

‘Io so’: the absence of resolution as resolution in contemporary Italian cinema about the ‘years of lead’

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This article analyses three fantasy sequences in contemporary Italian cinema about political terrorism in the period known as the *anni di piombo* (‘years of lead’). It argues that, faced with divided memories, ideologically-charged narratives of the past, political interference and the so-called Italian anomalies, film-makers have reacted by making the absence of resolution a question in its own right. The article identifies and analyses three specific approaches, each linked to a sequence from each film. The first sequence, ‘*uno sfondo di verità*’, focuses on Marco Tullio Giordana’s *Romanzo di una strage*, which navigates the absence of resolution, lamenting it but also exploiting it to force a particular version of events. The second sequence, ‘*vado a dormire*’, focuses on Marco Bellocchio’s *Buongiorno, notte*, which uses a dream sequence to fabricate a different resolution, but simultaneously underscore reality. The third sequence, ‘*mea culpa*’, analyses the invented confession scene in Paolo Sorrentino’s *Il Divo*, arguing that it employs ambiguity to find closure in imagination itself, rather than in an imagined truth. Through the micro-analyses of these texts, this article seeks to highlight a broader question about cinema’s relationship with ambiguity and mystery in modern Italian history.

Keywords: Italian cinema; history and film; terrorism; post-traumatic cinema; fantasy

Introduction

At the end of (another) dramatic election night, in the small hours of the morning of Tuesday 26 February 2013, *La Repubblica* editor Ezio Mauro sat visibly shattered in a television studio. Like the rest of Italy’s electorate (and more relevantly, like the rest of Italy’s left-wing intelligentsia) he had watched the centre-left’s lead narrow further and further to 0.38per cent (Ministero dell’Interno 2013). Silvio Berlusconi’s crumbling *Popolo della Libertà* coalition, disgraced by allegations of immorality, corruption and economic mismanagement, had been hounded out of office only in November 2011 amid the European Union’s financial crisis and to a global sigh of relief. Yet there it was, poised for a resurrection worthy of its leader’s self-anointed Messianic status. Eyes glazed in resignation, Mauro posited that perhaps the real Italian anomaly was not Berlusconi’s *partito-impresa* (company-party), or the Democrazia Cristiana before him, or any of the long list of anomalies, mysteries and ambiguities that beset the Italian state since its incomplete and imperfect Unification, but rather Italy’s ability to embrace its anomalies until they are no longer anomalous (Mauro 2013).¹ Working on Italian memories of the Second World War, the questions of collective remembering, forgetting and the construction of collective identities were

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ones I had grappled with before, but Mauro's categorical doubt raised a broader point: could the tendency to endlessly debate, and simultaneously repress, compromise, amalgamate, absolve and move on, be part of a wider national coping mechanism reflected also in popular culture?

Few of Italy's anomalies can be better suited to investigating this kind of question than its long decade of terrorism, broadly understood as incorporating the *strategia della tensione* ('strategy of tension') and the *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'), from the Piazza Fontana bombing of 1969 to the early 1980s. The 'systematic use of political terrorism' (Foot 2009, 424) and its direct link to the mass mobilisation of 1968, the widespread use of political violence, the treason of sections of the state's institutions, as well as the still uncharted intersections between all these, make the period not only a key 'divided memory', but a crucial example of collective trauma, displaying symptoms of repression, distortion and re-enactment (Glynn 2013, 7–9). The period's ambiguities have been compounded by endless and contradictory judicial processes (Cento Bull 2007, 19–28), and by a wealth of conspiracy theories. Even the best-known attempts at dissipating those ambiguities are themselves ambiguous, like the imaginary culprits of Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1974 piece 'Cos'è questo golpe? Io so', quoted in the title of this article and so often and so glibly appropriated since (Antonello 2013, 97–123). All this makes 1970s terrorism in Italy an ideal scenario to consider the absence of resolution and the role of fantasy in managing that absence.

This article analyses the relationship of three recent films with ambiguity and mystery in modern Italian political history, focusing specifically on the use of fantasy as a framework to interpret what is unknown. By considering fantastical sequences in Marco Tullio Giordana's *Romanzo di una strage* (*Piazza Fontana: the Italian Conspiracy*, 2012), Marco Bellocchio's *Buongiorno, notte* (*Good Morning, Night*, 2003) and Paolo Sorrentino's *Il Divo* (2008), the article's central aim is to stimulate a broader reflection on how Italian cinema has dealt with the absence of resolution, regardless of the specific historical context. The article distils three specific approaches, each linked to one of the selected films. The first approach, *Romanzo di una strage*'s 'un fondo di verità' ('an element of truth'), navigates the absence of resolution, lamenting it. Paradoxically, this approach seems to create more ambiguity: the hunt for the absent, the silent and the forgotten ends in a nihilistic embrace. The second approach, *Buongiorno notte*'s 'vado a dormire' ('I'm off to bed'), constructs a fantastical counter-history designed to underscore, rather than obfuscate, reality. As the article will show, this approach requires a double ending, whose effectiveness rests on the relationship between the imaginary resolution and the truthful one. The third approach, *Il Divo*'s 'mea culpa', turns ambiguity against those who have plotted and perpetrated it. In this approach, ambiguity is exploited to accuse the likely culprits, direct or indirect, of the long-term collusions between the Italian state, organised crime and subversive groups, finding closure in its very absence. These approaches, I argue, suggest that in the twenty-first century Italian cinema responds to the country's 'divided memories' (Foot 2009) and the loss of ideological certainties by making the absence of resolution a question in its own right.

