Between

«We accept the reality of the world with which we're presented»: The Truman Show Effect

Biancamaria Rizzardi

Abstract

«Fantasy is like jam: you have to spread it on a solid slice of bread»: this observation by Calvino is in line with all those narratives based on the construction of imaginary worlds, nonexistent or invisible cities, landscape dreams, and simulacra. In this regard, *American Dreams* (1974) by Carey, and *England, England* (1998) by Barnes seem extremely interesting. In both texts, it is a question of being able to invent lies capable of convincing readers, of substituting real places with false but plausible and narratively credible spaces. In the first case, the story showcases a point of conjunction between postmodern and postcolonial views thanks to Carey's way of dealing with the theme of simulation. In the second case, the protagonist's theme park aims to encompass all the life-size tourist and cultural attractions across England, appropriately selected through a survey. This is an "England, England", a replica truer than the truth to the point of replacing the original, which is doomed to an irreversible decline, in a perfect depiction of the *supermodernity* theorised by Augé. Both the theme park and the model town reproduce the ideal space of those who, too accustomed to images, no longer know how to appreciate reality or, differently put, the postmodern world. We could call this situation the "Truman Show effect".

Keywords

Julian Barnes; Peter Carey; Model town; Non-places; Supermodernity; Simulacra

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About halfway through Paul Auster's novel *The Brooklyn Follies* (2006), the two protagonists, Uncle Nathan Glass and his nephew Tom Wood, are travelling by car and, during the journey, the younger one tells the older one a story, which one assumes is true. The story is about Kafka.

The year before his death, in the autumn of 1923, Kafka was in Berlin, with Dora Diamant. Every day he would go to the park with her for a walk. One day he met a girl who was crying, and he asked her what was the matter. The little girl replied that she was crying because she had lost her doll. So, he began to make up a story to explain what had happened: in fact, he told her that the doll was fine and had only gone on a trip and that she would come back. The little girl being suspicious, she asked him how he knew. And he replied that she had written to him but that unfortunately he had left the letter at home and promised to bring it to her the following day.

Kafka immediately went home to write the letter. He sat at a table and Dora, observing him while he was writing, noticed the same seriousness, the same tension and precision that he showed when composing his prose: «precise, funny, and absorbing» (Auster 2006: 156). In the letter, the doll reassured the child by telling her why she had gone and where she was and promised to return to her. The next day Kafka rushed to the park with the letter. The little girl was waiting for him, and since she had not yet learned to read, he read it aloud to her. The doll was very sorry, but she was tired of always living with the same people. She needed to move and see the world, to make new friends. It wasn't that she did not love the girl, but she wanted a change of scenery, so they would have to separate for some time. Finally, the doll promised that she would write to the little girl every day and keep her informed about what she was doing. The story went on for another three weeks and would then come

to an end[1].

The protagonist of Auster's novel who tells this story comments like this: the reason why it is so difficult for Kafka to write the letter is that Kafka knows that if he manages to present the child with a very beautiful and convincing lie, he will replace the lost doll with a different reality, ultimately false but still believable from the perspective of the laws of fiction.

I believe that this comment is very useful in our context in order to understand the difficulty not only of writing, but above all of writing fantasy literature. In a nutshell, it is a question of replacing a given reality with a different one, «a false one, maybe, but something true and believable according to the laws of fiction» (Auster 2006: 155). In short, taking up the image and words of Italo Calvino (in a television interview aired after his death in 1985), «[f]antasy is like jam: you have to spread it on a solid slice of bread. If not, it remains a shapeless thing, like jam, out of which you can't make anything» (Scarpa 1999: 122).

This observation perfectly fits when it comes to all those narratives that are based on the construction of imaginary worlds, nonexistent or invisible cities, landscape dreams, and simulacra. For the authors of these stories, it is a question of being able to invent lies capable of convincing readers, of substituting real places with false but plausible and narratively credible spaces.

