FREQUENT IMAGES OF THE CITY
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"Invisible cities are a dream which rises from the heart of the unliveable cities"
Italo Calvino (1972-73)

Each one of us, within our own personal experience of image producer and with the use of a camera or a computerized graphics system, has dared to try and create landscapes. The family camera, or any other occasion for amateur image creation, pushes us more than anything else to try and do this. During a pause in the group photos, our camera accompanies our curiosity to snap the landscape around us which we find attractive. These are images which we wanted to freeze because they represented a sensation of novelty to memorise. Finding ourselves in a particular place and feeling it necessary to take away a souvenir which as close as possible to that sensation inspired by the image which in that moment is fixed in our minds, is often a common worry to the "accidental tourist".

The city is a jungle of strange attitudes, of landscape within the landscape, which manages to generate a curiosity similar to that defined by Ernst Bloch as the "flâneur which crosses things, it tries to give life to an outmoded communication … devoid of low-high, high-low hierarchies"1. Along the road of references and incantations which look at themselves, as in a labyrinthine game of juxtaposed mirrors, the flâneur (with the camera) tries to find the most sophisticated attempt to recount one's ID. One continually loses and finds one's way in a complicated network of images, he imitates Palomar "watching the swallows in flight and the laziness of the geckos"2. Just as Italo Calvino's character, he sees shops like museums and tries to sketch the semiotics of earthly things, a shop suddenly becomes a dictionary of signs. The geometry of infinite empty space is peopled with the colours of metropolises . One sees amateur photographers on top of low walls, crouched into the strangest positions, balancing on pretty dangerous slopes in order to find that surprising shot. They strive to conquer those "shots" and other attractions which move within the space, in between the trees, in between two axes which lead into the margins of a visual field, in front of the bastions which fortify the hill cities, amongst the columns, the capitals, the frontons which decorate sites from other ages, together with the cornices and ancient forms of arches which have now vanished. But very often, the result is disappointing, the photographs almost always lack character.

It is difficult to understand that photography, together with painting, often needs very few shapes, essential colours and a setting to be gathered into one single focal point, it needs a very simple background-figure. There are very few amateur painters and photographers who do not follow the mannerist impetus and take images at different times to those of the classical tourist or the life painters. Painting and taking photographs in the open, trying to render the pleasantness of the day with what is happening before our eyes, inside the focus, is a satisfaction which we often exchange with the other. We maybe don't even know where this pleasure comes from. Isn't it what François Desportes started at the beginning of the eighteenth century! But the "accidental tourist" does not pretend to be included in the ranks of the impressionists, who painted their landscapes in the open. Yes! the amateurs want moments of full light which they normally snap, beginners require pictures with the sun behind them as any instructions of any camera or roll-film will tell you. How can the "accidental tourist" reflect? How can he concentrate his attention on one point while looking at the horizon and the evocative images before him? His eye – probably – moves from left to right, coming back and stopping at centre, in the natural position with head aligned with the erect spinal column. These natural movements are often advised by any manual for "amateur photographers", as part of their training. The horizontal

sight and the vertical sight are the essential structures of educated perception. To these skills we must add the speed of execution and the instantaneous act of shooting. If the horizontal sight proceeds rapidly, then the reading is simply directed towards the general individualisation of the constitutive elements of the landscape; if, however, it proceeds slowly, then we apply what we define as a lapse of instant and flashing recognition. The observer needs time to read and recognise, and not only to individualise, the elements he is observing. The fixed images make us synthesise the two movements. The line of the horizon in a photograph is usually connected to the panoramic view: the eyes are usually stimulated to look from left to right, they then return to the centre and make an upward movement. This panoramic view develops the dominant presence of the image and it is enriched by our perceptive ability.

With these few rudimentary notions on how to see the landscape, anyone can have access to photography, to the pictorial composition and to the so called creative process. As Giuseppe Chiari stated time ago, "art is easy". Closely observing the linguistic-expressive field one usually finds that both in the production and in the fruition of images, certain interpretative stereotypes are formed, like, for example the observation on a horizontal and vertical axis. The crumbling of these stereotypes brings us to the creation of new interpretations and productions, translations, exegesis, metaphorical breeding and cultivation. This is how I found myself in front of Claudio Spoletini's recent images. After having followed his work for many years, in examining his work today, for the upteenth time, I was particularly struck, as I became aware of state buffeted by the escape lines which criss-cross his image of urban scale. Before now I was less stimulated to follow his work with a deeper eye: maybe I was influenced by the fact that his city images had a more post-modern set to them; or maybe because in his first pictures the city was merely a background for the images and scenes of puppet-characters taken in their normal everyday actions. Then, the cities became the picture, they came into the foreground, without hiding behind any vision articulated by other things. Let us say that in the first few years of my knowing Spoletini's work, I was influenced by too many deviating signs with which I had purposefully built a distracted idolatry of his iconographic research. His painting was for me a proof test of the many enjoyable photographic images which he had been showing me for many years. In fact, his ideas on pictorial space connected to what I had absorbed during the past years through my research on medial painting , and so, his apparently easy illustrationism was for me an addition to my passion for images, for lines and for that which Peter Szondi had stated about the travels of Walter Benjamin: a "Stadtebilder which represents the search for our nation", that is, an assemblage of arches and curves, of abacus and acanthus, of projections and attics, of caryatid and frontons, of facades and peaks, of drops and lanterns, of pilasters and hints of triglyphs, roofs and volumes which evoke drums, splays, half dosserets, capitals and colonnades which remind us that it would not just be a journey into the past, but of an assemblage, a future architecture, "the city itself writing its own memories".

