 1100, the 1100, the 1100...

(Rino Gaetano, *L'operaio Fiat*)

Chapter 1 considers the impact of deindustrialization on urban aesthetics and stresses the potential of literary nostalgia in reflecting on the transformations of the old industrial buildings and on the memory of the industrial landscape in postindustrial society. Chapter 2 focuses on the moral values at stake during the process of deindustrialization and looked at literary nostalgia as a tool to select from the past those worth remembering and bequeathing to the next generations.

Chapter 3 takes a step further in time and looks at the impact that the changes in the modes of work following the industrial crisis of the 1970s and the tertiary sector turn had at an intergenerational level. More specifically, it focuses on the way in which they affected the

relationship between working-class parents and their children. It does so by close reading the short story *La fabbrica* by Demetrio Paolin and the novel *La sfuriata di Bet* by Christian Frascella, both published in 2011. The two novels are analyzed in combination by means of the mythologem⁵⁰ of the hero's *nostos* and the close reading suggests that both narratives are rooted in a form of 'Telemachian nostalgia'.

The lyrics above are drawn from *L'operaio della Fiat* (1974), in which songwriter Rino Gaetano imagines the routine of a manual worker at Mirafiori plant during the 1960s, regulated by a rigid opposition between time of work and spare time, which do not interfere with each other. The worker can picture, and therefore project, the rest of his hard and yet secure life. In the song, the repetitiveness of the worker's gestures in the plant ("hai tolto i trucioli dalla scocca") and those in preparation of the leisure time (spegni tutte le luci di casa metti il tuo abito migliore e pulito, lasci al gatto la carne per tre giorni) is yet abruptly interrupted by the finding of his car (the 1100⁵¹) on fire.

In these lyrics Gaetano describes the impact of the workers' struggles during the Fiat crisis: the changes in the modes of working following the entrance in the era of flexible capitalism not only had a dramatic collective impact, but also unsettled the workers' daily routine and caused significant changes in people's perception of time.

As Alessio Berré points out in his contribution to *Le culture del precariato*, nowadays people perceive the passage of time as a chaotic accumulation of episodes (57). Echoing the thought of Sennett and Bauman⁵² Berré explains that, in the era of flexible work, precarity is, paradoxically, the defining element that shapes one's own identity. It is the uncertainty that the work precarity imposes that shapes the individual inner self, and not the job itself. This chapter explores how literary fiction can create a ground where the intergenerational conflict following this momentous passage can be rediscussed.

The first chapter argues that a form of 'reflective nostalgia' is at work in the narratives of Culicchia and Perissinotto. This form of nostalgia, outlined by Svetlana Boym in *The future of nostalgia* and described in the introduction to this thesis (9), allows the individual to bridge own

⁵⁰ In his seminal work *Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie*, published in 1941 together with Carl Gustav Jung, Hungarian philologist Karl Kerényi outlined the notion of mythologem. This is the minimal mass of narrative material at the core of every myth (15-17), the nucleus shared by a more or less broad number of myths. Mythology, Kerényi suggests, originates from the movement of this mass throughout epochs and cultures.

⁵¹ The Fiat 1100 was a car model manufactured by Fiat between 1953 and 1969.

⁵² For an overview of Bauman's and Sennett's theory on the end of work see the thesis' introduction (9)

lives and epochs that they have never lived. The second chapter looks at two fictional accounts featuring another form of productive analysis of the past, that is the ‘nostalgia for the future’, a form of nostalgia described by Laurajane Smith in an article of the same name and experienced by people who have lived a certain epoch and aim to bequeath some aspects of it to the next generation.

This third chapter looks at a form of nostalgia that is specular to the one described by Smith, as it proceeds from the children to the parents. As children raised in a working-class environment and precarious workers in the cultural industry, Paolin and Frascella have personally experienced the generational leap that the reduction of the industrial capacity entails.

The two authors share indeed a very similar biographical and intellectual background. Demetrio Paolin was born in 1974 in a small village in the province of Asti (Piedmont), but currently lives and works in Turin. He collaborated with several Italian newspapers and is the author of seven literary works and essays. As a critic, Paolin is best known for his essay *Una tragedia negata* (2008), in which he observes that most fictional works on the years of lead in Italy take place in the domestic environment, therefore favoring the intimate and limited dimension of the family over the dramatic and utterly complex whole of socio-political circumstances that led to the outburst of violence of the years of lead. *La Fabbrica* is part of the most autobiographical fictional work by Paolin, the collection of short stories *La seconda persona* (2011).

Christian Frascella was born in 1973 in a small village close to Turin. After working for eight years as a manual worker in a factory, in 2009 he published his first novel, *Mia sorella è una foca monaca*, which obtained numerous positive reviews (Pent 2009 and others) and has been discussed in the context of the scholarly debate around the evolution of postmodernism in Italian contemporary literature (Jansen 2011 and others). In an article appeared on newspaper *La Stampa* in 2016, Frascella describes himself and his interest in literature as follows:

Many years on the assembly line in the plant - nobody mentions anymore the fact that the factory is a true life-learning experience. [...] A big family, we were five boys, just above the poverty line. Nobody would read, and I don't know what led me to open a book: I

know for sure that, in it, I found a reason to live.⁵³

Between 2010 and 2018, Frascella has written six other novels (*Sette piccoli sospetti*, *La sfuriata di Bet*,⁵⁴ *Il panico quotidiano*, *La cosa più incredibile*, *Brucio*, *Fa troppo freddo per morire*). Most of his novels fall under the category of *Bildungsroman* and often feature children raised in a working-class environment. His second novel, *La sfuriata di Bet* features the memorable young female character of Elisabetta Corvino.

As the fourth section of this chapter will show, the presence of the factory plays a crucial role in *La sfuriata di Bet* and is, in general, a distinctive element of Frascella's narrative. The conflictual relation of the author with the factory is for instance at the core of the autobiographical novel *Il panico quotidiano*, which features a manual worker (the author) who begins to suffer from recurrent panic attacks. Frascella has quit his job as a manual worker several years ago, and currently defines himself as a precarious worker, unable to make a living out of his books and therefore constantly in need for other side jobs.⁵⁵

La fabbrica and *La sfuriata di Bet* revolve thus around two narrative poles: the factory, which is both a physical space and a *lieu de memoire*, and a domestic environment. Nostalgia is an essential element of the narrative and functions as a thread to bring together two radically different worlds, that of the parents who defined themselves through their job and that of their children, who came to adulthood in times of job precarity and global economic crisis.

Nostalgia allows the two narrative poles of the factory and the home to coexist in the plot. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis (9), the term nostalgia is in fact an *a posteriori* combination of the Greek words *nostos* (homecoming) and *algia* (pain), coined by doctor Hofer in 1688 to indicate the homesickness perceived by mercenaries Swiss soldiers fighting away from home. In *The future of Nostalgia*, Boym draws attention on the fact that the word *nostos* is connected to the indo-European root 'nes'. 'Nes', Boym explains, involves a sun-symbolism, and in ancient Greek, took the meaning of "return to light" (7). Drawing on Gregory Nagy's

⁵³ Tanti anni in fabbrica sui turni - non se ne parla più di quella palestra di vita che è la fabbrica. [...] Famiglia numerosa, eravamo cinque maschi, un gradino sopra la povertà. Nessuno leggeva, e non so cosa mi spinse ad aprire il primo libro: so per certo che ci trovai una ragione di vita.

⁵⁴ The novel was translated into Dutch in 2013 by Henrieke Herber, who also translated *Mia sorella è una foca monaca*.

⁵⁵ This declarations were released by the author in an interview to newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in 2013 ("Christian Frascella: 'Peggio di un attacco di panico c'è la paura che ritorni'" <https://www.iodonna.it/personaggi/interviste/2013/christian-frascella-libro-malattia-401342359146.shtml>).

⁵⁶understanding of Odysseus' *nostos*, Boym highlights how the *Odyssey* features two *nostoi*: the first one is of course the return of the hero to Ithaca, and the second one, of equal importance, is the return of Odysseus from Hades (7). Therefore, *nostos* does not only define a return home but also refers to the hero's *anabasis*, a return to light.

