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Cuori puri. Directed by Roberto De Paolis. Screenplay by Roberto De Paolis, Luca Infascelli, Greta Scicchitano, and Carlo Salsa. Young Films, 2017. 115 minutes.

In his seminal work on the relationship between cinema and physical reality, Siegfried Kracauer wrote that the chase is “motion at its extreme,” and is therefore “immensely serviceable for establishing a continuity of suspenseful physical action.”¹ The German theorist noted that this visual device allowed film to “cover vast expanses of physical reality,” thereby affording viewers the possibility to experience the “solidarity of the universe,” which he conceived as a balanced arrangement of spatial and temporal coordinates.² Kracauer’s reasoning was primarily concerned with the medium’s ability to capture and reproduce movement, yet his language also hints at the affective qualities of the chase, understood as a narrative topos capable of surging a film’s metaphorical pulse. Photographer and videographer Roberto De Paolis’s debut feature film, *Cuori puri* / Pure Hearts (2017), begins and ends with two extended foot chase sequences. In the film’s incipit, a young woman is seen fleeing from a man for reasons that are unknown to the viewer until she is caught: Agnese (Selene Caramazza) has stolen a mobile phone from the mall where Stefano (Simone Liberati) is employed as a security guard, and it is his duty to chase after her and report this theft to the police. A mirror image of its opening, the film’s closing scene features another heightened foot chase that leads to the potential for forgiveness and reconciliation between distant individuals in a fractured society.

In the brief, albeit highly charged encounter that opens *Cuori puri*, De Paolis establishes the main themes of what is to follow: an understated examination of marginalized, yet intertwined communities against the backdrop of the impoverished Roman neighborhood of Tor Sapienza. Agnese lives with her single mother (Barbora Bobulova), a profoundly devout and domineering woman, and is a member of a Roman Catholic youth group led by the charismatic Don Luca (Stefano Fresi). Estranged from his parents, who exist on the verge of destitution, Stefano must fend for himself, holding onto a decidedly frustrating job and occasionally drifting outside the confines of legality. Despite their differences, the two begin a clandestine relationship when fate (or coincidence) brings them back together: having been fired from the mall for failing to report Agnese’s theft, Stefano is demoted to surveilling a supermarket parking lot adjacent to a Roma camp where the young woman and her mother happen to volunteer.

De Paolis builds a minimalist film upon the Shakespearean premise of star-crossed lovers, focusing on the relationship between space and identity, and the interdependent questions of housing and belonging, which come in full relief in three key scenes: firstly, when Stefano is assigned to patrol the parking lot, and he begins to trade barbs with the Roma youths, whose biopolitically “other” bodies spill onto the neoliberal space (interestingly cluttered with discarded objects—the debris of capitalism) that the reluctant man is tasked to protect. Secondly, when Stefano’s parents, evicted from the crime-infested housing complex encircled by Viale Giorgio Morandi, retreat to a permanently stationed mobile home—a paradoxical dwelling produced by the same capitalist pressures Stefano is paid to enforce. Thirdly, in a wider sense, when Agnese begins to feel uncomfortable with the escalating demands of her religious group, which attempts to police her sexuality by enforcing the imported (American) custom of wearing a “purity ring” as a demonstrable sign of her chastity. Hesitant to embrace this practice, Agnese secretly wanders away from the church’s moral grasp, much to the chagrin of her mother, who will ultimately respond to her daughter’s objections with abusive fury.

¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 42.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

Despite this strong emphasis on location, De Paolis's treatment of urban spaces is unobtrusive, shorn of the formalist establishing shots that characterized Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra / Gomorrah* (2008), another film of recent memory whose stories pivoted around a massive housing project. Unlike Scampia's Le Vele, which *Gomorra* explores with ethnological precision, the ring-shaped complex of Tor Sapienza (inspired by Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* and erected in stages between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s by architects Alberto Gatti, Carlo Chiarini, *et alii*) remains in the background, the camera firmly planted on the protagonists' faces and bodies. By the same token, *Cuori puri*'s interest in the geography and the residents of Rome's *borgate* could be framed in Pasolinian terms—*Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962) being the obvious references. However, the director resists viewing Agnese and Stefano in terms of Gramscian subalternity, and the discussion of religion in the film is not in service to a critique of Marxist dialectics. In fact, the film's preproduction phase had its roots in the hallowed methods of neorealism: inspired by true events, the story was deliberately set in Tor Sapienza, a neighborhood marred by xenophobic violence and crime. "When history is made in the streets, the streets tend to move onto the screen," remarked Kracauer, noting that neorealism was a type of cinema inherently concerned with his treasured physical reality.³ While *Cuori puri* certainly lacks the historical urgency of its neorealist predecessors, it does inherit some of their defining characteristics: De Paolis spent over a year living in the neighborhood and building a relationship with its residents, many of whom appear in the film alongside the professional actors. Moreover, the film is unconcerned with maintaining a riveting dramatic pace, but rather unfolds calmly and methodically, pausing occasionally to make room for Don Luca's stirring sermons. This is not to say that the atheist De Paolis is seeking to echo Rossellini's Christian parables, nor does it imply that *Cuori puri* contains purely monstrational scenes of Zavattinian inspiration. It is a film with nevertheless sociological intents—however discreetly depicted—a fact that comes into sharper focus in the scenes involving Roma characters and their (in)ability to claim a physical and metaphorical space for themselves. In this, they are not dramatically different from the film's protagonists, whose cultural and economic marginality pushes them to make some morally dubious choices with potentially devastating consequences.

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³ Ibid., 98.