So basically, when I met Spoletini, and I'm talking about more than ten years ago, his images were not yet clear in the mirror of my periplus, maybe because of my lack of sensitivity, but they did not inspire that witz which connects the picture of the places to the urban reverie; maybe its features had not yet leapt into cartoon strips, the painting had not yet painted itself in that cloud of smoke which marks them out. Then it all suddenly happened and the horizons of the imaginary thinned out, lightened and rarefied, like a sky which is unexpectedly hued in recognisable colours and which takes your imagination for a walk. Maybe I literally underwent what Calvino describes while he was taking notes for Le città invisibili; looking at Spoletini's cities is like having carried around "this book of cities in recent years, writing in it occasionally, a

bit at a time, passing through different phases (…); there was a time when I compared the city to the starry sky, another time I was always talking about the rubbish which empties out of the city every day. It had become a sort of diary which followed my moods and reflections; everything became transformed into images of cities: the books I read, the art exhibitions I visited, conversations with my friends."3.

I have the same relationship with Spoletini's pre-architecture pictures as I have with the figure of the "accidental tourist". Looking at these landscapes today, which are built in a completely unreal space, I try to make my curiosity overtake. In fact, quickly memorising some of his works, the Idols of 1993 and '94 come to mind, who lacked a definition of outline, "emblematic" figures were purposefully scarce. Then come the sport ones in '94/'95 and the more recent ones who start off the period of architectures. It is in its painted architectures that Spoletini's work administers a dose of interest to me which goes above exciting curiosity. This is finally it, the image chosen from any landscape has been totally transformed, it has undergone a long awaited metamorphosis and it offers the perceptive parenthesis, the right syntactical openings to lead us near a road, a place where we can walk. The psychology of the accidental tourist comes forward. In fact, without taking on the role of ethnologist and anthropologist, personified so well in Marc Augé, looking at (and imagining) the "painted cities", I too can hear the initial words of Tristes Tropiques by Claude Lévi-Strauss in my head: "I hate journeys and explorers". But maybe in a pejorative sense, as Giorgio Manganelli intended, who made fun of those who had managed to stray from the journey around their house. Let us say that, if for Lévi-Strauss ethnology starts when exploration finishes, for the painter, the city starts there where the paint brush has managed to complete the last scrap of canvas stretched over an evocative frame. That is where Kublai Khan tries to deny Marco Polo's journey. Augé has shown his hand in the "charm of disorientation and of the importance of "local colour", the travelling writer already lives in the future in the past: what attracts him to the journey is the tale he will make of it later. A story organised around some emblematic images similar to the "instamatics" of our photo albums or our slide boxes."4. This is what should be said about Spoletini's painting, seeing as his preparatory work came from photographs, from detailed instant photographs which are then transferred, transposed and metamorphose into places, architectural complexes which build imaginary cities. If it is true that Mallarmé believed that the world was made to end up in a good book, photography for painters like Spoletini is made to take a step back, to archeo-grafically sediment painting. Emblematically, Augé says that we are victims of electronics and we often use it as a machine which functions as a search for Selbst (Lacan), the video is the federal reserve of the "mirror stage". "In order to exist I have to have been filmed", photography did as much when it appeared and became fashionable thanks to the building in 35, Boulevard des Capucines, where Nadar had his studio. Commenting as writers: "the journey acquires sense in a story which needs listeners"5, commenting as iconologists: photography acquires imagination at the moment in which it filters through painting, when it completely leaves what is real and what it itself is and when (in a Calvino situation) what is visible becomes invisible in the odour of the unliveable. If for Augé, the story of the journey has curative aspects, in a "wider sense: therapeutics which we see working in numerous religions in the guise of different types of confessions", the fin des voyages of painting presents, above all, curative aspects for the imaginative, which come out in complete smoke, in the most absurd cartoon strip, in the most disintegrated and praised of peregrine cloudology. Lévi-Strauss says in the Tristi Tropici that: "time has lengthened its isthmus between life and the id"6, in painting, architectural photography – interspersed with the colours from the strips and by the memorial illustrations of imagined cities – has lengthened its narrow strip of land. Augé's words: "In Lévi-

Strauss as in Proust, Flaubert or Chateaubriand, it is in fact the memory that goes on the journey"7, are beneficial to painting; in the photographic note pad however, painting becomes memory, it becomes pure brain, unfettered by the difficulties of any actualism.

These are some of the multiple activities of painting, those which, probably more than many others, contribute in modifying the aspect of the sign posted territory held by the icon. The psychological and metamorphic role which coincides with this extractive form is the only possibility which painting holds onto, the atypical circumstance which it still has available. That is if painting is still attached to something which is allegorically metaphorical and its metaphor does not lead away from the medial territory. Painting collects its raw materials from the extractive activities which rise from the basin of our memory. Here we find the use of such words as: close ups, shots, space, bird's eye view, aerial vision, geometric perspective, luminous radiation, mixing of colour, tone, shadow, organisation of the surface, relationship between paste and background, evocative force, classical painting and technical drawing acquire a meaning. Through his work, Spoletini deals with these magnetisms because he also uses photography, as we have already mentioned, which he uses to load that technical substance onto the pictorial image of the city, which leads us to the conflict between the use of historical memory and cartoon strip. It seems to me that the painting here has been created through the eye of the artist and above all of the photographer who can detach his persona and fly up to view the fluctuating condition of the city from on high.