This chapter reads *La sfuriata di Bet* and *La fabbrica* in the light of the Odysseian mythologem of the hero's *nostos*. Understood in its *Odyssey*-based definition, nostalgia entails thus the concept of motion and signifies both homecoming and return to light. In the two analyzed novels, the protagonists begin indeed a journey in search of their parents: maintaining the Odyssean parallel, they can be defined as two contemporary versions of Odysseus' son Telemachus. The journey of Telemachus offers fascinating parallels with *La fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet*. Drawing on Boym's considerations around the etymology of the term nostalgia, this chapter sets a parallel between these two literary works and Telemachus' journey, showing how the factory marks the main stage of the protagonists' homecoming and describing the various phases and the outcome of it. This close reading is based on the theory of the 'Telemachus complex' by psychoanalyst Recalcati, which will be analyzed in the third section of this chapter.

3.2 Intergenerational conflict in *La Fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet*

The two selected literary works deal with the passage from the projectuality intrinsic to the industrial work model to the fragmented time of precarity, and the way it affected the relations between children and parents. On the background there is Turin, caught in between the memories of its industrial heyday, the traumatic events that marked the end of it and the problematic transition towards a postindustrial identity. *La fabbrica* is set in a generic year after the inauguration of the Mirafiori Motor Village (2006)⁵⁷, while *La sfuriata di Bet* takes place in 2009, during the wave of students and precarious workers' protests against Berlusconi's IV Cabinet.

Frascella and Paolin rework in a narrative form the topic of the impact of the mutated working conditions in flexible capitalism on the intergenerational relationships in working-class

⁵⁶ Boym refers to Nagy's *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (1990)

⁵⁷ The Mirafiori Motor Village is Fiat's main car dealership and a polyvalent arena that includes a bar, a restaurant and multifunctional event space. For an overview of the project see http://www.fiatpress.com/download/SYSTEM_ARCHIVIO/GRUPPO01~06_PDF_FIAT/060712_F_IKEA_MMV_ITA.pdf

families. *La sfuriata di Bet* tells the story of seventeen years old Elisabetta (Bet) Corvino, who lives with her mother in Barriera di Milano, a peripheral area of Turin. Her parents, a manual worker and an employee in a factory, split up after the tragic death of Bet's little sister, accidentally caused by the protagonist herself. Bet is an intelligent and surly young woman with a sharp sense of humor and a mediocre high school student, who tries to fight the injustices that surround her, often adopting strategies that prove themselves to be disastrous.

A few lines at the very beginning of the book convey Bet's militant and naïve attitude towards her times:

Every morning, when the alarm clock rings I think about the Revolution.

I feel like somewhere in town all the *cassintegrati*, the young people, those who are exploited, those who can't take it anymore are revolting. Our epoch rioting against the injustices in the factories, schools, on the newspapers, everywhere (15).⁵⁸

On the other hand, Luca, the protagonist of Paolin's *La fabbrica*, is a chemistry student and the son of two manual workers. His father is dying from a lungs cancer, caused by the inhalation of considerable quantities of asbestos during his work as a varnish at the Mirafiori plant. Luca asks his brother Damiano, born from his father's previous marriage, to join him for a bike tour around the recently renovated Mirafiori plant. The two brothers have conflicting personalities: the eldest is a free spirit and a traveler, who has had a tense relation with their father from a very young age, while the youngest is devoted to the family and tries to support their ill father. The figure of the father, a grouchy and resentful man, is initially accounted for indirectly, through his children's memories, and intervenes directly in the second part of the short story, recounting some events of his work at the plant and his relationships with Damiano and Luca's mothers.

Luca and Damiano's father is a member of the 'old' Turinese working class, a protagonist of the 'hot autumn' at the Mirafiori plant and later a witness of the march of 40000. On the other hand, Bet's parents belong to the following working-class generation, whose members were born in the late sixties and have taken over jobs in the factory in the 1990s. The latter is thus an in-between class, caught between the old and the new working class, still emotionally linked to the

⁵⁸ Tutte le mattine quando suona la sveglia penso alla Rivoluzione. Penso che da qualche parte in città sia scoppiata la rivolta dei giovani, dei cassintegrati, degli sfruttati, di quelli che non ce la fanno più. La nostra epoca in tumulto contro quello che non va a scuola, in fabbrica, sui giornali, ovunque.

imaginary of the former and yet forced to deal with the largely mutated socio-economic context experienced by the latter.

Finally, the two young protagonists were raised in a working-class environment, and yet do not have any direct experience of work in a plant. Differently from their parents, they do not define their identity according to the life in the plant. They do not belong to a specific class but are both working class children who struggle to communicate with their parents, due both to personal circumstances and the mutated social and working environment around them. It is precisely in the complexity of these intergenerational relations that the two analyzed works intervene.

3.3 The Telemachus complex

In 2013, psychoanalyst and essayist Massimo Recalcati published *Il complesso di Telemaco*, in which he describes the spread of a complex of the same name among the new generations. Recalcati's theorization of the 'Telemachus complex' is rooted in Lacanian psychoanalysis, with a special emphasis on the encounter with the Other, enabled through the act of speaking and mediated by the Father (301). This is a dramatic yet necessary stage in the process of construction of one's own identity: in fact, together with the trauma of the encounter with the Other, the Father also bequeaths the desire of the world (99).

According to the author, nowadays fathers have ceased to take responsibility for this encounter and leave the children alone to deal with the impossibility of constructing their own identity. Therefore, young people demand the return of the paternal figure (23) and crave to reconstructs their identity as sons and daughters (28). The 'Telemachus complex' results indeed from the absence of the Father in present society and the subsequent impossibility of experiencing the conflictual encounter with the Other.

The conflict with the Other was, Recalcati argues, the defining element of the era preceding the current one, the era of Oedipus. The era of Oedipus runs from the contestation of '68 to the late 1970s (1253) and is characterized by the coexistence of two figures of the son: Oedipus and anti-Oedipus. On the one hand, the former wants to disavow his status of child and strives to eradicate the Other from his/herself (1287). Oedipus symbolizes thus the intergenerational conflict that spread across most countries in Europe and in the US since the late 1960s.

On the other hand, the figure of Oedipus carries in itself its opposite, the anti-Oedipus. The figure of anti-Oedipus, described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the book of the same name (1972), was one of the main reference points of a decade of struggles. The figure of anti-Oedipus was theorized in response to a Freudian interpretation of the myth of Oedipus: according to Deleuze and Guattari, the centrality of this myth in Freud's psychoanalysis is a mirror of the fact that psychoanalysis is dominated by a blind and uncritical acceptance of the authority (1326). On the contrary, these French scholars propose an alternative psychoanalysis rooted in an anti-authoritarian worldview that revolves around the potential of desire, discovered and immediately rejected as dangerous by Freud (1326).

According to Recalcati, Deleuze and Guattari's thought was misinterpreted by the '68 generation and understood as an "unconditional praise of the revolutionary quality of desire over the Law"⁵⁹ (1332). In its turn, the request for limitless desire was embraced and satisfied by global capitalism, which was the paradoxical outcome of a decade of struggles for freedom (1337).

The triumph of flexible capitalism marked the entrance in the era of Narcissus, running from the late 1970s to the beginning of the economic crisis of the early 2000s. (1258). This time span corresponds to the fall of the Berlin wall and, in Italy, to the crisis of the Left, and in particular of PCI, which definitely ceased to be a paternal leading figure (156). Narcissus symbolizes the new generations raised in a seemingly horizontal society refusing hierarchies (1381). In the lack of authority, the child is not given the chance to become a subject by confronting him/herself with the Other (1386). As a result, the child, having experienced nothing but a parallel world free from authority and conflicts, only knows and loves one image of him/herself, one that is stuck in a never-ending childhood devoid from a real desire of the world (1423).

More recently, and especially on the eve and during the global crisis of the early 2000s - Recalcati argues - the son-Telemachus has progressively taken over his predecessor Narcissus (1449). Whereas the latter did not experience anything outside him/herself, the former demands the encounter with the Other, and thus the return of the Father.

La fabbrica and *La sfuriata di Bet* feature the three generations described by Recalcati and thus are especially suitable for being analyzed in combination. On the one hand, *La Fabbrica* revolves around the figure of Luca's and Damiano's father, who actively participated in the

⁵⁹ "elogio incondizionato del carattere rivoluzionario del desiderio contro la Legge".

struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s in Turin. According to the tripartition proposed in *Il complesso di Telemaco*, he has therefore lived in the era of Oedipus. On the other hand, the maternal figure described in *La sfuriata di Bet* was born in between the era of Oedipus and that of Narcissus. Finally, the two young protagonists are members of Telemachus' generation.

