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**A Return to *Cinema d'Impegno*?  
Cinematic Engagements with Organized  
Crime in Italy, 1950-2010**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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# **A Return to *Cinema d'Impegno*? Cinematic Engagements with Organized Crime in Italy, 1950-2010**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Revised sections of chapters three and four have been published in the following article:

Dom Holdaway, ““Da fatti realmente accaduti”: Performing History in Contemporary Italian Film’, *New Readings*, 11 (2011), online: <http://ojs.cf.ac.uk/index.php/newreadings/article/view/43>.

## Abstract

This thesis seeks to interrogate the mutual relationship between representations of organized crime and commitment in Italian film (*cinema d'impegno*). Since the Second World War, images of bandits, mafiosi and criminal rackets have been central to some of the most important political films released, including *In nome della legge* (Pietro Germi, 1949), *Salvatore Giuliano* (Francesco Rosi, 1961) and *A ciascuno il suo* (Elio Petri, 1967). The 'mafia film' in Italy thus has a rich heritage of powerfully engaged cinema that remains a far cry from its glamourized international counterpart. Yet this 'filone', like *cinema d'impegno* widely, has suffered from the endemic political apathy that accompanied advance of postmodernity.

Drawing on recent scholarship on postmodern *impegno*, as well as on some of the most important contemporary mafia films that have led critics to announce a 'return' to this heritage of engaged cinema, this thesis will interrogate the image of organized crime today and its problematic mimicry of this past. It will employ a historically comparative approach, beginning with an analysis of the important waves of committed cinema in the post-War years. It then turns to the social role of the cinema since the 1990s, when, despite the disintegration of political 'grand narratives', the constant renewal of the trauma of organized crime has continued to produce boldly political cinematic denunciations.

A secondary aim of the thesis is to bring into question the very notion of *impegno*. As the discourses that are analysed in the first half show, the Marxist core of many of the political mafia films has led to a narrow understanding of the organized crime imagery. Building on Marxist theorists, from Lukács to Jameson, and extending a better critical appreciation of the spectator, this discussion seeks to bring into focus the importance of genre cinema in the dialectical creation of a political mafia image.



## Introduction

The Cannes film festival in the early summer of 2008 marked a triumphant moment for the Italian national cinema, when the two Italian films in the ‘sélection officielle’ took home the Prix du Jury and the Grand Prix. Much acclaim and celebration followed in the national media, with grandiloquent claims emerging of how these two directors had reinstated importance and presence to Italy’s cinema, otherwise marred by accusations of crisis and decay.<sup>1</sup> The films that provoked this reaction were Paolo Sorrentino’s *Il divo* (2008), a film about Italy’s most dominant and polemical political figure since 1945, Giulio Andreotti, and Matteo Garrone’s *Gomorra* (2008), an exposé of the wounds inflicted upon Italian society by the parasitic and corruptive Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra. The rebirth of cinema, then, came from two brazenly engaged films that sought to comment on Italian society by looking at the face and the roots of organized crime and corruption.

A number of journalists and film critics of this period created interesting parallels between the 2008 Cannes Film Festival and that of 1972, another high for the Italian national cinema, when Elio Petri’s *La classe operaia va in paradiso* and Francesco Rosi’s *Il caso Mattei* shared the Grand Prix award, and Gian Maria Volontè gained the Special Mention for his roles in both.<sup>2</sup> Francesco Rosi himself has interjected in the contemporary press discussions, symbolically overlapping the celebratory public embraces of Sorrentino and Garrone with that of himself and Petri:

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Roberta Scorrane, ‘Dopo *Gomorra* sono orgoglioso di essere italiano’, *Corriere della Sera*, 9 June 2008, p. 13; Roberto Rombi, ‘Spero che da oggi si producano più film’, *La Repubblica*, 27 May 2008, p. 38; Maria Pia Fusco, ‘Basta polemiche sul nostro cinema’, *La Repubblica*, 26 May 2008, p. 36. For a wider discussion of periods of crisis in Italian cinema, cf. the special issue ‘Framing Crisis and Rebirth in Italian Cinema’, *Italian Studies*, 67.2 (2012).

<sup>2</sup> D’Agostini, in ‘Nuovo cinema inferno’, makes this allusion, also creating parallels between Volontè and Toni Servillo who acts in the two more recent films; Anton Giulio Mancino also constructs lengthy comparisons between Rosi-Garrone and Petri-Sorrentino in ‘Politico/Politico-Indiziario’, *Cinema e generi*, (2009), 42-57.

‘In quell’abbraccio tra Matteo e Paolo ho rivisto quello che ci scambiammo io e Petri quel giorno di tanti anni fa sullo stesso palco’.<sup>3</sup> The image of the embracing directors thus stages a historical conjunction that connects the national cinemas of 2008 and 1972, and brings the weighty history of politically engaged cinema in Italy forward to the present.



Figures 1 and 2: Elio Petri and Francesco Rosi at the XXV Cannes Film Festival; Paolo Sorrentino and Matteo Garrone at the LXI edition of the festival.

In phrasing *Gomorra* and *Il divo* as markers of a *return* to an earlier moment of Italian cinema, the commentaries and critiques on the films and their success at Cannes betray a weighty pressure to historicize chronologically. Though they simultaneously and almost contradictorily emphasize the aesthetic coding of the films as original, the repeated grounding of Garrone’s and Sorrentino’s *impegno* within the past in these critiques articulates their work essentially as a re-evocation of a previous period of Italian film history.<sup>4</sup> Thus a tension appears below the surface of this cinema, between, on the one hand, the assumption that it is ‘innovativo, geniale, personale’, with one critic conceptualizing it within a broader downward shift in

<sup>3</sup> Paolo D’Agostini, “Matteo e Paolo mi ricordano l’abbraccio fra me e Petri”, *La Repubblica*, 27 May 2008, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> For a wider critical engagement with the cyclical periodizing of Italian film history, see Dom Holdaway, “L’esperienza del passato”: Situating Crisis in Italian Film History’, *Italian Studies*, 67.2 (2012), 267-82.

register as ‘nuovo cinema inferno’;<sup>5</sup> and on the other, the urgency to define or contextualize in the past of Italian film, as simply a ‘riscossa’ or ‘rinascita’.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of a possible, new *cinema d’impegno* for the 2000s thus appears to be caught in a clash between the push for the new and the return to the old.

The symbolic embrace of the directors, the critical discourses that have foregrounded this comparison, and more widely the success of these political films on an international stage mark a fruitful starting point for this thesis. In it, I aim to interrogate *cinema d’impegno* in Italy today in terms of its creation, interpretation and, where possible, its critical success, in relation to filmic representations of mafias and organized crime. The ‘return to *cinema d’impegno*’ to which I refer in the title applies not only to these two cases, but invokes more broadly the repeated attempts to recontextualize Italian political film in light of the past. It moreover attempts to pose a challenging topic of discussion that appears almost as a contradiction in the postmodern moment of political apathy and fragmented-engaged discourses, and the undermining of notions of the capacity of any form of art to ‘represent’ a given reality or position.

In order to approach the question of *impegno* in film, I will offer an account based on the one hand, in historical readings and embodiments of the term since 1950, the point at which many critics place the first Italian mafia film, and on the other, in thematic analyses of key terms across this period, aiming ultimately to return to the moment of 2008 (and beyond) and the question of *impegno* today. The key

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Laura Putti, ‘Penn: ecco il cinema italiano che sa raccontare il mondo’, *La Repubblica*, 27 May 2008, p. 38; Antonella Salese, “‘Viva Gomorra; basta col cinema borghese’”, *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 17 June 2008, online: <[http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/campania/spettacoli/articoli/2008/06\\_Giugno/11/luchetti\\_na\\_polifilmfestival.shtml](http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/campania/spettacoli/articoli/2008/06_Giugno/11/luchetti_na_polifilmfestival.shtml)> [accessed 1 July 2012].

<sup>6</sup> Cf. contemporary newspaper reports: Natalia Aspesi, ‘Il riscatto italiano’, *La Repubblica*, 26 May 2008, p. 1; Paolo D’Agostini, ‘Nuovo cinema inferno: la riscossa del cinema italiano’, *La Repubblica*, 27 May 2008, p. 38.

themes that inform my structure and recur throughout include realism, formalism, spectatorship and the political. In employing such a comparison, my aim is to interrogate and ultimately call into question the overpowering presence of historical models of *impegno*, in order to offer a more complex image of engaged filmmaking today. As I will illustrate in the following section, my understanding of *impegno* is very much influenced by the recent work theorizing the notion in postmodernity, and thus placed in a situation that is theoretically beyond ‘grand narratives’ of ideology or aesthetic dogma.

My research questions are as follows:

- Though realism as a model for direct communication between the text and the audience is widely assumed to be problematic and limited, many films today still rely on, and are evaluated according to, realist codes. As such, the question arises: what is the lasting relevance of the dated notion of *impegno* that has its roots in the neorealist urgency to come to terms with an external reality?
- Beyond the long-outmoded, essentialist readings of realism, under what terms is it possible to trace the interaction between socio-historical events, such as mafia assassinations, and their representations on-screen? Is it possible to view the mafia as a historical trauma, or does the continual renewal of criminal units and their activities prevent any straightforward ‘working through’ of trauma?
- Assuming the ‘fragmented’ model of *impegno* put forward by Jennifer Burns,<sup>7</sup> how can we evaluate the plural models of engaged cinema that co-exist, such as an anti-*impegno* ‘quality’ film and an explicitly politically committed film?

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<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001).

What is the function of the spectator, or specific groups of spectators, in coming to terms with plural discourses of *impegno*?

- What influence do the external (e.g. paratextual) discourses that surround a text play in relation to its position as a vehicle for commitment? How do the scholarly or journalistic critical responses to a film relate to the wide public reaction, if at all, and how can these be negotiated in order to question *impegno*?
- I suggest below that Italian mafia film can be read is less a genre than in terms of a kind of ‘macro topos’, which transcends and intersects an array of cinematic registers and styles (westerns, comedies, cop dramas). The question remains, however, of what the function of film genres is in the construction of an imagery of organized crime, and, in light of a certain critical freedom in the notion of ‘engagement’, what function do mass-produced genre films play in the dialectical construction of a mafia imagery?

Before specifying my approach to these complex questions, in this introduction I will offer some opening observations on the discourses surrounding *impegno* in recent years, and offer a broad historical context of organized crime in Italy. In doing so, I seek to introduce and outline a series of key issues that will remain pertinent throughout the following discussion.

### **i. Cinema d’*Impegno***

The notion of *impegno*, the Italian term that is typically translated into English as ‘commitment’ or ‘engagement’, is often weighed down by the implications of those rigid and ideologically overpowering texts with which the term became associated in 1940s. However, more recently work on *impegno* in Italian culture has been opened

up and invigorated by scholars such as Jennifer Burns, who introduced the significant metaphor of ‘fragmentation’ of the term, as well as Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, who contextualized its shift into postmodernity.<sup>8</sup> These volumes illustrate the necessary steps in the re-conceptualization of the term that allow us to take it beyond its typical exclusion from political discourses in the wake of the *riflusso*, the period of widespread political apathy in 1980s Italy. In this first section, I intend to trace briefly the disruption and ‘fragmentation’ of *impegno*’s foundational ideology, only I do so shifting focus from literature or culture widely onto Italian cinema only.

The ‘monolith’ of early *impegno* to which Burns refers is that constructed from the ashes of the Second World War, when authors such as Italo Calvino, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Elio Vittorini declared the importance of politically committed literature, and debated at length the various approaches to its production.<sup>9</sup> These debates were closely connected to the Italian Communist Party (PCI), who, as I illustrate in the first chapter, contributed much to the development of a strong political-intellectual culture. In fact the legacy of the PCI developed and matured into the 1960s, in fact producing a more complex and nuanced notion of political commitment than is often accounted for, then began a lengthy and enduring process of disruption. Burns takes the ‘spaccatura’ between Calvino and Pasolini in the early 1970s as a paradigm for the ‘fault lines in *impegno*’ that began to open up at this time,<sup>10</sup> fragmenting the broad ideological discourses that preceded this period. Crucially, though, this was not a fundamental split from the original discourses of *impegno*. Rather, literary and political influences remained present in the engaged texts of the late twentieth

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Burns, *Fragments of Impegno* and Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, eds, *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> I refer the reader to these volumes for wider references on the discussions surrounding *impegno* in the 1940s and 1950s, since space restricts me reproducing these at length in this introduction; cf. in particular Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, pp. 13-37.

<sup>10</sup> Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, p. 39. As I argue in chapter one, in fact many of the fractures in *impegno* can be traced back to the ideological *disgelo* that followed the Hungarian revolution in 1956.

century, as traceable along the fault lines; these lines of influence are nevertheless ‘crooked, broken, take unpredictable directions, and occasionally intersect one another’.<sup>11</sup> During the same period, a broad political crisis and widespread apathy took root that brought into question the very capacity of a text to produce a political commentary. As Burns notes, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 marks the symbolic overlap of the political and political-literary ‘breaking up’ of the dominant left-wing ideology that had guided both in the precedent years.<sup>12</sup> As the twentieth century faded into the twenty-first, the surface of the committed text had altered irrevocably, and the political situation mutated drastically too. The emancipatory potential of a text, however, had not been entirely obstructed: it simply required different critical models to be accurately understood.