In this regard, a short story by the Australian writer Peter Carey, *American Dreams* (1974), seems extremely interesting to me. In this story,

[1] For three weeks Kafka went to the park every day and each time wrote a new letter to the child. The doll grew up, went to school, met other people. She kept on repeating to the little girl that she loved her, but she alluded to certain complications that made it impossible for her to return. Gradually Kafka prepares the little girl for the moment when the doll will disappear from her life forever. He racked his brains to create a satisfying ending, fearing that if he did not do so, the spell might be broken. After having considered some hypotheses, he finally decided that the doll should get married. He described the young man she fell in love with, the engagement party, the wedding in the country, even the house where the doll and her husband were living. And then, in the last line, the doll says goodbye to her old and affectionate friend. But at this point of course the little girl no longer missed the doll. Kafka gave her something else in exchange, and at the end of the three weeks the letters had cured her of her anguish. She had the story, and when a person is lucky enough to live within a story, to live in an imaginary world, the pains of this world vanish. Because as long as the story continues, reality no longer exists.

the quiet life of a provincial village (which, even if it is not specified, clearly belongs to the Australian imagination) is eventually upset by a great discovery. One day, one of its inhabitants, Mr. Gleason, decided to have a wall erected on top of a hill and began to work behind the wall in a completely mysterious way: none of the village inhabitants could see what was happening beyond this barrier. A long time after his death, his widow had the wall torn down and it was then that his fellow villagers realized that, beyond that wall, Mr. Gleason had reproduced the village in miniature, a really beautiful model in which the houses, streets, buildings and even the inhabitants themselves were perfectly reproduced. If we accept Marc Augé's assumption that every place symbolizes the relationship of each of its occupants with itself, with the other occupants and with their common history (Augé 1994: 138), it can be easily gathered that Mr. Gleason, behind his wall, has transformed his provincial village into a non-place which does not symbolize identity or relationship, let alone its history, but only a space translated into images and spectacularized (Augé 1994: 151). It is no coincidence that first of all the wall and, later on, the miniature model of the village are the cause of many troubles for the inhabitants. Indeed, if the former obstructs the view of the landscape by casting a sinister shadow over the village, the latter soon reveals itself as the cause of many personal problems for the unfortunate villagers. As a matter of fact, when the roofs of the houses are raised, the inhabitants also discover things that would be better left unsaid, unseen. There is the exemplary case of a certain Mrs. Cavanagh reproduced naked in the arms of a fiery young lover who is undoubtedly not her husband. The initial pleasure at having a voyeuristic peek at other people's private lives soon gives way to the fear that one's own abyss might be discovered: «If Gleason knew about Mrs. Cavanagh and Craigie Evans (and no one else had), what other things might he know? […] We gazed silently at the roofs and felt mistrustful and guilty» (Carey 1974: 110).

Yet, even if the copy is all the more disturbing and problematic than the original, the inhabitants of the small village, aware of its tourist potential, decide not to destroy it. Then, on the death of the inventor, this unusual idea begins to attract American journalists and investors, who transform the model city and the real city into a sort of theme park. According to the decision of the minister of tourism, the «model town and its model occupants were to be preserved» (Carey 1974: 110). By using a passive construction and the term «occupants», the inhabitants are somehow 'stylized' as prisoners of their own world. In addition, the American visitors are not content to just look at the miniature model, but expect the

inhabitants to pose exactly as Mr. Gleason had immortalized them, so that a viewer could, with the help of a telescope, compare the original with the copy. As Cornelia Schulze writes, the «look through the telescope symbolizes the process of colonization» (Schulze 2005: 124).

From the very first lines of the story, the narrator, who is a young man from the village and who recounts the story in the first person, tells us that the village is happy but that all the inhabitants are obsessed with 'American Dreams'. Obviously, they are not dreams of America, but dreams of American consumerism, of possessing what America represents in their fantasies: beautiful cars, bright cities, ways to escape from their provincial lives. And it is precisely in line with the mirage of the American dollar that the village is preserved. Indeed, groups of American tourists soon arrive, eager to pay to photograph this theme park as well as be photographed next to the originals of the model, close to the real characters. But, as time passes, the model remains what it is, frozen in the eternal present of a non-place, while the real characters age and die. The Americans cannot stand it and get angry when, arriving in the village with the promise and the claim to find the same real-life characters as in the model, they realize that the copy does not have an identical correspondence. The mimetic plans are reversed, and the community of citizens must continue to mimic the small-scale reproduction of their world for American tourists, supporting and suffering their look of reproach for having made the 'mistake' of aging or not resembling the models enough.