Born after Odysseus' departure for Troy, Telemachus symbolizes the life-long wait for the Father; similarly, the protagonists of *La Fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet*, born after the march of 40000 and the phase of political activism of their parents, are in quest of their family roots.

In the first book of the *Odyssey*, Telemachus is described as "the blooming heir of sea-girt Ithaca" (21), who waits for his father to come back and restore justice on their island, Ithaca, sacked by the suitors of his mother Penelope. Exasperated by the Proci's oppression, in the second book Telemachus calls in assembly the lords of Ithaca. As the suitors still refuse to leave the island, Telemachus decides to take a journey to Pylos and Sparta in quest of his father. Telemachus' journey is the subject of the first four books of *Odyssey*, traditionally known as *Telemachy*.

Telemachus thus takes action, firstly speaking in front of the assembly and then embarking: Recalcati puts emphasis precisely on the active quality of Telemachus' quest of his father and highlights how his wait "is not a melancholic parabola"(48). A crucial point raised in *Il complesso di Telemaco* is that the evaporation of the father does not necessarily leave the children stuck and hopeless but, on the contrary, can lead to mobility and creativity (1147). Telemachus' journey leads to the family reunification, and the young hero must complete it in order to recognize his father and, thus, to finally appropriate his identity as a son (1778).⁶⁰ Together with Odysseus, Telemachus banishes Penelope's suitors from Ithaca, thereby re-earning his inheritance.

The process of reconquest of one's own inheritance is central to Recalcati's argument and, as the following sections will show, plays a crucial role in *La Fabbrica* and in *La sfuriata di Bet*. Drawing on Lacan's thought, Recalcati explains that the heir is the one who is able to subjectivize his roots (1788), thereby not renegading them, but not accepting them passively either. Telemachus does not simply receive Ithaca as part of his inheritance, but on the contrary must fight for it and succeeds in freeing it only after accomplishing a journey to Pylos and Sparta, and then back to Ithaca.

⁶⁰ Italics in the original

As anticipated, the close reading of the two selected literary works in this chapter is built on a parallelism between the travel of Telemachus in seek of Odysseus and those of the protagonists of *La Fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet*, in seek of their father and mother respectively. In Recalcati's analysis, Telemachus symbolizes the child in need of authority, who calls his/her father back to his duties. Ultimately, the author stresses the necessity of the reestablishment of the Law of the Father; on the contrary, the analysis proposed in this chapter leaves the issue of authority aside and reconsiders the symbolic value of Telemachus' journey in the context of the intergenerational conflict resulting from the industrial crisis and the tertiary sector turn. Moreover, emphasis is put on the form of nostalgia that initiates Telemachus' travel and thus on the link between the concept of nostalgia and that of motion. A second crucial difference lies in the fact that the figure of the Father, central to Recalcati's analysis and rooted in his Lacanian reading of the myth of Telemachus, is substituted by a generic reference to the parental figure, since, as anticipated, the symbolic journeys of the protagonists in *La Fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet* involve both a maternal and a paternal figure.

Nevertheless, it is my contention that the 'Telemachus complex' might be a valuable tool in the analysis of the two selected novels, since it offers an interesting perspective on the mutation of the intergenerational relationships in contemporary society.

3.4 The factory as the main stage of the hero's *nostos*

This section provides a close reading of *La fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet* based on the theorization of the Telemachus complex. More specifically, in Recalcati's words, it draws on the "active-practical" component of the myth of Telemachus (1766), that is his journey. Telemachus travels from Ithaca to Pylos and Sparta, and then back to Ithaca. The young hero, Recalcati explains, can return home and reunite with Odysseus only after completing his journey. Similarly, the young protagonists in the two selected literary works accomplish a travel around the factory and, from the factory, back home.

The Telemachian metaphor is therefore used to analyze two novels which reflect on the mutating intergenerational relationships in postindustrial Turin. The term 'postindustrial' is commonly used, and has been used in this thesis, to describe the outcome of the shift from manufacturing to the service sector at work in Western economics since the late 1970s. The use of the preposition 'post', though, leaves also room for a certain degree of ambiguity, since it

seems to imply that industry has been completely overcome by the service sector. While it is undeniable that the service sector is now the driving force of most Western economies, it is also true that, as Cowie and Heathcott have pointed out in *Beyond the ruins: The meanings of deindustrialization*, “the industrial ages is alive and well, even if the locations have changed.” (4) Deindustrialization is in fact an ongoing process, whose defining element, the factory, has been and still is subjected to multiple transformations, which contribute to make it an iridescent material, extremely difficult to narrate. It is thus especially interesting to notice that both Frascella and Paolin construct their narratives around the factory. Both narratives revolve in fact around a plant, and yet not into it. In other words, the factory shapes the story, but is not the setting of it.

The unconventional position of the factory as a narrative element determines in both cases an ambiguity in terms of narrative genre, as both works seem to be at the crossroad of industrial literature and literature on work precarity. Both categories fall in the broader trend of postindustrial literature, outlined by Paolo Chirumbolo in *Letteratura e lavoro*⁶¹. Moreover, *La fabbrica* also falls into the new working-class literature, as it is defined by Prunetti in “Nuove scritture working class”: as a largely autobiographical account of the relation between Paolin and his parents, it matches in fact the requirement of being written by “manual workers’ children, raised within the context of the old working class”. Being purely fictional, *La sfuriata di Bet* is not necessarily an example of new working-class literature, as it is defined by Prunetti. Nevertheless, excluding it from this literary category is also problematic, as not only Frascella was raised in a working-class environment, but, unable to make a living out of his activity as a writer, he is also part of the new class of precarious workers in the tertiary sector.

Both the novel and the short story are set in a time of relevant changes within the Turinese industrial context. *La fabbrica* is set around the Mirafiori plant, after the inauguration of the new Fiat’s car dealership and polyvalent arena Mirafiori Motor Village, that took place in 2006. The years between 2006 and 2010 marked a time of change for Fiat. On 19 January 2009, the website *Automotive News Europe* spreads the news of a tentative agreement between Fiat and Chrysler, this latter being on the edge of a bankruptcy. The day after, Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne

⁶¹ For an outline of Chirumbolo’s and Prunetti’s work and the current debate on Italian postindustrial literature see the section “Industrial and postindustrial literature in Italy and new perspectives on the working class” in the introduction to this thesis.

announced that a preliminary nonbinding agreement has been signed with Chrysler and, in April, the negotiations began.

The media coverage of the Fiat-Chrysler negotiation functions as a *fil rouge* in *La sfuriata di Bet*, set in December 2009. Bet, influenced by her parents' political activist past in the factory, perceives the policy of Marchionne as inequitable and immoral.

I read that Mirafiori plant might be shut down and the workers will be out of work. I don't really get it... firing people here and buying a factory in the U.S.? I'll have to ask my father about it on Saturday...when he was a worker in the manufacturing company where my mother still works as an employee (this is where they first met), he used to be a trade unionist. Then he quit because, and I'm quoting him, he couldn't look his colleagues in the eyes anymore, after having discussed, and usually lost, with the bosses. I guess it wasn't easy to get back to them empty-handed. His powerlessness and their unjustified resentment (41).⁶²

The Fiat Chrysler negotiations chronologically coincide with an intense economic and political phase in Italy and in Turin. In this period, many companies were being hit by the global crisis of 2008, including the (fictive) company in which Bet's mother is employed. Having found out that the company has announced a layoff, Bet decides to join the protest announced by the unions in front of the plant's gates and convinces her mother to participate.

Few other high school students take part in the protest, coordinated by Bet's schoolmate Andrea Reale. Reale is a positive character, an idealist. As a high-school student, he is involved in the student movement Onda Anomala, created in 2007 in reaction to the educational reform proposed by ministry Maria Stella Gelmini. Besides contesting the intervention proposed by Gelmini both in the universities and high schools, Onda Anomala also joined the struggles of the workers hit by the crisis, seeking to establish a new precarious workers - students unity.⁶³

⁶² ...ho letto che Mirafiori forse chiude e gli operai restano a spasso. Questa faccenda non mi torna tanto. Licenzi qui e compri in America? Sabato chiedo lumi a mio padre. Lui, quando era operaio nella stessa azienda metalmeccanica dove mia madre fa l'impiegata (e dove si sono conosciuti...), è stato anche sindacalista per qualche tempo. Poi ha mollato perché, parole sue, non riusciva a guardare in faccia i colleghi dopo aver discusso, e perlopiù perso, coi padroni. Immagino che non fosse facile tornare dagli altri a mani vuote...La sua impotenza e il loro ingiustificato risentimento.