Talking about flight, one would like to remember that pioneer who had tried flying over la Ville Lumière in the eighteenth century in order to immortalize an instant of the air de Paris. The Triumphal Arch and the Grands Boulevards in Paris seen from a hot air balloon (1868) is a visual journey which Nadar went on to catalogue the images of the city in relation to a minute of the life of his eye, a perception of space which worked both as a first trial and as the discovery of the architectural stereography of the memory, an undeletable precedent of the great image transactions. From high up in his hot air balloon the photographer of Paris used the eye of the explorer, connecting the reality of the planes to the horizon of dreams.

What does the word "plane" recall in painting and in photography, if the picture of the image is dictated by a structure which is mostly played on the possibility of "views"? The horizontal, panoramic lines of Spoletini's pictures divide the shot portrayed in the image into zones in which the eye is attracted either by colours, or by archeographed elements on the canvas. The various zones are related and this gives us that vertical reading mentioned before. In the images of the city the ochre colour shots follow each other in small and large dimensions which give rise to a reading which jumps from one architectural volume to another. The trees in Nuovi giardini di Babilonia (1993) however, make us read things vertically and slow down the viewing process. The result is something like a solfeggio, a glance at the brightness of the sun drenched wall and then up along the light and dark body of the buildings seen from above. This is where the fascination of this photography transformed into painting lies, where the author plays around with the shadows and light of a sun low over the horizon.

In the architectural images the brightness and open angle on the different zones of territory which emerge in the foreground do not stop the eye horizontally and create a "to and fro" rhythm, high and low, from left to right and vice-versa, which caresses the images and laps against the observation of the "tourist". It is not the symbol which lies on something very big that stops the eye and blocks our sight, nor is it the metope which turns towards the column, but the whole image which totals the sense of perception. Spoletini manages, in painting, to now do what he used to mostly do

with photographic collage. He unites the "planes" one after the other, raises and lowers the vertical view depending on the effect required. His painting cuts perspective, it inserts it into a phased horizon, it reduces the cuts in structure, it widens the volumes and heads towards a three dimensional effect. From here on it is possible to have a continual substitution of places which we meet in our observation and of the margins of the territory portrayed. By sorting out a key for interpretation, as we have done, criticising the "accidental tourist", we realise that at the same time this composition is played on the unreliability of the landscape.

Can we still say today that the beauty of a photograph or of a picture can be the result of a good composition? Can we still make, both in colour and in black and white, interesting picture – photographs with a precise meaning? It is well known that some works of art which deserve the name are often the result of simple bets. After a certain comparison of the inclined plane and the curved horizon, Claudio Spoletini has left chance to one side and has decided that in order to reach decent results one must work on framing using numerous diagrams and illustrations. This is how Spoletini approached the use of photography in a completely different way, both from the point of view of observation and of composition he has himself become the writer of an imaginary tourist who criticises it; he no longer takes the set-up and verticality for granted. What has emerged is an elaboration of the image which maybe represents the most consistent part of his work, above all when in relation to cartoon strips or the screen frames of cinema or video. Basically, our eye does not attribute a specific symbol to every element in this "New Babylon" landscape because that would be the extra decorative data, extended training, which allegorically clears up the resolution of focus in the emblem.

Let us observe Spoletini's images. There are chromatic contrasts from left to right which disorientate us, this is why the observer needs to make continual, almost circular, perspective movements, which fix attention on the promontory of a building. From here, it is easy to interpret and discover that the earth is shaped like a mushroom expanding in perspective. We can then say that the breaking up of the composing stereotype of an image favours a creative interpretation of Spoletini's work. This also happens in analogies between photography and painting. It is therefore this continued creativity (the metaphor) which is slowly shed, starting from the choice of a single image, and which then generates examples of allegorical construction. Spoletini's buildings change the way we usually interpret a landscape and everything seems to be built in negative. Perhaps, in the making of this image, there is more of a direct connection to the memory of the dark room than a complete use of photographic print. It is truly stereotype to imagine that in the figures we see the widest part is the base while the narrowest part is the top. This is how these conceived buildings become seductive. The turning upside down of the lines of horizon and perspective creates the representative charm of the city. Creativity in an architectural construction and in landscape already had a precise communicative meaning in non-contemporary art, chosen by the painter; in contemporary art, after the painter has added the contribution of other forms of expression to his technical abilities, how can one stop at modern horizons in which the painted space is not seen as a direct contrast to the eye trained in this new technique? The painter who wishes to remain connected to the image on the surface must play at dividing the image into zones, must use distorted perspectives, must use the space on the canvas like a worked pumice-stone, a volcanic material. He must try to form images as if he were following the shreds of viscose magma (acid lava) which is thrown into the air from the earth's fiery mouth. Before it quickly cools down and becomes like spongy stone, extremely light because full of emptiness, the painter must simulate this extraordinary gesture by bringing a quick sequence of images into the imaginary, which, like lapilli,

