

## DINO RISI'S *IL SORPASSO*: (IM)MOBILITY IN THE ECONOMIC BOOM YEARS

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**Abstract:** Through *Il sorpasso* by Dino Risi (1962), one of the most popular films of the “Italian comedy of the boom years” genre, my study explores the notion of mobility in the Italian society of the economic boom years (1958-1963). In those years, the car worked as the engine of the economic prosperity, which was first set in motion and then fueled by the car factories of the North of Italy, and because it was one of the first products to be mass-produced, it also served as the image of the first Italian consumer-driven society. This is probably the reason why a car, the Lancia “America”, is at the center of the film narrative. First, I address the issue of the transposition from Italian into French, Spanish and English of the film title to highlight what themes of the film narrative are foregrounded by the recreation of the title for different cultures. Then, starting from the original Italian title, *Il sorpasso* –a far richer and more complex title than any of its transpositions in other languages—I investigate the different meanings of “mobility” conveyed by the film to demonstrate that the contrast between the fast-paced but purposeful camerawork and the main character’s frantic and aimless driving creates a visual representation of the struggle to adjust to the rapid process of cultural and social transformation of the late 1950s and early 1960s many Italians experienced.

**Keywords:** film analysis; critical discourse analysis; audiovisual translation; titles; mobility; Italian economic boom.

## 1. Introduction

*Il sorpasso* by Dino Risi (screenplay by Dino Risi, Ettore Scola and Ruggero Maccari), released in Italy on December 6, 1962, is one of the most popular films of the “Italian comedy of the boom years” genre (*commedia del boom*), a subgenre of the Italian-style comedy genre (*commedia all’italiana*), which depicts the sudden prosperity that Italians experienced, because of the joint increase of employment and personal income due to the rapid economic growth, between the late 1950s and the early 1960s. This economic boom, or “miracle”, set in motion Italy’s “extraordinary process of transformation” (Ginsborg 1990: 239) from a poor, mainly rural nation with a traditionally family-centered society into a global industrial power with a more modern, individualistic, and consumer-driven society.

In 1963, about a year after it premiered in Italy, *Il sorpasso* was distributed in France with the title *Le fanfaron*, in Spain with the title *La escapada*, and in the US with the title *The Easy Life*<sup>1</sup>. Differently from today, in the 1960s film titles were almost always translated from the original (source) language into the receiving (target) languages. Although film distribution was already driven by marketing factors and box-office revenues, in the 1960s, the translation of film titles was mainly done to reduce the so-called cultural discount (Hoskins and Mirus 1988: 454) at a time when the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity was much more of a barrier to a foreign audience’s viewing experience than today<sup>2</sup>. As the literature on the translation of audiovisual titles demonstrates (Farghal and Bazzi 2017; Minutella 2017; Baicchi 2013; Bucaria 2010; Viezzi 2004), in the pre-globalization world the translation of film titles had three main purposes; 1) clarifying the topic of the film or making it more explicit, as, for example, the English title *The Easy Life*; 2) making the topic of the film catchy or captivating, as, for example, the Spanish title *La escapada* (“the flight”, “the escape”); 3) putting to the fore the actor/actress playing the lead role or the character he/she played, as, for example, the French title *Le fanfaron* (“the boaster”, “the braggart”). Differently from the original Italian title, *Il sorpasso*, which, as my analysis will reveal, contains multiple connotations besides the denotative meaning of a car passing another on the road, each of the Spanish, French and English titles highlight only one of the many themes of the film narrative, the one the distributors considered the most readily apparent and/or entertaining in their culture. The Spanish title, for instance, emphasizes the amusing two-day road trip in which the main character of the film, Bruno Cortona (played by the Italian actor Vittorio Gassman), speeds down highways and through small towns – from Rome to Viareggio (Tuscany) – in his sports car, hell-bent on going nowhere in particular, during the Italian mid-summer holiday (the weekend of August 15, *Ferragosto* in Italian). The French title, instead, calls attention to the

<sup>1</sup> My analysis of the film is based on the original version of *Il sorpasso* released in Italy on December 6, 1962, and on the English version of the film, in Italian with English subtitles, which premiered on December 6, 1963, in the US with the title *The Easy Life*.