⁶³ The manifesto of Onda Anomala, in the form of an open letter, is available on the movement's blog (<https://anomalonda.wordpress.com/>).

The protest in front of Bet's mother's plant is shut down by the intervention of the police. This event, that might turn into an umpteenth disappointment, determines instead the beginning of Bet's own protest. Later that day, Bet goes back to school, chains herself to the radiator and asks Andrea Reale to record a long invective against all the injustices that she has witnessed that day and in the past. Not only does Bet point her finger against the education reform, the economic crisis and the factories that dismiss their employees, but also finally faces all the issues that have torn her family apart. The wrath ("la sfuriata") that gives the title to the novel begins thus in front of a factory and, as it will be illustrated in the next section, gives rise to an introspective journey that eventually brings Bet back home, where her mother is.

As mentioned above, the main point of interest of the two literary works lies thus in the role of the factory in the construction of the plot. The stories are in fact not set in the factory, but around it. It is in the perimeter around the factory that the relation between Luca and his father and between Bet and her mother are rediscussed. The factory is not much of a physical space, but mostly a centripetal force that sets Luca and Bet in motion. The protagonists are aware of the fact that the factory has shaped their parents' identity and thus look at it as the key to get access to their parents' personalities.

As mentioned above, Bet's parents were born in the late 1960s/70s and belong to the generation who entered the plant after the march of 40000. A few scenes in the novel are indicative of the composition of the labour force in a Turinese industry after the 1980s, made by the new and the old working class. This latter carries on the memory of the industrial heyday in Turin and, together with the younger co-workers, tries to adapt the working class struggles to the changed working and economic situation. Differently than in the novels analyzed in the previous chapters (with the exception of *La festa è finita*), the new working class enters the narration, though not as a protagonist, as both Frascella and Paolin insist on the emergence of a new working class after the march of 40000. Through a memory from Luca's adolescence, the latter explicitly rejects the widespread assumption that the working class has disappeared.

Who said that the manual workers are not there anymore? That they don't exist? Sure, they don't have the *baracchino*⁶⁴, a black mustache, pomaded hair and a resigned look anymore, but they were there, in front of you... [...] They were getting on a bus and going back to their places, just like you. You felt like chasing one of them, to see how he lives.

⁶⁴ Colloquial name for a CB radio

Chi l'ha detto gli operai non ci sono più? Che non esistono? Certo non hanno più il baracchino, i baffi neri, i capelli impomatati e uno sguardo rassegnato, ma erano qui davanti a te. [...] salivano in silenzio sugli autobus e se ne tornavano a casa e tu con loro. Ti venne voglia di seguirne uno e vedere come vive (2124-2125).

Bet's parents are indeed part of the new working class described by Luca in *La Fabbrica*. Like many of her colleagues, Bet's mother finds herself involved in the consequences of the global crisis mentioned above. The protest in front of the gates on the one hand highlights the weakening of the working class, but on the other hand raises attention on the emergence of new forms of solidarity between working class, precarious workers and students in the early 2000s.

My mother greets her colleagues. - Anyone from the offices? -asks a man in his fifties, short, dark-skin, as thick as a tire.

She shakes her head.

- I don't get it" - goes another one, who's wearing a hammer and sickle badge attached to the blue jumpsuit. We are protesting for everyone's rights, including the employees. [...]
- What, did you forget about the march of 40000? "- another one tells me, like my father hadn't told me enough about it, when he was here with us.
- [...] The leader of the march even used to go on TV and talk about it, he was so proud of it, that old idiotic. ⁶⁵ (119-120) ⁶⁶

This passage reveals the traumatic impact of the march of 40000 on the working class. The old manual worker laments the 'betrayal' of the white collars, while his co-worker opposes the individualism of the employees to the sense of solidarity that had always driven the working-class struggles ("Noi protestiamo per tutti, pure per gli impiegati."). It is within this community

⁶⁵ The character is referring to white collars' leader Luigi Arisio.

⁶⁶ Mia madre saluta i suoi colleghi. - Non c'è nessuno degli uffici? - chiede un uomo di cinquanta, basso, con la pelle scura e spessa come un copertone.

Lei scuote la testa.

- Non l'ho mai capita, 'sta roba, - fa un altro, che ha una spilla con falce e martello attaccata a un taschino della tuta blu. - Noi protestiamo per tutti, pure per gli impiegati. [...]
- E che te la sei dimenticata la marcia dei Quarantamila? - mi dice un altro, come se mio padre non me ne avesse già parlato abbastanza a suo tempo. - [...]
- L'impiegato che ha organizzato la marcia dei Quarantamila andava pure in tv a parlarne, tutto fiero, vecchio rincoglione che non era altro.

that Bet's and Luca's parents have forged their identity: the factory is thus a necessary premise to the children's homecoming.

Both the analyzed novels share a fragmented style that is typical of the novels on precarious work and the economic crisis in contemporary society. In her contribution to the volume *Le culture del precariato*, Manuela Spinelli highlights how the economic insecurity deprives the individual of the fixed identity that job security guarantees and, with it, the possibility of imagining and projecting the future (129). In literary fiction, this subject lacking a defined identity is often recounted through a fragmented narration, which reflects a new perception of life imposed by the postfordist model of working and the economic crisis: life is not perceived as a linear and overall foreseeable sequence of phases, but rather as a succession of episodes (132). Many iconic narratives of the economic crisis characterized by the fragmentary style described by Spinelli, such as those of Culicchia, feature characters who are alike fragmented, incapable of taking control of their lives.

The changes in the mode of working correspond to a change in the perception of one's own identity. The identity defined by one's job is opposed to the impossibility of most people to define their identity according to their job. The life of the two young narrators is separated from that of the factory, but they need the factory to construct their identity. It is around the factory that their parents have defined their own identity and shaped that of their families. Thus, in order to really understand who their parents are and how they have changed, they have to go back to the factory, they have to look at their jobs. The factory is thus recounted through their new understanding of time as a sequence of fragments.

Nevertheless, differently from many characters in novels on precarious work, neither Bet or Luca are inept. On the contrary, like Telemachus, they take action and start a journey in search of their family roots, thereby moving and acting around the mental and physical space of the factory: like Odysseus' son, they actively engage with their family's inheritance. Understood as a homecoming, nostalgia is thus the force that prevents them from being immobile, stuck. Yet Bet and Luca do not go back to the factory in an attempt to retrieve the past, but because they are aware that in it they can find something about their parents that seems to be lost in the present: the factory represents thus the main, necessary stage of their respective homecomings.

3.5 Bet's and Luca's *nostoi*

In this close reading, Bet and Luca are analyzed as contemporary Telemachus in times of industrial crisis, who take a long journey in search of their parents. Even though Bet's and Luca's parents are not physically missing, they are distant, unrecognizable, unintelligible, and the structures of *La sfuriata di Bet* and *La fabbrica* are comparable to that of the Telemachy. On the one hand, Odysseus' son visits the courts of Menelaus and Nestor, inquiring about his father. On the other hand, Bet and Luca look for the traces of their parents in the factory, as this is the place that, more than anything else, has contributed in defining the latter's identity. At the end of Telemachy, father and son reunite in Ithaca, just like Bet and Luca eventually reconnect with their mother and father respectively.

Like Telemachus, who is escorted and advised by Athena, they both have a mentor. In *La fabbrica* this role is fulfilled by Luca's older brother Damiano, who is asked by Luca to join him for a cycle tour around Mirafiori plant, while in *La sfuriata di Bet* the young protagonist is supported by her friend Viola.

Ten years older than Luca, Damiano was born in 1970, in the aftermath of the 'hot autumn' and right before the beginning of the Fiat crisis. His childhood memories are therefore linked to the factory and the workers' struggles. Luca was born in the aftermath of the march of 40000, an event that has determined his family life as a child and has changed that of Damiano: it is indeed after this event that their father decided to leave Damiano's mother to move in with his lover, pregnant with Luca. At that point, their father had grown extraneous to any form of political activism, but continued his work as a varnisher, unaware of the fatal consequences of it.