To trace out an alternative historical map of cinematic *impegno* from that of Italian literature, following Burns’s model, is bound to incur eventual limitations, because the climate and socio-cultural impulses that affect one cannot be entirely dislocated from the other. Indeed the early manifestations of engaged neorealist cinema, beginning around 1945, constituted not just a cinematic movement but rather a wide cultural logic. As Pasolini puts it, neorealism was ‘il prodotto di una reazione culturale democratica alla stasi dello spirito del periodo fascista’. He elaborates eloquently on the aesthetic and thematic changes that his shift brought about (and this is worth citing at length):

essa è consistita in una sostituzione del classicismo decadentistico, ipotattico, ordinante dall’alto e implicante una netta ‘distinzione stilistica’ verso uno stile *sublimis* [...] con un gusto della realtà, paratattico, operante documentaristicamente al livello della realtà rappresentata, attraverso un processo di *mimesis* da cui nasceva la riscoperta del monologo interiore, del discorso vissuto e di una mescolanza stilistica, con prevalenza dello stile *humilis* (o dialettale). Alla base di questo rinnovamento letterario è il rinnovamento politico: e i marxisti – e coloro che ne hanno accettato la discussione – ne sono

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<sup>11</sup> Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, p. 2.

stati all'avanguardia. Primo effetto di questo rinnovamento è stata la ricomparsa dell'Italia che per venti anni era sparita: l'Italia quotidiana e bassa, dialettale e piccolo-borghese.<sup>13</sup>

Pasolini does, in fact, recognize that the cinema was particularly well equipped to enact this shift, 'possedendo tutti i requisiti necessari al gusto della realtà cui sopra: non c'era niente di più paratattico, mimetico, immediato, concreto, evidente di una inquadratura'.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the aesthetic and thematic 'rinnovamento' was broad, and the re-articulation of the political position of these texts was thus universal. With this in mind, it is little surprising that in cinema, as well as literature, neorealism came to constitute the foundations of early *impegno*.

Pasolini's definition of neorealism alludes quite usefully to the central impulses within this 'manifesto' of commitment. First, the 'stile *humilis*', and the 'gusto della realtà [...] operante documentaristicamente', emerging in particular as a response to earlier cinematic modes point to the key aesthetic mode: *realism*. The second key impulse is the given ideological core: *Marxism* (though Pasolini perhaps exaggerates the spontaneity of this particular political avant-garde). These impulses are prevalent in the films released in this period: prominent instances include the focus on the working class and the casual, realistic events that befall the protagonist of *Germania anno zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948), or Giuseppe De Santis's efforts to create a popular-frontist, consumable-Marxist message in *Riso amaro* (1949). The realist mode emerges from the brutal production of tragic or traumatic scenes within these films, such as the deaths of Edmond or Silvana, and the unflinching brutality of their depiction. As Karl Schoonover argues, in the spectacle of the dead or punished body lies the ethical and political commitment of neorealism (what he terms 'brutal humanism'):

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<sup>13</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Nota su *Le notti*', in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 699-707 (pp. 702-03).

<sup>14</sup> Pasolini, 'Nota su *Le notti*', p. 703.



It is interesting to consider how urgently neorealist films attempt to thematize ethical viewing as a form of action. Their spectacular display of suffering is remarkable precisely for how it compensates for the isolation and inactivity of those lucky people [i.e. the non-suffering audience]. In fact, these films seek to turn watching from a passive form of consumption into an activity replete with palpable geopolitical consequence. Through the staging of bodily violence for virtual witnessing, these films offer up the activity of looking as an exercise of political will.<sup>15</sup>

The staging of brutality within the neorealist film thus can be taken as a useful example of the construction of *impegno* here: the realist imagery, combined with the Marxist message, leads to the ‘action’ of a political response.<sup>16</sup> To give some instances (by no means exhaustive) of early *film impegnati* that adopt this approach: *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946), *La terra trema: episodio del mare* (Luchino Visconti, 1948), De Sica’s *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Umberto D* (1952), and *Senza pietà* (Alberto Lattuada, 1948). Though the use of explicitly *brutal* imagery will recur only in some instances of later films – and mafia films will prove to be particularly relevant here – the construction of the engaged film through the exposition of human suffering forms an important and lasting foundation of cinematic *impegno*.

In Burns’s historical rundown of *impegno*, as mentioned, she identifies the 1970s as the major point of ‘spaccatura’ that altered the course of engaged literature in Italy. In the case of cinema, however, it would appear that there were in fact two major moments of rupture: as well as the contemporary shift in film production that accompanied the major crisis of Italian cinema during the 1970s,<sup>17</sup> and led into the

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<sup>15</sup> Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision. The Neo-realist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. xvii. For his definition of ‘brutal humanism’, cf. p. xix.

<sup>16</sup> The international context of this political action, as a universal response based in pity and grief to the atrocities of the Second World War, should be acknowledged here (cf. Schoonover, pp. xiii-xxxiii).

<sup>17</sup> This moment of crisis occurs due to a shift in the social significance of the cinema in Italy, that accompanied the emergence and popularization of the television. In the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, the number of cinema tickets purchased per annum dropped from 631 million to 240 million. See Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 4 vols (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), IV, p. 24.

political, postmodern apathy, we might also pick out the early 1950s as an important, earlier moment of rupture. As I have argued elsewhere, this moment is best conceived less as a crisis of the national cinema or film industry than as a crisis of *representation*, when the key thinkers of neorealism (Zavattini, Aristarco, Bazin) were forced to come to terms with a cinema whose political and formal tendencies were shifting. The sudden change, which otherwise might well have occurred more slowly and organically, and the consequent assumptions of ‘crisis’ can be explained by the strict State intervention and censorship in the light of the ‘Andreotti’ laws (#379, 16 May 1947 and #958, 29 December 1949).<sup>18</sup> As such, this initial *spaccatura* (while less explicit than the paradigmatic rift between Pasolini and Calvino), signalled an enforced ‘speeding up’ of the wider maturation of realist-Marxist forms of *impegno* at that time. As I will better illustrate in my first chapter, the film theorists of the mid-century, such as Guido Aristarco and Pasolini, began to find new negotiations of realist filmmaking, which filmmakers contemporaneously employed.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the most important instances of engaged filmmaking that emerged throughout this period too – from Pasolini’s films (*Accattone*, 1961; *Teorema*, 1968) and Petri’s (e.g. *A ciascuno il suo*, 1967; *La classe operaia va in paradiso*); to Bellocchio’s (*I pugni in tasca*, 1965), Rosi’s (*Le mani sulla città*, 1963;

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Holdaway, pp. 269-70.

<sup>19</sup> As I will illustrate in the first chapter, Aristarco infamously pushed for a kind of non-neorealist realism with *Senso* as a leading example. Pasolini turned away from the neorealist ‘ethic of *pedinamento*’ by conceptualizing cinema as once removed from the action of real life – ‘la lingua scritta della realtà’ – which offered its own naturalist benefits for the creative representation of a social reality. It was furthermore common for film practitioners to enter into discussion on their political cinema: I use Rosi’s work in my first chapter, see also, in particular, Elio Petri, *Scritti di cinema e di vita*, ed. by Jean A. Gili (Rome: Bulzoni, 2007). On Aristarco, cf. Guido Aristarco, ‘Esperienza culturale ed esperienza originale’, in Luchino Visconti, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* di Luchino Visconti, ed. by Guido Aristarco and Gaetana Carancini (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1960), pp. 13-47, Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neo-realism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 187. For Pasolini, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘La fine dell’avanguardia’, *Saggi*, 1, pp. 1400-28 (pp. 1417-18); ‘La lingua scritta della realtà’ in *Saggi*, 1, pp. 1503-40. See also John David Rhodes, ‘Pasolini’s Exquisite Flowers: The “Cinema of Poetry” as a Theory of Art Cinema’, in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 142-163.

*Il caso Mattei*) and those of the Taviani brothers (*Un uomo da bruciare, I sovversivi*, 1967) – can be, and typically have been, critically evaluated in terms of their realist aesthetics and leftist ideologies. It was, however, not until the 1970s that these two central impulses were really put into question.

In order to conceive of the movement of cinematic *impegno* beyond this second period of fragmentation, it is crucial to contextualize it within the emergence of discourses on postmodernity, following Antonello and Mussgnug. During the 1970s and '80s, unlike the crisis of representation of the 1950s, the central 'grand narratives'<sup>20</sup> of Marxism and realism that lie at the core of *cinema impegnato* were problematized and challenged as never before. The collapse of the unitary ideological project during this period brought into question the intrinsic nature of the 'engaged' text: as Antonello and Mussgnug put it, 'Postmodern *Impegno* [...] may strike some readers as a category error, a contradiction-in-terms'.<sup>21</sup> The first step in going beyond the immediate dismissal of postmodern *impegno* is to introduce a self-aware focus, since 'postmodernist anxieties about political legitimation can prompt new forms of political action and help us reformulate the goals of emancipatory struggle'.<sup>22</sup> By focusing on these 'anxieties', the wider spectrum of possible political discourses emerges, and foregrounding their plurality necessitates a revision of how the political message is delivered, both on behalf of the author and the reader. Antonello and Mussgnug phrase this as an eschewal of the traditional 'top-down' models of 'cultural formation' in favour of 'post-hegemonic *impegno*'. This is defined as follows: 'an ethical or political position channelled through specific cultural and artistic activities, against any restrictive ideological brace'. The critics continue:

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<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Antonello and Mussgnug, 'Introduction', in *Postmodern Impegno*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug, pp. 1-29, (pp. 1-2).

<sup>22</sup> Antonello and Mussgnug, 'Introduction', p. 3.

Progressive art, in this context, is not defined as the struggle for a new hegemonic affirmation – the transformation of plurality into a new *habitus* – but as a challenge to any form of hegemony. The alternative to rigid ideological definitions, in other words, is an ‘emancipatory’ or ‘reformistic’ *impegno*, a shift from macropolitics to micropolitics, or perhaps – in Simon Critchley’s terms – an ‘ethical anarchy’, which respects the ‘multiple singularities of the encounter with others that defines the experience of sociality’.<sup>23</sup>

Central to the engaged text, then, is no longer a single Marxist ideology, but a broader and flexible challenge posed to hegemonic discourses. In moving from a top-down to a lateral notion of political commitment, the action which is foregrounded as a result is that of interpretation, in other words the ‘multiple singularities of the encounter’. Burns has noted that the turn to the reader has triggered a ‘shift towards attention to the empirical and material aspects of critical interpretation of literary and cultural texts’, whereby ‘the impact of factors such as market, dominant political or ideological models, intellectual trends, and social totems and taboos, [play] a significant role in the evaluation and discussion of texts in any particular period’.<sup>24</sup> As such, the socio-political position of the reader, instead of the author, quite radically, gains importance. Though the engaged director is dislocated, the freedom of interpretation that is subsequently adopted in our negotiations of *impegno* opens up the notion of commitment beyond recognition. It is not coincidental that, as such, Burns, Antonello and Mussgnug accentuate the shift ‘from an author-centric towards a reader-centric paradigm’.<sup>25</sup>

A consequence of the freedom brought about by this paradigm is a looser definition of *impegno*. Maurizio Grande has stated that ‘il senso politico di un film si situa certamente al di là dell’impegno’,<sup>26</sup> something which, if assuming a quite rigid notion of commitment that relates only to the ambitions of the director, appears valid.

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<sup>23</sup> Antonello and Mussgnug, ‘Introduction’, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Burns, ‘Re-thinking *Impegno* (again): Reading, Ethics and Pleasure’, in *Postmodern Impegno*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug, pp. 61-80 (p. 61).

<sup>25</sup> Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, p. 35; Antonello and Mussgnug, ‘Introduction’, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Maurizio Grande, *Eros e Politica: sul cinema di Bellocchio, Ferreri, Petri, Bertolucci, P e V Taviani* (Siena: Protagon Editori Toscani, 1995), p. 23.

If, however, we bear in mind the free and plural interpretations of wide spectatorships, which can overlap the ‘senso politico’ with a personal conception of the film’s engagement, then this statement is made problematic. This can be better illustrated by returning some of the exemplary discourses surrounding Sorrentino’s *Il divo*. On the one hand, the director himself has made it clear that ‘Non avevo l’ambizione di fare un film impegnato sull’Italia o sui nostri anni’. On the other, as he observes in the same interview, some spectators have responded as though it is an engaged film: ‘Mi hanno detto: “Lei ha girato *Il divo* per suggerire che Berlusconi è il male assoluto e il paese è alla deriva”’.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, a brief examination of both *Il divo* and *Gomorra* illustrate that they adhere very easily to a model of post-hegemonic *impegno*: they bring into question two major hegemonic frameworks in contemporary Italy, and moreover they do so with an original and innovative aesthetic code built on emblematic images and in-built citations.<sup>28</sup> What this points to is a certain clash between the director or producers who do not want to appear connected to a certain (traditional) notion of *impegno*,<sup>29</sup> and a spectatorship that willingly interprets the films as *impegnati*. An important part of my argument about *impegno* within this thesis seeks to highlight the weight of the reputation of political commitment in Italy, and to trace out the consequences that this ‘shadow’ has on productions today.