<sup>2</sup> The term “cultural discount” has been coined to capture the notion that a media product (e.g., a TV show, a TV series, or a feature film) rooted in one culture, and thus attractive in that environment, will have diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the styles, values, beliefs, institutions, and behavior patterns being portrayed (Lee 2006: 260).

most widely apparent and amusing trait, that of being a show-off who is quick to act out his impulses and speak his mind with uncensored frankness, whereas the English title, *The Easy Life*, highlights what makes the film an entertaining visual experience to a North American audience, that is a satirical portrayal of the lifestyle of a certain stereotypical Italian type, i.e., the layabout. Moreover, there is no denying that *The Easy Life* intentionally recalls Federico Fellini's film *La dolce vita* (1960), which had been released in the US in 1961, only two years before Risi's film, and had a great success in the North American art-house cinema market<sup>3</sup>. *The New York Times* review of *The Easy Life*, published the day after the film's opening at the Festival Theater in New York City on December 22, 1963, makes the allusion to Fellini's film explicit by stating that in *The Easy Life* Dino Risi creates an "upper middle-class *La dolce vita*" (Weiler 1963: 18)<sup>4</sup>. Paradoxically, the sensational climax and conclusion of the film shows that the catchy "easy life" of the title is a mere illusion, yet the viewers only realize it when they watch the shockingly tragic car accident in the final scene.

Starting from the original Italian title, *Il sorpasso* – a far richer and more complex title than any of its transpositions in other languages – I investigate the different meanings of "mobility" conveyed by the compositional features of the film to demonstrate that the contrast between the fast-paced but purposeful camerawork and the main character's frantic and aimless driving creates a visual representation of the struggle to adjust to the rapid process of cultural and social transformation of the late 1950s and early 1960s many Italians experienced. Ultimately, I intend to show that it is only by using the original Italian title as "starting block" of the analysis that the more "abstract, implicitly made meaning" (Bateman and Schmidt 2012: 2) of the film surfaces and guides the viewers to the line of interpretation mentioned above. If either the Spanish, or the French, or the English title is used as a "starting block" of the analysis, the viewer will only achieve a "film comprehension" (Bordwell 1989: 8-9), i.e., an understanding of the film based on meanings that are, to a large extent, explicitly recoverable by the viewers' common sense.

## **2. Camera movements: Mobility in the Boom Years**

In the Italian society of the economic miracle (1958-1963) the car not only worked as the engine of the economic prosperity, which was first set in motion and then fueled by the car factories of the North of Italy – Fiat, Lancia and Alfa Romeo – but also served as the image of the first Italian consumer-driven society as it was one of the first products, if not the very first one, to be mass-produced. In the late 1950s, Italians were spending a significant portion of their available

<sup>3</sup> As Forgacs and Lumley point out, thanks to Neorealist films of the late 1940s, Italy had built for itself an international reputation for "art cinema", films whose origins lay in the ideas and artistic creativity of their directors, and which were viewed by sophisticated audiences in the "art cinemas" of the major cities of the world, at film festivals, in universities and in film clubs and societies (1996: 227).

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the film critic Phillip Lopate, in his review of *Il sorpasso* for the "Criterion Collection", states that the English title *The Easy Life* seems "a transparent attempt to capitalize on the success of *La dolce vita*" (Lopate 2014: 4).

income for cars so that the car became Italy's primary form of mass transportation in the span of few years. To be precise, with the release of the *Fiat 600* in 1955, the circulating cars triplicated in only five years, from 800,000 cars sold in 1955 to 2,000,000 cars sold in 1960. On a symbolic level, owning a car became a sign of status and success as well as the ultimate jump out of the austerity of the past and into an unhoped-for prosperous future.