become impressed onto the canvas. This operation can take place if one exploits a traditional technique and if one adds the simulation of a plotted program. Painting is made up of volcanic memory which is at the same time, a forseeable one. In its direct form it has nothing more to discover, this is why it has historically altered its progress. The figure is born from the artist's artisan resignation and becomes polyhedric when he pulls out the magma of images from the ground and puts it into the thousand faces of the city. Contemporary painting is marked by the analysis of the painting itself, and by a continual enunciation of a technological force which is behind the artificialization of the image. The image here simply tells us about itself; in the moment in which it reveals itself it awakens an internal memory which can continually substitute new devices. Even if nobody can create a sort of techno-painting with classical tools, Claudio Spoletini goes towards an adjustment on the fictional screen plotter. He does not trivialise painting by allowing a computer program to tell him what tomorrow's image should be like, he goes directly to the traditional imitation of the invisible city, almost as if wanting to tell us that after these there will be no more drawings of cities or liveable cities. The real city is imprinted in the façade constructed by the occasion of painting.

Rifugio di Furore, January 1995

NEW TRANS-WORLD ARCHITECTURE

"En faisant de l'architecture l'art premier du cadre, Bernard Cache peut énumérer un certain nombre de formes cadrantes qui ne préjugent aucun contenu concret ni fonction de l'édifice: le mur qui isole, la fenêtre qui capte ou sélectionne (en prise sur le territoire), le sol-plancher qui conjure ou raréfie ("raréfier le relief de la terre pour laisser libre cours aux trajectoires humaines"), le toit, qui enveloppe la singularité du lieu ("le toit en pente place l'édifice sur une colline...")"8
Deleuze/Guattari

"So I wasn't surprised that my friend, the day after, when…we met, met me with these words: art of the surface did you say? Art? No, I don't think so. Art is the final loss. One goes…. without finding much – My family came from the country, my friends were from the country. I knew nobody in the city. I was ashamed of looking for posters with my friend, but it tempted me like a secret. I was doing"9.

Robert Musil

The word dog is not the real dog wagging its tail in the yard. The map is not the territory which is shown within. In both cases we find ourselves before a re-elaboration of reality, which, using different languages, allows us to understand what we are observing in order to work on it on an abstract, allegorical level. But if verbal or geographical language allows us to understand our life, to express it in communicative form to other people, to gain access to experiences told by others which we will probably never be able to live or see at first hand, the language of painting is well described in an apparent description of the figure of the writer which Italo Calvino uses in Il Castello dei destini incrociati. In a part of Tutte le altre storie, and in particular in a small chapter called Anch'io cerco di dire la mia, Calvino says that the life of the writer is spent between "the outbursts of a warrior and rubbing out and scrunched up papers". He is "playing the part of an old monk, who has been isolated for years in his cell, a book worm who, by the light of a lantern, reads over forgotten knowledge in the notes at the bottom of the pages. Maybe the time has arrived to admit that the tarot card with the number 1 is the only one which honestly represents what I have been able to be. A juggler or magician who lays out a certain number of figures on his stall, and by moving them, connecting them and exchanging

them he obtains a certain number of effects"10. Calvino also indicates the uselessness of realism in these passages, and compares his work to a magic trick which could be prolonged by getting into the museums, between a St. George and a St. Jerome and stating that "because it has been painted again and again, written again and again (a story…like painting)then if the narrative is not real, it becomes real"11. Calvino's awareness in confronting reality by dreamy gallops is well known, it has often been stated how he himself fixed the world, as if he dreamt it in a living transworld. The figure of the book worm, who leafs through forgotten knowledge by candlelight, creates a perfect analogy with the painter who does this through colours, light and shadows which accompany him in his journey to bury the images in that large connective cloth of painting. The painter is condemned to that same ubiquity, between what is real and what is imaginary, especially if his references often belong more to the world of cartoon strips and other more consumer, faster and more synthetic forms.

In front of Spoletini's canvases we have the distinct feeling that one must flow towards that illusionism which Calvino spoke of. Are we lucky or unlucky in this condition? We don't know and we don't care. Seeing as we have an artist who is aware, who becomes the one who manoeuvres "figures", "connects and undoes", a mixer of effects, we can be sure that whoever takes on this mantle allows us to cross his images freely without having to depend on "me too". Here, me too is a means, the means of something else which we want to see and can see by ourselves.

Following the School of Konstanz, let us ride off and away from the text and proceed as we most wish, in the image we see what we most like to see. This is essential for observing the cities drawn and painted by Spoletini and also for that which is our city. The city we look at is the one we use as a map, our observation is reflected in the mirror of roads which go to the great city built by painting. It is not enough to show a card, an oil painting, for the gallery to be able to sell it, the card we have created must build the possibility of an alphabet within us, an offer from which Italo Calvino does not draw back, having used the allegory of the writer "broken in half", of the wanted surprise of something missing at the end, of a destiny which is nearly always absconding. The parable from a large "collection of sand" in Calvino is really a revealing moment for the possibility of allegory. What can one do then to avoid an explanation of the cities painted by Spoletini? By offering, through interpretation, the story of the work, the idea of our cities. In order to be successful, it is useful to predispose, right from the first glance at the canvas, a possibility for our experience of seeing. So as not to lose ourselves there where it would be useless to study an art which no longer has anything to say, which through no fault of its own can no longer stimulate the imagination, we can perceive the icons of these images. One must ask oneself what is impossible to portray today, then portray it as if forced to, a truly provocative gesture in regard to the purity of the avant-garde traditions. The ethics one should respect, which would conserve this dry sentiment of purity in respect to "tradition of the new", can go to the devil. Next to these minimal confessions, essential for gaining access to a certain drawing schizophrenically, others are then naturally placed. Therefore let us give space to contradiction, let us indulge in Das Paradies, die Heimat der Kunst (1889) by Paul Scheerbart, let us leaf through the papers of Verlag Deutscher Phantasten (founded in 1892 by Scheerbart).