As mentioned, the shift to the reader-centric paradigm renders what Grande implies about the need to dislocate a film’s ‘senso politico’ and *impegno* quite

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<sup>27</sup> Sorrentino, cited in Malcom Pagani, “‘I critici? Sono alpini di pianura’, *La Repubblica*, 3 September 2011, section D, online: <<http://d.repubblica.it/dmemory/2011/09/03/attualita/attualita/129pao757129.html>> [accessed 18 July 2012].

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Pierpaolo Antonello, ‘Di crisi in meglio. Realismo, impegno postmoderno e cinema politico nell’Italia degli anni zero: da Nanni Moretti a Paolo Sorrentino’, *Italian Studies*, 67.2 (2012), 169-87 (pp. 184-85).

<sup>29</sup> *Gomorra*, too, has been deliberately withdrawn from discourses on *impegno*: ‘[Garrone] [a]bbandona completamente il tipo di narrazione e di regia dei film di impegno civile’. Carlo Chatrian and Eugenio Renzi, ‘Il reportage di guerra e la fiaba: conversazione con Matteo Garrone’, *Panoramiche-Panoramiques*, 47 (2009), 53-56 (p. 53).

problematic. As noted in the case of *Il divo*, which was not intended by the director to be an engaged film, certain members of the audience are no less capable of de-coding the film in this way. With this in mind, in fact, Grande's comments on the definition and analysis of the political Italian film can, in fact, be furthermore applied to a notion of *cinema d'impegno*.<sup>30</sup> The critic writes that:

Il cinema politico non è certamente un 'genere', e neanche un 'sottogenere', se indagato dal punto di vista di una *teoria dei generi*. Può, semmai, essere considerato un 'filone' che taglia trasversalmente generi e sottogeneri diversi (il dramma, la commedia, l'epopea, la fantascienza ecc.), dei quali etichetta un determinato orientamento *tematico* o *pratico* nei confronti della *politica*. Questa è una prima distinzione operabile nell'ambito di ciò che si può chiamare *aspetto politico* di un'opera d'arte [...]: 1) l'ambito dei *significati politici* affidati a un *tema* e a un *discorso*; 2) l'ambito dell'*influenza politica* (e ideologica) affidata a un *fare*, al modo di concepire, comporre e usare un'opera in quanto appartenente alla sfera della *prassi*.<sup>31</sup>

Essentially, much of what Grande observes in relation to the 'aspetto politico' of a text will, I believe, relate explicitly to the forging of *impegno* in contemporary films: the relevant political responses that a spectator 'entrusts' to the text, as well as the wider environment of her (and the text's) 'community' or 'constituency', relate directly to its political engagement. Finally, Grande's astute suggestion that the 'political' be less a genre than an intersecting *filone* becomes very intriguing, though certainly not unproblematic, when we substitute the term 'political' with 'engaged'. Like that of the political, the metaphor of the *filone di impegno*, which by no means casually shares much with Burns's model of 'fault lines', is able to transcend genres, sub-genres, themes and motifs while indicating a specific political stance more than ever thanks to the freedom that postmodernity has brought with it.

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<sup>30</sup> Though I do not assume these two terms to be the same, the blurring of the boundaries between them is something which I take for granted throughout this discussion.

<sup>31</sup> Grande, p. 16; author's emphases.

One final point remains to be made. As I have implied, the style of *Gomorra* and *Il divo* is caught between a very interesting tension: on the one hand, it is celebrated as a new manner to interrogate Italian society, which implicitly suggests (correctly) that there are few other mainstream, representative styles of post-hegemonic, postmodern *impegno*; rather these films typically remove the films from any notion of *impegno* whatsoever.<sup>32</sup> On the other, it is forced into a critical code that owes much to earlier, historical modes of *impegno*. These points are worth unpacking a little further, as they illustrate a very complex scenario. While *Il divo* and *Gomorra* can comfortably be taken as ‘new *impegno*’, not only do the filmmakers themselves reject this suggestion,<sup>33</sup> but the public critical responses have tended to react to the films *not* according to post-hegemonic *impegno*, but according to Marxist-realist codes.<sup>34</sup> The latter is evidently indicative of a wider tendency in Italian cinema criticism to prioritize readings based in realism or neorealism, that has been questioned in recent scholarship.<sup>35</sup>

*Il divo* and *Gomorra* offer ‘new’ aesthetic codes, that vocalize *impegno* in a manner which differs from traditional Marxist-realist models. The very fact that they

<sup>32</sup> [Garrone] [a]bbandona completamente il tipo di narrazione e di regia dei film di impegno civile’. Carlo Chatrion and Eugenio Renzi, ‘Il reportage di guerra e la fiaba: conversazione con Matteo Garrone’, *Panoramiche-Panoramiques*, 47 (2009), 53–56 (p. 53).

<sup>33</sup> A further significant example might be Sorrentino’s comparison to Elio Petri, in which he implicitly disregards the latter’s *impegno*: ‘Mi sento molto affine a Petri, credo di pensarla un po’ come lui: era molto vicino all’impegno, è vero, ma in realtà girava il film per poter fare le sue sperimentazioni espressionistiche a cui teneva tantissimo’. Gino Ventriglia and Nicola Lusuadi, ‘A proposito del Divo: intervista a Paolo Sorrentino’, *Script*, 44–45 (2007), 113–21 (p. 120).

<sup>34</sup> Particularly significant here is the phrasing of *Gomorra* in the UK press as ‘neo-neorealist’. Cf. Peter Bradshaw, ‘Gomorra’, *Guardian*, 10 October 2008, online: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/oct/10/crime>> [accessed 18 July 2012]. I will consider further instances of the phrasing of *Gomorra*’s political engagement below, at the end of the third chapter.

<sup>35</sup> *Il divo* marks a particularly striking instance here, as the subject of a recent discussion: Millicent Marcus offered a reading of the film as ‘post-realist’, in terms of its ‘complex state of “afterness” with respect to the tradition of neo-realism’. Two responses were contemporaneously released, that attempted to bring into question the need to qualify the film as ‘realist’ in any way, where it evidently transcends any traditional realist modes. Cf. Millicent Marcus ‘The Ironist and the Auteur: Post-Realism in Paolo Sorrentino’s *Il divo*’, *The Italianist*, 30.2 (2010), 245–57; and responses Pierpaolo Antonello, ‘The Ambiguity of Realism and its Posts: A Response to Millicent Marcus’, 258–62; Alex Marlow-Mann, ‘Beyond (Post-) Realism: A Response to Millicent Marcus’, 263–68. Cf. Alan O’Leary and Catherine O’Rawe, ‘Against Realism: On a “Certain Tendency” in Italian Film Criticism’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16.1 (2011), 107–28.

are ‘new’ suggests, of course, that alternative models of *impegno* do exist: less popular films such as *Fortapàsc* (Marco Risi, 2009) or *La siciliana ribelle* (Marco Amenta, 2009), for instance, have traditional, denunciatory narratives that appeal openly to older paradigms of *cinema d’impegno*. It is, of course, very important to take into account the ‘non-postmodern’ modes of engaged filmmaking today too, and to bring into question the manner in which these are able to transmit political codes anachronistically in postmodernity. In this thesis, I return repeatedly to this point in order to trace out an emergent ‘staging’, or, tentatively, ‘performance’ of *impegno* in recent years, that relies on a passive interpretation on behalf of the viewer. At this stage, further questions and few solutions arise; questions regarding the coherencies and clashes between the present and the past, between the production and reception of a film, and between the films that ‘fit’ the critical paradigms in Italy and those that do not. These are the types of questions that I aim to address in this thesis.

In order to illustrate further the range and the depth of the mafia images that could inform us about *impegno* and its development, I turn now to a brief rundown of organized crime on film in Italy.

## **ii. Organized Crime on Film**

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith makes the alluring suggestion that the roots of Italian political cinema themselves ‘can be traced to the first mafia movies, such as Pietro Germi’s *In nome della legge*’.<sup>36</sup> Though the narratives of political cinema since then have gone on to become a great deal more complex, this central position of the mafia cannot be overlooked. Certain films hold enduring importance, such as Francesco Rosi’s *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), *Le mani sulla città*, *Lucky Luciano* (1974) and

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<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, with James Hay and Gianni Volpi, *The Companion to Italian Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996), p. 65.



*Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976); or equally Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Un uomo da bruciare* (1962), Elio Petri's *A ciascuno il suo*, and Damiani's *Il giorno della civetta* (1968); such as the investigatory films of Giuseppe Ferrara, for example, *Il sasso in bocca* (1970) or *Giovanni Falcone* (1993), and the historical accounts of Pasquale Squitieri, including *Il prefetto di ferro* (1977); even the popular, melodramatic anti-mafia 'martyr' films of the 1990s and 2000s, such as *La scorta* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1993), *Un eroe borghese* (Michele Placido, 1995) and *I cento passi* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000); even to the latest, un-mitigating brutality of *Gomorra*. All of these together illustrate that, more than a common narrative, the mafia constitutes a crucial point of political commentary in Italy. Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely because of its central importance, the very notion of the 'mafia movie', or the 'gangster film', is not a sufficient enough category to encompass this range. In terms of subject matter, it risks implying only one mafia, the Sicilian Cosa nostra, and as a means to describe generic conventions, the label risks suggesting only a certain kind of crime drama. In order to better locate the importance of the 'mafia' to which Nowell-Smith refers, in this thesis I have generally adopted the term 'organized crime (film)' to better allow for the *filone*'s complexities.<sup>37</sup> In doing so, the categorization of these films can go beyond any expectations of genre conventions, and include the influences – at times subtle, at others dominant – of comedies, melodramas, cop dramas, romances, women's films, surrealism or horror films. This label moreover assumes a broader understanding of crime that includes the Neapolitan, Calabrian and Apulian mafias, in addition to smaller crime units such as the Banda Magliana or Banda Vallanzasca, and individual bandits like Salvatore Giuliano. It should also be made clear that my

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<sup>37</sup> To clarify: though at points in the thesis I refer to the mafia or the 'mafia film' in Italy, I do so for the sake of brevity and intend organized crime or organized crime film in the broad senses of the terms.

focus is quite strictly on Italian productions, and reference to international mafia films will be made only where it is relevant to do so.

Many critics share Nowell-Smith's assumption that *In nome della legge* (Pietro Germi, 1949) is the first Italian mafia film, with most commenting simultaneously that, as O'Leary puts it, it 'signal[s] the place of the Mafia film as mediation on the conditions of the First Republic (and beyond)'.<sup>38</sup> This assumption establishes the mafia film both at the base of, and informed by, a very specific strain of Italian political cinema that equates to the explicit social commentary outlined above. In my discussion here, I wish to challenge this notion of the Italian mafia film, and illustrate how the political reach of these films extends beyond the traditions of *cinema d'impegno* in Italy. A first step towards doing so is to observe that *In nome della legge* is, in fact, not the first cinematic representation of organized crime in Italy.<sup>39</sup> As Sebastiano Gesù notes, the first recorded case of organized crime on screen seems to be *La Camorra napoletana* (1906),<sup>40</sup> which attracted enough spectators for over two-hundred projections at the Sala Edison in Milan, signifying a wider, if already problematic success:

Il filone è ormai diventato popolare e, a prescindere dalla confusione che si fa tra le diverse organizzazioni criminali, il pubblico accorre numeroso nelle sale ad ammirare i misfatti della malvivenza. Questo fenomeno suscitò continue proteste da parte di strati sociali perlopiù cattolici e perbenisti, che invocarono l'intervento della censura per proteggere i minori 'dagli spettacoli

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<sup>38</sup> Alan O'Leary, 'After Brunetta: Italian Cinema Studies in Italy, 2000 to 2007', *Italian Studies*, 63.2 (2008), 279-307 (p. 296). Further instances of critics who assume *In nome della legge* to be the first mafia film include Vittorio Albano, *La mafia nel cinema siciliano: da 'In nome della legge' a 'Placido Rizzotto'* (Manduria: Barbieri, 2003), p. 153; Ettore Zocaro, 'Resistenza e Mafia, temi ricorrenti', *Cinema d'Oggi*, 14/15 (2000), 9; Claudio G. Fava, 'Le origini: dal western all' instant movie', *Rivista del cinematografo e delle comunicazioni sociali*, 66.3 (1996), 13-15 (p. 13).

<sup>39</sup> It might simply be, as Argentieri notes, the first time that the word 'mafia' is used on-screen. Mino Argentieri, untitled article, in *Le letture della mafia*, ed. by Elena Bertorelli and Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani (Vibo Valentia: Qualecultura, 1989), pp. 29-35 (p. 29).

