At the side

of the road

Travel book along the Highway 9 - Via Emilia

Written by Vittorio Ferorelli Photographed by Matteo Sauli Translated by Jessica Sciubba



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Italian edition:

Al bordo della strada.

Diario di viaggio sulla Statale 9 - Via Emilia

Bononia University Press

And I went to the crossroad, mama,
I looked east and west.
I went to the crossroad, baby,
I looked east and west.

Robert Johnson, Cross Road Blues

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Departure

Determined to explore places which seem to be doomed not to astonish anymore, a writer and a photographer go forth along the road path of the Highway 9, the historic transit road which runs through the Padan Plain, in the North-East of Italy. A track which persists in remaining alive, despite beltways and ring roads.

From Piacenza to Rimini, eluding any speed limit obligation, they stop to look at what can still be seen at the sides of the road. To listen, between the background noises, the stories it keeps on telling. Saving sometimes on paper, on file or on film, the images which the old time travelers would have preserved within a notepad.

Feeling at home away from home. Suddenly getting lost, though going straight. Changing direction at each crossroad. Going back and forth at will. Contradictions allowed. Just like in a tale. Because, after all, this is the description of a place.



Piacenza

Two blue beach umbrellas of Motta ice creams.

Some plastic chairs.

A green canvas hut.

A few nailed wood planks.

A group of old people sitting.

They stand here, as if nothing was.

As if there was nothing all around.

Neither the cars passing from every side.

Nor the viaduct behind them.

Or the tambour noise of the temporary bridge.

Not even the stumps of the collapsed bridge.

Or the workers over there, raising the new one.

Only the river which flows silent.

Standing that way.

As if it was only a story between it and them.

Sitting side by side,

above the wood planks nailed by hand.

Looking towards the river.

Thinking.

Playing cards.

Looking.

Talking about something.

Waiting to fish.

And still looking.

Francesco, 78.

A few hairs at the sides of his head.

Bags under his eyes.

Wrinkle ridges on the round cheeks.

We're called "Gli amici del Po".

From three to seven, we're always here.

Less during the winter.

This year, then, who knows.

Since the flood came, we don't know where to go.

We were well at the bank.

There was even the kerosene heater.

There was the garden.

We had planted roses.

We used to fish every day.

And the bridge has always been there.

Since '47 it has never seen a paintbrush. Now that it came down, they want to rebuild it. But these from the city hall, no one ever shows up.

Carlo, 86.

Smart eyes beyond the lens.

Blue shirt with breast pockets.

Tanned face, as an American actor.

My grandfather was a boatman.

My father too.

I've been a boatman myself.

Sand and gravel.

Saturday and Sunday we used to make two boats.

Taking people to the other side of the river.

I didn't go to school anymore.

One day I threw an ink bottle on the teacher.

They didn't want me for two years.

I used to fish every day.

I still fish, tho'!

My son even more than me.

Wels catfishes, carps, zanders. Some eels.

Not here, tho'! There's no more water here!

With the Isola Serafini the fish has gone.

You have to go to Cremona.

Out there, the Po is still nice.

Out there, there's a sea.

Angelo, 85.

Narrow neck, thin skin.

Open face, streaked with blotches.

Thick lens within his glasses, tied with strings.

The wind has already broken our shack.

It's just a temporary thing.

A caravan is what we would need, or a big cabin.

Just like the big punt we used to have.

That one has gone away with the flood.

We've already applied for it at the state property.

They gave me the task, since I'm familiar with these matters:

I used to be a stationmaster.

We put fifteen euro each.

We are all retired.

We've been here for twelve years.

Once we used to go to the fee ponds.

When one of us doesn't show up for a while,

we say that he passed through the "underworld door".

It's the obituary page.

Just for laughs, we call it that way.

Fiorenzuola d'Arda, Piacenza

The water tower looks at everyone, down on.

On guard of the passers-by and the curve.

Of the open space with the car wash.

Of the traffic lights and the streetlamps.

On guard of the "Bar del Ponte. Caffè La Messicana".

And of the bridge further on.

It keeps on being still for years and years, with its sign ahead:

A. BADONI & C. LECCO

Its legs are brown with rust,

just like the net and the poles which surround it.

But its shadow still casts itself.

It stretches down, over the yellow wall of the house.

Maybe someday it will fly away.