The relation between language and technique for the creation of a work of art is always a current issue. It is obvious that a general intervention to update one's forma fluens is needed each time one composes a new cycle of work, but one must correct using the necessary caution, as Spoletini's contemporary research shows. One recurring and widespread idea is that the preparatory drawing for iconographic painting is the place of definition of the picture. It is that precise moment in which the

creative force comes out into the open, with products of great depth, even if built using different techniques. We have seen in some of Spoletini's earlier work how the figurative outline which follows a certain program of signs is not only that which we are seeing, but what we have the occasion to think using other techniques and in front of other images. This sense is more explicit today and takes on the appearance of a medial allegory. In 1997, in the exhibition From cartoon strip to high quality which I co-ordinated in Rome, in Italia 2, I handled a show called Strips, paintings and other drifts where I exhibited a painting by Claudio Spoletini called Notte rossa a Mascate (1996, 202x135 cm.). That canvas carried the advert "Fly Sultanates" in the centre of the façade of a building; I happened to observe it with great empathy because it stimulated my thoughts on cities known and cities imagined. Another of Spoletini's works called Stazione Est (1997) confirmed his intention of reaching a pictorial position somewhere between cartoon strip and photographic painting. Studying these works in depth, I seem to have understood that a sign or the structure of a building mean something different from what we see and this other world is made available by stimulating our imagination. From 1995, when Spoletini's painting started going towards a cartoon strip – photographic image, paintings which concerned spectral or dreamlike architecture have been coming out one after another, in a continual flow. Thus we have seen the Osservatorio , the Torre di controllo, the stations, airports and then the Vicolo dei veggenti, the Isola, the port, the high structures, La città verticale and the Avvistamento (1996), Archeologia, Stazione Est, Il folle volo and Smistamento, etc……. One of Spoletini's paintings called Parcheggio (1995) apparently plays on the transformation of an area in Rome, but it really reminds us more of architecture connected to the styles of Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn and Michael Graves put together, added to which we find large aerostatic balloons which continually look for a "topos" in the line of René Magritte. It is then understandable that Spoletini's work abounds with references to surrealism, metaphysics, postmodernism and some other parameters of the forms of the cities drawn and painted by Massimo Scolari. But what makes these works specific is the fact that, even though they are distributed by a flow of references, the architecture has a distinguishing trait, it concerns that particular mediality to which they aspire, moving between a dream image and a cartoon strip. The drawing of the alleys with its arabesque houses, of the trains which enter the tunnels of the buildings, the allegorically vertebrate figures which fix the axis of a road, the modern cars, the false eighteenth century terraces and the structural exaggerations, the towers with their lamps of fire bring us a new aspect of medial painting, which is nourished by a space for illustration. While Sergio Cascavilla plays on the external and internal which remind us of the sign of the American cartoon strip Winnie Winkle created by Martin Michael Bramer, Spoletini uses only the spatial illusion of the cartoon strip; to the coldness of the coloured drawing he adds the stratification of painting which wraps itself in a photographic cartoon sequence. We can say, along with Pierre Fresnault – Deruelle: "A remodelling of the reference pictures is taking place in cartoon strips. Time, space, the city, have no more than a "surface" relation to the categories of the real, of which they are but analogues (…) The technique of the author goes back to a metaphysic – continues the French literary historian – the narrator chooses the layers, one by one"12. Spoletini, on the other hand, does not have a creature wandering around in these spaces, only racing figures, travelling figures who can cross the architecture continually. By dividing himself between imaginary science fiction, archeology and "vision literature", the corners of Spoletini's transworld are small sites of exfoliated memory, they speak of images embroidered for volume and shadows, city maps to discover and places to go to be stimulated into the journey.

