FERZAN OZPETEK'S *MINE VAGANTI* (2010):
WANDERING BETWEEN "THE COMIC" AND "HUMOR"

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Abstract: A powerful expression of Ferzan Ozpetek's narratives of displacement, *Mine vaganti* (2010) represents an open-ended journey of multiple characters and their tentative pursuit of happiness through the transformative power of "humor." More specifically, the inherent potential for change that defines this quest emerges from an oscillation between "il comico" and "l'umorismo" in light of modernist theories of humor, as they are articulated in Luigi Pirandello's and Henri Bergson's seminal essays, *Saggio sull'umorismo* (1908) and *Le rire* (1900). While following an *auteurist* perspective, this analysis focuses on the significance of the film script, coauthored by Ozpetek and Ivan Cotroneo. Moreover, it highlights the role that other elements of film form, such as sound, editing, cinematography, and mise en scène play in tracing the emergence of an "etica dell'estetica" (Zagarrio 2012). *Mine vaganti's* aesthetic poignantly renders Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" (2005) and advocates for a community in which identity is a liminal, fluid, and ever evolving creative endeavor that brings to the foreground marginalized agents of social and political change, in this case the homosexual and the elderly.

The cinema of Turkish Italian filmmaker Ferzan Ozpetek could be defined as "vagante" in its entirety.¹ His films hinge on "wandering" stories, which unfold along the inner journeys of multiple protagonists confronted with unforeseen facets of their identities, their memories, and their relationships. Ozpetek's recurring narratives of displacement explore sociological geographies, such as the entrepreneurial upper-middle class of the Southern Italian region of Apulia in *Mine vaganti*; historical events, such as the October 1943 raid of the Roman Jewish Ghetto in *La finestra di fronte*; discriminated sexual identities, as in the case

¹ Ferzan Ozpetek, born and raised in Istanbul, moved to Rome to study art history and cinema at the Università La Sapienza in 1977. He explores his transnational identity in two autobiographical fictions, *Rosso Istanbul* and *Sei la mia vita*.

of brothers Tommaso and Antonio Cantone in *Mine vaganti* and Davide Veroli in *La finestra di fronte*; and marginalized age groups, such as the elderly Davide in *La finestra di fronte* and La Nonna in *Mine vaganti*.

This essay argues that *Mine vaganti* represents an open-ended journey of multiple characters and their tentative “search for happiness and fulfillment” (Wood 179) through the transformative power of “humor.” More specifically, the inherent potential for change that defines this quest emerges from an oscillation between “il comico” and “l’umorismo” in light of modernist theories of humor, as they are articulated in Luigi Pirandello’s and Henri Bergson’s seminal essays, *L’umorismo* and *Le rire*. While following an *auteurist* perspective, this discussion focuses on the significance of the film script, coauthored by Ozpetek and Ivan Cotroneo.² Moreover, it highlights the role that other elements of film form, such as sound, editing, cinematography, and mise en scène, play in tracing the emergence of an “etica dell’estetica” (Zagarrio 95). The ethical significance of Ozpetek’s aesthetic choices enhances the transgressive power of “humor” as the “sentimento del contrario” (Pirandello, *L’umorismo* 127; “the feeling of the opposite,” *On Humor* 113). *Mine vaganti*’s aesthetic, which capitalizes on discontinuity editing, rotating camera, and non-diegetic sound,³ poignantly renders Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity.” Ozpetek’s authorial signature, particularly in *Mine vaganti*, conjures up Bauman’s advocacy for a community in which identity is a liminal, fluid, and ever-evolving creative endeavor that brings to the foreground marginalized agents of social and political change, in this specific case the homosexual and the elderly.⁴

² For an *auteurist* approach to Ozpetek’s production, see Rebecca Bauman 391, Caminati 456, and Marcus 142.

³ Ozpetek has had a long-standing collaboration with film editor Patrizio Marone (*Le fate ignoranti* [His Secret Life] 2001), *La finestra di fronte* [Facing Windows] 2003, *Cuore sacro* [Sacred Heart] 2005, *Saturno contro* [Saturn in Opposition] 2007, *Un giorno perfetto* [A Perfect Day] 2008, and *Allacciate le cinture* [Fasten Your Seatbelts] 2014). He has continued to work with Pasquale Catalano (musical score) and Maurizio Calvesi (cinematography) in *Magnifica presenza* [A Magnificent Haunting] 2012.

⁴ With “authorial signature,” I refer to the recurring “creative markers” (Fischer 7) that have come to define Ozpetek’s cinematic style. In his in-depth reading of *Le fate ignoranti*, Caminati points out stylistic and rhetorical strategies that hint at “a coming together of individual subjectivities” (458) in the spirit of Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community*.

Ozpetek's transnational, gay identity has creatively defined his work since his first feature films, such as *Hamam* (1997, Steam: The Turkish Bath) and *Le fate ignoranti* (2001, His Secret Life). *Mine vaganti*, whose primary plot wanders along the social and psychological challenges of a double coming out in a traditionally patriarchal and homophobic Southern Italian family, engages in an open dialogue with an LGBTQ discourse that perceptively takes into consideration critical responses to his first queer works.⁵ As John Champagne has convincingly argued, in *Mine vaganti* Ozpetek revisits the conventions of melodrama and "renders the film's sensibility as 'queer,' a deconstruction—and not simply a rejection—of the 'either/or' of modern categories of gender/sexual identities as well as the genres and sensibilities through which these categories are articulated and lived" (197). On the other hand, Rebecca Bauman has recently pointed out the inherent ambiguity of "Ozpetek's polysemic use of his male stars," from Pierfrancesco Favino in *Saturno contro* to Riccardo Scamarcio in *Mine vaganti*, which "indicate a still uneasy confrontation between queer modalities and ideals of masculinity and virility within Italian national identity..." (401).

As we shall see in a brief introduction to the film's narrative, *Mine vaganti* presents a synecdochic significance as it expresses common denominators that, according to film historian Gian Piero Brunetta, characterize the "situazione caotica... liquida" (31; "chaotic, liquid situation")⁶ of contemporary Italian cinema in its entirety.

Mine vaganti in context

As a catalyst of individual, societal, emotional, and professional tensions, the family is often at the center of contemporary filmmakers' attention (Brunetta 41–43), be it for its destructive power, as is the case of Muccino's *Ricordati di me* (2003),

⁵ For example, Luca Prono argues that the marketability of Ozpetek's *Le fate ignoranti* derives from "the major flaw" of its screenplay, centered on "a plot that remains suspended between a proud affirmation of difference and a portrayal of a world which is still conceived as apart." Edoardo Becattini criticizes in particular the "retrograde" nature of Ozpetek's queer cinema, which reinforces certain easily marketable gender stereotypes. Derek Duncan, in a more articulated analysis, suggests that "a queer cinema with radical pretensions" should express "sexuality and other forms of relationality" in "more recondite ways" (259).