La fabbrica is set after 2006 and begins after the return of Damiano, who is back in Turin after a long journey. Damiano is, and has always been, happy, but maintaining his happiness has required him to travel, to be far from their father, towards whom he has grown, it seems, indifferent. On the other hand, Luca has stayed in Turin and enrolled at the university as a chemistry student, with the purpose of carrying on a research project on a varnish whose preparation would be less carcinogenic than those currently on the market (23).

At the beginning of the story, Luca is eager to start their bike tour, their urban *nostos*. Damiano immediately overtakes Luca, self-proclaiming himself the tour guide and thereby appointing himself as his younger brother's mentor (23).

Over the tour, numerous characters appear, either physically or through Luca's memories, who recall the main collective and personal events linked to the father's life and shed light on his relationship with his job and his family. The first figure emerges from Luca's memories at the very beginning of the tour, in front of the gates in Corso Unione Sovietica. This is a taxi driver who, while driving Luca, had nostalgically evoked "the time of Corso Unione", a time when "everything was clearer" (25). The nostalgic evocation of the time preceding the march of 40000, that Luca has never experienced, is a *leitmotiv* throughout the book. The time of the workers' struggles preceding the march was, according to Damiano, the only time when their father had been, even though only occasionally, happy. Luca needs thus his brother, and the many characters that they meet during their tour, to rewind it and to have a glance of a version of his father that he has never seen.

The bike tour has just started when the first temporal leap brings the father at the core of the narration. He intervenes directly in the story, and not just through the allusions of his sons. The narration shifts thus to the evening of 14 October 1980, a few hours after the end of the march of 40000. Stunned by the events, the father makes the decision of moving in with Luca's mother "per somma" (26), thereby passively accepting the last of a chain of unexpected events. Turin and its inhabitants are entering the time of precarity, when the events are not logically related and mainly foreseeable, but a series of independent episodes in a non-linear life. The following passage is the father's bitter realization of the fact that, after the march of 40000, his whole world is going to be torn apart.

Things do not happen for a reason, they are just the result of a sum. Like a sponge that one impregnates, enlarges, broadens and then use. Like those men who were just a few thousands according to us, ten thousand according to the police and forty thousand according to the organizers (26).⁶⁷

This passage turns out to be itself a memory of the father: the narration goes suddenly back to the present, with the father refusing the cancer treatment (27). The tour continues, and the father is again evoked indirectly, this time by means of a shared memory of Damiano and Luca, who recall how, every day, their father would spend at least an hour washing his hands after his shift

⁶⁷ Le cose non accadono per una ragione, ma per somma. Come la spugna che s'impregnava, si ingrandiva, si allargava per poi usarla. Come quelle poche migliaia di uomini per noi, che erano diventate diecimila per la questura e quarantamila per gli organizzatori.

(31). This shared memory also determines a change at a narrative level, that is the sudden passage from the singular you (Luca) to the plural you (Luca and Damiano).

The plant is on your right side. The concrete wall runs next to you (31).⁶⁸

Symbolically, the shared memory of their father, evoked right in front of the factory, unites the brothers. Characters from the past and present overlap as the tour continues, while the memories linked to the father are more and more charged with emotions and tension. Through the interaction between Luca and Damiano during their tour around Mirafiori, this figure continues to evolve, turning from a fade shadow hunting the factory into a tragic hero.

In this second part of the short story, light-based images multiply as the end of the tour gets closer. Luca has planned to end the tour in front of the restaurant located in the Mirafiori Motor Village, that appears from the distance as a whole of “*luci simili a fuochi inferno*” (50). In the modern, luminous bar of the Motor Village Damiano shares one last memory with Luca, one dating back to the year preceding Luca’s birth. It is Christmas, and Damiano has been explicitly told not to unwrap his only gift, received during a Christmas party at Mirafiori. Damiano’s act of disobedience marks the beginning of his rupture with their father and Damiano’s decision to distance himself from their family. Damiano’s memory is charged with luminous images (the *palline dell’albero*, the lights in Fiat, the father who turns the light on and catches him in the act of unwrapping his gift). Another bright image indicates the return to the present:

The stars clump in you, you can feel them: something similar happens during a ground out. Electricity is not equally distributed among all the light sources. [...] Then the whole system goes off and everything is dark, just like you now (57).⁶⁹

Damiano pushes Luca to finish the tour. The short story closes on the most symbolic of the homecomings, that is the awakening of Luca in his father’s body. Luca takes possession of his father’s sick body, he inhabits and accepts it and, with it, accepts all the different versions of his father that his *nostos* around the factory has awoken.

⁶⁸ La fabbrica sta sulla vostra destra. Il muro di cemento vi corre vicino.

⁶⁹ Le stelle fanno massa in te, le senti distintamente: qualcosa di simile succede quando gli impianti della luce vanno in corto. La corrente non arriva equamente distribuita ai *punti luce* [...] Poi tutto salta e si è nel buio, come te adesso.

Then your eyes become turbid and you recognize your father.

You're in your father's body [...] before you see his heart, you see his lung tissue, full of ramifications that begin in the form of a cluster and look like roads. You feel like you're looking at the city again and, as you inspect its network, a white light blinds you...

You close your eyes and in front of you is a stale grey.

It's a luminescent latex, it is a tumor.

Simply, it is your father, the factory (59).⁷⁰

Luca's *nostos* ends thus with a light-based image, in a suggestive literary interpretation of the word's etymology. He has travelled back and forth between the industrial and the postindustrial era, he has covered the gap dividing his scattered era of precarious work and that of his father, organized by the rhythms of the factory. He has symbolically entered his father's body, and finally recognized him. Nostalgia has brought Luca back to the factory and, from the factory, back to his father.

La sfuriata di Bet features a similar narrative structure. Also in this case, the young protagonist (Bet) deals with the difficult relation with her mother, and the first part of the book focuses on Bet's everyday struggles, at home as well as at school. As anticipated, Bet's participation in a protest at the gates of the plant where her mother works marks a turning point in the adolescent's life. The protest ends with a violent police intervention, and the workers, including Bet's mother, go back to work. Upset by the outcome of the protest, she decides to give raise to a clamorous protest in her school. Bet had joined the protest at her mother's factory driven by nostalgia, longing for her childhood, a time when her parents were involved in politics and were, after all, happy. They have changed now. Her mother looks old, a pale imitation of the woman that Bet remembers.

She's only forty, fuck! I have such a bright memory of her: I'm running towards her, we are at the playground, it's summer, I am not even five years old (9).⁷¹

⁷⁰ Poi lo sguardo si intorbida e riconosci tuo padre. Sei dentro il corpo di tuo padre [...] Prima del cuore vedi il tessuto polmonare, pieno di ramificazioni che partono a grappolo e sembrano tante vie. Ti pare di guardare nuovamente la città e mentre ne scruti il reticolo, ti acceca il bianco... Chiudi gli occhi e davanti a te il grigio stantio. È un lattice luminescente, è un tumore. Semplicemente è tuo padre, la fabbrica.

Bet's father moved to Rome after their youngest child's death and lost interest in any form of political activism. Like Telemachus, Bet is pushed to take action (in this case, to join the collective struggle at her mother's factory) by desire for recovering her lost domestic serenity, and especially the relationship with her mother. The changes in Bet's domestic environment are mostly imputable to her little sister's premature death, but also need to be contextualized within the larger picture of the Italian economic and politic crisis of the early 2000s, that have jeopardized her parents' work situation and weakened their involvement with the workers' struggles.

During her protest in the headmaster's office, Bet recalls the time previous to her sister Martina's death, when her parents were together. That was a linear time, the routine of a working-class family, enriched by its members' political activism.