In asking whether these examples may represent broader trends, the article uses films closely connected in three important ways. First, they are contemporary films, produced between 2003 and 2012, in the midst of a broader cultural and political debate on the *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'). Second, they share a historical theme – terrorism and the *strategia della tensione* ('strategy of tension') – which intense cultural debate, political conspiracies and unresolved murders make ideally suited to a study of ambiguity and mystery. And third, all three films feature prominent fantastical scenes – in the form of dreams and imagined conversations – by which they attempt to offset, resolve or comment on the mysteries, speculation and passions that still surround those dramatic pages of Italy's recent history.

It is this latter aspect of the films that most interests me here. This piece is not about the representation of the *anni di piombo*, on which an exhaustive literature already exists.² As Alan O’Leary has pointed out, it is a theme that has been consistently addressed in Italian cinema since the 1970s, across different genres and with increasingly independent topoi (2010), but it is not my intention to revisit these here. Instead, adapting Joan Scott’s work on the construction of historical identities, the main aim of this article is ‘to consider fantasy as a formal mechanism for the articulation of historical scenarios that are at once historically specific and transcendent of historical specificity’ (2001). In this context, I am not using fantasy in terms of its psychoanalytic framework of sexual desire. I am rather referring to fantasy as the imagining of historical events, in the form of dream sequences or explicitly fictive reconstructions, and am particularly interested in its role in resolving contradictions, as ‘the narrative occlusion of antagonism’ (Žižek 2008, 11–17). This form of fantasy is most appropriate to the study of history, and of the study of histories steeped in mystery and ambiguity: not only does it contain the seed of the contradiction it seeks to resolve, but history itself – as a narrative form of the past – can be interpreted as an attempt to reconcile the chaos of an unbridled past.

By asking what role fantasy might play in our understanding of the past, and especially in those aspects of the past that are most elusive, this article contributes to the ongoing conceptualisation of the ‘double historicity’ of historical cinema. Historical cinema is a mediation between past and present that is simultaneously about both, and in that mediation is its potential as a source for studying memory. Film can thus be added to the rubric of what Pierre Nora called *lieux de mémoire* (1989), although Henri Rousso’s *vecteurs de mémoire* may be a more apt terminology for cinema (1988), and used as an invaluable source to allow us to trace the relationship between remembering, silence and forgetting (Winter 2010). On the one hand, this article seeks to find in the specific a key to more generalised conclusions, in the mould of Edoardo Grendi’s microhistorical concept of the ‘exceptional-normal’: ‘*il documento eccezionale può risultare eccezionalmente normale*’ (‘the exceptional document can become exceptionally normal’) (Grendi 1977, 512). The territory of this enquiry is thus not the *longue-durée* of Italian cinema about terrorism or of the careers of Bellocchio, Giordana or Sorrentino, but three specific sequences which, remarkably, all resort to fantasy to deal with Italian mysteries. These three sequences are to this historian what the individual lives of early modern peasants were to early micro-historians: ‘indicators of meaning that can assume general dimensions’ (Giovanni Levi 1991, 109). As Levi has written, ‘in micro-history the researcher’s point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account’ (106): this article is no different and it is as such that the reader should understand its deliberately personal tone.

‘Un fondo di verità’: ambivalence and compromise in Marco Tullio Giordana’s *Romanzo di una strage*

I like Marco Tullio Giordana. As a poet of what Paul Ginsborg has called the ‘virtuous minorities’ (1996, 26–27), he has consistently celebrated the post-war saga of Italy’s hard-working and resilient middle and lower-middle class. That might explain my bias, because the generation that he celebrates, most notably in *La meglio gioventù* (*The Best of Youth*, 2005), is that of my own parents: card-carrying members of the PCI, in the tense spring months of 1974 – when Pasolini penned ‘Cos’è questo golpe’ and a coup seemed imminent – they were among those who patrolled army barracks in Rome to monitor suspicious troop activity, in a wood-panelled Morris Minor later burnt by neo-fascists.

Like Nanni Moretti at the traffic lights in *Caro diario* (*Dear Diary*, 1993), though perhaps less idiosyncratic or inspired, Giordana celebrates the minority, now by imagining it a majority for a

day, as in the (ever-so-slightly) cheesy ending of *La meglio gioventù*, now by immortalising its martyrdom, as in *I cento passi*, first, and in *Romanzo di una strage* more recently. In spite of O'Leary's astute anti-auteurist account of political commitment in the films directed by Giordana (2009, 213–231), I would maintain that Giordana conveys a personal form of *impegno* (social and political *engagement*). This is distinguishable through its refusal to lament the individualism of Italy's left-wing bourgeoisie, its rejection of rigid ideological frameworks and even, as O'Leary himself acknowledges, its embrace of sentimentality (2009, 224–226). Much of his cinema and politics are based on a vision that is simultaneously lucid and optimistic, critical and hopeful, drawn from the collision of the individual with History, with a capital H.

