be greater" (77). Indeed, if excellent criticism can be described in terms of its turbulent distance, rather than alleged proximity, to the writer's work, then *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi* is a companion of the finest sort: conversational, but not intrusive, and one whose intelligence aims to enhance rather than diminish the singularity of its subject.

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Beatrice Barbato. *Sul palco c'è l'autore. Scrivere, filmare, interpretare: Carmelo Bene, Gianni Celati, Ascanio Celestini, Vincenzo Cerami, Roberto De Simone, Mario Martone*. Louvain: UCL Presses Iniversitaires de Louvain, 2006. Pp. 280, b/w ill. ISBN 2-87463-031-4. n.p.

Barbato's topical book looks at an emerging trend in the arts. Its focus on the six Italian artists cited in the title aims at foregrounding *la centralità dell'autore* and the scope of their work in a world overwhelmed by corporate information and commodified news. The urgency of individual artists to stand out of the 'cultural marginality' and into the spotlight where their voices re-appropriate ancestral stories, topically re-glued into the present time, finds new energy in a *mise-en-scène* inhabited by the author himself in all of his human and intellectual complexity. Barbato speaks of a rebirth of the Italian cultural scene, but she may well be intended as referring by extension to a larger community reaching the periphery of Europe or elsewhere and to a regeneration of *loci* and methods in which each community finds renewed forms of *mimesis* with its own remote (or more recent) past. To the century-old discourse on the relationship between written texts and images Barbato offers an *ex-novo* framework of experiences drawn from a contemporary context. She offers several such examples throughout the book: "[R]agiona intorno a degli esempi, in una radicata convinzione della difficoltà oggi a teorizzare e categorizzare i passaggi tra letteratura e arti visive[...] (13).

In the first part of her book she speaks of Carmelo Bene's embodiment of Amleto throughout his artistic career. Barbato argues that Bene registers an anti-romantic vein of the classic tale and its metaphysic meditations. He does so in order to renew the 'mask' and bring on the stage a topical enactment. He regenerates plot, language, and acting with a nuclear identification of the character's praxis with his own persona. The same operation occurs when adopting the French language as stock verses, which Carmelo Bene deploys both as cultural 'de-composers' and 'fertilizers' of an otherwise monolithic culture. In Barbato's view such representation by Bene finds *humus* in the re-visitation and recycling of the historical text and personage as an interpretative process by an author who constantly recreates himself in *mimesis* to the other.

In several chapters of part two, Barbato deals with the work of Mario Martone and Roberto De Simone. Particularly, she disserts on Martone's films such as *Caravaggio l'ultimo tempo* and *Teatro di Guerra*. In the first instance Barbato focus-

es on the paradigmatic operation of comparing Caravaggio's paintings in the Counter Reformation political context in which it was produced with contemporary images of a beloved and suffering city of Naples. The mythological contours of Caravaggio's work are juxtaposed to the inquisitive gaze of Martone's camera of a cynical and yet desperately human Naples. Barbato shows how simple details captured in the physicality of the city's corners re-propose via a filmic experience Caravaggio's Naples, the artist's creative struggles, his solitude, his demise, while depicting the current state of the city, its ghosts, its tragedies, along with its substrate vitality. In a similar way *Teatro di Guerra* is presented as a portrait of a collective current struggle, that of the Balkans. Here, too, the reconstruction of the historical siege of Thebes serves the purpose of narrating and 'translating' the current war and siege of Sarajevo. Barbato points out that Martone's artistry lies not in picking a physical location –the cities of Thebes, Sarajevo, Naples– but rather a moral centre, the spotlight of emotional relevance in the life of the artist, as well as of the audience and spectator, of a work whose aim is to aid in decoding the core of an interior conflict.