<sup>40</sup> It is striking that the very first film deals not with the Cosa nostra, but with the Camorra, in light of the tendency to prioritize the former, and to assume the latter widely absent from cinema screens pre-*Gomorra*. As I will point out in the fourth section of this thesis, in which I consider the moving geographies of organized crime, the Camorra does have a well-embedded place within Italian film.

cinematografici, nei quali i fasti della società corrotta e della delinquenza sono posti innanzi con tinte ammaliatrici alle tenere anime dei fanciulli'.<sup>41</sup>

While the difficulty of finding these films today restricts us from offering any detailed analysis of their political commentary, Gesù's words here indicate film stylistics built upon intrigue and *spettacolarità*, rather than any kind of serious engagement. The critique of the 'perbenisti' against the film establishes a very interesting starting point for a long line of moralist critiques of organized crime film, which will continue to accept or reject the representation of mafias according to the categorization of the texts as 'engaged', or *impegnato*, or merely as 'distraction'. This dichotomy, as I suggest later on, is often mapped over the perception of realism within the films.

Though there was quite apparently a 'vena documentaristica'<sup>42</sup> which upheld the 'realistic' side of organized crime film even in its earliest days – and a significant instance of this is the short newsreel *Gli imponenti funerali del poliziotto americano Joe Petrosino* (1909), about the famous anti-mafia policeman from New York, killed in Palermo<sup>43</sup> – even then this dichotomy appears to have been somewhat too simplistic. In the case of the Petrosino film alone, taking it as 'documentaristico' alone overlooks the performance inherent in the police officer's celebrity appeal, since his death, 'cui i quotidiani dedicarono ampio spazio, fece il giro del mondo, destando scalpore e scuotendo l'opinione pubblica'.<sup>44</sup> The more openly criticized, popular crime dramas, that were assumed to be unrealistic, similarly betrayed these mutual influences: as Gesù notes, while the American-Italian production *The Black Hand* (1906) was circulating in Italy, the same criminals sought by (and responsible

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<sup>41</sup> Sebastiano Gesù, 'La mafia sullo schermo: appunti per una prima ricognizione', in *La Sicilia tra schermo e storia*, ed. by Sebastiano Gesù (Catania: Maimone, 2008), pp. 119-40 (p. 121).

<sup>42</sup> Gesù, p. 119.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 172-74.

<sup>44</sup> Gesù, p. 121.

for the murder of) Joe Petrosino were signing communications of extortion and threat with the nickname 'La Mano nera'.<sup>45</sup>

During the 1910s and '20s, the development of longer and more durable reels of film accompanied a general move towards the popularization of the cinematic medium. The emerging industry turned out a series of thematically similar films, for instance Sicilian-produced, melodramatic family dramas which hinted at criminal ties, or explicitly mafia-based comedies based on 'la Mano nera'. These films aimed predominantly at distraction, pushing any obvious political function into the background. As Italy then moved into the Fascist *ventennio*, the number of organized crime films tailed off completely, thanks to increasing censorship. In the view of the authorities, such depictions could only be taken as fictional, since (following in particular the efforts of the 'Iron Prefect', Cesare Mori), organized crime 'officially' no longer existed by the 1930s.<sup>46</sup> As Palombo puts it, 'chi poteva, senza passare per un visionario, affermare il contrario, trattando della mafia in uno dei film girati in Sicilia e sulla Sicilia?'.<sup>47</sup>

The absence of organized crime during the *ventennio* helps to understand why the neorealist filmmakers, who, in Pasolini's words, offered the 'ricomparsa dell'Italia che per venti anni era sparita',<sup>48</sup> began to return to it in boldly politicized denunciations. Thus, the representation of organized crime met the foundational moment of political cinema in Italy. The appearance of the Cosa nostra in *In nome della legge*, but also of crime syndicates in Alberto Lattuada's *Il bandito* (1946) and

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<sup>45</sup> Gesù, p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Dickie, p. 191.

<sup>47</sup> Mario Palumbo, *La mafia nel cinema* (Palermo: Banco di Sicilia, 1964), p. 2. It was only by placing the mafia in an explicitly remote past context that the single, metaphoric representation of the mafia occurred during this period, in the film *Terra di nessuno* (Mario Baffico, 1939). For a slightly more detailed discussion of the film, see Gesù, p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> Pasolini, 'Nota su *Le notti*', p. 704.

*Senza pietà*, and even in Visconti's *La terra trema* project,<sup>49</sup> present the audience with various configurations of corrupted or destroyed innocence through which the films forge their social commentary.<sup>50</sup> In *In nome*, it is Paolino, the young boy, who is brutally murdered by the morally corrupt Francesco Messina. In *Il bandito*, the protagonist Ernesto returns to Turin after the war, and finding his family deceased, he then faces a struggle to find honest work. It is these oppressive social conditions that lead him into banditry, and inevitably towards his tragic death. In *Senza pietà*, the idealistic romance between Jerry and Angela is corrupted by the figure of Pier Luigi and the implicit crime syndicates of Livorno. Again, the oppressive social conditions of the characters force them into this criminality, and the film ends with their tragic and premature deaths. Organized crime in these films thus, crucially, figures as central to the films' engaged gazes on Italian society.

Though this moment prioritized an aesthetic shift from 'realismo prezioso' to 'un gusto della realtà [...] un processo di *mimesis*' that might imply otherwise, in the post-war period the influence of international genre codes is present in organized crime film. As Bondanella has observed, both *Senza pietà* and *Il bandito* have taken much inspiration from American noir and gangster conventions, for instance in the 'femme fatale' figure played by Anna Magnani in *Il bandito*, or the figure of Pier Luigi in *Senza pietà*, 'whose effeminate mannerisms and pure white linen suits, as well as his initials, cannot help but associate him with similar roles played by Peter

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<sup>49</sup> Though Visconti only made the first of the planned three episodes, *Episodio del mare*, already in this film there is some anticipation of damaging corrupt power that became thematic in later mafia films. In the projected third episode of the series, *Episodio della terra*, Visconti aimed to make more explicit the connection between capitalist power and organized crime: 'A leggere il canovaccio iniziale del film di Visconti, ci si accorge che nell'episodio della terra, la vera protagonista sarebbe stata la mafia, quella del feudo. L'uccisione di un organizzatore sindacale, a colpi di "lupara" che risuonano sinistramente nella vallata, arresta il movimento contadino per l'occupazione delle terre incolte' (Palumbo, p. 3). It is quite striking the extent to which this story, written in 1947, quite hauntingly anticipated the assassination of the anti-mafia trade unionist Placido Rizzotto in Corleone, one year later.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Schoonover, as above.

Lorre in [...] American film noirs'.<sup>51</sup> *In nome della legge* too, as I will illustrate in greater detail in the second chapter, is informed heavily by the genre conventions of both the western and the gothic fiction.<sup>52</sup> This is worthy of note, in that it testifies to an overlooked importance of the genre conventions within the foundational, political organized crime films.

In fact, the assumption that the neorealist model of the organized crime film defined the entire *filone* has led to a critical blindness towards any film which, while engaging with the mafia, like Lattuada's films explicitly employs genre conventions. Indeed many of the same histories which begin on *In nome della legge* do precisely this, typically jumping from Germi's film to Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano*, released some twelve years later: a film that can with some ease be placed as an inheritor of the 'engaged' neorealist aim and aesthetic.<sup>53</sup> The post-war period thus marked a fork in the production of mafia pictures, between the critically 'visible', socially realist texts on the one hand, and two important strains of genre vehicles on the other: first, during the early 1960s, the mafia comedy; second, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the numerous *polizieschi* that include organized crime within their narratives. Illustrative of the former strain are *I mafiosi* (Roberto Mauri, 1959), *L'onorata società* (Riccardo Pazzaglia, 1961) and *Mafioso* (Alberto Lattuada, 1962), and the Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia films based on 'i due mafiosi': *I due mafiosi* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1964); *I due mafiosi nel Far West* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1964), *I due mafiosi contro Goldginger* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1965) and *I due mafiosi contro Al Capone* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1966). The *polizieschi* were a great deal more popular and numerous: some fifty mafia films of this genre were released between 1960 and 1980 (the vast

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 105 (cf. pp. 104-06).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Danielle Hipkins, 'Which Law is the Father's? Gender and Generic Oscillation in Pietro Germi's *In the Name of the Law*', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Dana Renga, pp. 203-10.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, IV, p. 254; Schoonover, p. 208.

majority released 1972-77).<sup>54</sup> Important directors include Ferdinando Di Leo and Alfonso Brescia. As I will argue below, though, the split between the political and the genre film can only ever be superficial, since, following the theory of Fredric Jameson, the two sides can be read as dialectical.<sup>55</sup> Despite a small degree of communal influence, though, from the 1950s to '60s, the political mafia film and the entertaining genre vehicle appear to remain publicly distinct.

During the 1970s and '80s, however, the distance between 'high' and 'low' forms of mafia film became far less pronounced. Films such as *Cento giorni a Palermo* (Giuseppe Ferrara, 1984), *Mi manda Picone* (Nanni Loy, 1984), *Il pentito* (Pasquale Squitieri, 1985), *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (Lina Wertmüller, 1985) and *Il camorrista* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1986) demonstrate a notable overlap between comic and action-based popularizing techniques and conscientious, responsible critical messages. The body of work produced by Damiano Damiani is moreover very significant in this regard, producing, after *Il giorno della civetta*, several very interesting mafia films that played with genre conventions and frustrated expectations (e.g. *La moglie più bella*, 1970; *Come si uccide un magistrato*, 1976; *Un uomo in ginocchio*, 1980; *Pizza Connection*, 1985, and he also directed the first series of the long-running television show, *La piovra*, 1984).<sup>56</sup> Emiliano Morreale's depiction of Damiani is a common one, that links together the two strains of mafia film: 'Lo sguardo di Damiano è quello di onesta adesione democratica a un

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<sup>54</sup> See Antonio Bruschini and Antonio Tentori, *Città violente: il cinema poliziesco italiano* (Florence: Tarab, 1998), pp. 7-13.

<sup>55</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992). I turn to Jameson and apply his theory to this field in the second chapter.

<sup>56</sup> *Come si uccide un magistrato* is a particularly valuable text in which Damiani metatextually reflects on the proximities between mafia fictions/dramatizations and historical events, telling the story of a film director whose latest production appears to be linked in to a series of mafia murders.

meccanismo spettacolare, di nettezza nei contrasti, senza sfumature psicologiche né sociologiche, ma in fondo anche senza pretese di “denuncia” profonda’.<sup>57</sup>

In the early 1990s the tragic Via D’Amelio and Capaci *stragi* brought about a profound national tragedy that altered once again the approach to representations of the mafia. As I will argue in my third chapter, the scale of the trauma provoked by these events led cinematic representations to turn away from anything light-hearted or entertaining. This led to a loss of generic representations – films that employ comic or action techniques typically were denied any political readings<sup>58</sup> – and a powerful assertion of the need for realism. What thus emerged was a series of formally repetitive, melodramatic and biographical texts that produced images of martyrdom in the face of the mafia. Most common was the martyred judge – often quite specifically an identifiable representation of Falcone and/or Borsellino<sup>59</sup> – though several other anti-mafia men and women have featured too: this also includes Rosario Livantino, (*Il giudice ragazzino*, Alessandro di Robilant, 1994), Giorgio Ambrosoli (*Un eroe borghese*) and Pietro Nava (*Testimone a rischio*), Placido Rizzotto (*Placido Rizzotto*, Pasquale Scimeca, 2000), and Peppino Impastato (*I cento passi*). These

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<sup>57</sup> Emiliano Morreale, ‘Storia e illustrazione del mafia-movie’, *Lo straniero*, 82 (2007), 40-53 (p. 48). Bruschini and Tentori similarly describe Damiani as ‘da sempre interessato al cinema di impegno civile proposto in chiave altamente spettacolare’, and take *Il giorno della civetta* as ‘il punto di partenza del genere [poliziesco-mafioso]’ (p. 3) and for Ivano Sartori he is the essential ‘narratore popolare’. Ivano Sartori, ‘Ecco Damiani, regista d’impegno, autore d’assalto e di cassetta’, *Segnocinema*, 5.17 (1985), 51.

<sup>58</sup> The case of *Palermo Milano solo andata* is exemplary: in its review in *La Repubblica*, Roberto Nepoti damningly stated ‘Basta non prenderlo [...] come una storia impegnata sulla mafia, visto che si tratta di una “Piovra” per il grande schermo, movimentata come deve esserlo un buon film d’azione’. Roberto Nepoti, ‘Sesso violento nella caserma’, *La Repubblica*, 9 September 1995, p. 35.

<sup>59</sup> This is the case in *Giovanni Falcone*, *La scorta*, *Il lungo silenzio* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1993), *Gli angeli di Borsellino* (Rocco Cesareo, 2003), and *La siciliana ribelle*; in television films and series such as *Excellent Cadavers* (1999, made by Ricky Tognazzi for American TV), a part of *La meglio gioventù* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2003), *Paolo Borsellino* (Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, 2004), and *Giovanni Falcone: l’uomo che sfidò cosa nostra* (Andrea and Antonio Frazzi, 2006); and Pasquale Scimeca’s short documentary *Paolo Borsellino* (1995). At the time of writing, it has been announced that Scimeca has begun production on a further short: *Convitto Falcone – la mia partita*. Cf. See anonymous (Fonte Italtpress), ‘Pasquale Scimeca, un ciak per Falcone’, *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 5 April 2012, online <<http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/palermo/notizie/spettacoli/2012/5-aprile-2012/pasquale-scimeca-ciak-falcone--2003966611709.shtml>>, [accessed 11 April 2012].



films combine accentuated biographical-historical realism with a highly melodramatic film vocabulary, which prioritizes singularity and loneliness (*Testimone a rischio*, *Un eroe borghese*, *Il giudice ragazzino*) or establishes contrasting heroic families against the mafia (*La scorta*, *Gli angeli di Borsellino*, *I cento passi*), and typically aligns the emotional and political via the isolation or death of a protagonist at the conclusion (all of the above).