However, despite perhaps belonging (albeit unwittingly!) to what O'Leary would call 'the engagé constituency' (2009, 224–225), I will argue that in *Romanzo di una strage* Giordana's poetry of reconciliation goes too far, loses focus and, in negotiating mystery and conjecture, achieves only ambiguity and equidistance. In this case a compromise between divided memories achieves only a *compromised* memory. It does not escape me that, in dealing with Piazza Fontana and its cover-up, ambiguity might be an inevitable corollary, yet Giordana's ambiguity is not the judicial one of an unsolved mystery but the political one of a mystery solved and then shelved, lest the solution seem partisan and therefore divisive. To avoid this charge Giordana, once again collaborating with script writers Stefano Rulli and Sandro Petraglia,³ adopted the discredited two-bomb narrative advanced by Paolo Cucchiarelli in 2009 (Cazzullo, 2009), suggesting that two identical but differently powerful bombs were placed at the Banca dell'Agricoltura on 12 December 1969. The first was allegedly placed by Pietro Valpreda, designed to explode after business hours and create damage and confusion rather than victims. The second bomb, much more lethal, supposedly belonged to secret service-backed neo-fascists infiltrated amongst the anarchists, seizing the opportunity to launch a campaign of home-grown terrorism designed to strengthen the government's hand, and weaken the left's popular appeal. To further strengthen this plot and hammer home his message of civic responsibility, Giordana constructs three distinct sides to the Piazza Fontana story: violent anarchists, fascists and their puppeteers, and a virtuous minority committed to a democracy under threat by all sides.

Crucially for both the historical implications and contemporary political dynamics of *Romanzo di una strage*, both anarchist railwayman Giuseppe (Pino) Pinelli and police detective Luigi Calabresi belong to this latter category. Pinelli and Calabresi are immediately established as parallel heroes on opposite sides of the political divide. Within a few scenes, both are shown enjoying rewarding and harmonious family lives, respecting each other's motivation, actively calming down tensions and strongly rebuking violent allies. Stopping just short of co-opting him into the mainstream of the Communist Party, Giordana transforms Pinelli into the incarnation of a post-war Italian left committed to social justice, pacifism, democracy and reformism. In parallel, Calabresi becomes *the* state as it could have been: ethical, efficient, compassionate, dedicated to the rule of law and the fair exercise of power. Committed, selfless, witty, *padri di famiglia*: Calabresi and Pinelli are all-Italian heroes and parallel victims of subversive forces. Their still-mysterious deaths establish a final link between them: Pinelli was falsely accused of the Piazza Fontana massacre and fell to his death from a window while in police custody, on 15 December 1969; Calabresi, blamed by the Left for the anarchist's death, was gunned down in front of his apartment on 17 May 1972.

With two bombs and two opposing but mutually-respectful heroes, the film is the cinematic equivalent of the twin and rival plaques that today commemorate Pinelli's death in Milan: side by side, identical but for the words '*ucciso innocente*' ('an innocent killed') and '*morto innocente*' ('an innocent dead') that define the respective interpretations of Pinelli's death. Foot isolates those

plaques as symptoms of Italy's unique attitude to memory, capable of institutionalising counter-memories, and thus ultimately co-opting them or at least defusing their subversive power (Foot 2009: 404–433). Whether deliberately, as O'Leary has argued (2013), or not, Giordana's careful balancing act between two bombs, two sets of criminal responsibilities and two opposite but equally moral commitments to democracy, achieves a similar kind of unresolved closure.

There is certainly something to be said for the peaceful coexisting of different perspectives, especially when the judicial process has failed to resolve much of the mystery around Piazza Fontana and other massacres of the *strategia della tensione*. Yet ambiguity sits uneasily in a film that spans the genres of investigative thriller and political exposé. O'Leary's analysis of the film as 'part of the project to offer a memory of the event that can be shared by right and left', perhaps above and beyond the stated attempt to reconstruct the events of Piazza Fontana, is insightful (2013), but Giordana's cinematic Truth and Reconciliation Commission is missing a crucial ingredient: truth.

The potential for a cultural resolution to replace the absent judicial one is dealt a final, fatal blow by Giordana's finale, which deliberately blurs the historical record of the events with conspiracy theories and the subliminal qualities of fantasy and dream. As the investigation into the bombing reaches its climax, Giordana stages a conversation between Calabresi and Federico Umberto d'Amato, the controversial head of the *Ufficio Affari Riservati* (Confidential Affairs Office) of the Ministry of the Interior, who according to the film was both knowledgeable of the facts and actively hindering their proper investigation. In this conversation Calabresi refuses d'Amato's offer of a job in Rome, explaining instead his two-bomb theory: one of anarchic, the other of neo-fascist origin. 'Che romanzo' ('worthy of a novel'), is d'Amato's first reaction, before correcting Calabresi – 'visto che siamo in vena di fantasia' ('since we're in the mood for fiction') – with a story of two different bombs: one inspired indeed by neo-fascist provocateurs and disloyal elements of the secret service, harmless and meant to be blamed on anarchists like previous explosions on the railways; the other, the deadly one, placed by a murky cartel of international and domestic would-be military dictators inspired by the CIA-backed Greek coup of 1969. 'Favole', d'Amato concludes, 'ma come nelle favole c'è sempre un fondo di verità' ('fairy tales [...] but as in fairy tales there is always a background of truth'). Giordana is channelling a sense of drama and invention that has long been associated with Piazza Fontana, from Dario Fo's 1970 *Morte accidentale di un'anarchico* (*Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, [1970] 2007) to Corrado Stajano (1993). But politically and historically it goes further: the clear implication is not only that the Left is entirely innocent, but also that the disloyal sections of the state colluding with the extreme Right may actually have been sparing Italy an even worse, alien threat.