**Figure 1.** *The Lancia Aurelia B24 "America"*

Named after an ancient Roman road, the real star of *Il sorpasso* is a convertible Lancia Aurelia B24 (Fig. 1)<sup>5</sup> which is constructed as the object of desire of both the male protagonist of the film, Bruno Cortona, and the viewers. The Lancia car factory started to produce the convertible Aurelia B24 in the mid 1950s and gave it the name "America" because it was meant almost exclusively for the North American market and because of its panoramic windscreen, which made it look like an American sports car. From a filmic point of view, the extreme mobility of the camerawork, very often wandering through travel and pan movements around the Lancia "America", clearly reflects the economic and social mobility of the Italian society of the boom years. Therefore, the Italian title, *Il sorpasso*, refers to both the movement of the car, which literally moves up and down the Italian peninsula from the start to the end of the film, and the fast-paced camerawork. At least on a first viewing of the film, also Bruno Cortona shows the freedom and physical mobility experienced by a consistent part of the Italian society in those years.

The film has a sudden start. Bruno is speeding in his car through the empty city of Rome. He is desperately trying to find a public telephone, not an easy task on August 15 as all the stores are closed for the national holiday of *Ferragosto*. In the first close-up shot (Fig. 2), we see Bruno's back and the dashboard of his car and, at the same time, we see the road from Bruno's point of view, as if we were sitting in the back of Bruno's car. This type of take, beside allowing the viewer to see what Bruno sees while he is driving through the historical center of, in Bruno's words, the "paralyzed"<sup>6</sup> city of Rome, it conveys the idea that Bruno and his car are inseparable, and that the bond between them is the main issue at stake in the film. Moreover, the fact that Bruno defines Rome as a "paralyzed" city immediately begins to outline Bruno's personality. In opposition to Bruno's definition, in Italian we say that a city is "paralyzed" when there is a major traffic

<sup>5</sup> This picture and all the still frame captures included in this article were downloaded from the Internet and are no longer protected by copyright.

<sup>6</sup> Original line: *paralizzata*.

jam, rather than when it is deserted. So, one starts to perceive that Bruno is an anxious and restless person, he needs to be surrounded by people and noise because he cannot stand peace and quiet. This is how Bruno introduces himself to the viewers, and the rest of the film – both visually and verbally – is a confirmation of his restlessness as well as his close, not to say intimate, relationship with his car.



**Figure 2.** Still frame capture of the first from the close-up shot of the film



**Figure 3.** Still frame capture of a close-up shot from behind of Bruno driving



**Figure 4.** Still frame capture of a close-up shot from the front of Bruno driving

In the first road sequence of the film, which follows the encounter between Bruno and Roberto, the serious-minded law student (played by the French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant) who will accompany Bruno in his road trip, the extreme mobility of the camerawork becomes even clearer. This road sequence, one of the many road sequences of the film, is characterized by long takes of the car in movement alternated by a series of shot-reverse shots in which one sees the two men in the car from behind (Fig. 3) and close-up shots of the two men from the front (Fig. 4). In these close-up shots, Bruno and Roberto seem entrapped and isolated not only by the rigorous framing of the camera but also by the frame created by the windscreen of the convertible Lancia “America”. Moreover, at times the camera moves to shoot the car from either the right side or the left side. Interestingly, the extreme mobility of the camerawork in this film is given not only by using many different types of shots, but also by the fact that the camera moves as if it were another car on the road, at times following Bruno’s car, at times preceding it, and at times passing it from the left. This is the

denotative meaning of the title *Il sorpasso* as *sorpassare* in Italian is the act of overtaking or passing another car on the road<sup>7</sup>.

The film can indeed be seen as organized around the contrast between Bruno's frantic and aimless driving and the fast-paced but purposeful camerawork. At an even more detailed analysis of the road sequences of the film, we realize that each time Bruno's car overtakes another car, the camera immediately moves to the left side and passes Bruno's car with a tracking shot. This happens, for instance, when Bruno's car passes first a very slow car, then an old-fashioned sidecar, then a Vespa scooter and finally a bicycle. From this standpoint, the camera movement conveys a sense of freedom as well as a new perspective on the world that, in fact, can only be experienced from inside a fast-moving car. The next two paragraphs comment on these two interconnected perceptions.