Carey shows the grotesque results of the attempt to imprison a cultural identity in easy-to-use stereotypes, and the accusation, even before being directed at the exploiters of this mechanism, is levelled at those same compatriots who claim *Australianness* by birth, with their heads held high. In fact, it all comes down to dreams borrowed from others and which have submerged, cancelled, homologated or falsified dreams and authentic cultures that are different from each other and in a constant evolution. Taking a cue from the many references in the text to money, to the possibility of earning and of economically exploiting the plastic model, and above all to the Americans and their dollars, critics have significantly seen in the village where the story is set an allegory of Australia, a provincial country trying to ape the United States, or, rather, a former British colony wishing to reproduce US neo-colonialism within its borders.

To understand fully the course of Carey's life, it is necessary to dwell on this concept of 'American Dreams', and above all on the reason for this geographical connotation attributed to the wishes of the inhabitants. Having clarified that the adjective 'American' does not necessarily imply a topo-

graphical reference to the New World in general, or to the United States in particular, it should be noted that America stands in the title of the story and in the dreams of the characters as a sort of utopia. The same thing that happens to Carey's Australians had occurred to the Europeans with regard to the new continent. Carey's inhabitants soon realize this when the Americans come in droves with their dollars and their claims to transform the village into a continuous show. Anticipating Marc Augé's speculations by nearly two decades, Mr. Gleason's fellow citizens realize how disturbing a place deprived of history might be, in which identity and relationships are replaced by loneliness, similitude, and simulacra. Only the topicality and urgency of the present moment count. Thus, the narrator reflects on the Americans and their absurd needs in the epilogue of the story:

> The Americans would come, he said. They would visit our town in buses and in cars and on the train. […] They come looking for my father and ask him to stare at the gears of Dyer's bicycle. […] He does what they ask. They push him this way and that and worry about the expression on his face which is no longer what it was. Then I know they will come to find me. […] I stand sullenly and try to look amused as I did once. Gleason saw me looking amused but I can no longer remember how it felt. I was looking at Brian Sparrow. But Brian is also tired. He finds it difficult to do his clownish antics and to the Americans his little act isn't funny. They prefer the model. (Carey 1974: 110-113)

By saving the model, Mr. Gleason's fellow citizens do not look to the future with the prospect of building a new *civitas* in which utopia might epitomize the true nature of the civilization of tomorrow, but they accept to live by aping a fake, a reproduction, a simulacrum. In other words, they agree to transform themselves from individuals to copies of copies.

This makes *American Dreams* (and it will be much more so in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, 1994) an eccentric foray into Guy Debord's theory of the «society of the spectacle» and Jean Baudrillard's simulacrum theory. Debord defines the «society of the spectacle» in these terms:

> In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. […] Reality arises in the show and the show is real. (Debord 1983: 5)

The conversion of reality into a show, a spectacle, takes the place of religion. In the village of the story, everything has value only if it presents itself as a show: people, places and events are evaluated on the basis of their commercial value. And everything becomes a simulacrum: in fact, according to Baudrillard, the «simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true» (Baudrillard 2008: 1).

The reproduction of the town and its inhabitants fits perfectly with Baudrillard's thesis according to which postmodern culture is a universe of signs detached from their point of contact, or rather, of signs that precede it in the individual's cognitive dimension. The consequence is the immersion of society in a Hyperreality, a pseudo-reality generated by the simulation of models which, however, lack a reference in the real world.

In this connection, Baudrillard's reference to Disneyland, which could also be applied to Mr. Gleason's model, sounds very interesting:

> Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms. […] But what attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleasure of real America, […] Thus, everywhere in Disneyland the objective profile of America, down to the morphology of individuals and of the crowd, is drawn. All its values are exalted by the miniature and the comic strip. Embalmed and pacified. (Baudrillard 2008: 59-60)

For Baudrillard, the breaking of the boundaries between simulacra and reality generates an implosion of the social system in Hyperreality, whereby the distinction between classes, political parties, cultural forms, media and reality is loosened until it disappears. This is the situation of the model, of the postmodern and dystopian city, which is also the place chosen to become a stage on which we continue to celebrate the history of a culture based on self-deception and illusion. According to Bill Ashcroft, however, Carey's simulacra ultimately take on a positive, politically connoted value. For the postcolonial writer, the question of representation becomes a point of critical reflection on the issue of power imbalances between hegemonic and minority cultures, and political action is not necessarily inhibited by simulation.