⁶ With the exception of the film's English subtitles, all translations are mine if not otherwise indicated.

or for its supportive strength, as in Giordana's *La meglio gioventù* (2003). *Mine vaganti*'s collective protagonist, a Southern Italian family of pasta entrepreneurs, is imbued with both destructive and supportive connotations.⁷ The Cantone family is the agent of a collective *Bildungsroman*, a novel of formation in the sense of maturation and inclusiveness, as the open-ended conclusion suggests. In this respect, *Mine vaganti* indicates "il punto di luce in fondo al tunnel" (Brunetta 44; "the luminous dot at the end of the tunnel"), which constitutes the second common denominator of Italian cinema of the third millennium.

At the center of this collective novel of formation, Vincenzo and Stefania Cantone, owners of the successful family business, have to cope with sudden revelations about their sons' (gender) identities. The older Antonio prevents his younger brother, Tommaso, from disclosing his homosexuality and his vocation as a writer by coming out at a formal dinner with business partners.

Antonio's untimely revelation triggers the development of multiple, intertwined subplots that indicate how *Mine vaganti* also expresses the third defining trait of Italian contemporary film: "la contaminazione stilistica e linguistica" (Brunetta 44; "stylistic and linguistic contamination"). Despite critical acclaim as "a contemporary revival of the *commedia all'italiana*" (Marshall 61), *Mine vaganti* presents a rather complex reinterpretation of the *commedia all'italiana* beyond restrictive labels and conventional gender representations associated with this genre during the economic miracle.⁸ Ozpetek traces a portrait of the Cantone family that is "sym-pathetic" in the etymological sense of suffering (*pathein*) together (*syn*). The director, his characters, and his audience take part in the at times painful process of understanding, accepting, and including the Other.⁹

In this sense, *Mine vaganti* also shares the fourth and last common denominator of Italian cinema in the present tense, which Brunetta defines as "il bisogno di confrontarsi con l'Altro per ritrovare un'identità sempre più sfuggente" (47; "the need to interact with the Other to find again an increasingly evasive identity"). Without resorting to a geopolitically defined Otherness, such as the crumbling

⁷ Rebecca Bauman identifies an "Ozpetek touch [...]" in the choral nature of his narratives, which tend to focus on improvised but tightly-knit communities of friends and lovers, rather than on individuals" (392).

⁸ For an analysis of depictions of masculinity in the traditional Italian-style comedy of the '50s and '60s, I refer to Fullwood 56–61 and Günsberg 60–96.

⁹ For an analysis of Ozpetek's "double position at the margins, as an immigrant (from Turkey) and a homosexual," and his representation of the "Other," see Ferrero-Regis (193).

Turkish Empire in Ozpetek's *Hamam*, the mythical American Dream of the early-twentieth-century migratory wave in Crialesse's *Nuovomondo* (2006), or the developing Indian economy in Francesca Archibugi's *Lezioni di volo* (2007), *Mine vaganti* inspires its audience to build a more inclusive identity through a hybrid narrative of displacement, in which the multiple inner journeys of the characters unfold along the oscillation between "the comic" and "humor" in Bergson's and Pirandello's terms.

This comical-humoristic fluctuation is already implied in the enigmatic Italian title, literally referring to a "wandering," and therefore dangerously destabilizing, explosive device, which originates in a line uttered by Stefania Cantone in the first part of the film. Stefania's husband Vincenzo, recovering in the hospital from a heart attack provoked by Antonio's disclosures, is deeply worried about the social impact of his son's revelation. Sitting next to him, Stefania reassures Vincenzo that "Tua madre ha giurato che non parla, ma *quella è una mina vagante*, lo sai. A tutti quanti ho detto che [Antonio] è partito per motivi suoi, nessuno lo sa" ("No one said anything, but *your mother is a loose cannon*;" italics mine). La Nonna's ability to "vagare" ("wander") by distancing herself from the conventional norms of the provincial, patriarchal middle class to which the Cantones belong becomes explicit shortly thereafter. "Normalità, che brutta parola!" ("Normal, what a terrible word!"), she proclaims in order to counter the societal normative vision of health and illness. La Nonna's linguistic and cultural openness, which defines her as a "mina vagante," gradually emerges in a crescendo that reaches its climax in the end sequence.¹⁰

The first laughter scene: "The comic" as "une espèce de brimade sociale" (Bergson)

Thus, the original title, *Mine vaganti*, entails a mimetic and thematic significance, which remains enigmatic through to the end of the film. As Romano Luperini

¹⁰ For example, when Vincenzo suffers a further crisis during his recovery and sobbingly declares that he is "ashamed" for what Antonio has done to him, La Nonna rebukes him with, "Sono io che mi vergogno di te, Vincenzo!" ("I am the one ashamed of you"). Later on, Vincenzo silences Tommaso, who timidly explained to him at the breakfast table that it is not "a fault to be homosexual" by stating, "Questa parola non la voglio più sentire" ("I don't want to hear this word"). "Perché?"—La Nonna bluntly asks—"È una parola come un'altra. È meglio che ti abitui. Sei tu che sei tardo a sei tardo a capire" ("Why? It's a word like the others. You have troubles understanding").

argues for Pirandello's "humoristic" *novelle*, such as "C'è qualcuno che ride" (1934) and "Tu ridi" (1912), titles that are at once mimetic and thematic create in the audience a sense of expectation toward their diegetic referent(s) (108). Expectation emerges as one of the conditions of comedy in the analyses of Theodor Lipps, to whom Pirandello refers in his essay on humor (*L'umorismo* 41, 122, 130–31; *On Humor* 23–24, 108–09, 116–17), and in other contemporary writings about the destabilizing nature of laughter by Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud.¹¹ It is, indeed, a disappointed expectation that culminates in the first laughter scene of *Mine vaganti*, the plot's crucial turning point. Tommaso, back home from Rome, where he lives, has shared his revelatory intentions with his older brother Antonio. At the upcoming dinner with prospective business partners Raffaele Brunetti and his daughter Alba, Tommaso plans to unveil aspects of his identity that do not correspond to the image that his parents have constructed of and imposed on him. Tommaso holds a degree in literature (not in business, as his parents believe); he wants to become a professional writer (not an associate in the family enterprise); and he is homosexual.

As he candidly explains to his brother, Tommaso aims at provoking a reaction that will force him out of the company, so that he can pursue a writing career and be himself. At the beginning of the dinner sequence, the audience's expectations rise when, as a conversation starter, Vincenzo invites his new business partner Raffaele to share a joke rich with sexual innuendos. Through a series of rotating medium close-ups, the camera involves each member of the dinner party. Sitting around an elegantly set oval dinner table, with Vincenzo and La Nonna at opposite ends as the patriarchal and matriarchal principles, the guests appear divided but at the same time united in an eerie tension, cast against a

¹¹ Interestingly, Pirandello never directly quotes Bergson's *Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Alcan 1900), which appeared in Italian as *Il riso. Saggio sul significato del comico*, trans. A. Cervesato and C. Galli (Bari: Laterza, 1916). The only indirect, irrelevant reference appears in the "second, augmented edition" of *L'umorismo* (*L'umorismo* 125). This is even more surprising since Pirandello quotes James Sully's *Essai sur le rire*, published in 1904 (Paris: Alcan), which consolidated several essays that had previously appeared in British and French journals between 1897 and 1902. Similarly to Lipps and Freud, Bergson underlines the role of the *attente* ("expectation") in the genesis of laughter (*Le rire* 65; *Laughter* 80). Completely absent from *L'umorismo* is also Sigmund Freud's *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Leipzig-Wien: Deuticke, 1905) (translated into French only in 1930 and into Italian in 1966). Theodor Lipps's "Komik und Humor. Eine psychologisch-ästhetische Untersuchung" was included in his *Asthetik. Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst* (Hamburg-Leipzig: Voss, 1898).

backdrop populated with props exuding the formal solidity of the bourgeoisie—a framed family portrait, antique china, sparkling wine glasses, a crystal chandelier, a marble fireplace, draped curtains. When Tommaso interrupts the recounting of the vulgar joke with a tinkling sound, suddenly his older brother Antonio stops him with the same gesture and begins narrating in the third person the story of a boy that always did what his parents wanted him to do. The audience and Tommaso assume that Antonio is the self-cast messenger of his younger brother's intended triple revelation.