Calabresi wakes up in cold sweats on his sofa after this conversation. Did it really take place? Was it all a dream? The question is left unanswered, yet in its immediate aftermath the masked men who gun down the policeman under his apartment inevitably appear in a different light: are they revolutionary communist militants of Lotta Continua avenging Pinelli, as the judicial truth suggests, or are they also puppets of the CIA? The film creates an ambiguous, alien enemy in the face of which even the antidemocratic forces within Italy's state abhor violence. It is scarcely believable, for instance, that even Prince Junio Valerio Borghese, former commander of the dreaded X Mas under Mussolini and figurehead of a failed coup on 8 December 1970, is shown to plot against democracy but also deeply to regret the loss of life in Milan. More importantly, the film seems to conclude that Pinelli was murdered but Calabresi knew nothing of it; that Valpreda is innocent; that Freda and Merlino meant to kill no one and that Lotta Continua probably did not execute Calabresi: is anyone culpable of anything in Giordana's drama? What exactly is in the foreground against the 'sfondo di verità'? The result of Giordana's

venture into fantasy achieves the ‘narrative occlusion of antagonism’ only through a particularly pernicious kind of closure.

‘Io vado a dormire’

Buongiorno, notte also uses a final dream sequence to mix fact and fiction, but in quite a different way. While Giordana commits his key argument to a conversation that may or may not have happened (and may or may not accurately reconstruct the facts), Bellocchio uses fiction to underscore reality. The fantasy of Aldo Moro’s survival works as a post-traumatic closure because the fact disputed by the dream is, in fact, not disputed at all. In some ways, he could not be otherwise, because of all of Italy’s mysteries that of the Christian Democratic statesman’s abduction, incarceration and murder may well be the least mysterious. Yet in other, significant ways, fantasy and imagination are as appropriate, perhaps even necessary, to representing the Moro affair as they are to Piazza Fontana’s tangle of secrecy. As Giancarlo Lombardi has argued, the case has not only been debated endlessly in Italy but also widely ‘imagined’, both symbolically, in terms of the counterfactual histories constructed around it and literally, in the numerous ways it has been represented visually, in theatre, television, photography and of course film (2007, 397). Indeed, as the work of Glynn and Lombardi (2012), Uva (2007, 69–77) and others has demonstrated, the figure of Moro ‘is now more than a character [...]: a Lear for Italian actors of a certain age, with the text of the prison letters as the classic script that can be reprised again and again [...]’ (O’Leary 2011, 72).

Whereas in Giordana’s work the dream sequence is an intrusion in a story otherwise constructed in the sober tones of investigative journalism, in Bellocchio’s film, a degree of ambiguity between reality and unreality is consistent with an ongoing ‘oneiric space rich in fictionality and intertextual references’ (Renga 2012, 184). Because Bellocchio’s gaze is fixed on the experience of Moro’s captors, perhaps more than on Moro himself, a restrained image is constructed, defined by inaction rather than action. Through every aspect of a subdued cinematography, Bellocchio makes the life of Moro’s jailers appear both squalidly mundane and unreal, an existence awkwardly suspended while the historical event they have enacted seemingly unfolds in spite of them. The apartment becomes to the *brigatisti* what the secret cell is to Moro: a box in which both prisoner and guards are in jail, confined both physically and psychologically by the act *in fieri*.

The terrorists’ lonely utopia of proletarian revolution invests them and the film with a dream-like stare, from which they emerge only from time to time. An apt example is the brutal cut away from the funeral of the police escort to television images of singer Raffaella Carrà: is she, more than the forces of law and order, the real enemy of the *brigatisti*’s ultimate goal?⁴ Or is she rather the evidence that they too are part of the same bourgeois hypocrisy, and perhaps a symbol, as Tiziana Ferrero-Regis has suggested, of the terrorists’ ambiguous identity formation (2009, 169)? Elsewhere, footage of Soviet social-realist propaganda gives the ideological, almost religious dimension of the BR: the *brigatisti* may chant ‘*la classe operaia deve dirigere tutto*’ (‘the working classes must manage everything’), but the working classes they are watching on television, crying for Moro and cheering Berlinguer’s defiant democratic oratory, do not have life in the socialist utopia on their minds. The Soviet propaganda – still true to Stalin’s idea of realism as ‘life as it ought to be’ (Taylor 2008, 129) – serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it frees the narrative of the need to contextualise the *Brigate Rosse*, allowing Bellocchio to represent them as ordinary, undermining them and avoiding the resonant but caricatured terrorists of films like *La meglio gioventù*, full of scenes of smoky, cult-like meetings and self-righteous comrades discussing ‘*il bisogno di comunismo*’ (‘the basic human need for communism’). On the other

hand, the sunny, joyful footage of Soviet parades hints at a kind of *collective trance*, reinforced by Moro's comparison between his own faith and the communist faith of his killers, in his eyes far more rigid and self-punishing.

Thus, by the time Chiara's subconscious revulsion at the conformist, almost bourgeois mundanity of her accomplices emerges, during a last supper in which she imagines them crossing themselves before eating, the line between reality and unreality is well and truly blurred. It beckons a fantasy of Moro's survival which has largely defined the film, attracting much critical attention (O'Leary 2008, 38–39). As Chiara declares '*io non ho fame, vado a dormire*' ('I'm not hungry, I'm off to bed') to the complete lack of acknowledgment of her three male comrades, all heads down, slurping soup in unison, she checks on the politician condemned to die in the morning and heads to bed. She closes her eyes and the film enters a long dream sequence in which Moro quietly slips out of his cell, puts on his coat and leaves the flat in the cold light of dawn. As the Christian Democrat sets off down the deserted street, with a peaceful and grim smile, EUR's Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana can be seen in the background: a site dripping with political, urban and cinematic symbolism at least since *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, Roberto Rossellini, 1945) (Zambenedetti 2010). A slow fade cuts back to Chiara, still dreaming her alternative ending as her accomplices lead a blindfolded Moro out of the hideaway, on his last walk to the red Renault Four in the back of which his body would be found, later that day. The film's title appears in red, as a boundary between the fiction and the real footage of Moro's funeral that follows it. Importantly, this is not the private, family ceremony where he was interred, but his public, 'fake' funeral (Foot 2009, 434). A long panoramic shot of mourning dignitaries serves both to indict them for failing to redeem Moro from his kidnapers and as a reminder of the true ending of the story.