Baudrillard conceives Hyperreality as a sociopolitical disaster, due to the lack of any institutional foundation, and as a cultural disaster, due to the transformation of the very concept of culture into an undifferentiat-

ed and unstoppable flow of images and signs, in which the simulacrum supplants representation. In contrast, in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* as well as, in a certain sense, in *American Dreams*, Carey considers culture itself as a theatre and the struggle for cultural dominance as a competition between theatres, where no artistic identity enjoys a status of authenticity, since it turns out to be founded on the emulation of a mediator situated on a higher rung of the scale of exempla. Following Ashcroft, in his commentary on Carey's *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, the story represents a point of conjunction between postmodern and postcolonial in his way of dealing with the theme of simulation:

> In fact, the book situates itself at the juncture of the postmodern and the postcolonial in presenting two dimensions of simulation, a postmodern field of simulacra in which all meaning implodes and about which nothing can be done; and a postcolonial field of representation in which simulation and performativity become the strategies of cultural struggle. (Ashcroft 2005: 202)

For Carey, cultural identity is a field of simulacra that try to impose themselves on each other through performance, thus generating relationships of power. Carey develops the discourse on simulation at various levels, from linguistic to thematic ones, directing the reader's attention to the mechanisms and rules of representation, the function of disguise or the change in status of an individual who was very different before becoming a kind of actor.

A quarter of a century after the publication of *American Dreams*, one of the best-known English writers, Julian Barnes, in the novel *England, England* (1998)[2], tells the story of an industrial magnate who transforms the

[2] In its structure, the new novel is divided into three parts in chronological order. The first one, "England" (23 pages), focuses on Martha Cochrane as a teenager, fond of jigsaws, suspicious of religion and of the mechanisms of memory. The second part, "England, England" (210 pages), is set in the near future and presents a fantasy: media mogul Sir Jack Pitman and his associates (amongst them a cynical and skeptical Martha approaching middle age) turn the Isle of Wight into a gigantic theme park called "England, England", in which one finds replicas of England's best known historical buildings, sites and figures. The Island Project is a great success while the mainland suffers a vertiginous decline. The third part, "Anglia" (25 pages), takes place decades later when Martha, now an old and wiser woman, has gone back to the former England, which has reverted to a pre-industrial era.

Isle of Wight into a theme park which reproduces the real England, starting from an assumption according to which

> nowadays we prefer the replica to the original. We prefer the reproduction of the work of art to the work of art itself […] since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of the replica is the one we can possess, colonize, reorder, find *jouissance* in, and, finally, if and when we decide, it is the reality which, since it is our destiny, we may meet, confront and destroy. (Barnes 1998: 53-55)

Sir Jack Pitman's theme park would be a sum of all the life-size English tourist and cultural attractions, appropriately selected through a survey: not a miniature England, therefore, but an "England, England", a replica truer than the truth, to the point of replacing the original, which is doomed to an irreversible decline. One is reminded of Borges's apologue "On Rigor in Science", in which a map – so detailed that it coincides in every aspect with the territory it represents – ends up being abandoned to the elements, revealing all its uselessness:

> In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the map of one Province alone took up the whole of a City, and the map of the empire, the whole of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps did not satisfy, and the Colleges of Cartographers set up a Map of the Empire which had the size of the Empire itself and coincided with it point by point. Less Addicted to the Study of Cartography, Succeeding Generations understood that this Widespread Map was Useless and not without Impiety they abandoned it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and of the Winters. In the deserts of the West some mangled Ruins of the Map lasted on, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in the whole Country there are no other relics of the Disciplines of Geography. (Borges 1964: 325)