And yet, Antonio becomes his brother's double in a surprising move that reminds us of the metamorphoses of the double as a literary topos, from Plautus's *Menaechmi* through Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* up to Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal*.¹² The narrative switches from the third to the first person, and Antonio adds details about his homosexual relationship with Michele, a former employee in the family company, whom he had fired for fear of a scandal: "Trent'anni ho buttato a nascondermi per paura di quello che potevate pensare e adesso finalmente ho trovato il coraggio di dirvelo: sono gay" ("I spent thirty years hiding, scared of what you might think. Finally I've got the guts to tell you: I'm gay"). When the camera slides to Tommaso, a non-diegetic musical commentary instills a comic twist in the eerie silence, and Stefania, indeed, starts laughing. Vincenzo at first, and then other dinner guests, joins her contrived hilarity. Stefania's laughter represents a contagious expression of society's self-defense, insofar as it voices her inability to accept the contrast between the changing identity of her son and the rigid (gender) categories of societal conventions—or, in Pirandellian terms, the

¹² While expanding on René Wellek's analysis of the theme of the double in "German and English Romanticism: A Confrontation," Sandro Moraldo proposes a threefold literary and artistic rendition of the double: "Der Doppelgänger ist möglich 1. Als 'identischer' Zwilling, 2. Als magisches Ebenbild und 3. Als Gestalt des anderen Lebens, die jedes beliebige Aussehen haben kann" (13; "The double is possible 1. As identical twin, 2. As magical spitting image, 3. As form of the other life that can take on any kind of features and appearances"). While Moraldo analyzes Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Prinzessin Brambilla* as examples of the first two incarnations of the double, he dwells on Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal* as the narrative rendition of "the other life that can take on any kind of features and appearances" and, therefore, threatens the stability of the individual identity. This disquieting process lies at the core of the humorous doubling of both Pirandello's Mattia Pascal/Adriano Meis and Ozpetek's Tommaso/Antonio.

conflict between “vita” and “forma” (“life” and “form”).¹³ Thus, laughter emerges in this scene as a device of social (self)repression, according to modernist theories of this disquieting phenomenon.

In particular, a reference to Bergson’s analysis provides a useful conceptual tool with which to interpret the multilayered significance of *Mine vaganti*, beyond its reception as “a relatively straightforward seriocomedy that focuses mainly upon interpersonal relationships and internal crises” (Rebecca Bauman 389). Bergson’s seminal essay *Le rire*, published in 1900, along with Theodor Lipps’s *Komik und Humor* (1898) and Sigmund Freud’s *Der Witz* (1905), lay the foundations for Pirandello’s further reflections on the difference between comic and humor. According to Bergson, laughter is a reaction to “*du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant*” (*Le rire* 29; “something mechanical encrusted upon the living,” *Laughter* 39). The juxtaposition of a mechanism with the fluid multiplicity of life creates a rigid disguise, the Pirandellian mask, “qui jure avec la souplesse intérieure de la vie” (*Le rire* 34; “clashing with the inner suppleness of life,” *Laughter* 45), and objectifies the human being. In other words, “*Le rire est un certain geste social, qui souligne et réprime une certaine distraction spéciale des hommes et des événements*” (*Le rire* 66–67; “*This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events,*” *Laughter* 82; italics mine).

The corrective function of laughter, according to Bergson’s analysis, aims at amending alleged “imperfections,” such as, in the film’s context, different (sexual) behaviors, thus humiliating its object(s). “Toujours un peu humiliant pour celui qui en est l’objet, le rire est véritablement *une espèce de brimade sociale*” (*Le rire*

¹³ “La vita è un flusso continuo che noi cerchiamo d’arrestare, di fissare in forme stabili e determinate, dentro e fuori di noi, perché noi già siamo forme fissate, forme che si muovono in mezzo ad altre immobili, e che però possono seguire il flusso della vita, fino a tanto che, irrigidendosi man mano, il movimento, già a poco a poco rallentato, non cessi. Le forme, in cui cerchiamo d’arrestare, di fissare in noi questo flusso continuo, sono i concetti, sono gli ideali a cui vorremmo serbarci coerenti, tutte le finzioni che ci creiamo, e condizioni, lo stato in cui tendiamo a stabilirci. Ma dentro di noi stessi, in ciò che noi chiamiamo anima, e che è la vita in noi, il flusso continua, indistinto, sotto gli argini, oltre i limiti che noi imponiamo, componendoci una coscienza, costruendoci una personalità. In certi momenti tempestosi, investite dal flusso, tutte quelle nostre forme fittizie crollano miseramente; e anche quello che non scorre sotto gli argini e oltre i limiti, ma che si scopre a noi distinto e che noi abbiamo con cura incanalato nei nostri affetti, nei doveri che ci siamo imposti, nelle abitudini che ci siamo tracciate, in certi momenti di piena straripa e sconvolge tutto” (Pirandello, *L’umorismo* 152–53; *On Humor* 137).

103; "Always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is, really and truly, *a kind of social 'ragging,'*" *Laughter* 122; italics mine). The comic laughter that attempts to negate Antonio's self-revealed identity represents a "brimade sociale," a violent, repressive social bullying that suddenly has a dual resonance with the audience, which is aware of the "comedy of errors" that is unfolding. For the imposition of a rigid mechanism upon existence concerns not only Antonio, but also Tommaso. Thus, laughter as a means of self-defense and repression is amplified through the uncanny aspect of the double, in this case Antonio's sexual orientation, which duplicates Tommaso's and deprives the latter of his own uniqueness.¹⁴ When asked why he decided to recount this story as a comedy, despite the sadness of the real-life experience of the friend that inspired it, Ozpetek replied:

Das hängt einfach mit meiner Lebenseinstellung zusammen. Ich versuche auch über tragische Dinge immer ein wenig zu lächeln, was nicht heisst, dass ich sie nicht Ernst nehme. Aber im Kino ist das natürlich immer eine Gratwanderung. Kleine Nuancen entscheiden darüber, ob etwas als tragisch oder komisch wahrgenommen wird. In diesem Film sind manche Szenen zum Beispiel erst durch die Musik komisch geworden. ("Mein Vater" 9)

This has to do with my approach to life. I always try to smile a little bit even about tragic situations, although this does not mean that I do not take them seriously. Yet on the screen this is always a tightrope walk. Light nuances determine whether something is perceived as comic or tragic. In this film, for example, certain scenes have become comic just because of the music.