In the chapters in the third part, Barbato speaks of art-video and autobiographical trends and asks the fundamental question: to which space does the body of the artist belong? This too is a decade-old core question, which can be rephrased as: how can the artist be simultaneously in front and behind the camera at the same time? How can he or she be the object of scrutiny and observing subject concurrently? How does he or she pose as the actor and spectator within one simultaneous process? Barbato is interested in one particular aspect of this dilemma. She puts aside any attempt to explain the phenomena with Cartesian rigour in order to highlight the goal of investigating one's exterior and interior worlds coaudiated by modern technology. It is the process that matters, its space and time of operation, the act of 'realizing' and being realized, rather than the posthumous dilemma of the 'what' and 'why.' Barbato maintains that it is in this very process of auto-representation that one recognizes oneself in a dynamic way, and in opposition to a two-dimensional image. She cites Godard, Warhol, and speaks of Carlo Alfano, as examples of this process.

In part four Barbato speaks of Gianni Celati as a *racconta-storie*. She argues that Celati's work and experience as a translator have positively shaped his writing vein. She draws parallels between Celati's *Narratori delle pianure* and Walter Benjamin's reflections in *Le narrateur*. Celati's concise style, descriptive skills, and Kafkian influence are purported as examples to seize reality, penetrate its *stratum*, research its complexity.

The fifth and last part of Barbato's book is devoted to Vincenzo Cerami, author of *Lettere al metronomo*, as well as to Ascanio Celestini's research related to the 'Fosse Ardeatine' and subsequent work, *Radio clandestina*. In this closing section Barbato questions the role played by that intriguing, if not tormenting, human ability to remember, to re-live, to store memory of past events, key events, crucial historical events. How is memory preserved? What images, what facts, remain intact, if any? What role does narration play? How are fictional renditions of such facts relevant? Barbato critically addresses the relationship between fact

and fiction in Cerami and Celestini's narrative and staged *tableaux* of techniques, depictions, authorial legitimacy, and transmission of feelings and reflections of one's rapport to the now and then.

In conclusion, Barbato's book is a rich sort of *passé-partout* of ideas, propositions, and questions surrounding the role of the individual artists' representations, and of the increasing authorial presence in contemporary culture. It is a good source of reflection and reference, although it could benefit extensively from a detailed index, which is missing.

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Bernardette Luciano. *The Cinema of Silvio Soldini: Dream–Image–Voyage*. Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2008. Pp. xvii, 201, b/w ill. 18. ISBN 978-1906510-244. £15.99, US\$ 29.95

Bernardette Luciano's book *The Cinema of Silvio Soldini: Dream – Image – Voyage* is an awaited addition to the bibliography of Italian cinema and cineastes. It is a passionate and first extensive monograph on a little known (not for long) Silvio Soldini and his cinema in the English language. After the year 2000 Soldini's name began to be heard more often in international festival circles and distribution chains thanks to the success of his award-winning film *Pane e tulipani* (*Bread and Tulips*). A masterful comedic twist from an *engagé* auteur of the new Italian cinema, this film captured the interest of critics and viewers alike who immediately turned their attention to any other available work from the Milanese filmmaker. Soldini belongs to the new generation of Italian directors whose talent was nurtured through the years of the "Italian Nouvelle Vogue," and whose emergence in the panorama of international cinema is marked by a solid grasp of technical forms and a "burning" concern for social and transcultural issues. After a formal training in Cinema at New York University, the laborious gestation of his first short films and documentaries, Soldini's career has slowly but steadily risen to international acclamation and critical recognition.

Taking inspiration from Soldini's first work and student film *Drimage* (1982), Luciano proposes an engaging study of the man and his cinema. She approaches the study of Soldini's cinematic vision through a schematic triad of dream-image-voyage as indicated in the title of her book. Speaking of *Drimage* she writes: "[...] is an invented word which intersects the notions of dream, image, and age. By replacing 'age' with 'voyage', I propose an alternative triad, dream-image-voyage [...]" (xi). Such is the suggestion she receives from watching and examining Soldini's early work and subsequent professional development on the basis of a multidisciplinary approach, inclusive of cultural studies and feminist theory. In doing so Luciano underscores important relations between Silvio Soldini's visual philosophy and the landscapes, the characters, the cultures, the languages, and the music that are captured by his vision and which populate his work. The chief of