It will point at the lightning rod towards the sky.

Blazing flames from the cement head.

There will be a hole left in the centre of the village.



Parola, Fidenza, Parma

Outside.

From the long rank of

bony trees-

From the row of

walls without

windows.

Of black shapes a-

round the vans...

SET MENU 10

EURO-

Shattered

Re-

flectings. Drains.

Fences.

Railings. Grids.



Twisted metal sheets-FURNITURE, KITCHEN FITTINGS THE HOUSE...

After.

Straight after the just raised neighborhood. The mirror windows and the chrome steel.
The sand at the stone post's sides.
The half-empty parkings.

There is hardly a door at the end.

A stone wall closed around by the green. Of the grass.
A hedge.
Some looked after plants.
Someone lives there.
Someone lives th-

But the road goes on.

ATTENTION

After the curve, only the time to see the church's banner:

Comprehension is silver. Dedication is gold.

Il Moro, Parma

He springs among the branches of the fake acacia.

Saint without name and without nose anymore.

Remained to keep watch over the bridge.

Left to guard the river.

No one knows he remained here.

Saint without vision.

Who passes by doesn't see him anymore.

The halo is rusted.

But he watches.

You could tell that he still watches.

His eyes head upwards.

He holds tight some iron flowers.

While the fake acacia covers him up with thorns.



Sant'llario d'Enza, Reggio Emilia

Behind the fuchsia, on both sides of the sign, two little women's silhouettes without color.

ORBITA Sexy Disco

Under the turned on spotlight, fully pictured, a Jessica Rabbit is sitting there.

Saturn is inclined. So she can stay comfortable. Her feet upon its rings.

Her legs crossed.
Red shoes, dress too.
Long gloves.
Half-opened mouth.
Smooth hairs over her face.

She looks at the street with her half-closed eye. Waiting alone in the dark. With her long cigarette. In the empty space of the black cosmos.

ORBITA Lap Dance Table Dance SEXY DINNERS

Four smaller signs. One after the other, At the same distance.

(white girl almost naked)

The cars' headlights sometimes reflect themselves over the glasses which cover the pictures.

(sitting with tight thighs legs almost open)

Vittoria Risi SATURDAY October 16th

(blond hair covered breast)

Vittoria Risi SATURDAY October 16th

(wicker chair raised arm)

Vittoria Risi SATURDAY October 16th

(high heels panties under the knees)

Vittoria Risi SATURDAY October 16th



Rubiera, Reggio Emilia

Past the pump house.

At the end of a parking.

The old road ends that way.

The dark asphalt over the signs of yore. The curve's signals dug in the grass. Beyond that curb, towards Modena.

The silos lock up the sky under cement. Behind the metal sheets.

No passing here.

50 SHOPS 12 RESTAURANTS 11 CINEMAS 1 FITNESS CENTER I PETALI SHOPPING TO LIVE STADIUM AREA GIGLIO RE

Besides, on the ground, a lopsided stone. From the times when you could pass here.

Oberdan Ferrari
7-19-1988
Your youth
your smile
struck within an instant
by the one
who was in a hurry to arrive.



Fossalta, Modena

The clouds' off white puffes look like cotton.

The heat is gluing them on the blue.

If it hadn't been for the antenna poking out from the roof, the façade's symmetry would have been perfect. Not even the tinplate skeletons could spoil it.

The thin cream line of the ledge runs straight and clear.

The brow strip just below.

The wide brick band is spaced out by the bone-white rectangles of the shutters.

Four on the right. Four on the left.

At the low ground, between the entrance doors, four equal signs.

Polished. All at the same distance:

Private ownership

NO PARKING HERE

And especially the shop window.

Exactly in the middle.

Halved by a thin wall.

Beyond the windows, it lays a tidy row.

Litter baskets.

Five on the right. Five on the left.

Different from each other.

Cylindrical, oval, rectangular.

The poorer model besides the most adorned one.

Smoother lines, more squared lines.

Classic basket. Futuristic basket.

Basket. Basket. Basket. Basket.

Basket, Basket, Basket, Basket, Basket,

On the background, the same image. Repeated twice.

A hill, covered by acid green grass.

Only a tree on the top, though leafy.

And, above the tree, the electronic blue of a fake sky.

The shop window, in fact, is a veranda.