It was Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, August. Then Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, August, all over again. It was her birthday, it was my birthday. Frozen streets, sunny yards, plunges in the Tyrrhenian sea, snowmen in the backyard, next to the garages [...] We were a family like any other, neither too loud or too quiet, neither rich or poor, a working-class family like those living in our building and those living in the building next to ours. [...] Maybe we would go to the pizzeria once a month, and Martina would want the margherita, and then she wouldn't want it anymore. [...] maybe it was a Sunday night and my father had organized a boycott against Enel and the four of us would spend the whole evening defrosting the fridge (146-147).⁷²

The passage is devoid of any form of sentimentalism and charged instead with nostalgia. In line with Boym's considerations around nostalgia narratives, this feeling is evoked through details (the holiday by the Tyrrhenian sea, the pizza, the boycott against multinational manufacturer and distributor of electricity and gas Enel). The sweet evocation of her past domestic life and the sense of linearity emerging from the description of her family's routine are in sharp contrast with

⁷¹ Ha solo quarant'anni, porcaputtana. Ho un ricordo di lei così splendente: io le corro incontro, siamo al parco, è estate, avrò sì e no cinque anni

⁷² Era Natale, Capodanno, Pasqua, agosto. Poi di nuovo Natale, Capodanno, Pasqua, agosto. Era il suo compleanno, era il mio compleanno. Le strade gelate, i cortili assolati, tuffi nel mar Tirreno, pupazzi di neve nel giardino sul retro, accanto ai box delle auto [...] Eravamo una famiglia come tutte le altre, né troppo rumorosa né troppo silenziosa, né ricca né povera, una famiglia operaia come quelle del nostro palazzo e come quelle dei palazzi accanto. [...] Magari andavamo in pizzeria una volta al mese, e Martina voleva la margherita e poi la margherita non la voleva più [...] magari era domenica sera e mio padre organizzava lo sciopero della luce per boicottare l'Enel e ce ne stavamo tutti e quattro a sbrinare il frigo [...].

the fragmented narrative that characterizes the rest of the book and the description of Bet's protest in her school.

This latter marks the turning point in the protagonist's psychological growth and the decisive stage in her symbolic homecoming. Bet's protest is unexpectedly welcomed by her schoolmates, who decide to occupy the school as a proof of their solidarity. The teachers are surprised with the students' response, and one of them nostalgically compares it with the "mythical '77".

- Reale is leading the rebellious - Crivelli announces - There's a sense of unrest all around. Also in the universities. You picked a good moment. [...] This reminds me of my old days.
- What days?
- The seventy-seven, Corvino. The mythical year seventy-seven. - And a trace of nostalgia fills his eyes, for a moment (140).⁷³

Bet's personal insurrection takes place within the larger frame of the students revolts in 2009. "You picked the right moment", Bet's teacher tells her, thereby highlighting the overlap of the individual and collective levels in Bet's protest. The school's occupation is covered by the media, and a journalist writes a very sympathetic account of Bet's gesture (175-77). Back home, Bet's mother welcomes her: like Telemachus, Bet has (symbolically) re-earned her inheritance as a daughter.

Just like *La fabbrica*, *La sfuriata di Bet* ends with a light-based image. This is the birth of Bet's friend Viola's baby, which takes place right after Bet's homecoming and, symbolically, her rebirth as her mother's daughter.

3.6 The active-practical quality of Telemachian nostalgia

The etymology of the term nostalgia implies dynamicity and, more precisely, a temporal and spatial progression. The nostalgic longs for a home far in time and space, in which the time has

⁷³ -Reale coordina i rivoltosi, - annuncia Crivelli - C'è un bel fermento. Anche all'università. Hai scelto un buon momento [...]
Come ai miei tempi.

-Quali tempi?

-Il Settantasette, Corvino. Il mitico Settantasette - . E un velo di nostalgia gli passa un attimo sugli occhi

never stopped but, on the contrary, has changed things, sometimes to the point of making the house and its inhabitants unrecognizable and incapable of recognizing him/her

Telemachus leaves Ithaca to reunite with his father and succeeds in his purpose only after facing innumerable challenges set by the gods. An external force thus interposes itself between Telemachus and his family, making the hero's *nostos* long and painful. Telemachus' private quest involves gods, as well as other men and women, resulting in the overlap of the personal and the collective level. The interconnection between these two dimensions is also at the core of the phase of deindustrialization, a change in the mode of work whose consequences had and still have a crucial impact on the everyday life of communities, families and individuals.

The two literary works analyzed in this section look at the intergenerational dimension of this (still ongoing) socio-economic revolution. Far from being sentimentalist, the novels' young protagonists actively face their problematic relationships with their parents by taking a symbolic journey between private memories and collective events, looking at the present situation with the analytic tools provided by their domestic life in a working-class environment. Neither Luca or Bet naively believe that they will restore the past: on the contrary, they retrace back their family past and that of their urban community in order to recognize their parents in the present. Like the contemporary figure of Telemachus described by Recalcati in *Il complesso di Telemaco*, they engage in a painful, heroic quest for their long-missing parents

Besides their artistic value, the works of Frascella and Paolin have the merit of shedding light upon the mutated conception of one's own job in the era of flexible capitalism. Bet's and Luca's *nostoi* begin in front of the factory, the place that has shaped and defined their parents' identity and, with it, that of their families. Any collective event concerning the industry, the authors suggest, has an impact on the life of the people concerned with it and needs therefore to be considered both in its public and private dimensions. Literary fiction becomes the terrain on which these two dimensions interact, and nostalgia proves itself to be an effective tool to explore the dialectic relation between them: despite their ambiguity in terms of genre, *La Fabbrica* and *La sfuriata di Bet* seem therefore to be suitable for being included in the literary category of postindustrial literature.

The originality of the two narratives consists thus in the fact that they draw attention on the dynamicity that nostalgia entails: nostalgia is understood as motion, as a journey that begins in the past, but ends in the present.

CONCLUSIONS

Rethinking industrial Turin, between imagined past and possible futures

As in an old Bavarian engraving
 in the subalpine sky the sun goes down . . .
 From Palazzo Madama to the Valentino
 grounds
 between the lighted clouds the Alps are
 blazing ...
 This is the hour of Turin most worth having,
 this is the hour of the true old town...

I've talked of the Risorgimento in such
 hours, I think of My Recollections, of the
 young
 Massimo d'Azeglio, and a feeling
 overpowers:
 I was born too late...It was a much finer
 thing
 to live in that sacred reawakening
 than in these meek and sleepy days of ours!

You're aging a bit, provincial, nonetheless
 still fresh with a Parisian courtesy,
 and I find the infant that I used to be
 in you once more, I find the gracefulness
 of childhood once again, and like the nurse
 who saw me born, Turin, you're dear to me!
 [...]

Infancy buried deepest...school, and game...
 my vivid youth...the few pale loves I had...
 all the frustrated waiting that I did...
 the tedium that doesn't have a name . . .
 Death, and my Muse alone where no one
 came,
 disdainful, taciturn, misunderstood.

When I go yonder, deserting you to play
 at chasing my chimeras on the run,
 when I wander toward the Mezzogiorno sun,
 toward lovely lukewarm lands so far away,
 half of me stays with you, so that I may
 find myself here when I come home again

In 1911, poet Guido Gozzano (Turin 1883-1916) dedicated to his hometown the poem *Torino*, included in the collection *I Colloqui (The Colloquies)*, translated by Michael Palma in 1981. One hundred years after the publication, these light-hearted yet ruthlessly ironic verses still wonderfully encapsulate all the contradictions of Turin, serious and at the same time naively frivolous, divided between the delusions of grandeur of a big city and its intrinsic provincialism. First capital of the newly born Kingdom of Italy in 1861, Italian manufacturing superpower, scene of the 'hot autumn' in 1968 and of the trial of the 'Red Brigades' in 1978, host city of the

2006 Winter Olympics Games and nowadays a center internationally renowned for its food⁷⁴ and its cultural events, Turin has lived a multitude of afterlives. And yet, despite its transformations over the centuries, it has preserved the same restraint, the same “Parisian courtesy” and the same degree of hypocrisy captured by Gozzano.

The paradoxical and contradictory quality of Turin is also at the core of the six literary works analyzed in this research, and, it has been argued so far, is brought out through nostalgia. The active and critical forms of nostalgia at work in the selected corpus share some essential attributes with the one underlying Gozzano’s poem. When he was writing *The Colloquies*, the poet used to sojourn for long periods of time by the sea in the Italian Riviera, in a vain attempt of recovering from his pleurisy⁷⁵: the theme of the distance is thus at the core of Gozzano’s poetics and, in *Turin*, is made especially strong by the references to travels by sea and the descriptions of exotic landscapes that, at the time, Gozzano had not yet visited⁷⁶ and nevertheless evokes in the form of a generic description.