If we take a brief excursion into the iconography of the city in Art during the last ten years, it is not difficult to meet the name of Valerio Adami, Christo, Crippa, De Maria, Dorazio, Dova, Peverelli, Salvo, Turcato and many more. Adami, for example, paints Quai de la Mégisserie (1979), where the figures, coloured in strong tones of colour, are marked by metropolitan signals. Christo, on the other hand, coming from conceptual installation, tries to redesign the perspective and the map of the Champs-Élysées, reminding us of that project for wraping Paris in 1969. His work is tied to the topological and conforming conditions of a city, so that it spreads like an oil slick, enforcing the reliability of the work on the basis of project space or operation. One of the components of the Nuclear Movement in 1972, working with "amiantite", produced a series of work on the image of the city, they are geometric symbols of clear scansion. Dorazio looks at reality through a fermentation of crossing lines which move with co-ordination on the surface of the canvas. Nicola De Maria uses stains, which are spread and worked on in a sensitively nervous way, called Città ridente di luce. Peverelli looks into the city as a Souvenir à la mémoire. Salvo's metaphysical and post-modern landscapes finish off as an alternative to oils and mixed techniques on canvas, seen to by Giulio Turcato, called Centro Storico (1988). From these traditions, Spoletini does not learn anything, our Roman artist needs the cartoon strip Dylan Dog more than the image of Italian cities painted by Emilio Tadini. Even if they could have certain things in common, like signs which touch the atmosphere of Italian urban volumetric, the conceptual cut of these images is definitely different. Spoletini's city is not graphic, even if inspired by cartoon strips, it does not seem to be drawn like a sketch for a cartoon character, but it enters into the most classical atmosphere of painting, it holds onto a trace from future memory, a memorial relic. It is not conceived as a mass, but in many cases it is a frontal city, frontal because it is pictorial. Spoletini's city tends to give a galactic vision of the places where people live, using only curves and sensations of a network to bring out the points of connection of the metropolis. Apparently there has been no life in the city. It tries to go beyond the place loved by painters, during the long period when art history was a living subject. Ambrogio Lorenzetti's teaching, from Allegory of good government and its effects on the city is alive in Spoletini, his images of buildings and volume tend to go upwards, to climb towards the sky horizontally and vertically and even where they do not move forward, they go in, they crowd together like a hint of the roads which go away towards space. There is no sign in these images of the teachings of the eighteenth century Italian landscape painters, Canaletto, Bellotto or Guardi, because, although Spoletini uses photography, in fact he is a photographer as well as a painter, he does not prefer the effect of depth but rather the enlarging effect, the focalisation of the detail, which one notices in some of the classical pictures of Metropolis (1926) by Fritz Lang. It is as if Spoletini puts to one side all of the iconographic traditions of Pissarro, De Nittis, Signorini and even Van Gogh. In the definition of space one does not find the expressionist sensation that one gets in Boulevard de Clichy by Van Gogh (1887); there is not even the idea of La Città che sale, U. Boccioni's famous work (1910), which produced a less intimate and more sociological image. Nothing of Sironi in Spoletini, even if Sironi , in the never ending tension towards the return to order, was busy putting classical volume and space with strongly cut tones, compromised by the representation of space at the limit of a melancholy iconography into the foreground. Spoletini's metaphysics come from another idea of urban space, the human is not even absent as in American hyper-realism. Neither Hopper nor Scheeler are present. At this limit of cartoon strip reality, Spoletini composes an image which gives back a different version of the cartoon strip itself. In fact, it is as if by making a cartoon strip we do not enhance the cartoon strip but disorientate it. It is the photograph which helps the cartoon strip become painting, and it is the photograph which helps painting become cartoon strip. Enrico De Paris's city does not belong here. The aerial views

observed from above never represent the suburbs, Spoletini paints all places as if they were the centre, as if the suburbs had been totally eliminated. Inside these city tubes we cannot find our chaotic life full of contrasts; the houses, the buildings, all seem perfect models of an ideal city where the depth of the city's extension is justified. We find ourselves in an image which is contradictory to what G. Simmel suggested in his essay in 1903 Die Großstante und das Geistesleben. Simmel talks about a psychological foundation upon which the type of metropolitan individuality arises, suggesting the complex notion of nervenleben. In Spoletini's city there does not seem to be any "intensification of nervous life, produced by rapid and continual alternation of external and internal impressions"13. For the metropolis, Simmel suggests a method which goes from man, from the folds of his spiritual life, towards the city dimension. In Spoletini's images the psychological signs of man seem to be present, but the images of the city reach their apex the moment they are free from any nervous pulsation. Simmel also says: "All affection between people is based on their individuality, while intellectual relationships treat men as if they were numbers, indifferent elements, who are of interest only for what they produce"14. Spoletini produces an apparently classical but substantially geometric architecture, which moves within the space of the number and of the mathematical galaxy. Esprit de géométrie, a spirit which is in contrast to the "collective caprice" mentioned by Simmel and which fits into the "fixed temporal scheme", almost as if there were no blasé citizen to wander around these spaces. Quantity is produced by the accumulation of economic life which hangs over everything "rising in its colourless indifference"15. One does not see the teeming metropolis because one does not want to resort to the lack of freedom felt in the rhaetian cages controlled by the great Panopticon. The cosmopolitan aspect and the globalisation forseen by Simmel in 1903, cannot be seen directly in the mural city, there is a sphere of apparently ideal life where conflicts play in absence. Simmel says something positive about these city images when he states that the great masses are "the real scene of this civilisation which transcends and goes above any personal element. Here, in the buildings and educational institutes, in the miracles and in the commodity of technology which goes beyond distance, in the formation of community life…there is such a heavy, squashing pile of crystallised, unpersonalized spirit that the personality cannot hold against it"16. The same goes for the historical inheritance of the architectural galaxy going towards the post-fordist image, here the spirit seems to be completely crystallised, as if history had stopped and sand had covered the façades of the buildings which pull towards the warm, dense colours of our memory.

There is however a meeting point between passivity and conflict, in which Simmel rightly sees that the greatest concentration of what is new, the strongest incitement to cross-value, brings us to saturation, crystallisation means zero value: "the big city acquires a new value in the universal history of the spirit"17 . This is what comes to mind when looking at Spoletini's images: everywhere seems noble, well built, all perfectly represented, but all old, ancient, past, crystallised; maybe because our contemporary world, in its never ending stimulation of our economic life which rules that of the spirit, catapults our present into a near past, in the manner of our frivolous idea of the future.