In Barnes's narrative universe, the theme park thrives as a copy, while the original decays. How we get to this is the subject of the novel. In other words, how do you manage to present a fake in such an authentic way that it might replace the real thing? Sir Pitman's recipe is apparently banal: magic must be added to the urgency of the present, to space and to the perfect copy:

> 'What we want,' said Sir Jack, [...] 'is *magic*. We want our Visitors to feel that they have passed through a mirror, that they have left their

> own worlds and entered a new one, different yet strangely familiar, where things are not done as in other parts of the inhabited planet, but as if in a rare dream.' (Barnes 1998: 120)

Thus, if in Borges the life-size map is useless and is therefore abandoned precisely because it is nothing more than the cast of the world he wants to represent, stripped down and reduced to its own cartographic skeleton, in Barnes the theme park is rather a magical mirror of the real world, and the visitor, totally similar to Alice in Wonderland, has to cross it to simultaneously savour the dream dimension and its alienating familiarity with reality. We have on the one hand an excessive scientific rationality – as suggested by the title "On the Rigor of Science" – and, on the other, oneiric irrationality.

However, in preparing to give shape to his own project, Pitman finds himself having to deal with something objectively scientific: the idea of a national history in whose representation a whole community can recognize traces of its past. Since the Pitman Project is, above all, a marketing operation, the images of that past should not only be easily identifiable, but also predictable, i.e. stereotypes that, in the collective imagination, constitute the quintessence of Englishness. These are places and monuments (for example, the Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament or the white cliffs of Dover); characters (from the Royal Family to Robin Hood, from Shakespeare to Alice); ideologies (imperialism); habits (gardening, pubs, shopping); and commonplaces (emotional frigidity, bad personal hygiene, phlegm and snobbery)[3]. Translating them into a series of tourist attractions means, first of all, dealing with a common historical legacy made up of clichés, of names that have always been handed down but are now empty of meaning; of dates learned by heart; of a past about which most English people have vague ideas but which, for this very reason, they are ready to mythicize. For Pitman and his followers, it is a question of recovering – rather than creating – a common fictional encyclopedia for potential visitors to "England! England!". The theme park is a great fictional operation,

[3] Sir Jack asks his Concept Developer to take an opinion poll on the «Top fifty characteristics associated with the word England among prospective purchasers of Quality Leisure. Serious targeting. I don't want to hear about kids and their favourite bands.» (Barnes 1998: 58) The polling takes place world-wide, because the idea is to attract as many visitors from as many countries as possible. The result is a heterogeneous list of fifty quintessences of Englishness. (Barnes 1998: 83-85).

a fake world theoretically recreated; therefore, as happens to the reader of fiction, in order to interpret it, the visitor

> has to reorient his cognitive stance to agree with the world's encyclopedia. In other words, knowledge of the fictional encyclopedia is absolutely necessary for the reader to comprehend a fictional world. The actual-world encyclopedia might be useful, but it is by no means universally sufficient; for many fictional worlds it is misleading, it provides not comprehension but misreading. (Doležel 1988: 181)

As with the reader of fiction, so for the park visitor the encyclopedia of the current world could be useful, but not universally sufficient; indeed, in some cases, it could even be misleading. Visitors, therefore, like readers,

> have to be ready to modify, supplement, or even discard the actual-world encyclopedia. As long as the reader reads, his/her knowledge expands by incorporating more and more fictional encyclopedias. The reader's encyclopedia is one of those dynamic knowledge structures that must be able to change as a result of new experiences. (Doležel 1988: 181)

It is therefore as much for reasons of fictional economy as owing to market considerations that Pitman and his team proceed to eliminate all the less attractive characteristics, those not authentically English, such as, for example, everything that can make one think of Scotland or Ireland. They will fill the black holes of history with popular myths and legends by inventing, if necessary, bogus mythologies that can embellish the past. The construction of a commercial and marketable Englishness must indeed deal with elusive memories, poor knowledge or distortions of history, but it also inevitably leads to the invention of cultural traditions capable of coming to terms with the present.