¹⁴ According to German philosopher Karl Löwith, "das Unheimliche des Doppelgängers ist, dass er einem die Selbstverständlichkeit der eigenen Singularität oder Einzigheit von einem anderen her zum gegenständlich deutlichen Bewusstsein bringt, der 'ersten' Person zeigt, dass sie noch einmal in zweiter Person da ist, und sie so ihrer einmaligen Einzigheit beraubt" (65; "The uncanny of the double is that the latter provides one with objectively clear consciousness of the obviousness of its own singularity or uniqueness deriving from the other. [Thus] it shows the 'first' person that she is there once again as a second person, and, in this way, it robs her of her unique singularity").

This is precisely the case in the dinner scene that determines a decisive turning point in the narrative. As Champagne notes, “music is a crucial element of Ozpetek’s films” (191). In this case, the “simple, mischievous slow waltz [...]” undercuts “the melodrama of a scene, deploying the orchestration in a characteristically comedic manner, as a counterpoint to the visual images and narrative” (191). This musical choice defines the scene as comic, and laughter ensues as a device of social control that attempts to suppress “life” under the rigidity of “form.” Yet Antonio’s unexpected switch from the third-person narrative, which the audience interpreted initially as an allusion to Tommaso, to a self-referential first person seems to defeat its purpose. The hilarious reaction that his first attempt triggers prompts Antonio to add a series of synonymous definitions of his identity that carry different sociolinguistic connotations: “Mi fa piacere che ridete. Non avrei mai immaginato. Comunque, avete capito bene? Sono gay, omosessuale, finocchio, frocio, ricchione...” (“I’m pleased you’re laughing. I didn’t expect that. Anyway, have you understood? I’m gay, homosexual, queer, faggot, bent”). A somber, subdued, non-diegetic musical accompaniment underscores the failed attempt to repress life under the mask of societal conventions when Antonio voices a collective concern that the increasingly faster rotating camera underlines visually: “Cosa diranno domani in città, cosa dirai quando t’incontreranno per strada?” (“What will they say tomorrow in town... What will you say when you meet them in the streets?”). Desperately seeking to mimic his role as *pater familias*, Vincenzo then demands that Antonio leave the house, the family company, and all the status symbols of his hereditary role in a crescendo that makes him stand up and go closer to a seated Antonio. But Vincenzo’s low-angle shot lasts only a fleeting second.

Vincenzo’s struggling patriarchal figure exerts his last power over his wife by instructing her to go after Antonio, who is now in his room, to summon him to a private conversation after dinner. Stefania, though, will not carry out her husband’s mandate. Once in the hallway, she remains silent, torn between her subjugated spousal role and her tacit admiration for her courageous (gay) son, as an emphatic contrast between a dark left and a light right side of her face in medium close-up underscores. A series of shot-reverse-shots alternates between a motionless Stefania and a dynamic Antonio, portrayed while packing in a protracted long take. The *mise en scène*, with a dancing bronze sculpture on a pedestal next to a

symbolic open door framing Antonio's impending departure,¹⁵ underscores the liberating significance of Antonio's disclosure. Stefania does not convey her husband's message, thus disentangling herself from a legacy of repression and oppression. When Stefania returns to the table following Antonio's departure, Luciana, her sister-in-law, breaks the uneasy silence with a statistical comment about half of the Italian population being bisexual. Salvatore, Vincenzo's Neapolitan son-in-law, shows his support by providing a broader perspective: "Nella vita ci stanno disgrazie più grandi: le malattie, la fame, le carestie, la morte..." ("There are worse things in life: illness, hunger, famine, death..."). Yet Salvatore miserably fails to comfort Vincenzo. In an oxymoronic gesture, Vincenzo stands up to emphasize the imperative mood of his upcoming scream, "Non chiamarmi papà!!!" ("Don't call me dad!!!"), but his heart fails him. Vincenzo collapses and grasps the tablecloth, thus dragging to the floor the precious dinnerware and, metonymically, the fragile bourgeois respectability of the *pater familias*. A prolonged eye-matching shot of the precipitating table setting underscores the horizontal dimension of life literally taking over the vertical dimension of patriarchal power epitomized by Vincenzo's rise and fall. Notably, the potentially tragic heart attack scene turns into comedy through the non-diegetic intervention of folksy tarantella music, in accordance with Ozpetek's musical strategy. This central sequence stands for several others in which the musical soundtrack defines the comic key of *Mine vaganti's* narrative of displacement.

The "humoristic" role of music

As Peter Larsen points out in his detailed analysis of non-diegetic music's formal functions in film's narrative, "the task of film music is to transform a stream of fragmentary, visual and auditive information into a cohesive whole, into a perceptual *Gestalt*" (217) that underscores the interpretative role of the audience. More specifically, non-diegetic music can "indicate to the spectator how a particular scene is to be understood and experienced" (212). In the case of *Mine vaganti's* crucial dinner scene, the apparent dissonance between the tragic consequences of Antonio's coming out and the comic key of the non-diegetic musical accompaniment invites the viewer to reflect upon the ethical implications

¹⁵ The bronze sculpture lingering at the center of the frame is reminiscent of the iconic *Diskobolus* of Myron (circa 460–450 BCE), captured while winding on his torso in the static fragment of time prior to the release of his disc and his potential, as in Antonio's case.

of (musical) aesthetic choices. A reference to the role that Pirandello advocates for music in cinema can help us appreciate the significance of music in defining the aesthetic of *Mine vaganti* in relation to the transgressive power of humor.

Mesmerized by the dynamism of the New World, which so fittingly expresses the mechanical and metaphorical essence of cinema, Pirandello entertains a tormented yet indispensable relationship with the Seventh Art of modernity.¹⁶ Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to defend the superiority of theater over cinema on several occasions, particularly in a 1929 article entitled “Se il film parlante abolirà il teatro” (“If the Talkies Will Abolish the Theater”).¹⁷ The playwright criticizes contemporary cinematography for imitating literature through the integration of spoken dialogues in the “film parlante o film sonoro” (*Scritti sul teatro* 1031; “talking or sound film”).¹⁸ To prevent cinema from destroying itself by losing the intrinsic “internazionalità” of its purely visual language, Pirandello advocates a deeper synergy between film and music: “*Cinematografia, ecco il nome della vera rivoluzione: linguaggio visibile della musica*” (*Scritti sul teatro* 1035–36; “*Cinematography, this is the name of the true revolution: the visible language of music*”; italics mine).¹⁹

¹⁶ Film remained Pirandello’s “musa inquietante” (Genovese 166), from the first nucleus of *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* in 1903 to the forty-nine unrealized film projects of *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* through to the controversial script for Walter Ruttmann’s 1933 *Acciaio* (Càllari 17, 78–80).