Two layers of nostalgia overlap in the verses: the first one is the historical nostalgia for the Risorgimento⁷⁷, that Gozzano evokes as a time of dynamism and collective struggle (“It was a much finer thing to live in that sacred reawakening”), opposed to the current times of impasse; the second one is a form of personal nostalgia for the experiences of his childhood and early youth, but mostly for all he could have done, and never did (“the few pale loves I had... all the frustrated waiting that I did”). Gozzano longs both for a time that he never lived and for a time that could have been, but never was. Gozzano longs for the possibilities, craves for the return to a virtual space. Therefore, he comes back home from a place that he has never visited (the “lovely lukewarm lands so far away”) and from a time that he has never lived.

This double understanding of nostalgia is at the core of the likewise fascinating work of Svetlana Boym that has inspired this thesis. Interestingly enough, in the conclusive chapter of *The future of nostalgia*, the Russian-American scholar refers to the poem *The last homecoming*

⁷⁴ Inventor of the slow food Oscar Farinetti opened the first Eataly store in Turin in 2007. Turin currently hosts numerous cultural events that attract people from all over the world. Among the most renowned are Salone del libro, Artissima and Salone del gusto.

⁷⁵ For an overview of Gozzano’s life and work see the preface by Michael Palma and the introductory essay by Eugenio Montale in *The Man I Pretend to Be: The Colloquies and Selected Poems of Guido Gozzano*.

⁷⁶ Gozzano travelled to India and Ceylon from 1912 to 1913.

⁷⁷ The term Risorgimento designates the historical phase that began in 1815 with the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and led to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. On 17 March 1861 the first Parliament was assembled in Turin and proclaimed Victor Emmanuel King of Italy.

(*Ritorno*)⁷⁸ by another Italian poet, Giorgio Caproni (1921-1990) as an exceptionally clear poetic conversion of the virtual quality of nostalgia. This poem, Boym argues, is about a classical homecoming, “only in this case it is a return to a negative space” (352).

The Last Homecoming

I have returned there
where I had never been.

Nothing has changed from how it was not.

On the table (on the checkered
tablecloth) half-full

I found again the glass

never filled. All

has remained just as

I had never left it.

The verse that gives the title to this thesis (“I have returned there where I had never been”) is especially illuminating in this sense. Caproni describes the details of a generic homecoming that, precisely because of its genericity, can speak to anyone. This “generic dream” certainly speaks to Boym, who “never owned a checkered tablecloth” and yet feels “vicariously nostalgic” about it. (352). Like Gozzano’s *Turin*, *The last homecoming* is built on the seeming paradox of the generic details (“the checkered tablecloth”, “the half-full glasses”). Caproni is not describing his own home and yet manages to evoke the most real, the most relatable of the homecomings.

This thesis understands nostalgia both as the experience of a time that the nostalgic has actually never lived and as the return to a time that never was, but could have been and, as could have resulted in a different present. Drawing on Boym’s work and on those contributions in the field of nostalgia, with a special emphasis on those around nostalgia for the industrial golden age (Smith 2017, Strangleman 2007 and 2013), this research has shown that nostalgia is not necessarily a form of self-torture, but also an extraordinarily refined intellectual practice, expression of the ability of the human mind to access the virtual.

⁷⁸ The poem is included in the collection *Poesie 1932-1986*

Nostalgia-based fiction as a counterdiscourse against Turinese postindustrial regeneration

This thesis stresses the role of nostalgia not as a paralyzing form of longing for one's own home, but rather as a set of possibilities and a tool to revisit the individual and collective past and project the future. Understood in this sense, nostalgia not only can be an active way of reflecting on one's own personal past, but also a mode of engaging with collective events affecting more or less wide communities. The present research deals indeed with the role of nostalgia in the process of remembering of a widespread collective event, that is the progressive reduction of industrial capacity following the tertiary sector turn of the late 1970s.

This (ongoing) economical phase left lasting marks on once industrial superpowers across most advanced economies and has been object of a four decades-long scholarly debate. As illustrated in the introduction to this thesis, the debate around the economic and cultural meanings of deindustrialization firstly arose in the USA in reaction to Reagan presidency. As explained by Garruccio⁷⁹, over time the debate, firstly carried on by historians and economists, has come to integrate other disciplines such as sociology, literary studies and art history and nowadays pays a special attention to the representations of the process of deindustrialization across a variety of media.

In line with the most recent developments of the debate, the present research stresses the potential of nostalgia in contemporary literary representations of the process of deindustrialization in Italy and, more precisely, investigates the relation between nostalgia-based narratives dealing with the postindustrial aftermath of one specific city/region and the policy of management of the industrial heritage carried on in that city/region. This analysis is performed on a ground that had not yet been explored so far, that is the representations of industrial heritage in communities such as Turin, in which the industrial identity has apparently been successfully overcome.

Overall, the corpus of nostalgia-based literary fiction analyzed in this research provides a less positive image of postindustrial Turin by bringing the dark sides and the victims of the process of deindustrialization at the core of the narration. Therefore, the research aims at raising awareness on the role of nostalgia within seemingly successful cases of postindustrial

⁷⁹ For an overview of the evolution of deindustrialization studies see the section "Deindustrialization" in the introduction to this thesis.

regeneration. More precisely, it shows the potential of literary nostalgia in actively rejecting, problematizing or aligning with the bright accounts of the afterlife of industry.

It does so by means of a close reading of six contemporary fictional works dealing with the memory and the perception of industry in Turin and written by authors born or based in the same town. It does not surprise that a large fictional production around the construction and loss of the industrial identity has arisen in Turin, in which automobile manufacturing, and especially Fiat, has been the main city landmark for more than four decades. All these narratives shed light upon hidden or neglected sides of the process of deindustrialization, thereby problematizing the public image of Turin as a successful case of postindustrial regeneration. The policy for postindustrial Turin, as defined in the *Piano Regolatore* in 1995⁸⁰ was aimed to adjust the city to the tertiary sector turn and thus to reconstruct an urban collective identity outside the industrial framework. The analysis conducted in this thesis has revealed that, all together, the considered narratives stand as a counterdiscourse which problematizes the outcome of the *Piano Regolatore* and draws attention on the aspects of the process of deindustrialization that the town policy had neglected to take into account.

This research bridges the wide and interdisciplinary field of nostalgia studies and the ongoing scholarly debate around the evolution of industrial literature and the emergence of a new postindustrial literary trend in contemporary Italy. Both study fields are linked to the scholarship on deindustrialization, and especially to its current phase. Drawing on a sizable and diverse corpus of contributions around the trajectories of nostalgia in literary fiction, the present research focused on works which have not yet been extensively discussed within the context of postindustrial literature in Italy.

The selected corpus is varied in terms of narrative genre, as it ranges from noir fiction to *Bildungsroman*, and of narrative style, as it includes the multifaceted, unique prose of Rastello next to the fragmented narrative of Culicchia: despite their differences in terms of content and style, all selected narratives are nevertheless tied together by the *fil rouge* of the memory of industry and the problematic process of construction on a new urban identity beyond the industrial framework.

The books are close-read in pairs over three chapters, each chapter corresponding to a specific feature of the process of deindustrialization in Turin. In fact, despite its geographical spread,

⁸⁰ For an overview of the *Piano Regolatore* see 1.3.

deindustrialization is a highly place-dependent phenomenon that must therefore be contextualized and discussed within the frame of a specific community.

The urban community of Turin is an especially interesting case study, for three main reasons: firstly, in post-WW2 era it became the leading industrial force of Italy; secondly, in the 1970s not only it was struck by the industrial crisis, but also became one of the main scenes of the Italian student and workers' movement struggles and then witnessed some of the most shocking events of the 'years of lead'; finally, differently from the 'rust bells' protagonists of the scholarly debate around the long-term effects of deindustrialization, Turin is generally considered to be a successful case of postindustrial regeneration. Interestingly enough, literary fiction appears to be the ground on which the discourse around the seeming bright present of postindustrial Turin is problematized.

Whilst it is undeniable that Turin has proved itself to be able to handle the transition towards the tertiary sector better than other notable examples of once industrial hubs like Detroit or Youngstown, it is likewise true that the memory of the golden era of industry and the chain of events that marked it have never been fully elaborated at a collective level. The selected corpus intervenes precisely in the memories of the Turinese urban community, thereby drawing attention on the dark side of the process of deindustrialization and on its unresolved aspects.