The rigid notion of what a cinematic representation of the mafia *should be* remains present today. New or renewed aesthetics have undoubtedly emerged – to suggest that neorealist films continue to be produced would be entirely incorrect – though the critical success of these films remains dependent on the assessment of the ability of each to represent the mafia in a morally correct manner. The influences of the *poliziesco* and comedic strains of the mafia are evidently still traceable: films such as Michele Placido's *Romanzo criminale* (2005) and *Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male* (2011) demonstrate the presence of cop drama aesthetics; and *Tano da morire* (Roberta Torre, 1997) and *Totò che visse due volte* (Daniele Ciprì and Franco Maresco, 1998) show the evolution of comical representations of the mafia in grotesque terms. The framework of reception nevertheless only gives these films a public presence if the film ultimately offers a 'successful' political depiction of organized crime. Placido's most recent film, which has been very widely criticized, is an interesting example in this regard (I examine this in the fourth chapter).

Though, as this historical rundown has attempted to illustrate, organized crime is a *filone* that runs through a range of films – some that are overtly political, others that are genre vehicles, most which combine both approaches – the critical framework that has remained behind the imagery of the mafia since its first films has an imposing presence that skews our perception of mafia film in Italy. As the references

to the 1992 attacks show, this critical tendency appears to be directly linked to social events in Italy. Thus, though widely the mafia film in Italy is assumed to be *impegnato*, this very definition is complicated by this imposing discourse. I will turn now to some further critical responses to these films, in order to introduce the key themes that repeatedly arise.

### iii. Critical Responses to Organized Crime Film

The September 2009 special edition of the film magazine *Duellanti*, devoted to ‘mafia e cinema’, comprises articles by Sicilian and Campanian anti-mafia magistrates (Antonio Ingroia, Raffaele Marino and Roberto Scarpinato).<sup>60</sup> The very choice of these men to function as film critics is immediately symbolic of the stringent proximity between mafia film and the reality of organized crime, and indeed such a choice would perhaps be considerably less credible in relation to other sub-genres of crime film: would a prison guard be asked to comment on a prison film? Though the articles in the issue are full of useful insight, they are also notably biased towards a specific function of the cinema. Scarpinato, for instance, criticizes black and white representations of criminals and honest people, arguing that they do not respond to the difficult questions which a political film *should* ask; as an alternative he poses famous mafia trials as more successful more cinematographic alternative.<sup>61</sup> He provocatively discerns an ‘omertà culturale’ within the public discourse on the mafia, which eschews social responsibility in favour of ‘tante pellicole che, pure di ottima fattura, si rivelano tuttavia depistanti nel loro raccontare un universo mafioso

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. ‘Speciale mafia e cinema’ in *Duellanti*, 55 (2009), pp. 20-28; including Roberto Scarpinato, ‘Breve storia di una rimozione’, 20-23; Antonio Ingroia, ‘Il prezzo dello stereotipo’, 24-27; Raffaele Marino, ‘Napoli tradita’, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Scarpinato, pp. 20-21.

quasi completamente decorrelato nella sua genesi e nelle sue dinamiche dal sistema di potere di cui è espressione e sottoprodotto'.<sup>62</sup> This is a more explicit and aggressive instance of the typical codification of Italian mafia film to which I hint above, where rather than simply dismissing a 'non-serious' text, such a film is considered offensive and politically damaging. This tendency allows little space for genre or narrative variation within a cinematic text, and quite notably excludes the option of film as *divertissement*.

The contribution of Ingroia to the special issue demonstrates a wider awareness and tolerance of the diversity of representations of the mafia, more sensibly criticising any 'sottovalutazione [della mafia] che ne trascuri l'impatto sulle chance di successo dell'anti-mafia'. This is based on a familiar point that public opinion is 'decisivamente condizionata dai cliché veicolati da una cultura televisuale come la nostra'.<sup>63</sup> The proximity of the text and reality is considered here in terms of an interaction between the two, noting in particular the influence of 'la generazione televisiva' on contemporary mafiosi. Despite the atypical observation that 'lo spettatore medio percepisce e apprezza il racconto televisivo come finzione', Ingroia identifies 'una sorta di orgoglio regionalista rovesciato' which celebrates the sinister fascination of the mafioso. With this in mind he criticizes 'la ricorrente scelta drammaturgica di eliminare dalla narrazione i "sopravvissuti dell'anti-mafia"' in favour of exclusively 'martirologie' or 'biografie in nero', and welcomes texts such as *The Sopranos* (over *Il capo dei capi*) for its normalization of the mafia.<sup>64</sup> The observations of these magistrates, though not exactly archetypal, act as a useful introduction to the typical motifs within the reception of mafia cinema.

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<sup>62</sup> Scarpinato, p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Ingroia, p. 24.

<sup>64</sup> Ingroia, pp. 25-27.

In the 'Cinema e mafia' special edition of *Rivista del cinematografo e delle comunicazioni sociali* from 1996, the first five of the 13 articles are devoted to the then forthcoming film, *L'avventura di un uomo tranquillo*, a dramatization of the life of Piero Nava, witness to the murder of judge Rosario Livatino in 1990.<sup>65</sup> The film receives a notable level of support, given that it had not yet been released, and with retrospect this attention far outshines the eventual success of the film: released in February 1997 under the title *Testimone a rischio*, directed by Pasquale Pozzessere, the film earned relatively little at the box office.<sup>66</sup> The film was by no means critically rejected, though, in fact winning nominations and awards within Italy for its screenplay, producer and actors, notably a Donatello and a Premio Sacher for lead actor Fabrizio Bentivoglio. This implicitly raises questions about the incongruent expectations of mafia cinema between critics and audiences.

The style of the critics in *RC* echoes the sentiment noted above that mafia cinema must be viewed as contiguous to reality, and specifically that the text can influence the individual outside of the cinema.<sup>67</sup> This emerges in particular in the contributions of the filmmakers, screenwriter Furio Scarpelli and director Pozzessere, the latter of whom describes mafia film as 'Un argomento molto abusato e trattato spesso con superficialità'. He continues, 'è necessario trovare nuove chiavi di lettura che avvicinino alla comprensione delle cause di questo fenomeno, facendo a meno

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. 'Speciale: Cinema e Mafia' in *Rivista del cinematografo e delle comunicazioni sociali*, 66.3 (1996), 7-22. The articles on *L'avventura di un uomo tranquillo* are: Marina Sanna, 'L'eroe è tra noi', 7; Marina Sanna, 'Lo Stato siamo noi', 8-9; Marina Sanna, 'Le voci della coscienza', 10-11; Pasquale Pozzessere, 'Interpretare la mafia', 11; Pietro Valsecchi, 'Ammiro quel coraggio straordinario', 12. The other articles included are Fava, op. cit.; Roberto Nepoti, 'Vittime della mafia, Protagonisti del cinema', 15; Marina Sanna, 'La lotta silenziosa', 16-17; Damiano Damiani, 'Metamorfosi di un mafioso', 18-19; Giuseppe Ayala, 'Per non dimenticare', 20; Francesco Puglielli, 'L'altra faccia della medaglia', 21; Marina Sanna, 'Al cinema per combattere la mafia', 22.

<sup>66</sup> The film earned ITL 448,580,000, around £200,000. This was less than 1% of the domestic earnings of Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella*, from the same year, and around 13.5% of the box-office takings for Francesco Rosi's *La tregua*, also released in 1997. Statistics taken from *Imdb*, online: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0117884/business>> [accessed 1 August 2012].

<sup>67</sup> Cf Valsecchi, p. 12; Sanna 'Lo Stato siamo noi', p. 9; Sanna 'Le voci della coscienza', p. 11.

degli aspetti sensazionalistici di pura facciata. *Salvatore Giuliano* di Francesco Rosi è un esempio illuminante in tal senso'.<sup>68</sup> This statement signposts clearly once again the strict codification of mafia cinema, furthermore once again placing committed mafia film into a historical context by aligning it to a *filone* of *impegno* symbolized by *Salvatore Giuliano*. This emerges in the contribution of *Testimone a rischio*'s producer, Pietro Valsecchi, who claims that his 'formazione culturale' in the 1970s built on such political directors 'ha fatto il mio pensiero e mi ha fatto prediligere l'impegno civile'.<sup>69</sup> Claudio G. Fava attempts to view Rosi's film as influential in financial terms, as having triggered a wider support on behalf of production companies to create mafia films, but he nevertheless implicitly supports the rigid delineation of mafia cinema along the committed *or* popular trajectories by referring exclusively to the former (albeit unusually in light of financial motivation) in a pseudo history of the *filone*.<sup>70</sup> Other contributions to the special edition waver in a contradictory manner between the importance of the cinema in the anti-mafia fight,<sup>71</sup> and others who openly criticize it, notably magistrates Pino Arlacchi and Giuseppe Ayala.<sup>72</sup>

A further instance of this pattern of reception can be found in the radio programme *Guardie o ladri* from 5 January 2008, which, under the same theme of 'La mafia nel cinema', discusses representation of organized crime with two filmmakers (Marco Amenta and Mauro Parissone) and a journalist (Enrico Fierra).<sup>73</sup> The same issues emerge, specifically the proximity to reality which emerges from the

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<sup>68</sup> Pozzessere, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Valsecchi, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Fava, pp. 13-15. In fact, the journalist's emphasis on the financial impetus is quite interesting in light of the articles on *Testimone a rischio*, in which constant reference, in a blindingly positive light, to the film *Un eroe borghese* (Michele Placido, 1994, also produced by Pietro Valsecchi) attempts to establish the more recent film as a predecessor, appropriating the film's *impegno civile*.

<sup>71</sup> Damiani, p. 18; Puglielli, p. 21; Sanna, 'Al cinema per combattere la mafia', p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> Arlacchi is cited in Sanna, 'La lotta silenziosa', p. 16; Ayala, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Online: <http://www.radio24.ilsole24ore.com/main.php?articolo=mafia-cinema-05-01-2008.xml> [accessed 27 May 2011].

filmmaker belonging to the context in which s/he works, and a universalizing suggestion that mafia film is *either* ‘svago’ *or* ‘impegno civile’. The link is thus made between a need for realism, albeit without much of a notion of what that entails formally, in valid mafia cinema. Little instance of ‘cinema svago’ is given, though the presenter makes reference to the television series *Il capo dei capi* as ‘una mafia buona che buona non è’, which relates to the ‘orgoglio regionalista rovinato’ observed by Ingroia, above. Adopting a notably Marxist qualification of aesthetics, a valuable mafia film is thus recognized by the artists and journalists as one which ‘sveglia le coscienze’.

The references to *Il capo dei capi* – a TV series of six episodes which offered a fictionalized biography of mafia *capo* Totò Riina – make recourse to a public polemic which emerged the previous summer, during the airing of the series. The positive light in which the criminal was portrayed caused concern for a number of people, including then Minister of Justice Clemente Mastella who attempted to have the series taken off-air.<sup>74</sup> Antonio Marziale, in the position of president of the Osservatorio sui Diritti dei Minori, stated that ‘il messaggio offerto agli adolescenti dalla fiction è pedagogicamente distruttivo e *non può essere affatto definito d'impegno sociale*. La messa in onda di un film porno in prima serata avrebbe prodotto sicuramente effetti meno nocivi’.<sup>75</sup> The reference to the series as being anti-*impegno* and ‘pedagogicamente distruttivo’ quite evidently relies on the same binary codification of organized crime cinema that I have outlined here. A further contributor to this public debate was the Sicilian author Andrea Camilleri, who

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<sup>74</sup> ‘*Il capo dei capi*? “Era meglio un porno”’, anonymous article, *Corriere della Sera*, 29 November 2007, online: <[http://www.corriere.it/cronache/07\\_novembre\\_29/fiction\\_riina\\_osservatorio\\_ee70554a-9e6b-11dc-9968-0003ba99c53b.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/cronache/07_novembre_29/fiction_riina_osservatorio_ee70554a-9e6b-11dc-9968-0003ba99c53b.shtml)> [accessed 27 May 2011].

<sup>75</sup> Cited in ‘*Il capo dei capi*?’, online.

criticizes the polemicist response to the series, such as the above, but nonetheless also denounces *Il capo dei capi*:

Non si tratta di non parlare di mafia (più se ne parla e meglio è), è in quale contesto se ne parla. Questa fiction è stata sceneggiata anche da Claudio Fava, sulla cui netta presa di posizione anti-mafia non c'è nemmeno da discutere. Il fatto è che il risultato finale rischia d'ottenere l'effetto opposto di quello voluto. E questo capita sempre nei romanzi e nei film che si occupano di mafia. [...] Io personalmente ritengo che l'unica letteratura che tratti di mafia debba essere quella dei verbali di polizia e carabinieri e dei dispositivi di sentenze della magistratura. A parte i saggi degli studiosi, naturalmente.<sup>76</sup>

These four cases that I have used to illustrate the critical reception of organized crime cinema in the public sphere in Italy are striking in that they combine individual cases and scenarios (such as the emergence of a TV show, or the opinion of an anti-mafia magistrate) with a series of utterly unavoidable themes. This includes the pressure not to spectacularize the mafia, rather to produce a *realistic* image of the mafia; and, related to this, to create an image of organized crime that is both accessible and not positive.