¹⁷ According to Pirandello, “con la parola impressa meccanicamente nel film la cinematografia, che è muta espressione di immagini e linguaggio di apparenze, viene a distruggere irreparabilmente sé stessa per diventare appunto una copia fotografata e meccanica del teatro: una copia per forza cattiva, perché ogni illusione di realtà sarà perduta” (*Scritti sul teatro* 1032; “When words are mechanically juxtaposed to a film, cinematography, which is the mute expression of images and silent language of appearances, ends up irreparably destroying itself and becoming, indeed, a photographic, mechanical copy of the theater: a necessarily bad copy, because every illusion of reality has been lost”).

¹⁸ Manuela Gieri has convincingly analyzed Pirandello’s writings on the film-theater relationship from the perspective of Benjamin’s concept of *Aura* and the impact of the mechanical reproduction of the living, speaking, moving body through cinema on the condition of the modern subject (38–59).

¹⁹ Nino Genovese points out that, paradoxically, the first sound film with words and songs of Italian cinema history was *La canzone dell’amore*, directed by Gennaro Righelli in 1930, inspired by one of Pirandello’s short stories, entitled “In silenzio” (167).

The second laughter scene: "Humor" as "il sentimento del contrario" (Pirandello)

The powerful Pirandellian idea of the "linguaggio visibile della musica" offers us a key to reading Ozpetek's narrative of displacement in *Mine vaganti* as it wanders from the comic to humor in the second scene centered on laughter.²⁰ This crucial sequence follows a flashback belonging to La Nonna's subplot, which has accompanied us since the opening sequence of the film.

Over the course of a late-night conversation with Tommaso, La Nonna begins to reminisce about the joy she shared with Nicola, her brother-in-law and "amore impossibile," while working together in the then-artisanal pasta factory. An alternate editing pattern that interweaves the journeys of grandmother and grandson through the notes of a harmonica underlines the allusive meaning of the sailboat painting in the background, which frames La Nonna's head. The birds' chirping in the idyllic Salento countryside the day of La Nonna's wedding to Nicola's brother transmutes into the abrupt, mechanical noise of an opening door that becomes the sound bridge connecting the present narrative with past memories.

Young Nicola, shot at a low angle to underscore the strength this gesture required, opens the door of the ancient *tuffo* dwelling where the young bride, who is promised to his brother, silently threatened to take her life with a pistol in the first flashback scene of the movie.²¹ Only a nostalgic music of remembrance accompanies this and all of the flashback sequences, infusing the visual force of the warm sepia tones, the wide lens views of the olive groves of the Salento region, and the extreme close-ups of the two unhappy lovers with the power of the "cinemelografia" invoked by Pirandello.

While the camera rests on a close-up of the bride, intent on finding the inner strength to join her groom for the wedding ceremony, an unlikely male

²⁰ Pirandello's vision of cinema is very nuanced and never completely shared the theoretical approach of the early-twenties' French avant-garde, followed by Germain Dulac, Marcel Duchamp, and Fernand Léger. Pirandello "had a far-seeing concept of cinema as well as of all other artistic expressions, and thus he expected film form to undergo a total renovation that would account for and make use of all the techniques available from the other arts in a synthesized, uniquely *cinematic* structure" (Gieri 52).

²¹ See Marrese 33 about the role that the particularly warm light of Lecce's *tuffo* stone, called "mazzaro," plays in *Mine vaganti*.

laughter builds a sound bridge to the following sequence. Vincenzo, the son of that young and conflicted bride-to-be, is crossing the piazza with his son Tommaso in the narrative's present. For the first time in public after his heart attack (and his older son's revelations), Vincenzo invites Tommaso for an aperitif at an elegant outdoor café with the main goal of tacitly re-establishing the appearances of "normality" and regaining his family social clout in town, which he deems to have been compromised through Antonio's coming out. While interspersing his verbal exchanges in the piazza with mechanical laughs, Vincenzo elicits a perplexed question from his son: "Papà, ma che ridi?" ("Dad, what are you laughing about?"). A series of increasingly faster shot-reverse-shots reveals the curious, malicious gaze of the café guests targeting the Cantones. Vincenzo is shown in close-up at the center of the frame between a man and a woman sitting at the next table, who gradually focus their attention on him and share his laughter. Tommaso, in medium close-up, is framed by several other seated guests. While their gaze shifts to Vincenzo, they gradually echo his laughter. In an aural and visual crescendo, Vincenzo's and everyone else's laughter becomes louder, the alternate editing pace becomes faster, and the anonymous crowd of onlookers is fragmented in swift close-ups of grotesque masks. Vincenzo continues to laugh in an increasingly desperate outburst, punctuated with a whispering, "Lo sanno... lo sanno tutti" ("Everyone knows..."). His cramped facial expression mixes laughter and tears while the camera zooms in on Tommaso, whose serious, calm expression prompts the audience's reflection about the meaning of humor in *Mine vaganti*. In a key passage of *L'umorismo*, Pirandello articulates the role of reflection in the humoristic artwork as follows:

nella concezione di ogni opera umoristica, la riflessione non si nasconde, non resta invisibile, non resta cioè quasi una forma del sentimento, quasi uno specchio in cui il sentimento si rimira; ma gli si pone innanzi, da giudice; lo analizza, spassionandosene; ne scompone l'immagine; da questa analisi però, da questa scomposizione, un altro sentimento sorge o spira... *il sentimento del contrario*. (127)

during the conception of all works of humor, reflection is not hidden, it does not remain invisible: it is not, that is, almost a form of feeling or almost a mirror in which feeling contemplates itself; rather, it places itself squarely before the feeling, in a judging attitude, and,

detaching itself from it, analyzes it and disassembles its imagery; from this analysis and decomposition, however, there arises or emerges a new feeling... *the feeling of the opposite*. (*On Humor* 113)

This second, crucial laughter scene of *Mine vaganti* is placed at the center of the narrative's temporal and geographical coordinates, in the town piazza and between the evoked past of La Nonna's subplot and the present of the Cantone family's plot. The aural and visual contrast between Tommaso's meditative expression and Vincenzo's mechanical laughter, between the persistence of Tommaso's subjectivity and the inconsistency of Vincenzo's mask, generates the humoristic reflection that Pirandello describes.