The camerawork conveys a freedom of movement which is allowed by, and, at the same time, is a consequence of, the rapid modernization – and motorization – and the excitement felt by many Italians in negotiating the new instances made available by the sudden economic prosperity. Therefore, in this film, each time he passes a car, Bruno leaves behind something traditionally linked to the past and to an old lifestyle, almost as if they were a source of shame, such as the “wonderful Italian families”<sup>8</sup>, as he sarcastically defines the family who is driving to the beach of Ostia in an old-fashioned sidecar. This family is certainly meant to represent what he considers old family values and habits, where the household is at the center of everyday life and different generations of the same family live in the same house. Then, Bruno's car passes a group of foreign priests standing on the side of the road who, since they cannot speak Italian, are asking for help to change a flat tire in Latin. He disrespectfully answers their plea shouting, “Non habemus jack, desolatus”<sup>9</sup> in pseudo-Latin. This scene shows how not only a fundamental Italian institution such as the family but also the Church is considered old-fashioned and no longer suitable to the needs of the rapidly changing lifestyle by Bruno. Next, Bruno's car passes a truck, a sort of home-made trailer, on which a man is peacefully eating his lunch, and to whom Bruno asks, “How come you eat at home on a holiday?”<sup>10</sup> He is indeed horrified by the fact that this man does not go to a restaurant to celebrate the *Ferragosto* holiday. Once again, Bruno's behavior stresses his rejection of traditional habits, such as that of celebrating the most important holidays at home with big meals. Later, Bruno's car passes a cyclist to whom he yells, “Get a Vespa scooter!”<sup>11</sup>, and then explains to Roberto, in a pretentious and snobbish way, that he has always preferred playing pool rather than cycling because the latter would build too many muscles in his legs. Finally, Bruno and Roberto give a ride to a peasant (Fig. 6) who is hitch-hiking – he obviously does not own a car

<sup>7</sup> Illuminating, in this respect, as it complements my analysis, is Natalie Fullwood's discussion of the tension between the car as movement in driving sequences and the car as stasis in frequent scenes of traffic jams in Italian films of the 1960s in the chapter “Driving Passions: Cars in Comedy, Italian Style” of her book *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space*.

<sup>8</sup> Original line: *Le belle famiglie italiane!*

<sup>9</sup> Original line: *Non habemus crick, desolatus.*

<sup>10</sup> Original line: *Ma che rimani a pranzo a casa anche a Ferragosto?*

<sup>11</sup> Original line: *Fatte 'na Vespa!*

– and Bruno ill-treats him and calls him “land laborer”<sup>12</sup>. Bruno’s inappropriate comment sounds not only as a rejection of the post-war past, when Italy was a country of poor peasants where bicycles were the only available means of transportation (as seen, for instance, in Neorealist films), but also, and most of all, as a way of exorcizing that indeed recent past.



**Figure 5.** Still frame capture of Bruno's passing a cyclist



**Figure 6.** Still frame capture of the scene in which Bruno gives a ride to a peasant



**Figure 7.** Still frame capture of the close-up shot of Bruno and Roberto looking backward

As previously mentioned, besides conveying a feeling of freedom of movement and a break with the past, the continuous and fast camerawork constructs a new way of perceiving the world which can only be experienced from inside a fast-moving car. It is a sort of “perception-in-movement” (Ross 1995: 39) which, on the one hand, reflects the social and economic mobility of the boom years but, on the other hand, embodies Bruno’s restless – and careless – attitude toward what happens around him as well as toward the people he meets.<sup>13</sup> There are many signs that hint at this attitude in the film. For instance, Bruno cannot stop driving his car and, when he gets out of it, he feels the urge to get back into it as soon as possible. Moreover, he cannot stand silence. He talks all the time, even while driving, and the few times the conversation between him and Roberto dies, he starts honking the car’s horn – which is cheerful and irritating at the same time, just like him – in an obsessive manner. Bruno and Roberto’s Road trip from Rome