A final fade goes back to the serene Moro heading down the street, as Pink Floyd's *Shine on You Crazy Diamond*, which had accompanied the entire dream sequence, gives way to Schubert's *Moments Musicaux in F minor* (*D 780, Op. 94 No.3*). The soundtrack further reinforces the fertile tension between fact and fiction. Pink Floyd's track had in fact accompanied the condemned partisan's letter, read earlier in the film in a poignant moment associating Moro's desperate missives to his wife and his friend Pope Paul VI to those of the victims of fascist reprisals in the Second World War; Schubert, on the other hand, had accompanied the Soviet new society parades. Where the former is Bellocchio's music of grim historical reality, the latter is the sound of utopia, working here as a nostalgia for a future that never was.

Where in Giordana's film the dream sequence had worked to render the film's conclusion ambiguous and open it to different interpretations, in Bellocchio's the same device creates a double ending, a counter-factual resolution that is not only consolatory but also works to render the whole film a 'palimpsest', as O'Leary has convincingly argued, that interacts simultaneously with the historical events and their afterlife (2008, 43). That complexity affords viewers the choice either to seize a consolatory closure that allows them to maintain a basic belief in Italian democracy and humanity, or to resign themselves to a depressing ending that hints at missed opportunities, fatal flaws, and perhaps the impossibility of ever achieving meaningful change. It is a device that has often been used in recent times, for example in Holocaust films such as *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*, Roberto Benigni, 1997), *Train de Vie* (*Train of Life*, Radu Mihaileanu, 1998) and *Jacob the Liar* (Peter Kasovitz, 1999), in which death and survival are both offered to the audience, more or less subtly and in different permutations. But the historical and political effectiveness of the double ending arguably resides in the relationship between the two endings: the impact of a happy ending dashed by a tragic reality can be immensely more powerful, and healthy, than the cathartic and consolatory reverse. In the same vein, Chiara's dream captures a historic moment because it is her dream, not the spectator's, who is uncompromisingly shaken from it.

Mea culpa

Like, but also unlike Bellocchio, Sorrentino blurs the line between reality and imagination in *Il Divo*. Like Bellocchio, the Neapolitan director seeks to access what Paul Ricoeur would have called ‘the essence of history’ (1984, 7), something deeper than a correct reconstruction of the facts. Unlike Bellocchio, however, Sorrentino is quite happy to use the same cinematic register for truth and fiction. The result leaves the viewer the impression not that truth does not matter, but that in a country where truth is so consistently hidden, imagination might just get us closer to real understanding. Right from the vertiginous combination of low-angle tracking shot and bird’s-eye view of the bomb that killed judge Giovanni Falcone, his wife Francesca Morvillo and their police escort at Capaci in 1993, Sorrentino’s trademark camera(over)work introduces elements of his baroque visual imaginary even into established historical record. Sorrentino is, in this respect, the most genuinely postmodern of Italy’s ‘historiophoters’, to adapt Hayden White’s term (1988).

Il Divo is a dramatised and perceptive interpretation of the final years in power of Giulio Andreotti, the veteran Christian Democratic politician and seven-times prime minister of Italy, who was widely linked in the last three decades of the twentieth century to all major Italian mysteries, from corruption scandals to political murders, from murky international deals to collusion with the Sicilian Mafia. In my Roman high school – the same that Andreotti once attended – a graffito reproduced Andreotti’s famous hunch under a huge bag of loot, with the words ‘*er sacco de Roma*’ (‘the sack of Rome’ – referencing the Landsknecht ransack of Rome in 1527). It was only a flight of stairs up from another graffito: ‘*la P38 spara*’ (‘the P38 shoots’ – a well-known terrorist slogan of the ‘years of lead’ after the Red Brigades’ favoured pistol). This is to say that conspiracy theories around Andreotti were mainstream in late First Republic Italy. *Il Divo* embraces all of them – including a rumoured fraternal kiss between Andreotti and brutal Mafia boss Totò Riina – with the same jovial *j’accuse* of those high-school artists, and with the same matter-of-fact acknowledgment of the school authorities who had tolerated their creative reading of Italian history. It was after all the same nonchalance with which Andreotti himself rode his own conspiracy theories while he was in power, simultaneously dismissing and cultivating his aura of untouchability with pithy and ambiguous aphorisms.