For Barnes, telling its own history in the wrong way is part of the very essence of a nation: in his novel he is forced to note with bitter irony that the nation of England today is only told through falsified, distorted and misunderstood stories. A country like England, in which the marketing of tradition has become a form of tradition itself (as testified to by the countless pseudo-historical tourism traditions offered to London visitors), ends up as a kind of Historyland – "England, England", a historical oxymoron, an original replica – but also as the objective proof that its most representative elements can be ridiculed by the British and foreigners alike, given

their scale reduction into an area no bigger than the Isle of Wight. In Augé's words:

> Space offers a reference point to memory and, if it often disappoints it, it is because memories drift, travel and are themselves unfaithful. The day when space attacks memory by destroying its reference points to replace them with simulacra, nothing can hold back the memories: their flight accelerates, they move away without the hope of returning. (Augé 2000: 51; my translation)

By replacing the community's cultural reference points with their perfect simulacra, space attacks memory[4]: the country remembers a false story; instead of recognizing the continuous evolution of its national identity, it freezes it into false images, reworking a nostalgic past from the point of view of the present. As Vera Nünning has observed, *England, England* does not call into question the past existence of specific characters or events, but man's ability to know or faithfully represent history. Any attempt to build yet another version of Englishness by resorting to the past is bound to lead to another invented tradition, which serves above all to come to terms with the present:

> The invention of a tradition is thus shown to be of essential importance for individuals and countries. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering what Barnes satirically illustrates over and over again, viz. that there is no 'essence' of Englishness, let alone a 'quintessence'. Just like any other construction of past events, the invention of 'Englishness' is primarily a means of coming to terms with the present. (Nünning 2001: 73)

In an interview given when *England, England* came out in Italy, Barnes himself claimed that the main theme of the novel consisted in the comparison between the falsity of public life and the private sphere. And he added that «usually what a country passes off as authentic or typical of its own reality is invented, artfully constructed and falsified, distorted and overturned, so much so that one lives in a world of replicas, simulacra and fakes» (Albertazzi 2000: 60).

[4] Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, artificial places of memory that substitute the real memory which has vanished in modern culture, can be related to Augé's ideas as Augé himself refers to Nora's concept.

Having ascertained through surveys and market investigations that, «if given the option between an inconvenient 'original' or a convenient replica, a high proportion of tourists would opt for the latter» (Barnes 1988: 181), Sir Jack Pitman constructs a world of fakes which presents itself as the perfect depiction of the 'supermodernity' theorized by Augé and characterized by an 'excess of time' (the events that have marked English history have been assembled together and can be covered in an afternoon) and an 'excess of space' (all English history and culture are restricted to the perimeter of the island, making the shrinking of the planet of which Augé speaks physically tangible). The result is that, as in Augé's supermodernity, in the Pitman theme park the acceleration of history and the narrowing of space lead to the fluctuation of the collective reference points, catalyzing a tendency to individualize paths and spectacularize reality. Spectacularization, after all, is the watchword of Pitman and his acolytes, whose initiative is first and foremost a «project of fictionalization», «an image of an image of an image», a sequence of «bubbles of immanence» (Augé 1999: 112-113). The latter expression (which Augé coined precisely with reference to theme parks) looks at a fictional cosmology consisting of discernible signs and in which one can recognize oneself, but which lacks in symbology. One must relate to and interpret it only in relation to pre-established norms. That we are faced with false cosmogonies is demonstrated by the confusion that arises when, crossing the ever thinner boundary between illusion and reality, some actors who impersonate historical figures of the past are completely identified with their roles, i.e. stealing from tourists, as happens with Robin Hood and his cheerful brigade, or, in the case of the fake Dr Johnson, impolitely harassing patrons in the pub.