<sup>12</sup> Original line: *Lavoratore della terra!*

<sup>13</sup> For more on the relationship between the freedom of movement allowed by the car and mobility in social life see the contributions of Urry, Edensor and Merriman on the notion of automobility – a combination of autonomy and mobility – in the volume *Automobilities* edited by Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift and John Urry.

to the Tuscan Riviera, which, interestingly, Bruno calls simply “a spin”<sup>14</sup>, ends up being also a tour of newly available consumer goods, such as refrigerators, automated devices such as vending machines, and venues for leisure-time activities, such as restaurants, beach resorts and dance floors. Moreover, the “spin” is accompanied by a soundtrack that is a collection of light, catchy pop tunes of that time, such as the twist dance song “Guarda come dondolo”.

### 3. Car movements: (Im)mobility in the Boom Years

By shifting the focus from the movements of both the Lancia “America” and the camera discussed in Section 2 onto Bruno and Roberto’s overriding personality traits as well as their conversations (where, alas, Roberto is most of the times the patient listener of Bruno’s loud thinking), one realizes that the notion of mobility that the Lancia “America” and the camerawork convey is at odds with both Bruno and Roberto’s personalities. *Il sorpasso* is one of the first films of the genre that, only few years later, with the release of *Easy Rider* by Dennis Hopper (1969), will be officially labelled “on the road”<sup>15</sup>. American road films, however, usually show their main characters looking for a change in their lives, or escaping from something or somebody, and thus beginning a quest for freedom. This does not happen in Risi’s film. Even though the film accurately depicts the process of transformation that was taking place in the everyday life of Italians, both Bruno and Roberto do not seem to be affected by it as they represent a pre-boom lifestyle, one that clashes with the filmic and thematic elements of the film.

The character of Roberto is more easily understandable than Bruno’s as, though much younger than Bruno, he represents the shy, reserved, well-mannered and serious-minded Italian of the immediate postwar period who is hoping to raise his social status by getting a Law degree. When Bruno rushes into his life, convinces him to take a break from his books and join him in a “spin” in his car, Roberto is studying for his upcoming university exams and seems unaffected by the holiday mania that has taken hold of Italians. For this reason, he represents the type of Italian who has not yet been affected by the new “mobile” consumer-driven society, and whose life is still governed by the principles of renunciation and savings that emerged out of the Second World War. On the contrary, Bruno is extroverted, loud, brash, arrogant and fun-loving but, in the end, as frozen in time as Roberto, if not more. At first sight Bruno shows the traits of a certain stereotypical Italian type, the layabout, somebody “who lives by the art of *arrangiarsi*, a kind of improvisational way of getting by through a combination of bravado, seductiveness, and ‘smarts’” (Restivo 1997: 235). It is precisely the quality of being able to adjust to new situations and sudden change of events that should make of Bruno the perfect representative of the new “mobile” Italian. Bruno’s adaptability and improvisation, instead, are only apparent as, at a closer and more careful look, he is, even though apparently not as traditional and

<sup>14</sup> Original line: *un giro*.

<sup>15</sup> Dino Risi himself stated that his film describes the Italian society of the economic boom “through a gallop, a movement” (*attraverso un galoppo, un movimento*, translation mine) (Pisano 1980: 32).



conservative as Roberto, someone who is “out of sync” with the new society. Here is where we come to a true understanding of Bruno’s obsessive mobility; Bruno’s frenetic pace and aimless driving represents his inability to adjust to the rapid modernization of those years, hence his mobility is the exact opposite of the freedom of movement described in Section 2. The close-up shot in Fig. 7 is quite symbolic of this condition, the car is moving forward but both Bruno and Roberto are looking backward, as if stuck between the past and the present in a sort of (im)mobility.