Notably, Andreotti did not attempt to stop the film being made or released, as many others might have done; rather, after struggling to sit through the film at a dedicated pre-release screening, the 90-year-old politician simply said: ‘*È molto cattivo, è una mascazzonata, direi. Cerca di rivoltare la realtà facendomi parlare con persone che non ho mai conosciuto*’ (‘It’s an extremely mean-spirited film, a dirty trick even. It attempts to flip reality by making me speak to people I’ve never met’) (De Marchis, *La Repubblica*, 2008). Interestingly, it was not an imagined conversation with a corrupt politician, a liaison with an anti-democratic conspirator, a link to a string of violent murders or even the creepy embrace of a Mafia boss, which made Andreotti lose his truly legendary aplomb. Rather, it was an imagined conversation with himself. In the film’s seminal scene, Andreotti delivers a theatrical confession to his beloved wife, in which he claims ‘*La responsabilità diretta o indiretta per tutte le stragi avvenute in Italia tra il 1969 e il 1984, e che hanno avuto per la precisione 236 morti e 817 feriti*’ (‘the direct or indirect responsibility for all the massacres perpetrated in Italy between 1969 and 1984, which claimed the lives of 236 people and wounded 817, to be exact’). Sorrentino intercuts this scene with images of the young couple’s promenade amongst the gravestones of a cemetery, rather than with the victims and physical perpetrators of these killings as elsewhere in the film. In so doing, Sorrentino reprises the concept of Andreotti’s peculiar relationship with God, almost as a devout associate of a being omnipotent but unelectable, who has charged him with the mucky business of earthly power.

Power, its retention and accumulation, not individual choices, is responsible for those crimes. So while he says ‘*a tutti i familiari delle vittime io dico: “confesso: è anche per mia colpa, mia colpa, mia grandissima colpa”*’ (‘to all relatives of the victims I say: “I confess, *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*”’), Andreotti is far from chastising himself. Rather, he insists on the ‘*mostruosa e inconfessabile contraddizione: perpetuare il Male per garantire il Bene*’ (the ‘monstruous and unconfessable contradiction: perpetuating Evil to guarantee Good’), concluding that ‘*bisogna amare così tanto Dio per sapere come sia necessario il Male per avere il Bene. Questo Dio lo sa, e lo so anch’io*’ (‘one has to love God deeply to know that Evil is necessary to achieve Good. God knows that, and so do I’). That is why the confession cannot be delivered to a parish priest: such a scene would have required contrition, and judgement; the film’s monologue entails neither.

The confession fantasy is in the only instance in *Il Divo* where the accusations against Andreotti are not carefully reconstructed from the words of judicial findings or other accusers: anti-Mafia prosecutors; Mafia men turned prosecution witness (*pentiti*); party comrade Aldo Moro; the wife of one of Falcone’s murdered police escort in a stinging tirade at the funeral; *La Repubblica* editor Eugenio Scalfari, who channels the accusations of many other relatives of innocent victims of political murders. Navigating the libel laws, Sorrentino is careful not to make any new accusation, except in the ostentatiously fake confession scene.

I framed that monologue in a theatrically nightmarish sequence because it is the only moment when I dared to express my own viewpoint. Everybody has an opinion on Andreotti, so I thought that it would have been hypocritical not to reveal my own feelings about such an important topic. That’s the sequence that particularly annoyed Andreotti when he watched the film (Bonsaver and Sorrentino 2009, 44).

At the same time, the director uses a fantasy resolution in order to distinguish his film from the tradition of the diverse *engagé* filmmakers that inspired him, such as Francesco Rosi and Elio Petri Elio (Bonsaver and Sorrentino 2009, 43). Their influence is evident in a film that, like *Todo Modo* and *Cadaveri eccellenti* (both released in 1976), homes in on power per se, as well as the all-Italian collusion of economic and political power in concealed relations that also draw in organised crime, international intrigue and the interests of the Vatican. Yet Sorrentino replaces denunciation – which generally carries some certainties even in the vain pursuit of truth – with a more detached psychological gaze that involves more explicitly the audiences’ own interpretative individuality (Marcus 2010, 256). This contrast makes *Il Divo* an example of what Antonello and Mussgnug have termed ‘post-modern impegno’ (2009, 21), and of what Millicent Marcus has called ‘post-realism’: ‘a self-conscious step beyond this storied precedent, at once challenging its linguistic orthodoxy while reinforcing the urgency of realism’s imperative to monitor the Italian national condition’ (2010, 246 and 269–271).

Ultimately, Sorrentino can have Andreotti confess because it is only a rhetorical confession, with Andreotti becoming a symbol of Italian power after the Second World War. In this fact I see both the strength and the limitation of *Il Divo* as a political and historical film. On the one hand, the caricature of Andreotti as an all-powerful Antichrist does not really uncover or suggest anything new: by 2008 he was a figure both already reviled by the public and largely irrelevant. On the other hand, the collapse of fantasy and reality allows *Il Divo* to make a deeper point and eschew the inescapable ambiguities and mysteries of its interconnected Italian stories. Where Giordana’s dream sequence at best emphasised the absence of resolution, and Bellocchio’s oneiric finale lamented a resolution that cannot be doubted, Sorrentino’s is a fantasy of closure that is simultaneously an acceptance of its absence. In his approach, closure is achieved through imagination itself, rather than through an imagined truth. If nothing is certain and everything is conspiracy,

then the director can very well imagine a definitive truth. To those who resent the long, slow manipulation of Italian democracy through corruption, treason, propaganda and murder, Sorrentino's use of ambiguity as a weapon against those who sowed and exploited mystery is a rare moment of triumph and retribution.

Convergent parallels? Intersections and conclusions

For all its sharp edges, *Il Divo* ignores the revealing ecumenism of the 2004 judgement of the Corte di Cassazione in the case of Andreotti's alleged collusion with the Mafia, for which the statesman had been first absolved, in 1999, then condemned on appeal, in 2003. With that sentence, the highest Italian court sanctioned the scarcely believable concept that Andreotti had indeed been actively favouring Sicilian organised crime, but only until 1980: he was consequently only guilty in regard to years already covered by the statute of limitations (Suprema Corte di Cassazione, 2004). Thanks to that judicial truth, those who had long believed in Andreotti's pivotal role in the mysteries of post-war Italy could see their (though not his ...) convictions upheld, while those who saw him as a martyr of a politicised judiciary and an out-of-control *pentiti* system could equally celebrate his innocence. Sorrentino missed the opportunity to reflect on the broader significance of the Cassazione sentence, which remains another clear example of Foot's theory around the institutionalisation of Italy's divided memories.