The unavoidable context of the mafia film in Italy is, therefore, not only that it must be *impegnato*, but that it must be *impegnato* according to a particular aesthetic and narrative code. The brief history of mafia film and its reception that I have offered here seeks to illustrate some continuities with the issues surrounding *impegno*, above. The history of the mafia film, in particular since the Second World War, illustrates that the development of the organized crime aesthetic shares much with the development of *impegno*. With this in mind, it is clear that Nowell-Smith's comments about the centrality of the mafia narrative within Italian political cinema can be easily justified. Nevertheless, his comments evidently bypass a series of 'absences' in the mafia case, such as lesser known genre vehicles or important organized crime

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<sup>76</sup> Andrea Camilleri, 'Di mafia parlino le sentenze', *La Stampa*, 29 November 2007, online: <[http://www.lastampa.it/web/cmstp/tmp1Rubriche/editoriali/gEditoriali.asp?ID\\_blog=25&ID\\_articolo=3840&ID\\_sezione=&sezione=>](http://www.lastampa.it/web/cmstp/tmp1Rubriche/editoriali/gEditoriali.asp?ID_blog=25&ID_articolo=3840&ID_sezione=&sezione=>) [accessed 8 June 2011].

narratives that go beyond Sicily, and raise issues that need to be investigated; the absence of these issues in discourses of *impegno*, too, act as further testament to the proximity of the organized crime film and *cinema d'impegno*. The model of reception of the mafia film that I have outlined through a few instances in the previous paragraphs becomes particularly significant when considering the comments made in the opening pages of this introduction, regarding the plurality of engaged modes in a contemporary or postmodern environment. The style of mafia film that is demanded and supported by these critics very evidently coheres with the Marxist-realist notion of *impegno*. Though the intrinsic nature of the anti-mafia film appears pointedly compatible with the post-hegemonic *impegno* text, this overbearing framework ultimately raises the question: what space is there for the moralist mafia film to evolve within postmodernity?

#### **iv. Thesis Outline**

Though I have set out my introduction according to the two categories of *impegno* and organized crime cinema, both of which put into place a necessary set of important themes and critical ideas that will be touched upon repeatedly throughout this thesis, I hope it is clear to the reader that a separation of these two categories can essentially only remain superficial. As Nowell-Smith argues, Italian political cinema cannot be dislocated from Italian mafia cinema, yet nor can cinematic representations of organized crime, rightly or wrongly, be appreciated beyond broad discussions on political cinema. As I have suggested above, the paradigmatic shift of *impegno* that has re-affirmed the text's interpretation as a site of politics means that universal boundaries between *cinema politico* and *cinema d'impegno* cannot be drawn. Though the framework of reception of the organized crime film in Italy appears impenetrable



and restrictive, it is fundamentally brought into question by the assumption that a text's interpretation is the political action, and that interpretation can, in theory, be entirely free. The issues of genre, pleasure, and a film's profit – with more entertaining films such as *Palermo Milano solo andata* often taking better ticket sales than the politically engaged films such as *Testimone a rischio* – further problematize this. Each of these brief instances thus signals a network of impulses within the rhizomatic map of *cinema d'impegno* and organized crime which goes beyond these critical responses and which, like the 'fault lines' of *impegno* '[are] crooked, broken, take unpredictable directions, and occasionally intersect one another'.<sup>77</sup>

For this reason, this thesis makes no claim to isolate or differentiate the twin issues of *impegno* and the imagery of organized crime. Its narrative is broadly chronological (the first two chapters relate to the cinema of 1950-1992, the second two 1992-2010); such a division is undertaken tactically in order to root and then build upon a body of observations on historical *impegno*. Each individual section then assumes a thematic thread, and analysis within it moves between different historical periods. Broadly, these focus on (i) the history of *impegno* in high-brow culture; (ii) the place of the political in low-brow culture; (iii) the re-affirmation of a certain high-brow code (realism) as a result of traumatic social events; and (iv) the historical repetition of *impegno* and our critical capacity to transcend this. The choice of films in each section is made according to their pertinence to these themes, though I attempt to include as wide a range of texts as possible. This of course involves certain regrettable omissions, as I will comment below. Though the continual reports of

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<sup>77</sup> My use of the term 'rhizomatic' takes inspiration from that philosophical concept of the rhizome developed by Deleuze and Guattari, that which is 'connected to anything other, and must be', a 'map and not a tracing' that implies a broad and flexible network. This model, in my view, is compatible with the model of post-modern *impegno* put forward by Antonello, Burns and Mussnug. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London, New York: Continuum, 2004) pp. 3-28 (p. 13).

mafia crime and the renewal of its trauma make identifying any ‘turning point’ problematic, the significance of 1992 as a point at which to make the division of my sections seems particularly relevant as the twenty-year anniversaries of the horrific events take place while I write the conclusions of this thesis.

The first half of the thesis attempts to introduce the historical notions of engaged cinema in Italy, and the intellectual questions that surrounded its emergence. The first chapter frames political cinema through the central narrative of Marxist aesthetic theory, and perhaps the most important political (and organized crime-film) director in Italy, Francesco Rosi. The oeuvre of Rosi began to emerge at a critical junction in Italian political film history, where the highly celebrated neo-realist period was in decline, and critically derided popular films, such as comedies and melodramas, were ushered forward by the legal system introduced by the Christian Democrats. This director, now widely accepted as a father of engaged cinema in Italy, thus exhibits interesting interactions of cinematic modes.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the importance of the Italian Communist Party in the forging of a dogma of *impegno* in the immediate post-war period, tracing out the importance of the party between 1945 and the ‘fatti di Ungheria’ in 1956. Central to the remainder of the chapter is the aesthetic theory of György Lukács. Though, as Nello Ajello notes, Lukács had a relatively low impact on Italian political-aesthetic theory at that time,<sup>78</sup> as I will illustrate in this chapter, his theorization of progressive culture is applicable to the cinema of Rosi and to the ‘foundational’ modes of *impegno*. Here I rely moreover on Ian Aitken’s expert translation of Lukács’s theory from literature onto film.<sup>79</sup> Beginning with Lukács’s

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<sup>78</sup> Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI, 1944-1958* (Bari: Laterza, 1979), p. 410.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Ian Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth-Century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

metaphor of the ‘great river’, the chapter sketches out a notion of progressive-emancipatory art, contextualizing this through the theorist’s influential prioritization of the realist mode. The Lukácsian notions of Type and Totality are then mapped over some initial instances from Rosi’s oeuvre, such as *Le mani sulla città* and *Salvatore Giuliano*, in order to illustrate a foundational compatibility between the theory and the cinematic mode. I then turn to issues of form and citation, in particular a ‘distancing’ citation of genre films, to illustrate how Rosi plays with alienation in the Brechtian sense. Towards the final part of the first chapter, I then illustrate the evolution of discourses surrounding form and realism, and ultimately the limitations intrinsic to the Marxist emphasis on this mode of political engagement, by introducing Rosi’s later films, such as *Tre fratelli* (1981) and *Diario napoletano* (1992), and the evolved aesthetics of these films.<sup>80</sup>

The second chapter then furthers this initial problematization of the *impegno* model that is based not only on Marxist aesthetic theory and realist modes, but also ‘high’ auteur cinema, through Fredric Jameson’s theory of the dialectic of forms. This will first be introduced by placing the false rhetoric of modernist and mass productions within the framework of the Frankfurt School, and in particular Theodor Adorno. The chapter then contains two sections: the first illustrates Jameson’s theory by comparing two mass produced movies, *I padroni della città* (Ferdinando Di Leo, 1976) and *Tony Arzenta* (Duccio Tessari, 1973) and one ‘modernist’ text, *Lucky Luciano*. By comparing the films in terms of their repetitive consumability and the frustration of expectation, and then offering a more complicated argument regarding

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<sup>80</sup> My choice of case studies here is mostly characterized by those of Rosi’s films which most explicitly engage with organized crime. As such, the films that, as Mary Wood observes, crucially allowed Rosi to develop a more significant career (the genre vehicles such as *C’era una volta*, 1967) are omitted. As the work undertaken in the second chapter aims to attest, this move does not seek to dislocate the popular and the political. Cf. Mary Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 2.

the strikingly complex narratives of gender coding within each film, I attempt to open out the question of *impegno* beyond the simple divide of high-low culture. The choice of case studies here reflects a specific period (the mid-1970s, and the height of the *poliziesco*) and the same theme (organized crime), though the choice moreover intrinsically reflects a tricky anxiety. The manner in which popular film is conceived by the film theory on which I base this thesis typically takes it as a mass-consumed product, and therefore intrinsically plural. By isolating just two of these films, there is the risk of eliding the very repetitive context of their production that Jameson emphasizes. Nevertheless, this is a necessary risk in my own approach, which foregrounds the formal comparison of mass and modernist texts, due to restrictions of space.

In the second half, the issue of reception and spectatorship is foregrounded, first through a brief consideration of the possibilities of ‘oppositional’ interpretations. Here I draw on Stuart Hall, in order to reflect the importance of cultural studies approaches in this work. Following a brief discussion of cinematic spectatorship studies, the chapter then introduces Hans Robert Jauss’s model of the ‘horizon of expectation’ as a means of conceptualizing the ‘empirical and material aspects of critical interpretation’ outlined by Burns. Though slightly outdated, Jauss, even more so than his contemporary colleague Iser and the model of the ‘imagined reader’ remains highly important to this project as his theory speaks directly to the issues of form and history that I introduce in the first chapter. Following Judith Mayne, I argue that Jauss’s theory can be shifted from literature to film studies usefully to promote a concrete ‘historical’ study of the film’s audience.<sup>81</sup> In order to paint such an accurate picture of the complexity of the organized crime *filone*, and its dependence on a range

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<sup>81</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 76.

of registers, the chapter takes a series of genre-based case studies, including the western, the comedy and the *giallo*, and expands on pre-existent discourses, thus complicating our understanding of the audience's 'horizon of expectation'.

Following this, the thesis progresses to a focus on more contemporary filmmaking practices. The shift to post-1992 cinema follows the aforementioned re-assertion of the very strict critical codes of mafia cinema reception that have been outlined above; indeed these will remain central to the arguments that follow. Given the evident links between social events and cultural output, the third chapter aims to question the possibility of a 'post-traumatic' mafia cinema in light of the 1992 bombings and the films produced in the immediate aftermath. Using the Freudian notion of the 'compulsion to repeat', I draw on a series of repetitive, traumatic images from *Giovanni Falcone* and *Il giudice ragazzino* (both made between 1992-4) discussing specifically the combination of melodramatic and brutally realistic tones within these films. Taking the emphatic repetition as a sign of the films' position within wider traumatic discourses, I then return to the issues of realism raised in the first chapter.

In the following section, the textual reaction to a traumatic social lens is read through Michael Rothberg's theory of 'traumatic realism', in order to cement these connections. What stands out in the Italian case, however, is precisely that 'repetitive' realism noted in the first half of this chapter, which can in turn be read as a kind of 'staging' of a culturally accepted form of engaged cinema. By locating this firmly within a postmodern period that, contrarily, undermines the direct relationship between a realist text and society, I argue in the second half of the chapter that by staging realism, the films are straightforwardly or dominantly 'decoded' by a

spectator who does not question the ‘reality’ with which they are confronted. I term this process ‘performative realism’.

Returning explicitly to the question of *impegno*, the final chapter then adapts this understanding of realism and poses the question of whether ‘performative *impegno*’ can exist once the ‘grand narratives’ of modernity have disintegrated. This relies fully on the model of postmodern *impegno* that I have outlined above, whereby the overtly engaged text, such as *I cento passi*, exists alongside the overtly postmodern text, such as *Il divo*, and, crucially, a public critical framework in Italy that favours the realist mode in engaged cinema. The central question which informs this chapter is: can the performance of *impegno* be read, phenomenologically, as a *realizing* or *legitimizing* of political engagement? My attempt to trace out and theorize a possible ‘performative *impegno*’ is built on the comparative analysis of three texts: *I cento passi*, an alternative screenplay of the story of Peppino Impastato, and *Le conseguenze dell’amore* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2005). These films reflect three significant cases whereby each constitutes a representation of organized crime that relies to significantly different extents on an overt performance of *impegno*.

In the final part of the chapter, I then return to *Gomorra*, and to question whether, in light of this framework of *impegno*, the film can still be viewed as particularly important. Building on the postmodern theory of Jean-François Lyotard (again, the postmodern context of this period of film production and theory is key), I attempt to suggest that what is new about *Gomorra* is the manner in which it forges a progressive ‘partnership’ of engaged and spectacular modes of cinema. In order to illustrate the continued importance of the film, I then trace its influence in three subsequent organized crime films: *Fortapàsc*; *Una vita tranquilla* (Claudio Cupellini, 2010) and *Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male*. This allows me to offer some

further questions and observations on engagement in Italian organized crime film today, such as the contribution of the star persona, and to trace the emergence of new themes in this filmmaking, such as the north-bound geographical shift from the Sicilian to the Neapolitan mafias and beyond.