ALLEGORY OF/IN THE CITY

Spoletini could have been stimulated by the parable of Le città invisibili by Italo Calvino. In his work we find that game of combination which mirrors the love of the writer for those corners of volume and space taken up by geometrical figures. Calvino's text is divided into nine parts where the voices of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan describe the numerous cities. The sections in italics refer to the metaphor of Il Milione, entertaining the reader with the dialogue between Marco Polo and the

emperor, while the other 55 stories act as a comparison. Each city is the allegory of a landscape and the cities change like our moods: besides, one of the two exegete guides along the intricate path has the difficult task of finding the key to interpretation. The Chinese boxes, the stitches, the surprises appear like the retinal tangle of Calvino's imaginary labyrinth. A body within a three dimensional body which brings out Smeraldina's voice, a city which corresponds to the dimensions of the Italian Laguna beauty described by Alberto Savino as a "colossal armpit".

A curious personality born in Gdansk in 1863, in the house of Arthur Shopenhauer, writes about a fantastic city and tells about Lesabéndio and his fixation with building a tower to reach the shining cloud which glides over Pallas. The tower should unite the skeleton of the star to its head which is hidden by the cloud. Scheerbart autodefines himself Visionar aus Ekstase (visionary by ecstasy), he approached Glasutopie (utopia of glass) by Bruno Taut and philosophised on Gläserne Kette (glass chain) from Glass Architecture. It is a pity that what Walter Benjamin wrote on Lesabéndio is said to have been lost. It seems to have been synthesised into the form of a political treatise on the meaning, able to appreciate the destinal spirit of Scheerbart's work, which leads to obvious historical reflection and to a melancholy conclusion the book in 1913, with fourteen drawings by Alfred Kubin. According to Benjamin, Lesabéndio was a real politician because he is redeemed at the extinction of his figure inside the project of non-place, he accepts the condition of disappearing and lasting in time. The following year Scheerbart published Glasarchitektur in which he develops all of his fantasmagorical force, forseeing an image of the city which plays on the context of transparencies. Scheerbart's piece of writing is the most acute document on the death of the bourgeois interior, the meeting point between nature and technique, as it could be for painting, which seems to move at the same pace. Let us say that by immersing itself into the image of the metropolis, it can't but look back, an estrangement which is typical of Pallasian sentiment. Painting is dead, we no longer have the possibility of managing a technical horizon in which the copy is not reproduced. Everything is loaded into the universe of technical comparison, pure, absolute pigment lives in the simulation and the emulation of what it has as a reference. The city here is above all its reproduced image, it takes on the air of a cosmopolitan universe, as Simmel stated. There is no more empty space in the image of the city, everything is full. It is therefore very difficult to walk in this city, especially when it is a thick mass of holes, mouths, openings, rings and viaducts which inter-connect. The image of the city which post-Fordist painting gives us is a way of alluding to crowded places in which everything is covered working at filling the ground. Scheerbart writes: "The great union between above and below has taken place. This is an example also for other asteroids, they have reacted to the pain of Pallas. I saw it and even the sun became more troubled because of it. So we have to unite more above. Artistic opposites shouldn't distance us from each other"18. The metropolis has always been the concentration of financial life, as Simmel stated, and here the monetary economy is translated into the symbolism of the city. Different economies crash, come into conflict, just as the image of the buildings in the city comes into conflict. In Spoletini's city everywhere is noble, it shows a dimension articulated by place.

The image of the metropolis is by no means recent. Reading various classics of sociology, like W. Sombart, one learns that it is the continual rise in population, starting in the sixteenth century, that leads to the explosion of a new type of city in the twentieth century. In fact, from the seventeenth century on, London and Paris became the urban conformation which most adapted to the consequences of the modern type of city. Baudelaire, who was not a descriptive poet - to the point where G. Macchia defined him as the minstrel of the nervous life in the city 19 -, is the symbol of the modern citizen and of the flâneur. Just as nineteenth century literature,