It juts out a bit from the building façade.

Over the canopy, exactly in the middle

(three small windows on the right, three small windows on the left),

only a big dustbin dominates.

A folding one, like the ones standing along the streets.

Over the metal sheet, a black and white picture.

Faded.

Maybe by the sun.

Maybe to give it the time's effect.

So that the image looked like a museum one.

A man with a bucket in his hand.

Coming out from an old farmhouse.

Approaches a horse.

Waiting tied to a cart.



Santa Maria degli Angeli, Castelfranco Emilia, Modena

ORATORIO B.V. DEGLI ANGELI

The church's façade is lighted in orange. Sunset must be close.

In front of us the road is deserted.

Of the new one, only the brake's noise is left.

They made the roundabout just before it.

Among the wild trees, a very high metal palm.

It carries on the top strange coco nuts. Which look like floodlights.

Or are they loudspeakers?



The old stretch, now, is safe, behind the guardrail.

Beyond that sign, the deviation blew some fragments on the ground.

Parings of asphalt and glass.

Construction sand.

Blades of grass growing in the midst.

ORATORIO B.V. DEGLI ANGELI

The wooden door remains locked.

Almost illegible the letters above the small headstone.

The half circled glass door has many years less.

On the inside, an electric clock.

It must have run down long ago.

Only the hands are left.

Behind the windows' grid, the shutters are closed too.

But not wholly.

Divided in the middle by an iron cross, an empty little space remains open.

An image survives on one of the shutters.

The Blessed Virgin can still be seen through the paper into pieces.

A brick wall lays by the side of the façade along the edge.

Who knows when, a new body has been married off to the first one.

In order to consecrate the union, someone added earthenware.

The Madonna showing the Holy Heart.

All around, her angels smiling.

Borgo Panigale, Bologna

Waiting to fill up at the Methane Station...

Here it comes Spring! We make the only and real African braids Cell. 346...

Cylinder for sale for LPG 62 liters at 250,00 Euro cell. 347...

Sardegna

2010 Holiday apartment for rent Sardegna Valledoria SS

- 950 mt from the beach
- Easy access to services
- Washing machine, TV, air conditioning
- 7 km from Castelsardo

Two-room apartments for rent 4/6 accommodations weeks in June-July-August partial September interesting price cell. 328...

I give away a boxer two years old acustomed to stay home very beautiful Tel. 333...

Offer of 200 Euro reward for useful indications or information to find a white Piaggio Porter with covered body license plate: BX...
The means has been stolen a few days ago nearby the Centro Lame of via Zanardi, it's supposed it might have been abandoned in a parking or in a secluded place.
Whoever might give useful information please contact one of the following numbers: 320.../ 328...
Immediate reward.

I buy Vespas piaggio or Lambrettas Even wrecked or without documents. I also buy only the spare parts. 347... Fabrizio vespas

Mower for sale Five-horse not working 50 € Tel. 348...

CA' del COSTA's FESTIVAL Monghidoro 31st of July

Saturday 5 pm - Holy Mass

- from 6,30 pm street market
- from 7,30 pm eating time
- from 9,30 pm auction-bingo
- during the evening dancing with

EDDY dj

The Great Lucky Dip Saturday from 7,30 pm Sunday from 4,30 pm

August 1st

Sunday 10 am - Holy Mass

- from 5 pm food stands
- from 9 pm ballroom music...

and much more with...

CESARE LIVE GROUP

The money raised from the 2009 Festival was donated to:

€ 775 Ai.Bi - € 1000 ANTR - € 750 Congo Project

€ 1500 Casa della Carità Borgo Panigale

€ 1000 Italian Association Non-toxic Syndromes

€ 750 Cottolengo Chaaria (Kenya)

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP

I'm looking for any kind of scooter for free as long as it works. Whoever wants to get rid of it please call 328...



San Lazzaro di Savena, Bologna

The green light lasts a few seconds.

Bologna> <Forlì

When the cars stop, you can hear better any other sound. You notice the cicadas' tre tre.

Here, beneath these trees, there's the only shadow of the whole open space.

PRIVATE PARKING
FOR PUBLIC USE
THE COMET COMPANY
IS NOT RESPONSIBLE
FOR ANY DAMAGE TO
THE PARKED CARS

White letters on a blue background.