In the final pages of the thesis, I will pick out the major points of intersection of these rhizomatic ‘fault lines’, and offer final observations on the politics of the mafia film in Italy by picking out the repeated imagery of destruction and grief that lies at the ending of every mafia narrative. Each of these chapters and the conclusion of this thesis thus focus on one or two central thematic notions, from realism to the popular, trauma, performance and narrative closure. These themes are by no means limiting or limited, though; instead they also seek to complement one another, and to construct an accumulative discussion that answers some questions, and poses further ones, about committed images in Italy today.

## I. The Marxist Foundations of *Cinema d'Impegno*: Realism and Form in the Films of Francesco Rosi

At this point [the late 1960s], the word *impegno* renders the sense of a creative task at hand which demands of the individual writer *a serious moral, intellectual, and aesthetic investment*. The definition of *impegno* which Vittorini, Calvino and Pasolini gradually make space for, and which carries forward to the writers of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, is perhaps: *treating responsibly the task of artistic communication in the contemporary social environment*.<sup>1</sup>

I begin with Burns's informed and lucid sense of the direction of the engaged text for the three writers during the 1960s as it determines several valuable terms which resonate in the approaches of several post-War Italian directors: communicating to the contemporary spectator a considered message via a complex aesthetic vehicle. The 'moral, intellectual, and aesthetic', that is, the three impulses which inform this creative task, mask a series of complex issues when considered in relation to these filmmakers, and these issues will inform this discussion throughout the following pages. It would certainly be possible to view each of these terms in its own right, whereby the moral impulse implies the context and reason for which the filmmaker is creating, and the intellectuality and aesthetics stand for what her message is and how it is conveyed. And yet, as the following chapters aim to demonstrate, attempts to differentiate these forms would be risky, as they are mutually dependent and involved in complex dialogues with each other.

The historical moment that Burns focuses upon to create her definition of *impegno* is that instance when its agenda has matured, and it is on the brink of fragmentation. The same transitional moment was underway in the cinema too, as I suggested above. Filmmakers like Pier Paolo Pasolini and Elio Petri were debating the possibility of an engaged text that investigated reality, albeit transcending the mimetic aesthetic of neorealism. In this first chapter I focus on the work of a

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), p. 37; my emphases.



contemporary director who was embracing the same challenge, Francesco Rosi. By now Rosi is recognized both domestically and internationally as the most important of Italy's *registi impegnati*, and, as a further testament to the interweaving of organized crimes into political discourses, he has produced countless charged images of Italy's mafias across his oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> The chapter establishes Rosi as a key case study, in order to introduce and expound on the important themes that are central to the foundations of *cinema d'impegno*.<sup>3</sup> As my introduction has implied, these are rooted in a Marxist political ideology, and a realist aesthetic. Should further justification for foregrounding this particular director be needed, it would suffice to glance at the press release which accompanied Rosi's Golden Bear for Lifetime Achievement at the 2008 Berlinale festival: 'his works are classics of politically engaged cinema', 'Rosi's films never fail to display great commitment and passion and still have an enormous impact today - a fact that underscores their greatness as works of art'.<sup>4</sup>

Even the most superficial overview of Rosi's career highlights easily the director's very strong sense of moral commitment to major social issues. Representations of organized crime and corrupt power are the explicit focus in *La sfida* (1958), *I magliari* (1959), *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), *Lucky Luciano* (1973), and *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990), and implicitly present in several others, including *Le mani sulla città* (1963), *Il caso Mattei* (1972), *Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976), *Tre*

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<sup>2</sup> By taking much of Rosi's work together, I hope to avoid any thorny issues of definition, in deciding which of his movies can be classed as 'organized crime films'. I continue to employ a broad understanding of this definition, and will focus on the images of mafia organizations generally within his films.

<sup>3</sup> Though the chapter risks some shortcomings in its singularly 'auteurist' approach, I anticipate that it be taken alongside the second chapter, where I intend to complicate the observations made here in order to bring forward the discussions on *impegno*.

<sup>4</sup> 'Berlinale 2008: Homage and Honorary Golden Bear for Francesco Rosi', anonymous article, *Berlinale.de*, 27 November 2007, online: <[http://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2008/08\\_pressemitteilungen\\_2008/08\\_Pressemitteilungen\\_2008-Detail\\_3748.html](http://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2008/08_pressemitteilungen_2008/08_Pressemitteilungen_2008-Detail_3748.html)> [accessed 25 August 2010].

*fratelli* (1980) and *Diario napoletano* (1992). As such, my tracing of his career draws on the majority of these films, though my focus is on the construction of *impegno*, rather than the representation of organized crime directly. Mary Wood writes that Francesco Rosi's 'presence in the Italian film industry from 1945 onwards provides a tool to chart a way through the complexities of Italian cinema', and moreover 'prompts interesting contrasts with contemporary film-makers who have had difficulties achieving a national, let alone an international profile'.<sup>5</sup> Unusually for scholarship on Rosi, Wood emphasizes the importance of the genre 'vehicles' of Rosi – for instance the fairy-tale film *C'era una volta* (1967) – in the director's negotiation of the industry. Though for thematic reasons I will focus predominantly on his 'political' films, I mimic Wood's general charting of the director's *oeuvre* through reference to the influence of genre cinema, and I follow her in attempting to reproduce a more complete image of the Italian film industry (this will be continued in the second chapter).

As I suggested in the introduction, the foundations of *impegno* that I investigate in this chapter were constructed over a strictly leftist political code, it having been the Marxists who led the avant-garde of the immediate post-war period. As such, the theoretical framework for this chapter will begin with the notion of a political text according to the Marxist aesthetic theorists, and in particular György Lukács. Though this risks including slightly outmoded theorists such as Marcuse and Brecht, or those not common in the *impegnati* circles of post-War Italy like Lukács, this is a necessary step in the conceptualization of the engagement of Rosi in his work, and furthermore serves to highlight the limitations of these theorists within the context of engaged art in Italy. Having established an

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 2.

outline of the principles in this approach, the chapter will then include three main sections: the first investigates realism, attempting to go beyond the neorealist aesthetic of ‘pedinamento’ in relation to Lukács’s system of ‘totalities’ as a key to national cinema (and here I draw from important cases in Italian film history). This is then contrasted in the second section to the genre aesthetics that Rosi ironically uses in order to differentiate his own cinema from the ‘mass’ product and to alienate his spectator, in Brecht’s sense. Bringing together the notion of alienation with an on-going emphasis on film form, the final section analyses how this is used to alienate the spectator within a political action in films such as *Salvatore Giuliano*. Umberto Eco’s important essay on form and *impegno* will also be employed, in order to lead towards a better understanding of how form and realism need to evolve in the historical development of an aesthetics of *impegno*.

### **i. The Engaged Intellectual and the PCI**

There is a common tendency to associate Italian political filmmakers with the political and intellectual Left, as Daniele Lucchetti does: ‘comme tout le monde dans le cinéma, je suis de gauche’ [like everyone in cinema, I’m on the Left].<sup>6</sup> This stereotype can be traced back to 1945 in Italy, and the ‘rinnovamento politico’, as Pasolini had put it in the citation I used in my introduction.<sup>7</sup> As Pasolini writes, this was an avant-garde led specifically by the Marxists, as they appeared to offer the most straightforward and overt rejection of the intellectual approaches that had dominated throughout the Fascist ‘ventennio’. As I will outline in the following, this artistic emancipation that took place is usefully associable to the activity of the

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Christophe Buisson, ‘Renaissance italienne’, *Le Figaro*, 7 September 2007, section Le Figaro magazine, online: [http://www.lefigaro.fr/lefigaromagazine/2007/09/07/01006-20070907ARTMAG90466-rennaissance\\_italienne.php](http://www.lefigaro.fr/lefigaromagazine/2007/09/07/01006-20070907ARTMAG90466-rennaissance_italienne.php) [accessed 17 August 2010].

<sup>7</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘Nota su *Le notti*’, in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull’arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 699-707 (pp. 702-03).

Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), in particular in the period that spans from 1944, and party leader Palmiro Togliatti's return to Italy, to 1956, and the ideological 'disgelo' that followed the Hungarian Revolution.<sup>8</sup> By associating intellectual culture to the Italian Communist Party, however, I do not aim to make the quite hasty assumption that every artist or filmmaker at that time was necessarily a communist activist, or even necessarily associated to the Left. Francesco Rosi has made this point, in reference to the neo-realist filmmakers of the time:

Non mi si dica che erano tutti comunisti quegli uomini di cinema perché non è vero: Rossellini non era comunista, De Sica neppure, Visconti diceva di esserlo, ma non lo era. Zavattini si dichiarava comunista, lo era Giuseppe De Santis, ma non lo erano Suso Cecchi D'Amico né Fellini, né Antonioni, né Germi e tanti altri che elencare sarebbe troppo lungo. Ma c'era un'onda di volontarismo ideale in tutto il cinema italiano di allora di cui il partito comunista [...] e il partito socialista di Nenni, avevano ben capito la portata, e della quale si erano fatti sostenitori, contro una ufficialità governativa che la osteggiava apertamente.<sup>9</sup>

Though Rosi's words point to a more complex personal-political scenario for each of these directors and screenwriters, the peaks and troughs of the 'onda di volontarismo ideale', and its related macro-political approach to filmmaking at this time in which Rosi's own engaged cinema took root, can be mapped out through the PCI.

This wave of idealism was able to bring together such a range of artists and intellectuals thanks in part to its explicit emphasis on the cultural sphere and its use in the reformation of society. As Stephen Gundle has noted, Togliatti's party was thus able to draw in not only those figures who stood united in the PCI's stance towards cultural formation, but also, through sheer fascination, those who simply

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<sup>8</sup> Choosing these historical moments I imitate loosely the coordinates set out by Nello Ajello, in *Intellettuali e PCI. 1944-1958* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Francesco Rosi, 'C'era una volta il cinema', *La Repubblica*, 20 April 1994, online: <<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1994/04/20/era-una-volta-il-cinema.html>> [accessed 17 August 2010].

sought political change: 'it was [...] a place of refuge to which intellectuals fled when political advance seemed impossible'.<sup>10</sup> Ajello, too, observes that '[tra] il 1944 e il 1947 la migrazione di intellettuali genericamente 'di sinistra', ma anche liberali e repubblicani, verso il Pci è stata continua', forging overall a quite significant cultural patrimony for the party that included (among many more) Natalino Sapegno, Valentino Gerratana, Gastone Mancorda, Galvano Della Volpe, Antonio Banfi, Elio Vittorini, Dario Puccini, Cesare Pavese and Francesco Rosi himself.<sup>11</sup>

This migration of a variety of thinkers and artists brought about two significant effects. First, the association of highbrow intellectuals brought the party a significant prestige and influence.<sup>12</sup> This was accentuated by a contemporary merging of domestic and international cultures. During the 1930s and '40s, while the Fascist government produced tighter censorship of international cultural products, the same intellectuals who were aligning themselves to the PCI began to circulate pamphlets, books and newspapers of an international nature.<sup>13</sup> Again, once the war had ended, the left-wing groups opened the way to international trends of cinema (for instance the cinema of Marcel Carné and Jean Renoir) and music (jazz), as well as to literature, as Ajello writes, thanks to the 'amorose traduzioni' of American authors such as Hemingway and Melville by Vittorini and Pavese.<sup>14</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: the Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ajello, p. 78; Cf. p. 65 for a lengthier list of PCI intellectuals. In fact, for geographic motives Rosi was in the very early intellectual circles that Togliatti met when he first returned to Italy, landing in Naples (see Ajello, p. 30).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Gundle, p. 21. Though we might be unwise to make a direct, causal correlation between the migration of intellectuals and the migration of voters toward the PCI, these correlations remain significant. As Gundle notes, PCI membership increased exponentially between 1943-45, shifting annually from 5,000 members to 500,000, then to 1,700,000 (Gundle, p. 23).

<sup>13</sup> Ajello, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ajello, p. 14.

body of work opened a series of stylistic and political influences to contemporary Italian artists.

A second consequence is that the model of political engagement that the party promoted was greatly amplified. As certain events illustrate, however, such as Togliatti's infamous clash with Vittorini on the pages of *Il politecnico*,<sup>15</sup> the PCI's effort to contain and control their policies was never straightforward. In the following paragraphs, I will dwell a little further on the development of *impegno* within this political ideology before observing its development and interpretation in Rosi's engaged cinema, and to establish the political background of the first major wave of *impegno* that preceded the fragmentation outlined by Burns, cited above.

The cultural and intellectual contexts which met Togliatti on his return to Naples, and which emerged alongside the fast-growing PCI, were informed by a range of intellectual impulses, three of which have significant weight. First of all, in terms of local intellectual thought, the legacy of the idealistic philosophy of Benedetto Croce had proved dominant, tracing out a model of artistic beauty as intuitive (rather than positivist) and dislocated from ideology.<sup>16</sup> As Ajello has demonstrated, the PCI's relationship with Croce was complex and tense: though Togliatti, as well as his colleague, Emilio Sereni, had originally made some efforts to situate Croce within an intellectual genealogy – and no doubt the philosopher's (eventual) turn away from Fascism and position as intellectual and politician contributed to this implicit mark of respect – this was phrased progressively as a bourgeois cultural history that was necessarily to be overcome.<sup>17</sup> Later on, once

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ajello, pp. 113-37.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Benedetto Croce, *Breviario di estetica. Quattro lezioni*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1963).