according to Macchia, connects man to his own paradise and his own hell by discovering the legendary side of modern life, then painting does the same with its colours. In his elegy of colour, Baudelaire writes "the correct way to know if a picture is less odious is by looking at it from a distance where one cannot make out either the subject or the lines. If it is melodious then it already has a meaning and it has already entered repertory of memories."20. Baudelaire understands that this atmosphere of colour and of memorability gives the work an epic perception. The eye of the lone traveller can dig well into this memory, it is the eye of Benjamin who arrives in Paris to write an essay on matriarchy and funeral archaeology in Bachofen. After having reflected on the journey of this lone Swiss to Greece, for Benjamin, the figure of the lone traveller becomes the continual exercise of re-memorising the past. This is where Benjamin's ability for flânerie started. In 1935 Benjamin writes Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century, and so goes back to a project started in 1927 called Passagenwerk 21. The parisian passages are in themselves a monumental work and capable of putting the city in touch with its accumulation in size and vehicles. The author takes a step back and gives space to hundreds of quotations which he collects and mixes together. From Benjamin on, the journey acquires a sort of fantasmagorical dialectic which springs from various points. One of these is Baudelaire, another is the surrealist filter of Aragon which he perceives in the peasant of Paris22. Here is where the passages meet, and though they are the places where humanity and merchandise come together in metropolitan cosmopolitanism, they also have to cover the symbolical constellation of the tombs, of the relics and ruins of modern day. The moment this happens, the moment it is realised, it passes from the attraction and novelty stage to the subtraction and primordial memory stage. Benjamin thus ably breaks the original categories upon which Bachofen founded his interpretation of ancient history. The academic Swiss sees the altar, the sacrificial rite and the symbol as something which is fixed in a never changing reality 23. According to Bachofen, the tombs lay at the beginning of the cult, at the beginning of sacred architecture, they are immobile and immortal, but strangely, the city walls and all that is planted in the ground also belong to these types of sites, like something primitive. In Benjamin's description of the entrance to the view of Gropius there are strong analogies between places in Pompeii and the holes and openings which modernity offers. Looking closely at Spoletini's paintings one notices a subtle clin d'oeil which follows this tomb like atmosphere. Here the architecture, which alludes to the most modern and fantasmagorical sign, reacquires an ancient, monumental feeling which crosses the conditions of time, of all times. Painting itself is a passage, the traveller spends the night in this infinite network of labyrinths and memories and it seems that by looking, he will be allowed to walk along this path until he is able to do so. This is why the search for planetary neo-communication is not directly reflected in the work of this painting, mediality is an indirect form in painting. It appears as a reflection that has been pushed back continually into the mouth of the optical camera that paints the details of the city. There is no need to show the technical fusion of telecommunications with the potential of computers in order to show how much painting is copyist and modern, it is so, regardless of what the theatricality of the present shows us. One must therefore assimilate how the most traditional means of communication – like painting – could satisfy the marginal role of everyday life decoration and bring out a memorable trace of technological culture. The hand of modern man is already a hand of the network more than a financial or political hand. The city already goes beyond the urbs (physics), it is already essentially civitas (political), in fact, in many cases it is above all this. All there is left for pictorial decoration to do is to study the physical aspect of the urbs in the form of signal metaphor. The citizen already belongs to the government of the many networks and painting, in its abstraction, can symbolically go beyond the city's moral order or public

space. Not being a valid anti-network of governance, nor a password to gain access to networks which legitimise citizens and not having the power to create an image which gathers interest, painting can create passages to a more concrete vision of our nearby cemetery, on the tombs which potentially welcome our yearnings of life. Here, painting becomes a contradiction, the critical cavil of the lone traveller.

Notes

1 Tracce (1930-59, expanded ed. 1969), it. ed. by L. Boella, Milan, Garzanti, 1994, p. 177.

2 Italo Calvino, Turin, Einaudi, 1983.

3 Presentazione 1972-73, in Le città invisibili, Milan, Mondadori, 2001, p. VI.

4 Marc Augé, Finzioni di fine secolo, tr. by A. Salsano, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2001, p. 55.

5 Calvino, p. 58.

6 Tristes Tropiques, Paris, Plon, 1955, p. 45; this edition is valid for further quotations by Lévi- Strauss.

7 Augé, p. 59.

8 Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie?, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991, p. 177; it. tr. by A. De Lorenzis, curated by Carlo Arcuri, Turin, Einaudi, 1996, pp. 193-194.

9 Robert Musil, Estate in città, in Romanzi brevi, novelle e aforismi, Turin, Einaudi, 1986, p. 621.

10 Italo Calvino, Il Castello dei destini incrociati, containing also La taverna dei destini incrociati, Turin, Einaudi, 1973, p. 104.

11 Idem, p.108.

12 Il linguaggio dei fumetti (1972), it. tr. and introd. by M. Giacomarra, Palermo, Sellerio,1977, sec. ed. 1989, see the paragraph about La città, L'organizzazione della città, Il tecnicismo della città, Il destino delle città immaginarie, pp. 184-189.

13 In Jahrbuch der Gehestiftung, IX, then in Brücke und Turm, Stuttgart, Koehler, 1957, pp. 227-242; it. tr. by R. Solmi, La metropoli e la vita spirituale, in AA. VV., Tecnica e Cultura. Il dibattito tedesco fra Bismarck e Weimar, curated by T. Maldonado, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1979, p. 66.

14 Idem, p. 67.

15 Idem, p. 70.

16 Idem, p. 78.

17 Idem, p. 79.

18 The final fragment of Lesabéndio is in AA. VV., Nel tempo dell'adesso. Walter Benjamin, tra storia, natura ed artificio, curated by G. Perretta, Milan, Mimesis, 2002, p. 172.

19 G. Macchia, Il mito di Parigi, Turin, Einaudi, 1965, p. 341.

20 Scritti sull'arte, Turin, Einaudi, 1992, p. 62.

21 I "passages" di Parigi, curated by R. Tiedemann, it. ed. curated by E. Ganni, Opere Complete, vol. IX, Turin, Einaudi, 2000.

22 A fragment of this Aragon's writing is in AA. VV., Nel tempo dell'adesso…, op. cit., under the title La fantasticheria dei sensi, pp. 175-181.

23 Walter Benjamin, Il viaggiatore solitario e il flâneur. Saggio su Bachofen, curated by E. Villari, Genoa, Il Melangolo, 1998.