In Barnes's universe, the abolition of the barriers between true and false does not affect the Isle of Wight only. Old England too, the 'real' England renamed «Anglia» in the third part of the novel, which is neglected by tourists and has regressed to a pre-industrial condition, is not exempt from spectacularization and falsification. In this sense, the case of Jez Harris, the prototype of the typical Anglia villager, is emblematic. Harris, «one of the most convincing and devoted villagers» (Barnes 1998: 261) and the narrator of atavistic stories and traditional legends, is in fact not a local farmer but an American lawyer. He tells completely fictional stories that he will never replace with the legends of the authentic folk tradition for the very good reason that visitors prefer them to the 'original' (Barnes 1998: 244). Similarly, his fellow villagers will easily adapt by inventing local festivals to celebrate fake anniversaries. In both cases, not only is the copy preferred to the original, but a supposed tradition is created without any

connection with the real past. From the falsification of the past we arrive at its invention: if "England, England" is a codified fake, Anglia is the caricature of a myth. Both reduced to non-places, they represent the awareness that England's past has been rebuilt, remodelled. And if the island is just a 'bubble of immanence', Anglia resembles those real English villages now deserted by the natives and inhabited exclusively by commuters.

Similarly, in *American Dreams* the inhabitants of the small Australian village are trapped in the perfect representation that Gleason has forged of them and their environment, perhaps precisely with the aim of distracting them from dreams of metropolitan grandeur. But, as in Barnes, also in Carey, tourist exploitation and spectacularization, instead of chasing away American dreams, end up magnifying them, imposing the replica village as a magical catalyst for earning dollars and launching business.

The 'new reality' must, paradoxically, be perfect thanks to the exaltation of deception. It is no coincidence that, in both Barnes and Carey, visitors prefer the copy to the original, and complain when the boundaries between true and false are erased, as in the aforementioned instance of the actor who plays Samuel Johnson in *England, England*, or in the case of the narrator of *American Dreams*, too old when compared to his copy reproduced in the model town:

> The Americans pay one dollar for the right to take our photographs. Having paid the money, they are worried about being cheated. They spend their time being disappointed and I spend my time feeling guilty, that I have somehow let them down by growing older and sadder. (Carey 1974: 113)

Both the theme park and the model town reproduce the ideal space of those who, too accustomed to images, no longer know how to appreciate reality or, alternatively, the postmodern world, which is reduced to a succession of empty images and entirely spectacularized. That is a world where things happen as in a dream.

We could call this situation the *Truman Show effect*, referring to the famous 1998 film by Australian director Peter Weir, in which the main character unknowingly lives his own existence on a film set of a perfect provincial town located, as in *England, England*, on a small island (Seahaven). He is constantly under the eyes of hundreds of cameras scattered all over the place, in a sort of perpetual *Big Brother* atmosphere designed to satisfy the voyeuristic tendencies of the television audience. Every gesture, every act and feeling are fed to the crowd; every house, every street and

tree are part of a studied set design. Although it has been interpreted almost unanimously by critics as an indictment against the excessive power of the media, Weir's film also and above all functions as a bitter and disenchanted representation of the global village, in which the clear distinction between the observer and the observed disappears. That is, the distinction between the gaze cast on the Other and the one that the Other sends back to us, as both do not arise so much from a desire to look at, know or welcome reality, but from an impulse to show and show oneself, in an incessant representation in which the other is seen, at best, as a supporting actor. In this game of gazes, reality, as in Barnes's theme park or as in Carey's models, boils down to a scenography for the performance of the self, an ego that is itself a scene, an exhibition, a story. In the society of images, what is important is not for life to be varied, interesting or adventurous, but that life can be shown. Therefore, the boundary between life and the story of a life, between reality and the image of reality, collapses. To be is to be *there*.

Like Truman Burbank, Carey's characters always have to confront fictitious representations of the real world, to the point of living through images rather than in reality, and thus risking being overwhelmed. Unintentional actors in the show of their lives, like Truman, they yearn for the truth but, in spite of themselves, they live in a false world. Sir Jack Pitman in *England, England* is also reminiscent of the *deus ex machina* of the cinematographic story, i.e. Christof, the producer-demiurge and arbiter of Truman's destiny. Furthermore, these same performances need not only stages (the plastic model or the theme park), but also spectators who are in the know: the Americans who pay the ticket to be photographed with the citizens reproduced in the Gleason model, the tourists who arrive in droves from all over the world to the Isle of Wight to visit "England, England". It is no coincidence that all these narratives with a Truman Show effect, in which what is described is a hyper-narrativization of reality, present open endings: as long as there is an audience eager to cultivate the perversion of the image, of the false and of the copy, without feeling any moral responsibility, the show must go on.

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