Hence, the reason why Bruno practically lives in his car is because it is the only place where he feels comfortable. When he tells Roberto, “I don’t feel anywhere as good and comfortable as in my car. Boy, just get me in a car ... Just let me drive and I go anywhere”<sup>16</sup> we come to the realization that Bruno, even though he is constantly and frenetically moving around in his car – the quintessential symbol of the new economic and social mobility of those years – is trapped in it. From a filmic perspective, as Fig. 8 shows, the rigorous framing of the camera as well as the many frames created by the windscreen of the car show precisely how Bruno is entrapped and isolated in his car and, therefore, alienated from the rest of the new “mobile” society. In turn, this visual alienation may also well be interpreted as a result of his breakneck speed which has “the effect of propelling the driver off the calendar, out of one’s own personal and affective history, and out of time itself” (Ross 1995: 21). Interestingly, Bruno seems to verbalize the effect of speeding just described when, while racing down a highway, he tells Roberto, “Do you know which is the best age? The one we have every day”<sup>17</sup>. To put it in other words, driving fast, an instance of what François Baudrillard defines “mobility without effort” (1968: 94), leads to a kind of unreal happiness, a suspension of existence, a lack of responsibility, all states of mind that can be associated to Bruno.



**Figure 8.** Still frame capture of a close-up shot of Bruno framed by the windscreen of his car



**Figure 9.** Still frame capture of a close-up shot of Bruno's ex-wife

<sup>16</sup> Original lines: *Io bene come in macchina non sto in nessun posto. Mi riposo. Basta che guido, poi io vado o in sù o in giù, per me è la stessa cosa.*

<sup>17</sup> Original lines: *Sai qual è l'età più bella? È quella che uno c'ha ogni giorno.*



**Figure 10.** Still frame capture of a close-up shot of Bruno's daughter

Bruno Cortona is always very reluctant to talk about his personal life. When Roberto asks him about his family, he evasively answers, “My wife was jealous of my car”<sup>18</sup>, which implies that the rivalry between his wife and the other “she”, the car, caused their separation<sup>19</sup>. As a matter of fact, before he decides to drop by his ex-wife summer house in Castiglioncello, on the Tuscan riviera, we do not know anything about his family up to a point where we really start to think that with his fast driving, he wants to hide something about himself, and perhaps also about his dysfunctional family. We soon find out that both Bruno’s estranged wife, Gianna (played by Luciana Angiolillo, Fig. 9), and Bruno’s daughter, Lilly (played by Catherine Spaak, Fig. 10), are representative of that large part of the Italian society who has been able to take advantage of the new opportunities that the economic prosperity made available. They are clearly emancipated women who, contrary to Bruno, are determined to pursue the material security that the boom years seem to offer. For this reason, they are unattainable by Bruno. Gianna works in the advertising industry and, most important of all, made the courageous choice of leaving her husband at a time where divorce was not yet legal in Italy. Lilly, instead, will soon go to Harvard University to study Public Relations to be able to help her fiancé with his business<sup>20</sup>.

Bruno, on the other hand, is an anti-intellectual person as the scene in which he comments on Michelangelo Antonioni’s film “The Eclipse” shows. This scene starts with one of Bruno’s rare moments of introspection which is triggered by Domenico Modugno’s song “Vecchio frac” played by the car radio.<sup>21</sup> But, as it often happens with Bruno, this moment of introspection is short lived. Bruno starts talking about the reasons why he loves Modugno’s song but, when he mentions the feeling of alienation that the song communicates, he suddenly thinks of the film director Michelangelo Antonioni. He does so not because

<sup>18</sup> Original line: *Mia moglie era gelosa della mia macchina.*

<sup>19</sup> Between Bruno and his Lancia “America” – that he once affectionately calls “Little Horse” (original line: *Cavallina*) – there seems to be a real bond of affection. As Kristin Ross points out, Bruno’s gesture of reaching the car record player to change records in the same way as his often caressing the car while he gets into it or out of it can be seen as a metonymy for all the repetitions of small, unthinking, daily gestures of love in a long relationship (Ross 1995: 23).

<sup>20</sup> Although my analysis does not take the film’s dialogues into consideration, it is important to mention that film dialogues contribute to provide “characterization” (Kozloff 2000: 44). Among the lead characters of *Il sorpasso*, Bruno is the only one who speaks Italian with a marked Roman accent. Roberto, Gianna, and Lilly, speak standard Italian. Bruno’s Roman accent, besides increasing the humorous effect of his character, is clearly used to further emphasize his inability to adjust to the new “mobile” society.