In the first laughter scene, the dinner table sequence previously analyzed, the musical commentary activates the comic as "l'avvertimento del contrario" (*L'umorismo* 127; "the perception of the opposite," *On Humor* 113). This definition implies the perception of a contrast between "form" and "life," being and becoming, between the closeness of societal conventions and the openness of (gender) identities, between the rigidity of conventional mechanisms and the fluidity of existence, which a comic laughter seeks to control, according to Bergson. In the second laughter scene in the piazza, the comic evolves into Pirandellian humor through the "sentimento del contrario."²² Through this development from the comic into humor, *Mine vaganti* represents a collective novel of formation whose narrative engine is the reflexive approach to life and its inherent diversity, which La Nonna incarnates and gradually instills in her family. The lies that nurture Vincenzo's painful laughter belong to the very subject of humor in Pirandello's analysis: "Tutte le finzioni dell'anima, tutte le creazioni del sentimento vedremo esser materia dell'umorismo, vedremo cioè la riflessione diventar come un demonietto che smonta il congegno d'ogni immagine, d'ogni fantasma messo su dal sentimento" (*L'umorismo* 138–39; "We shall see that all fictions of the spirit,

²² As is the case with Cervantes's Don Quijote, evoked by Pirandello in almost Bakhtinian, "carnavalesque" terms, "noi vorremmo ridere di tutto quanto c'è di comico nella rappresentazione di questo povero alienato che maschera della sua follia se stesso e gli altri e tutte le cose; vorremmo ridere, ma il riso non ci viene alle labbra schietto e facile; sentiamo che qualcosa ce lo turba e ce l'ostacola; è un senso di commiserazione, di pena" (*L'umorismo* 129; "We have the urge to laugh at all that is comic in the artistic characterization of this poor deranged man who involves himself and everybody and everything in the disguise of his madness; we feel like laughing but the laughter that comes to our lips is not natural and easy; we sense that something troubles and hampers it, and this something is a feeling of pity, of sorrow," *On Humor* 115).

all the creations of feeling are the basic material of humor; that is, we shall see that reflection becomes something resembling a diabolical imp that takes apart the mechanism of each image, of each phantasm produced by the emotions," *On Humor* 124–25). The systematic deconstruction of masks implemented by the "macchinetta infernale" that is logical reasoning (*L'umorismo* 154; "a certain devilish little machine," *On Humor* 139) gives way to a sense of "sym-path-y," a compassion that shares the pain of "un buco nel cielo di carta" (*Il fu Mattia Pascal* 141; "a hole torn in a paper sky," *The Late Mattia Pascal* 146) of the illusory unity of the modern subject.²³

The Pirandellian analysis of humor as "sentimento del contrario" offers a key to understanding the meaning of the disquieting duplication of Tommaso's intended coming out into Antonio's implemented coming out. As Elio Gioanola points out, the theme of the double is inherent to modernist theories of humor, which Pirandello also defines as a "fenomeno di sdoppiamento nell'atto della concezione [dell'opera d'arte]" (*L'umorismo* 134; "a phenomenon of doubling in the act of artistic conception," *On Humor* 120). Ozpetek, we could say, incarnates the (cinematic) humorist described by Pirandello: "Ogni sentimento, ogni pensiero, ogni moto che sorga nell'umorista si sdoppia subito nel suo contrario" (*L'umorismo* 139; "Every feeling, every thought, or every impulse that arises in the humorist immediately splits into its contrary," *On Humor* 125). As is the case in the morphing relationship between Mattia Pascal and his double, Adriano Meis of *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904), to whom Pirandello dedicated *L'umorismo*,²⁴ Tommaso and Antonio become the complementary alter egos of each other.

Pirandellian humor furthermore helps us understand the role that La Nonna plays in *Mine vaganti*.²⁵ La Nonna is the only member of the Cantone family able to see through and reflect upon masks, thus recognizing the different and intertwined identities of Tommaso and Antonio. La Nonna in *Mine vaganti* is the character that incarnates "the constant movement between flux and consistency" (181), between "life" and "form." By epitomizing the Diotima Group's vision of

²³ For an analysis of the famous parable about the ontological fissure of modernity in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1908), see Harrison 190–93.

²⁴ The first edition of the essay (Lanciano: Carabba, 1908) included the following dedication: "Alla buon'anima / di / Mattia Pascal / bibliotecario."

²⁵ According to Daniela Bini, Pirandello "places woman in a privileged space" of humoristic reflection, as the female characters of the "theater in the theater" trilogy—such as Delia in *Ciascuno a suo modo* (1924)—indicate (165).

sexual difference as an ability to communicate that denies the binary hierarchies of the male logos,²⁶ La Nonna deconstructs the male logic of language and enacts and inspires in her family different channels of communication and expression, such as silence.

For example, in a sequence that portrays the family reunited around the breakfast table in the garden, La Nonna does not hesitate to side with Tommaso, who seeks to convince his father that he should welcome back Antonio because he is the same person he used to be prior to his coming out. "Ragioni come se fosse colpa sua che è omosessuale" ("You talk as if it were his fault to be homosexual"), Tommaso calmly notes, but Vincenzo replies with anger, "Questa parola non la voglio più sentire" ("I don't want to hear this word!"). "È una parola come un'altra," La Nonna bluntly objects, "Sei tu che sei tardo a capire" ("Why? It's a word like the others. You have troubles understanding"). Following up on La Nonna's discourse on linguistic and existential tolerance, Zia Luciana remarks, "È più faticoso stare zitti che dire quello che si pensa" ("It's more difficult to stay silent than saying what one thinks").

This different channel of communication and expression, which is inherent in the non-binary logic of sexual difference according to the feminist analysis of the Diotima Group (26), nurtures not only Zia Luciana's comments about the significance of silence, but also the revealing conversation between Tommaso and his sister, Elena, in the sequence that immediately follows. Elena is finally working in the family company after Tommaso has enabled her to use her managerial abilities professionally. Now colleagues who share business responsibilities (and white smocks), brother and sister engage in a brief exchange that articulates La Nonna's linguistic and existential legacy:

Tommaso: "Elena"

Elena: "Sì"

Tommaso: "Sono gay, omosessuale" ("I'm gay, homosexual")

Elena: "L'avevo capito" ("Yes, I already knew")

Elena's spontaneous, understanding reaction includes, as she underlines, reflection: "Ad Antonio piacciono gli uomini, a te pure... Io ci ho riflettuto se mi piacciono le donne... però, no... non mi piacciono... io non sono gay" ("Antonio likes men, you do too... I even wondered if I liked women, but... I don't... I'm not gay").

²⁶ Cavarero 74–77; Cixous and Clément 63–130; Kristeva 164–66.

While Elena openly talks to her brother, the prop in the background underlines the expressive significance of the *mise en scène*. A framed black and white picture of Istanbul's iconic Greek orthodox basilica of Hagia Sophia highlights the wisdom of acceptance that Elena epitomizes in this scene. Dedicated, as its name suggests, to the Wisdom of God, the Logos, that is the second person of the Trinity according to Greek orthodox theology, Hagia Sophia here represents Istanbul and, therefore, Ozpetek's roots in a patriarchal culture. And yet, in the foreground of the black and white Hagia Sophia picture, a sailboat with colorful stripes crossing the Bosphorus shares the frame with Elena's close-up when she calls Tommaso back to posit the only question that matters: "Tommaso, sei felice?" ("Are you happy?"). The camera lingers on Tommaso and, after a long pause, he utters, with an enigmatic smile, "Mah...." The sailboat, a detail of the *mise en scène* that we already encountered during a key conversation between La Nonna and Tommaso, returns here to underscore, through another female character, the importance of following everyone's own path to happiness on a journey of maturation that intertwines different aspects of everyone's identity and culture.