It was, aptly, a sentence reminiscent of the Milan Tribunal's decision in the case brought by Pino Pinelli's widow, Licia Rognini, against Calabresi and the police for the murder of her husband. On 27 October 1975, the Tribunal resorted to the depths of Italian rhetoric to claim that the anarchist had neither fallen nor been pushed from the police headquarters' window: he had most likely died, the investigative judge decreed, due to a sudden fit caused by stress, smoke and tiredness, resulting in '*l'alterazione del centro di equilibrio cui non segue perdita del tono muscolare e cui spesso si accompagnano movimenti attivi e scoordinati*' ('the alteration of his centre of balance without consequent loss of muscular tension [collapse] but accompanied by active and uncoordinated movements'). Pinelli's death was, therefore, accidental, as Dario Fo had presciently satirised it: neither suicide nor homicide.⁵ Again, those who believed in the police's guilt could continue to do so, legitimately blaming it for the conditions that caused Pinelli to feel ill, not to mention for his unjust arrest, the numerous attempts to mislead and so on. Meanwhile, those who believed in the innocence of the State institutions could also see their views vindicated, yet without further injuring Pinelli's name with allegations of suicide and the inevitable corollary of a presumption of guilt. The twin plaques that now commemorate Pinelli were sculpted in this judicial finding.

Albeit in wholly different contexts and with different motivations, these were sentences by which the judiciary, who are charged with bringing resolution to mystery, had deliberately embraced ambiguity, not only to allow the supporters of both interpretations to confirm their conviction, but also to neutralise those convictions. In doing so, each sentence performed a peculiar extra-judicial role, both political and historiographical, sanctioning Italian history without tearing the social and political fabric in ways that might have been unpredictable and painful, but also arguably warranted and even necessary.

It is worth noting that *Romanzo di una strage* and *Il Divo* tackled such similar cases of divided memories, mysteries unresolved both judicially and historically, while *Buongiorno, notte* addressed a case that has been judicially closed with consistent findings and convictions, but that still carries an air of mystery. Its perseverance in the face of judicial closure has frustrated historian

Richard Drake, who sees in the ongoing conspiracy theories around Moro's murder the Italian left's unwillingness to accept its own antidemocratic subversions (Drake, 2001). The contemporary return to these three pivotal moments in post-war Italian history, and the recourse to fantasy to navigate the ambiguities that still remain in the public discourse around them, suggests that Italian filmmakers perceive a link between those mysteries and the political and institutional crisis gripping Italy since the end of the Cold War. The contemporary perception of immobility and intrigue seems inextricably linked to past mysteries, reinforced with constant reminders of those connections, from the investigation into the alleged negotiation between the Italian state and the Sicilian Mafia to the arrest in 2014 of Massimo Carminati, a neo-fascist and former member of the Banda della Magliana in the Mafia Capitale investigation.

Perhaps with the exception of *Il Divo*, these dreams and fantasies of resolution (or of a different resolution) reflect a new sense of impotence that is peculiar to the twenty-first century. It was there neither in the 1990s, when public opinion hoped for the possibility of truth and reconciliation (O'Leary, 2011, 185), nor earlier, when the events were still being shaped and investigated amid confusion, terror and desperation, and when filmmakers (like everyone else) had to coexist with mystery, conspiracy and murder. In some respects, deploying fantasy helps contemporary filmmakers to reconnect with Pasolini's already-mentioned 'Cos'è questo golpe?', the tirade published in *Il Corriere della Sera* on 14 November 1974:

Io so.

Io so i nomi dei responsabili di quello che viene chiamato 'golpe' (e che in realtà è una serie di 'golpe' istituitasi a sistema di protezione del potere).

Io so i nomi dei responsabili della strage di Milano del 12 dicembre 1969.

Io so i nomi dei responsabili delle stragi di Brescia e di Bologna dei primi mesi del 1974.

Io so. Ma non ho le prove. Non ho nemmeno indizi.

I know.

I know the names of those responsible for what is being called a 'coup' (and that is in fact a series of 'coups' that has arrayed itself to protect the establishment).

I know the names of those responsible for the Milan massacre of 12 December 1969.

I know the names of those responsible for the Brescia and Bologna massacres in the first months of 1974.

I know. But I have no proof. Nor do I have clues.

Indeed, the connections between some of these films and Pasolini's piece are explicit. In the first instance, the title of *Romanzo di una strage* directly references the title Pasolini gave his 1974 piece when he republished it in the collection *Scritti corsari* (1975) as 'Romanzo delle stragi'. Moreover, at a 2015 symposium in Rome, Giordana himself referred to Pasolini's piece in the context of his own film: everybody knows what happened, was his conclusion, but Italy survives by co-opting both revolution (as with the leaders of the 1968 generation) and reaction into an awkward ecumenical embrace (Giordana, 2014).

