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elements), Cabiria's innocent smile does not communicate Fellini's message about salvation with the same power found in *La strada*.

Fellini, whose films always mirror his own state of mind, perhaps no longer believed in this message as strongly as he had in Gelsomina's time. He was not insensitive to the attacks by the Marxist press on *La strada*'s spirituality. In *Cabiria* he tried to revive some of the neorealist impulses: the shooting was preceded by a very thorough research on Roman prostitutes, and the dialogues, coscripted by Pier Paolo Pasolini, were charged with social content. But the imagery of the neorealist style did not express Fellini's spiritual concern, and the film seems dated. Three years were to pass before Fellini directed another film—*La dolce vita*—wherein the road to salvation and hope was definitely barred.

The films Antonioni made in the mid-fifties—*Le amiche* (Girlfriends, 1955) and *Il grido* (The Cry, 1957)—were also his last films in which people were still ready to die for something—the loss of love or the pain of memories. In his later films, willingness to leave life receded in favor of indifference, of a refusal to take responsibility for one's own life in any way. Rosetta, in *The Girlfriends*, commits suicide because she does not know how to live, not unlike Giuliana in *Red Desert* (the film Antonioni made in 1964) who suffers from the same neurosis but is incapable of making any decision at all. Likewise, Aldo in *Il grido* foreshadows Sandro in *L'avventura* and Giovanni in *La notte* in his refusal to acknowledge the fading of love. Whereas Sandro and Giovanni eventually accept the inevitable, Aldo struggles against it; and when he loses, he leaps to his death. The characters in



Il grido

Girlfriends and *Il grido* rebel against the changes of sentiments, against a mystery of emotions in which they are trapped.

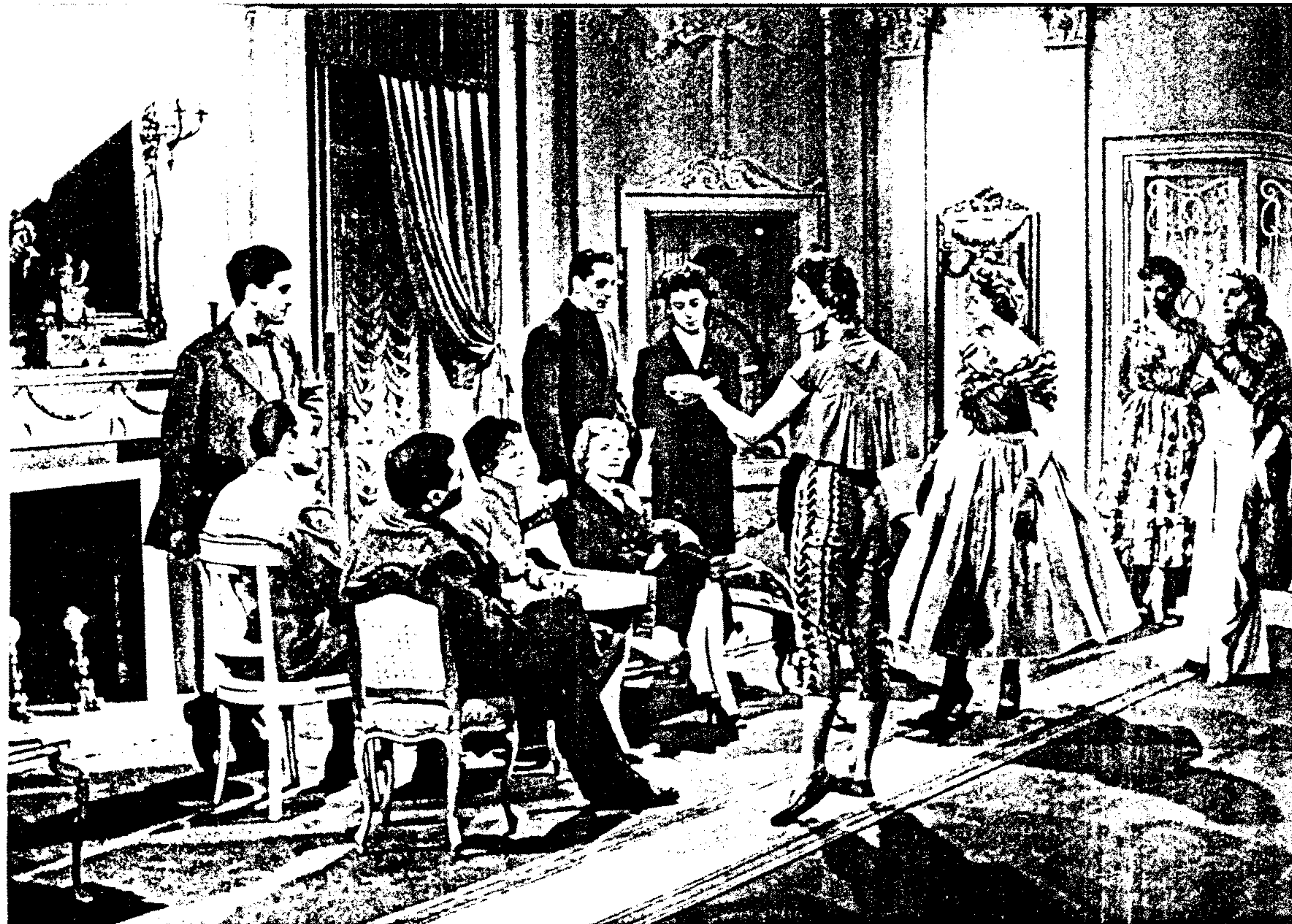
The Girlfriends, based on a novella by Cesare Pavese, follows the lives of four young women as observed by Clelia, who has returned to Turin, her native city, after having risen to an important position in a fashion house in Rome. She becomes involved with a group of wealthy young people, only one of whom, Rosetta, questions their empty lifestyle. Clelia is "a character among characters," sharing the author's omniscience about the others and preferring like Pavese, to see isolation as a voluntary solitude.