The first chapter provides a close reading of *Quello che l'acqua nasconde* by Alessandro Perissinotto (2017) and *Brucia la città* by Giuseppe Culicchia (2009), both concerned with the ongoing identitarian and moral crisis that, in the authors' understanding, followed the end of the industrial heyday. Culicchia and Perissinotto break the surface of the seemingly reconciled postindustrial Turin and bring out its dark sides, focusing on the phenomenon of industrial ruination and real estate speculation respectively.

The close reading points out the commonalities between the form of nostalgia displayed in the two literary works and the definition of 'reflective nostalgia' coined by Svetlana Boym in *The future of nostalgia*. This notion is thus reworked within two narratives displaying very different stylistic strategies, but nevertheless sharing a critical, non-sentimental and often sarcastic approach to Turinese past. None of the protagonists has experienced or played an active role in the economic crisis of the 1970s and in the students' and workers' struggles. Nevertheless, the beginning and the end of the industrial heyday in Turin play a crucial role in the construction of the plot. Past and present, as well as personal and collective events overlap in

the novels, proving the capacity to bridge the individual and collective dimension to be the essential quality of nostalgia.

The second chapter proposes an analysis of *La festa è finita* by Lidia Ravera (2002) and *Piove all'insù* by Luca Rastello (2006). Activists in the student movement of '68 and in the movement of '77 respectively, the two authors rework their memories through literary fiction and reflect on the premises and the outcomes of the students' movement and on the collapse of the worker-student unity in Turin.

The close-reading of the two novels is built on the concept of 'nostalgia for the future', a form of nostalgia coined by Laurajane Smith specifically in the context of industrial identity. This form of nostalgia is not in conflict with the one outlined by Boym but moves the emphasis on the object of remembering and, more precisely, on the values specific to the industrial time that are worth selecting and bequeathing to the next generations. These are, according to Ravera and Rastello, the solidarity and active projectuality intrinsic to the social movements that arose between the late 1960s and the late 1980s.

The third chapter identifies a third form of nostalgia at the core of the short story *La fabbrica* by Demetrio Paolin (2011) and the novel *La sfuriata di Bet* by Christian Frascella (2011). The definition of this third mode of looking back on the past, 'Telemachian' nostalgia, is inspired once more by the insights offered by *The future of nostalgia*, a work that cannot but amaze for the richness of perspectives it opens. 'Telemachian' nostalgia defines the nostalgia of the children for their missing parents, thereby rediscovering the etymology of the word (a combination of Greek words *nostos* and *algia*, that literally translates as the pain for a return home) and drawing on the Odysseian mythologem of the hero's *nostos*.

Whilst in her work Boym focuses on the figure of Odysseus, the analysis conducted in the third chapter revolves around the figure of Telemachus, whose *nostos* in search of his father is recounted in the first four books of *Odyssey*. Drawing on the theory outlined by Massimo Recalcati in *Il complesso di Telemaco*, Telemachus is considered as a symbol of the new generations, caught up in the mutating working and living conditions in postindustrial society and struggling with communicating with the previous generations. Like Telemachus travelled across Greece trying to gain knowledge of his father, the protagonists in Frascella and Paolin go back to the factory to learn about their parents and reunite with them. Paolin and Frascella accompany their protagonists in a time they never lived, and then back to the present: this

chapter offers an understanding of nostalgia as travel, therefore stressing the mobile and future-oriented quality of nostalgia.

The future(s) of industrial nostalgia

Understood as a potentially active way of revisiting the past and reconsidering the future, nostalgia distinguishes itself for its elasticity, that escapes all kind of compartmentalization. This thesis shows the trajectories of three different forms of literary nostalgia, thereby first of all contributing to the studies of the cultural representations of the process of deindustrialization.

On the one hand, this work hopes to raise awareness on the potential of nostalgia and to contribute in contrasting the widely spread association of the term nostalgia with conservative positions. In the present thesis, these positions have been challenged within the context of literary fiction and on a ground dominated by nostalgia, that is the remembrance of the golden age of industry. On the other hand, this research bridges the wide, interdisciplinary and transcultural field of nostalgia studies and the scholarship around the emerging postindustrial literature in Italy. The two fields are put in communication by means of a definition of the term deindustrialization that encompasses both the collective and the personal impact of this process. This inclusive understanding of deindustrialization underlies the current phase of the scholarly debate on the memory of the industrial heydays, which thus offers a rich plethora of contributions in this sense.

By bridging these two fields, on the one hand this research contributes to the debate with an example of active forms of nostalgia in the context of artistic representations of the industrial age. On the other hand, it expands the criteria of selection of the corpus of postindustrial literature in Italy by including works that deal both with long-term effects of the process of deindustrialization (the tertiary sector turn, the mutated urban aesthetics) and with the link between the beginning of the industrial crisis and the collapse of the worker-student unity in Italy.

At present, the emerging corpus of Italian postindustrial literature tends to only include narratives focusing on the present modes of work, both in the industry and in the tertiary sector, and other literary works dealing with the life and struggles of the old working-class, often recounted for by its children. This research suggests that the debate around the new postindustrial literature in Italy should take into account also narratives establishing a dialectic

between industrial past and postindustrial present through the exploration of the long-term effects mentioned above.

Finally, attention was drawn on six literary works that would have been otherwise unavailable for a non-Italian-speaking audience: this research suggests that these works might be fruitfully integrated in a larger analysis of the role of nostalgia in seemingly successful cases of postindustrial regeneration in other geographical contexts.

To a large extent, this research must also be seen as a product of our current epoch of nostalgia, to which, among many others, David Lowenthal has consecrated his research.⁸¹ The widespread tendency to long for various stages of the collective and personal past manifests itself in a multiplicity of fields, ranging from politics to pop culture, and seems to be in expansion. It is therefore of the utmost importance that scholars, as well as the general audience, reflect on the variety of forms of nostalgia at work around them, and, most importantly, select those displaying a critical and productive approach to the past.

The comparative and interdisciplinary approach to research underlies this thesis: the process of deindustrialization is in fact considered in its manifestations at a collective level and the representations of it in the literary medium are explored alongside its timeline. Such approach makes this research suitable for being expanded in at least two directions: on the one hand, it leaves room to the exploration of the role of nostalgia in a corpus of literary works based on other cities or regions especially concerned with the industrial crisis (i.e. the town of Milan and the city of Ivrea, in Piedmont); on the other hand, it could take a transmedial approach and thereby look at the representations of Turinese or Italian industrial heritage across various media (i.e. TV series, movies, songs etc). Other inputs include a comparative analysis of some of the nostalgic representations of the worker-student unity across various media, with a distinction between the specific features of the Italian struggles and those across Europe and in the US.

The spectrum of future research illustrated so far demonstrates the elastic quality of nostalgia, showing how this mode of looking back on the past carries extraordinary potential and must thus be encouraged and spread rather than labelled as conservative. Most importantly, this research aims to raise awareness on the fact the sense of movement is intrinsic to the concept of nostalgia and that, as a consequence, a form of nostalgia that leaves the subject stuck contradicts its own

⁸¹ The volume *The past is a foreign country* by Lowenthal is mentioned several times over the thesis. See in particular the section “The past is a foreign country”, in the introduction.

etymology. The nostalgic never stands still: on the contrary, s/he accesses and moves across the infinite possibilities of expansion of the human mind. All the protagonists in the analyzed novels are indeed in motion: they not only explore the streets, the squares, the modern buildings and the ruins of Turin, but also move across the borders between past, present and future, as well as those between the intimacy of their houses and the life of their urban community, Turin.

A smoky working-class city in Lucio Dalla's lyrics and a hotbed of untalented artists according to contemporary rapper Willie Peyote, Turin has always attracted the interest, and often the criticism, of numerous singers, poets and writers. Over the past two decades, these latter have appeared to be especially capable of phrasing the contradictions of this city, caught up somewhere in between the memory of its past and the (perhaps deluded) promises of a bright future outside the industrial frame.

All the analyzed literary works feature a fluid approach to the past, which enables the reader not only to critically consider its effects, but also to imagine the different presents that could have resulted from it. This actively nostalgic account of the urban past succeeds in problematizing and enriching the simple, but not necessarily thorough discourse around the positive outcome of the process of deindustrialization in Turin: in this research, nostalgia thus comes out as the opposite of stillness, for it entails motion, a progression that cannot but take the future into account, an imaginative approach to the past that considers the potential alongside the factual.

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