Giordana's point mirrors Ezio Mauro's discouragement at the country's proficiency in normalising its anomalies. Yet is quoting Pasolini in post-Berlin Wall, post-PCI Italy not a hollow and anachronistic part of that same normalisation process? After all, even in 1974 'Cos'è questo golpe?' contained its own brand of ambiguity: not only did Pasolini not actually know the name of the culprits, not only did he launch his sweeping accusation from a regular column in *Corriere della Sera*, the newspaper of the economic and political Establishment, but also: who are Pasolini's 'they', who cannot be mentioned? Who indeed is the intellectual's collective 'I', who knows the identity of the culprits? As Antonello has written, the constant and selective quotation of Pasolini, 'con la riduzione della sua opera a poche formule d'effetto' ('with the reduction of his work to a few catchphrases') (2013, 98), progressively diminishes the outrage, resentment and urgency of Pasolini's original message (122–123).

At the same symposium in Rome, Giordana also remembered Bernardo Bertolucci quoting Cocteau's maxim about history and legend: 'I've always preferred mythology to history. History is truth that becomes an illusion. Mythology is an illusion that becomes reality' (Giordana, 2014). Can it be that the ambiguous language of legend, made of symbols and parables, is the only way left to cope with the mysteries shrouding Italian history? Surely not, especially since all three of these films also share the use of archival footage, which Catherine O'Rawe has highlighted as a widespread contemporary trend (2011, 108–110). Yet this snapshot, this fantastical micro-history of the contemporary resort to dream and invention, demonstrates that fantasy is a temptation and an opportunity when the facts and their meaning are too hard to grasp, or draw out from the shadows.

Just as fairy tales have traditionally been – and are still – used to exorcise unspeakable monsters and primeval fears, so dream and imagination in these films provide alternative endings. While diverse, the shared use of fantasy in *Romanzo di una strage*, *Buongiorno, notte* and *Il Divo* confirms that the problem for 'historiophoty', for cinema as historian, is not what language to adopt but deciding what to say and not say. In relation specifically to Italy's relationship with mystery and ambiguity, these examples show that fantasy can either serve to highlight the absence of resolution or to blur it, either clean the national wound or stitch it up unhealed. In that respect, the three approaches to fantasy discussed in this article as a 'narrative occlusion of antagonism', or a means of historical interpretation, point to two core models of interaction with Italy's anomalies, worthy of further investigation: one that deals with ambiguity by rejecting it, demanding or imagining closure through different endings or admissions of guilt; the other that deals with ambiguity by accepting it, regardless of our fading hopes of resolving its contradictions.

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Notes

1. In the weeks that followed, Mauro would commit his thoughts to print, as here: 'In sostanza è come se la destra dicesse al sistema: l'anomalia berlusconiana [...] è troppo grande e troppo permanente per essere risolta. [...] Dunque al sistema conviene costituzionalizzarla, introiettandola: ne uscirà in qualche misura sfigurato ma definitivamente pacificato, perché a quel punto tutto troverà una sua nuova deforme coerenza.' (It is as if the Right was telling the country: the Berlusconi anomaly [...] is too pervasive and too permanent to be resolved. [...] The most convenient option for the State is to constitutionalise it, making it its own: it may be somewhat disfigured as a result but also definitively pacified in a sort of new, deformed coherence' (Mauro 2013).

2. The representation of terrorism has almost become a separate subfield of Italian cinema studies in recent years. Comprehensive discussions of an increasingly large number of films devoted to this topic can be found in Uva (2007); Antonello and O'Leary (2009); and O'Leary (2011).
3. On Petraglia and Rulli, see the chapter 'Brothers in Arms: History and Masculinity in the *anni di piombo*', in O'Rawe (2014, 117–137).
4. Raffaella Carrà, a singer, dancer and television presenter, has been a feature of Italian popular culture since the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, she was involved in immensely popular programmes such as *Fantastico!*, the Sanremo music festival and the Sunday afternoon staple *Domenica in*, as well as in brand new primetime formats such as *Carramba! Che Fortuna!*. She became a paradigm of the *cultura nazionale-popolare* (national-popular culture), alongside the likes of Mike Bongiorno and Pippo Baudo. In *Buongiorno, notte* Carrà is performing *Tango* in the 1978 show *Ma che Sera*.
5. It is worth noting that while it has become common to refer to judge Gherardo d'Ambrosio's use of the term 'malore attivo' ('active illness' or 'turn'), the text penned by the judge never in fact used those words.

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Italian summary

Questo articolo analizza tre sequenze, tratte dal cinema contemporaneo sugli anni di piombo, che utilizzano l'invenzione per avvicinarsi alla storia per molti versi ancora misteriosa di quegli anni. La tesi centrale dell'articolo è che, a fronte di memorie divise, costruzioni del passato politicizzate, interferenze politiche e le

cosiddette anomalie italiane, i cineasti hanno reagito concentrandosi sull'assenza di risoluzione. L'articolo identifica tre modelli, ciascuno incarnato da una sequenza: *'uno sfondo di verità'*, basato sulla conversazione tra Calabresi e d'Amato in *Romanzo di una strage* di Marco Tullio Giordana; *'vado a dormire'*, tratto dal doppio finale di *Buongiorno, notte* di Marco Bellocchio; e *'mea culpa'*, che si rifà alla confessione di Andreotti in *Il Divo* di Paolo Sorrentino. Il primo cerca di risolvere il mistero, ma anche di sfruttarlo per cercare una lettura condivisa del passato; il secondo immagina una risoluzione alternativa, che ha la funzione di rinforzare la reale conclusione storica degli eventi; il terzo, intrinsecamente post-moderno, non trova la soluzione all'ambiguità attraverso un'invenzione ma piuttosto nell'atto stesso di inventare. Attraverso queste tre micro-analisi del testo, questo articolo cerca di porre una domanda più ampia sul cinema come interfaccia tra memoria, ambiguità e mistero nella storia dell'Italia moderna.