The Girlfriends, like *Il grido*, tells of the pain of memories and the impossibility of escaping the reality of the feelings. Both Rosetta and Aldo make this attempt but return to their point of departure, only to find that their emotional core has remained unchanged. With this realization, they succumb to the Pavesian "absurd vice." Each of these films holds a special place in Antonioni's *oeuvre*. *The Girlfriends* is the most elaborate of his black-and-white films. By 1955, his style had already reached its peak and did not undergo any further essential changes. Loosely inspired by the Pavesian narrative, it anticipated the approach of the French *nouveau roman*, according to which the world is neither meaningful nor absurd; it just *is*. *The Girlfriends* reveals almost everything of Antonioni's style: the internal montage that does not follow the action and is based on temporal expansion or restriction; the insistence on "useless gestures," usually captured by sequence shots; a slow pace, creating the impression that the film does not progress; the emphasis at certain moments on sounds rather than on characters; the "stylization of emotions" (a term coined by Antonioni) created through the use of psychological time in opposition to real time. (One of the most impressive sequences captures Rosetta's walk with Lorenzo on a road outside the city, with horseback riders and cars passing by. The insistence on sounds and silence, together with the rhythmically patterned gestures and dialogue, creates the impression that the sentiments are evolving while the action stands still.)

In the overall composition of *The Girlfriends*, incidental shots become increasingly rare. Everything is subordinated to a rigorous formal structure where nothing is left to chance.²⁶ Above all, the meaning of the dialogue is fully revealed only in connection with the composition of the shots. As Antonioni pointed out: "Whether a line is uttered against a wall or against the background of an entire street can change the situation."²⁷

The distinctive characteristic of Antonioni's style is a kind of objectivity generated by the decomposition of the environment and the events. This objectivity, however, often referred to as "coolness," is always injected with lyrical components (such as the landscape in *Il grido*), which produce interdependence between subjectivity and objectivity. The same holds true for characters. On the one hand, Antonioni sides with them (close-ups, subjective function of the landscape); on the other, he views them as aliens (the distant perspective of the camera during Aldo's frantic search for oblivion). In this respect, Antonioni's style differs from the poetics of the *nouveau roman*, which never renounces its objectivity.

Il grido has a special place in Antonioni's *oeuvre* not only because it is his only

*Le amiche**Il grido*

film set in a working-class milieu—as is often mentioned—but also for personal reasons. This reputedly autobiographical film was shot in the Po valley at the time of Antonioni's separation from his wife; there, fifteen years before, Antonioni had directed his first short, *People of the River Po*, which he wanted so much to make into a feature film. It is as though he wished to revive the time of his youth and with it the era of neorealism. *Il grido* draws upon some neorealist components, particularly the interdependence between the landscape and the characters and the emphasis on objects, which in Antonioni's other films seldom play a significant role. But the dramatic nucleus of *Il grido* is charged with the same sense of abandonment and dismay as *The Girlfriends* or *L'avventura*: Aldo returns home only to find Irma married to another man and his friends enclosed in an almost hostile indifference.

Il grido is one of Antonioni's own favorite films. In 1959, he contended: "When I saw *Il grido* after some time, I was stunned to find myself faced with such nudity, with such great solitude. It was like what happens on some mornings when we look in the mirror and are startled by the reflection of our own face."²⁸

In 1955, in an open letter to the journal *Contemporaneo*, Fellini summed up the moral problems of the "difficult years" as reflected in both his and Antonioni's films. This letter concludes, in a way, the period of transition from neorealism to realism, answering some of its questions and suggesting the direction for the further evolution of the Italian cinema, or, at least, of one of its alternatives. "*La strada* captures an experience," Fellini wrote,

which is, according to the philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, the most important for any social perspective: the experience of the communication between two human beings. This is what I have in mind: to learn to live with a human being is as important as to learn to live a rich sociopolitical life. If we do not resolve this humble but necessary point of departure, we may soon find ourselves in a well-organized society, where the private relationships between two human beings will be empty, indifferent, isolated, and impenetrable. Solitude will be the greatest pain of modern man. It begins somewhere very deep, at the very roots of a human being. No public delight, no political symphony can ever heal it. In my opinion, there is a way for two human beings to reach out and find one another. If a film creates a microscopic concentrated image of this evolution of feelings (in art, historical dimensions do not count) and captures the contrast between a monologue and a dialogue, then it fulfills a contemporary need, clears up and penetrates some of its aspects: this is what I call realism. Art has the duty to discover the historical process. But this process is based on a less complicated, less technical and political dialectics than some believe. Sometimes a film that captures the contradictions of contemporary feelings through an elementary dialectics is more realistic than a film that depicts the evolution of a precise sociopolitical reality.²⁹