Ozpetek's "humoristic" aesthetics

Ozpetek explains his refusal to define *Mine vaganti* a "Schwulenfilm" ("gay film"): "Ich vermische in meinen Filmen immer sehr viel miteinander—zwei Länder, zwei Arten der Sexualität, zwei Religionen—und versuche, einen transversalen Blick auf die Dinge zu bekommen. Das schafft oftmals Schwierigkeiten, weil die Leute einen nicht in einem bestimmten Rahmen plazieren können" (9; "I always mix together a lot of elements in my movies—two countries, two sexual orientations, two religions—and I try to reach a transversal gaze on things. This can often cause difficulties because people aren't able to use labels to frame one of my films"). The metaphorical "frame" to which the director alludes reminds us of Pirandello's "form," which channels "life" and often paralyzes it (*L'umorismo* 151). It is cinematography, as the art of "motion picture," that offers Ozpetek the way to forge a filmic aesthetics that fuses movement and consistency through *mise en scène* and discontinuity editing. When asked whether his film would have looked different if it were set in Turkey, Ozpetek replies: "Eigentlich spielt es keine Rolle, ob die Geschichte in Istanbul, Dallas, Rom oder wie hier in Lecce spielt. Wichtig ist, wie man sie erzählt" (9; "Actually, it doesn't matter whether a story plays out in Istanbul, Dallas, Rome, or in Lecce. What matters is how we tell it").

In *Mine vaganti*, this "how" is defined by an editing style that intertwines "vita" and "forma," movement and consistency, silence and word, past and present. This specific feature of Ozpetek's authorial signature characterizes in particular the final sequences, in which La Nonna's character emerges as the catalyst of the collective novel of formation that defines the Cantone family's journey. Once again reunited at the breakfast table in the garden terrace, the Cantones experience the fall of another Schopenhauerian veil of appearance and, at the same time, continue their inclusive process of maturation, underlined by the circular steady-cam movement. Tommaso explains to his dismayed parents that: "Questo voglio fare nella mia vita, voglio scrivere" ("This is what I want to do with my life: write"). For only when he writes, his "lived experience," what German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey defined as *Erlebnis*,²⁷ becomes "real," that is, imbued with an inner aesthetic that links perception, understanding, and expression.²⁸ Despite his attempts to establish a meaningful relationship with the work in the pasta factory through physical and psychological *Erlebnis*, Tommaso recognizes that "Io ci ho provato... Ma non m'importa, non sento niente" ("I've tried... But I don't feel a thing").²⁹ La Nonna, the inhabitant of a "privileged space" (Bini 181) between "vita" and "forma," leaves the breakfast table.

After cross-cutting to a reminiscence of the past, when the young bride braces to meet her designated groom accompanied by her true love, Nicola, the camera suddenly focuses on an extreme close-up of La Nonna's eyes reflected in one of the many parts of a composite mirror in her room. While she carefully

²⁷ In his 1910 work *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (*The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*), which shaped the development of hermeneutics and phenomenology, Dilthey analyzes the *Erlebnis* as the quintessential tool of historical narration, in which lived experience, understanding, and expression are inextricably intertwined.

²⁸ "Di notte, mentre voi dormite qua dentro, sapete che faccio? Scrivo. Le cose che vedo, quelle che penso, quelle che voglio dire diventano vere. Riesco a dire quello che sento, come io nella vita a voce non riesco a fare. Sì, perché io non so parlare..." ("At night, while you're sleeping, you know what I do? I write the things I see, that I think, what I want to say... It all becomes real. I can express what I feel. I can't do it with spoken words. I'm not good at talking...").

²⁹ When, in a late night conversation with La Nonna, Tommaso had replied that he would follow her example by touching the pasta in the factory, she rebuked him with, "No, non la toccare, Tommaso. Se uno fa sempre quello che gli chiedono gli altri, non vale la pena di vivere..." ("No, don't touch it, Tommaso. If one always does what others ask him to do, life is not worth living").

applies makeup to her eyes and lips, a circular steady-cam slides from one mirror panel to the other, thus creating the multifaceted, fragmented identity of the *persona* and her *personaggi*. During La Nonna's own liberating journey, the camera underlines the beauty of pleasure when it lingers on the pastries that rest on the mirror counter, in an intertextual reference to their "poietic" meaning, which was already at the center of *La finestra di fronte*.³⁰ Through silence, La Nonna expresses in this scene, accompanied by a recurring nostalgic harmonica leitmotiv, the significance of humor as "sentimento del contrario," which Pirandello explained with the example of a "vecchia signora [...] goffamente imbellettata" (*L'umorismo* 127; "an old lady [...] all dolled-up," *On Humor* 113). Despite the differences between the two "vecchie signore," in both cases the makeup creates a mask that articulates the language of desire and its liberating power. La Nonna's self-chosen and applied masquerade underlines the beauty of pleasure—in this case, the sweet pleasure of desserts that she was not allowed to eat because of her diabetes. — La Nonna's suicidal death, which concludes this sequence, mimics the quintessential mask that humoristic reflection decomposes and turns into its opposite in the ensuing funeral procession.

In a voice-over monologue, La Nonna accompanies her own last journey: "Chissà se questi luoghi avranno memoria di me. Se le statue, le facciate delle case si ricorderanno il mio nome" ("I wonder if these places will remember me? Will the statues and the church facades remember my name?"). Interestingly, Tommaso's voice-over alternates with this narration, creating a sense of wandering identities and legacies, when we hear, "voglio camminare un'ultima volta per queste strade che mi hanno accolto tanti anni fa quando tutti mi chiamavano 'La Toscana'" ("I want to walk one last time through the streets that welcomed me years ago when everyone called me 'The Tuscan Girl'..."). The meaning of this at first confusing oscillation between La Nonna's and her grandson's off-screen voices emerges when La Nonna's voice articulates her spiritual testament for all members of the family—a testament of reciprocal acceptance, respect, and freedom, which culminates in her words for Tommaso:

Scrivi di noi, la nostra storia, la nostra terra, la nostra famiglia, quello che abbiamo fatto di buono e soprattutto quello che abbiamo fatto sbagliato. Quello che non siamo riusciti a fare perché eravamo troppo

³⁰ For a symbolic interpretation of pastries and baking in Ozpetek's *La finestra di fronte*, see Marcus 151–52.

piccoli per la vita che è così grande. *La mina vagante se n'è andata*. Così mi chiamavate pensando che non vi sentissi, *ma le mine vaganti servono a portare disordine*, a prendere le cose e metterle in posti dove nessuno voleva farcele stare, a scombicare tutto, a cambiare i piani...

Write about us, our history, our land, our family. What we did right, and most importantly what we did wrong. What we didn't manage to do because we were too small for life, which is so vast. *The loose cannon is gone*. That's what you called me thinking I couldn't hear you, but *loose cannons are used to create disorder*, to put things in places where no one wants them to be, to disturb everything and upset plans... (italics mine)

Thus, in a circularity that reflects at the narrative level the rotatory nature of the steady-cam in several key scenes, the entire film emerges as the visual representation of both Tommaso's writing and the empowering legacy of the female, alternative logos incarnated by La Nonna. The "mina vagante" has succeeded in bringing disorder, that is, "life," into the orderly rigidity of societal "form" during the procession. More specifically, the disorder invoked by the "mina vagante" brings together the members of the Cantone family. Stefania, receptive to her deceased mother-in-law's words, turns towards Antonio, back in town to accompany his Nonna's casket, and then goes against the flow of the procession, leaves her role-compliant position next to her husband in the first row, and joins the second row between Antonio and Tommaso with a smile. Vincenzo, in turn, looks back to the three of them with a promising gaze of understanding. The wandering behavior of La Nonna, the "mina vagante," has ignited a journey of maturation that articulates different paths for different family members. Stefania's and Vincenzo's gestures and facial expressions hint at a new, inclusive openness and indicate that they have absorbed the meaning of La Nonna's legacy.