The sign is tied to a streetlamp with a thin stem. Which ends in a mushroom shaped lamp.
A silver little mushroom, which the sun reflects upon.

The building closes one side of the parking. Steel stakes protect the pulled down shutter. The metal cut out grid covers almost the entire façade. From the garret, till half meter from the ground. Like a veil.

A voice covers the tre tre. Another one answers loudly. A line of cyclists passes by.

The blue metal veil covers the shutters. It conceals the air conditioners. It creates a reflection on the walls below. But above all it bears the big yellow and red sign. Hiding the building's origin.

Which actually looks like it had been a factory once. Even if all done over now. Just before the parking entrance, four red brick wall columns.

Coming out from a bush.

It's just a small hedge paring, but someone spruces it up.

Instead, no one thinks about the columns anymore.

They stay there, almost invisible.

But proud.

One, higher and voluminous, complete with capital, sphere and rusted spike.

Three lower and thin, but all different from each other: a complete one, one without the spike, the last one without sphere, nor spike.

A family of decayed columns.

Among them, dividing the hedge, a little spotlight stands out. Like a soldier on sentry duty.

Mounted on a small metal column.

Directly heading towards the sign.

On the same line, almost at the end of the parking, another red brick column. Standing aside, between two mushroom shaped streetlights. As big as the other one, and complete with everything. But the capital is chipped.

An old little spotlight remained tied to the taller part of the shaft. But it hangs downwards.

Looking all the time aimless.

Always towards the grey asphalt.



Castel Bolognese, Ravenna

Northeast Broker Service Watercrafts Journey and Discovery

The sign is almost covered by a self-sown tree. Green leaves fan-shaped. Jungle remnant.

Beyond the enclosure, an accumulation of boats. Stems and sterns, side by side. Parts of engine. Empty tows. A lift truck.

The shed's front almost doesn't show up anymore.



Three buntings hanging down, with their faded triangles, just like on the deck of an old boat.

Two propellers taken apart lie on the ground. Just below the "Carpe Diem". Which resting on four tires, is waiting for its time to come.

There's a construction site just outside of here. A gust of wind lifts the dust. The blue container doesn't move.

HANJIN

Who knows from which sea it comes from. It looks like a flag waving motionless. With its oriental ensign.

Pieve Ponte, Faenza, Ravenna

A long straight cable.
Starting from the old block along the road.
It sticks to the new white façade.
Keeping it anchored.
As if it might fly away.
Towards the sky, or the far away hills in the distance.

A rectangle, plus a half oval scarcely sunken. Clear-cut façade, as a cathedral. All white, squared in rectangles.

Standing still, apart from everything. Stuck on a smooth asphalt carpet.

Little hangar waiting for something. Surrounded by empty lanes. And white arrows printed on the ground.

The sign announcing the relocation came down, pulled out by the wind, or by someone.

An electric gate closes off the entrance to the open space.
But it is so low that you could jump over it.

There is nothing anymore, inside the cathedral.
Only walls and windows.
Reflecting as a mirror the street, and the houses in front of it.

Only the adhesive inscriptions are left. Almost intact.

ENJOY THE ESSENTIAL

GET FREE OF THE SUPERFLOU



Cosina, Faenza, Ravenna

ROMAGNA GARDEN

Beyond the grid
they look towards the street.
Dappled cows through the grass.
The horse with the abandoned halter.
The open mouth crocodile.
The pink flamingo.
The heron shaking in the wind.
The swans in the pond.

Only the Bengal tiger has the courage to look elsewhere.

Even the gorilla shouting voiceless.

But they all lie still. Exactly where someone planted them.



Secante Cesena, Forlì-Cesena

At the end of the tunnel, just outside of the dark, a whitish tower suddenly appears.

Above the ground, beyond the still fresh dike.

Round, postmodern cylinder. Remembrance of a medieval fortress.

Blinding tower of the hundred glasses: a thousand archers, from there, could shoot darts.

Over who gets out of the twisting depths without the time for reflection.

Or over who enters it, descending headlong under the city.

BOILDTIP LA STAMPA

Santarcangelo di Romagna, Rimini

They stand still at the sides of the street, as the cars glide away, one after the other along the straight tape.

They are like broken-down vehicles: eight old printing machines not employed anymore.
Standing still, here, between one tree and the other.