<sup>21</sup> “Vecchio frac” (literally “Old Tailcoat”) is a dramatic ballad written by Italian singer-song writer Domenico Modugno. It tells the story of an elegant man in tailcoat who is walking at midnight through empty city streets and at dawn he commits suicide by drowning in a river.

alienation is the main theme of Antonioni's films, rather, because the word "alienation" reminds him of the fast car Antonioni drives,

[Modugno's song] seems like nothing, but it has everything: solitude, incommunicability, and that thing they talk so much about ... alienation! Like Antonioni's films. Have you seen 'The Eclipse'? I slept through it. Antonioni's good. He's got a fast car. Once I had to drive like a mad man to beat him".<sup>22</sup>

Bruno's superficiality, disregard for others and lack of social filter is further emphasized in the scene showing a highway collision involving a truck full of refrigerators. Disturbingly, when Bruno sees the damaged refrigerators scattered on the highway, all he can think of is a lucrative business opportunity. Thus, he walks to the truck driver, who is standing in despair near a dead body, and asks him if he can buy the whole accident as he would like to resell the damaged refrigerators as "rotten goods".<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in another scene, Bruno tells Roberto that the Law degree he will soon receive is an old-fashioned one. He advises him to specialize in "space law"<sup>24</sup> because soon they will need lawyers on the moon. The superficiality, arrogance, irresponsibility, and only apparent modernity that Bruno exhibits in these scenes are further signs of his being ill at ease with what is happening around him. The truth is that, despite his compulsive fast driving, he is trapped in his car and, therefore, cannot take an active part in the new "mobile" Italian society. Rather, he watches it through a screen – the windscreen of his car – as if it were a film.

#### 4. Conclusions

Through Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso*, my study explores one of the most important cultural distinctive features of the car in the Italian society of the economic boom (1958-1963), namely, mobility. Starting from the original Italian title, *Il sorpasso* – a far richer and more complex title than its transpositions in Spanish, French or English – I investigate the different meanings of "mobility" conveyed by the film to demonstrate that the contrast between the fast-paced but purposeful camerawork and the main character's frantic and aimless driving creates a visual representation of Italy's struggle to adjust to the rapid process of cultural and social transformation of those years.

Both the camerawork and Bruno's fast driving down highways and through small towns in his Lancia "America" convey a freedom of movement which is a consequence of the sudden economic prosperity and the rapid modernization as well as the excitement and desire of many Italians to negotiate the many new instances made available by the economic boom. However, by shifting the focus

<sup>22</sup> Original lines: *Pare una cosa da niente invece c'è tutto: la solitudine, l'incomunicabilità e poi quell'altra cosa ... quella che va di moda oggi ... l'alienazione! Come nei film di Antonioni. L'hai vista 'L'Eclisse'? Io c'ho dormito ... una bella pennichella. Bel regista Antonioni! C'ha un Flaminia Zagado ... una volta sulla fettuccia de Terracina m'ha fatto allunga' er collo.*

<sup>23</sup> Original line: *merce avariata.*

<sup>24</sup> Original line: *diritto spaziale.*

from the movements of both the Lancia “America” and the camera onto Bruno and Roberto’s most important personality traits, we realize that the idea of mobility that the car and the camerawork convey is at odds with both Bruno and Roberto’s personalities. Even though the film accurately depicts the process of social and cultural transformation that was taking place in the everyday life of Italians, both Bruno and Roberto do not seem to be affected by it as they represent a pre-boom lifestyle, one that clashes with the filmic and thematic elements of the film. In those years, *sorpassare*, the act of passing another car on the road, is no longer a matter of choice but rather a necessity to adjust to the new economic mobility and the rapid modernization. Envisioned in this respect, the male protagonist of the film, Bruno Cortona, lives in a condition of (im)mobility and, consequently, sublimates all his conscious and unconscious frustrations, anxieties, and desires into his relationship with his car which, in the end, is the only thing which he can get hold of in his life.

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