At this point, and for the first time in the narrative, the young bride and her brother-in-law, Nicola, suddenly enter the frame from the left and pass the procession. Mirroring the inclusiveness of the female logic and the language of desire at the center of La Nonna's subplot, Ozpetek and Marone's editing strategy defeats the linear succession of time and intertwines past and present, form and life, word and silence. A low-angle shot follows the young bride who, after a silent farewell to Nicola, climbs a staircase leading to her groom on the other side of

an iron gate. “Non siate tristi per me,” Tommaso’s voice-over playing La Nonna’s role continues, “quando non sentite la mia voce in casa. La *vita* non è mai nelle nostre *stanze*.³¹ Moriamo, e poi torniamo, come tutto” (“Don’t be sad when you don’t hear my voice any longer in the home. *Life* is never in our *rooms*. We die and then we come back, like all things”; italics mine). With these last off-screen words, in which La Nonna’s silence and Tommaso’s writing creatively coincide, co-scriptwriters Ozpetek and Cotroneo explicitly render the Pirandellian duality between “vita” and “forma” that is humor’s point of departure.

The *mina vagante*, the wandering metaphor epitomized by the female protagonist of the film, expresses this constant tension between flux and consistency, between “vita” and “stanze.” La Nonna’s lexical choice reminds us of Hinkfuss’s statement in Pirandello’s *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*: “La vita deve obbedire a due necessità che per essere opposte tra loro non le consentono né di consistere durevolmente né di muoversi sempre... *E la vita bisogna che consista e si muova*” (*Maschere* 1:209; “Life must obey two principles that, for being in opposition to each other, do not consent either to persist forever or to move constantly... And life must persist and move”; trans. in Bini 165). Thus, “stanze” (rooms), etymologically related to the ontological permanence and fixity implied by the verb “consistere” (to persist, to consist [of]), alludes not only to the architectural form that structures and limits life within the house, but also to the literary “form” of the stanza that structures poetic creativity.

Mine vaganti’s ethics of aesthetics

The ontological reflection inherent in the humoristic nature of *Mine vaganti* forges an aesthetics between “life” and “form” that editing and soundtrack choices underline, particularly in the conclusive flashback about La Nonna’s wedding.

Once the bride and groom open the dances in the festive gathering in the garden, the camera pans smoothly among the guests sitting around until Nicola offers his arm to a young Zia Luciana, inviting her to dance. We follow the dancing couple wandering among other improbable pairs, who equally defeat the linear time sequence. For example, Stefania, La Nonna’s daughter-in-law in the present of the narrative, is dancing with one of her son Tommaso’s gay friends. The

³¹ While I followed the English subtitles for all the quotations from the film, I used my own translation for this sentence, “La vita non è mai nelle nostre stanze,” which was subtitled as, “You must go out and enjoy your lives.”

living disorder that the *mina vagante*'s voice-over explained in relation to "le cose" applies to human beings. The caricaturally heterosexual Salvatore, the Cantones' son-in-law, is dancing with Tommaso's gay friend. Marco, Tommaso's partner, and Alba, the Cantones' new business associate, are also dancing together, and wondering about Tommaso's feelings, as a quick series of shot-reverse-shots indicate. Most importantly, perhaps, Antonio and his father Vincenzo walk around together and exchange a smile.

The music that interweaves gazes of the past with hopes for a future of acceptance and inclusiveness is at the same time diegetic and non-diegetic. While the camera repeatedly shows musicians playing the instruments whose sound leads the characters' dance—for example tambourine, classical guitar, and harmonica—the audience also hears the voices of Turkish pop singers Sezen Aksu and Arto Tunçboyacıyan. The lively, joyous, and, at the same time, nostalgic song they perform is aptly entitled "Kutlama" ("Celebrating"). The open ending of *Mine vaganti* is, indeed, celebrating not only the beginning of a new, more open and inclusive family and community, but also the creative power of the (cinematic) image that incarnates Pirandello's idea of "cinemelografia": "Materia nella origine, spirito nella sua vita interiore, unisce il mondo e il pensiero" (*Saggi* 1266; "Matter in its origin, spirit in its interior life, the image unites the world and the thought").³²

This image, capable of uniting "il mondo e il pensiero," is what ties together past and present, tradition and innovation, cultural roots and acquired identities in Özpetek's authorial signature. Through circular camera work, non-diegetic sound, and discontinuity editing, *Mine vaganti* represents an open-ended journey of maturation of multiple (gender) identities that develop a more inclusive and accepting family and society.

³² "L'immaginazione ci mostra la corrispondenza incessante della natura e del pensiero, il movimento perpetuo dall'una all'altro, e pare che risolva, senza che noi ce ne accorgiamo, il problema insolubile dello spirito e del corpo. Lo spirito si fa corpo, il corpo si fa spirito. L'immagine è ancora la sensazione, e di già se ne dilegua: materia nella origine, spirito nella sua vita interiore, unisce il mondo e il pensiero" (*Saggi* 1266; "Imagination shows the constant correspondence of nature and thought, the perpetual movement from one to the other, and seems to solve, without us realizing it, the unsolvable problem of spirit and body. The spirit becomes the body, the body becomes the spirit. An image is still a perception, and yet it is already vanishing. Matter in its origin, spirit in its interior life, the image unites the world and the thought").

In conclusion, the exploration of *Mine vaganti*'s narrative mode, wandering from Bergson's "comic" to Pirandello's "humor," has highlighted the ethical significance of Ozpetek's aesthetics. While articulating this comic-humoristic reflection, *Mine vaganti* proposes an "etica dell'estetica" (Zagarrio 95). For Ozpetek's cinematic aesthetics capitalizes on the hybridization of past and present and on narratives of displacement in order to evoke an ethical vision of community in which identities can creatively and constructively coexist. The cinematic aesthetics of humor in *Mine vaganti* emerges from the "art of 'liquid life'" as Zygmunt Bauman delineates it: "[A]cceptance of disorientation, immunity to vertigo and adaptation to a state of dizziness, tolerance for an absence of itinerary and direction, and for an indefinite duration of travel" (4). *Mine vaganti*'s humoristic narrative, through its cinematography and "cinemelography," articulates a twenty-first century response to Pirandello's call for a "cinema [che...] più facilmente, più completamente di qualsiasi altro mezzo d'espressione artistica possa darci la visione del pensiero" ("a cinema [that...] more easily, more completely than any other means of artistic expression could make thought visible"; trans. mine).³³ A cinema, and a thought, that aims at shaping a community of openness and inclusiveness.

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³³ Interview released in Paris, 1924, quoted in Cällari 24.

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