Dropped over cement's squares, at the same distance.
Retired workers.
Upright, at the sunset light.

LINOTYPE 5 METEOR

The keyboard still bears almost all the letters.
A black keys' row, a row of purple ones, one of white ones.

ESCV THMB ARFG ODWK ILYQ

A thick dark paint has covered every centimeter of iron.

But in the hidden shelf the rust spreads its color.

Small pieces of lead Left to the rain, together with a leaf. Thicknesses of different measures. A caliper locked at the end point.

CLEAN THE SPACES TWICE

There's a field at the sides of the factory. Planted with vines and olive trees. Cars passing over and over again.

The machines, here, lie still.

LINOTYPE MODEL – E CHASSIS NUMBER – 68 L 199

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Rimini

The road ends here, where a tight white stone bridge begins.

Istrian stone, keeping motionless for a long time.

Tiberio's Bridge (1st century)



Does it end here?
At least it seems,
by looking at the cars
the bikes, the motorcycles and people on foot,
coming down the pines' ally,
crossing the bridge
one way only.

For some meters the asphalt gives way to the stone. Underneath, the river doesn't say a word: it breathes slowly under the arches.

The imperial creature lies calm, as an old fisherman under the April sun.

Everything ends here.
Roads, houses, signs, factories.
Crossed lands.
Shadows hidden behind the gates.
Rusty iron rails.
Mirror windows.
Dust and fragments.
People met.

Everything ends this way. In order to start again maybe over there. At the other end of the road.

Images

cover: Ozzano dell'Emilia, Bologna, 2011

8: Cosina, Faenza, Ravenna, 2011

11: Osteria Grande, Castel San Pietro Terme, Bologna, 2012

12: Idice, San Lazzaro di Savena, Bologna, 2011

14: Castel San Pietro Terme, Bologna, 2012

17: Borgo Panigale, Bologna, 2011

19: Faenza, Ravenna, 2012

21: Piacenza, 2011

22: Ozzano dell'Emilia, Bologna, 2011

26: Santarcangelo di Romagna, Rimini, 2011

29: Idice, San Lazzaro di Savena, Bologna, 2012

30: Gallo Bolognese, Castel San Pietro Terme, Bologna, 2012

33: Il Moro, Parma, 2011

35: Cesena, 2012

37: Forlì, 2012

39: Ponte Gambino, Noceto, Parma, 2011

40: Faenza, Ravenna, 2011

Vittorio Ferorelli, journalist, born in 1971, has been working at the Institute for the Cultural Heritage of the Region Emilia-Romagna since 1997.

Editor-in-chief of the quarterly review "IBC. Informazioni, commenti, inchieste sui beni culturali" he is responsible for its web version. He contributed to the editing of four volumes: one concerning cinema (Federico Fellini autore di testi. Dal "Marc'Aurelio a Luci del varietà), one of narrative museography (La coda della gatta. Scritti di Ettore Guatelli: il suo museo, i suoi racconti) and two collections of journalistic articles: Ma questa è un'altra storia. Voci, vicende e territori della cultura in Emilia-Romagna (1978-2008) and Una parola dopo l'altra. Interviste e conversazioni sulle pagine di "IBC".



In 2010 he won the prize "Navile - Città di Bologna" for the illustrated fiction with *The Neighbor*, a tale with illustrations by Marco Pizzoli.

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Matteo Sauli, born in 1982, has been practicing photography since very young. He developed his skills by working side by side with some professional photographers like Daniele Casadio and Ettore Malanca and attending the Academy of Art.

He acquired the photographic technique through the experimentation of the classic format in photography, from Leica to Polaroid, and the experience in the darkroom.

Since 2004, the year of his first exhibition, he has been carrying out different photographic projects, among which the one realized on the Romea Street ("SS309"), the one on the backstage of the exhibition dedicated to the Renaissance painter Garofalo at the Castle Estense

in Ferrara, and the participation at the survey campaign "Ritornando in Appennino". For these last two projects he collaborated with the Institute for Cultural Heritage of the Region Emilia-Romagna, which in 2008 dedicated to his images a pamphlet of the "IBC" review.

In 2011 the FORMA Foundation for the photography awarded him the first prize in the contest "Eccezionalità dell'Ordinario" in memory of the writer Giuseppe Pontiggia.

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