<sup>17</sup> Sereni set out this link to Croce early on, in the 1930s, in the Italian journal *Lo Stato operaio*, published in Paris: 'Certo, la cultura borghese ha creato in Italia valori culturali e prodigi di opera

Togliatti had returned to Italy, the clashes with Croce and his thought became more explicit and public, the PCI leader began to critique him far more openly, in particular for his privilege, his Fascist links, and his oppression of Marxism.<sup>18</sup>

A second key intellectual impulse of that period was the Soviet Union and the Russian leaders, in particular Joseph Stalin and Andrei Zhdanov. Already the influence of the USSR had been significant in Italy, as demonstrated by the ousting of Amadeo Bordiga from leadership of the PCI after his outspoken comments over Stalin and leadership of Soviet party, as well as the period Togliatti spent in the Soviet Union whilst in exile from Italy.<sup>19</sup> The doctrine of Zhdanov and Maxim Gorky, which outlined the position of the intellectual as one who necessarily contributed to the progression of communist society, specifically through the use of socialist realism, was particularly influential in Italy (I return below to the practical application of progressive and realist art in this context).<sup>20</sup>

As with Croce, though, the integration of Zhdanov's doctrine – not unlike the relationship between the PCI and the USSR – was similarly complex and layered. In fact there were clear interests in Italy on behalf of the two sides of the Iron Curtain, as is made apparent, for instance, in financial dealings such as major aid packages from the USA and reported contributions to the election campaigns of the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party.<sup>21</sup> Togliatti's idea of Italy was nevertheless one of a negotiation between these powers, and certainly not the

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che noi non possiamo non riconoscere ed apprezzare. Il proletario difende i valori della tradizione politica e culturale italiana. [...] Il proletario può raccogliere l'eredità culturale della borghesia solo rielaborandola, passandola al vaglio della sua esperienza storica e politica, vivificandola al calore della sua lotta'. Emilio Sereni, 'Intellettuali e cultura', *Lo Stato operaio* 10:9 (1936), p. 632.

<sup>18</sup> A famous and relevant instance is Togliatti's review of Croce, 'Per la storia del comunismo in quanto realtà politica', *Rinascita* 1:1 (1944), p. 30, which triggered Croce's vocal anger in parliament. Cf. Ajello, p. 19; Gundle, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Gundle, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Robert Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), in particular pp. 61-99.

puppet of the Soviets: his political approach was very much the ‘via *italiana* al socialismo’.<sup>22</sup> In this he ultimately differed from the more conservative Sereni, who, as Albertina Vittoria has observed, read the Soviets singularly as ‘i buoni’, from whom ‘bisognava approvare qualsiasi iniziativa, anche in campo culturale’. Togliatti’s political aim, on the other hand, ‘era di confrontarsi con la realtà culturale italiana in tutte le sue sfaccettature e di stabilire rapporti ampi con gli intellettuali’.<sup>23</sup> This reflected itself in a very careful negotiation of Zhdanov and social realism: on the one hand, as Ajello observes, ‘[era] difficile immaginare qualcosa di più distante dai propositi di Togliatti, che consistevano nell’acclimatare il comunismo in un paese dominato dall’ossessione, e se si vuole dalla retorica, della cultura umanistica’.<sup>24</sup> There was no rejection of Zhdanov, though, rather a kind of abandonment ‘in una specie di limbo’. Indeed the PCI members rather attempted to ‘rimandare la polemica’, for instance in the pages of the journal *Rinascita*, in order to avoid the critical eschewal of authors such as Gide or Sartre.<sup>25</sup> Though space prevents a lengthy pause on the effects of this doctrine, the cases of Vittorini in the *Politecnico*, or to a more pronounced end the clashes that followed 1956 (below) testify to the on-going pressures of the individual Italian case and the suppressive part of the party’s ideology.

A third, key impulse that presented itself increasingly after the end of the Fascist *ventennio* was the writing and thought of Antonio Gramsci, Togliatti’s predecessor as leader of the PCI. Having been imprisoned for his political beliefs for a decade, Gramsci was granted a restricted freedom in 1934, though his deteriorating health took his life just three years later. At that time, his work – the

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<sup>22</sup> Albertina Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali: Storia dell’Istituto Gramsci negli anni cinquanta e sessanta* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1992), p. xix.

<sup>23</sup> Vittoria, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>24</sup> Ajello, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ajello, pp. 51-2.



notebooks and letters that he wrote in prison – were mostly unknown except to Togliatti and his closest collaborators. Though the release of Gramsci's ideas was slow and somewhat manipulated,<sup>26</sup> the challenge to hegemony and the function of the intellectual within this were quickly placed at the forefront of the PCI's ideology. Gramsci very clearly articulated the need for (organic) intellectuals to assume a crucial role in the production of proletarian culture and education, and for this figure to remain socially distinct from the political leader.<sup>27</sup> The position of the intellectual thus went under much scrutiny and redefinition during this period, with the emphasis ultimately being on her or his progressive action.<sup>28</sup> Baldelli's description of progressive culture and the function of the intellectual, though written some years later, constitutes a useful indicator of the foundational notion of the intellectual that was built upon in the following decades:

Non esiste la via per un profondo progresso della cultura (teatrale, letteraria, ecc.) se la cultura – il ruolo dell'intellettuale – non si inserisce, in prima persona, senza deleghe, nella battaglia politica per una nuova strategia del movimento operaio e del socialismo (congedo definitive, quindi, alla *categoria degli intellettuali*). E dunque il socialismo non sullo sfondo, ma dentro ogni parola, anche nella minima azione di cultura.<sup>29</sup>

The role of the intellectual, thus mediated through the thought of Gramsci, Zhdanov and Croce, was given a significant boost by the social condition and consequent attitude of those emerging from a World War. As Franco Fortini put it, 'non fui io a impegnarmi nella politica, fu la guerra che mi impegnò'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed perhaps one of the most significant triggers of the engaged cultural environment

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Gundle, pp. 16-7.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. I: Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura'.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Vincenzo Binetti, 'Marginalità e appartenenza: la funzione dell'intellettuale tra sfera pubblica e privata nell'Italia del dopoguerra', *Italica*, 74.3 (1997), 360-74

<sup>29</sup> Pio Baldelli, *Politica culturale e comunicazione di massa* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1968), p. 255.

<sup>30</sup> Franco Fortini, cited in *La generazione degli anni difficile*, ed. by Ettore A. Albertoni, Ezio Antonini and Renato Palmieri (Bari: Laterza, 1962), p. 147.

was the social condition brought about by War, and by twenty years of fascist government.

The need to produce artistic, engaged responses to the war, within the context of the cultural and intellectual impulses introduced above, can usefully be illustrated with the example of neorealist filmmaking. Immediately, cases like Rossellini's war trilogy attest to the creation of a cinematic constituency of the anti-fascist Resistance, moreover doing so with a formal technique that appealed the advocates of social realism. Though, as noted above, many of the neorealist directors were not members of the PCI, the men and their films were quickly associated to Togliatti's party. As a result, this movement quickly became the canonical mode of creating political art: '[a] partire dal 1948 all'incirca, il neorealismo diventò infatti un passaggio obbligato per gli artisti di sinistra'.<sup>31</sup>

In fact many of the same ideological battles over aesthetics within the leftist intelligentsia and particularly between the Communists and the conservative Christian Democrats, were played out following the release of these films. Internally to the films themselves, there was no doubt a clash between more traditional adherents of PCI philosophy and those whose political stance was less strong. An interesting example of the former is Giuseppe De Santis, whose highly-political films attempted to construct a working class narrative of critique of the American image of spectacle. In *Riso amaro* (1949), for example, a causal link is created between the ultimate corruption and death of the main character, Silvana, and the American cultural products such as boogie-woogie music and *Grand Hôtel* in which she demonstrates a constant interest. Though the message of the film is

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<sup>31</sup> Ajello, p. 203.

deeply and explicitly political (particularly from a social-realist point of view), De Santis's approach was met with harsh criticism with regard to the infamous sexualization of actor Silvana Mangano.<sup>32</sup>

The clash between the political right and left was later infamously played out through the governing party's eventual suppression of neo-realist cinema. While constantly criticized by the Christian Democrats for the negative representation of the country, and defended by the left as progressive art – the Communist newspaper *L'Unità*, in particular, was quick to defend (as an example) Visconti's commercial failure *La terra trema: episodio del mare* (1948) – it was only with the advent of the 'Andreotti Laws' (1947, 1949) that the right began to actively repress independent or minor filmmaking.<sup>33</sup>

These efforts on behalf of the Christian Democrats were violently rejected by the left in Italy: here we might cite the numerous 'Comitati per la difesa del cinema' who rejected the Andreotti laws, uniting filmmakers and actors such as Anna Magnani and Alessandro Blasetti with Communist activists in 1949; or later, in the early 1950s, the outrage, protests and manifestos in *L'Unità*, *Società* and *Rinascita* that followed the arrest of Guido Aristarco and Renzo Renzi for their film script of *L'armata s'agapò* in 1953.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the strong allegiance to the PCI when facing the cultural attack of the DC, in fact the engaged artists of the period were beginning to shift their own cultural outputs, and to express a kind of 'stanchezza e distacco' towards the

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<sup>32</sup> Ajello, p. 297.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Ajello, p. 219; pp. 301-2. Aristarco and Renzi were arrested for 'vilipendio alle Forze Armate dello Stato', in relation to the critical representation of the Italian forces in Greece, in their film.

ideology of the PCI.<sup>35</sup> During the same period, film critics began to observe a ‘crisis’ of neorealism, as a response to the emergent mainstream, popular films that appeared to serve only distraction, not any political progression. Following Visconti’s *Senso* (1954), critics like Aristarco attempted to trace out an evolution of forms by turning to realism, rather than neorealism, as will be better explained below.

By the end of 1956, however, it was the PCI’s association with the Soviet Union that was to have profoundly negative effects on its links to cultural intellectuals. Following first a violent uprising in Poznań, Poland, in January, and the removal of Mátyás Rákosi from the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party, anti-Communist opposition in Hungary began to grow increasingly. On 23 October, a peaceful protest against the government began in Budapest, which soon grew vastly in number and became violent towards certain strategic landmarks, such as the statue of Stalin. What followed – the fall of the government, its violent reinstating, with heavy support from Soviet tanks and soldiers and many Hungarian casualties, and a propagandistic re-writing of the history in Soviet presses – had a profound, negative effect on the international perception of the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> In Italy, this negativity was felt deeply by many of the artists and intellectuals who were associated with the PCI, who were disgusted by the violent repression of democratic fighters in Hungary.<sup>37</sup> In the immediate wake of the events, 101 of these intellectuals, including Alberto Asor Rosa, Enzo Siciliano, Lucio Colletti, Dario Puccini, Lorenzo Vespignani, Corrado Maltese and Elio Petri, signed a manifesto directed to the PCI, protesting the violent repression (‘Il manifesto dei 101’). Quite

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<sup>35</sup> Baldelli, pp. 276-7.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. György Litván ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression, 1953-1963*, trans. by János M. Bak and Lyman H. Legters (London: Longman, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ajello, pp. 397-428.

symbolically, the phrasing of the opening of the manifesto illustrates the manner in which the progressive engagement of the intellectual was changing sides:

I tragici avvenimenti d'Ungheria scuotono dolorosamente in questi giorni l'intera opinione pubblica del paese. La coscienza democratica e il sentimento d'umanità dei lavoratori e di tutti gli uomini onesti reagiscono con la forza delle grandi passioni civili alle notizie divenute di giorno in giorno più drammatiche. *La fedeltà all'impegno assunto con l'atto dell'adesione al Partito impone di prendere una posizione aperta.*<sup>38</sup>

As the final sentence demonstrates, the ultimate aim of these intellectuals was not to break from the party directly, but rather to enact a symbolic assuming of position. Togliatti's response to the events, while diplomatic, nevertheless ultimately placed the Communist ideology at the front: he wrote in a letter to Paolo Spriano of 'compagni che non comprendono come queste nostre posizioni [...] siano dettate dalla esperienza sicura della lotta di classe'.<sup>39</sup> This isolated further the intellectuals of the PCI, many of whom symbolically abandoned the PCI in retaliation of its proximity to the USSR, and to the anger of the most conservative communists.<sup>40</sup> This then marked the beginning of what Ajello labels the 'mal di Ungheria', a lengthy period of decline for the PCI, which forced the party leaders to re-assert, through the following decades, alternative modes of politically engaged art.<sup>41</sup>

The opening up of *impegno* beyond a single political ideology, a process that begun in the mid-1950s, coincides with a key moment of fragmentation of the term. It was during this process, in the wake of neo-realism and the PCI's efforts to re-assert itself and its Marxist approach to aesthetic production and the creation of the intellectual, that Francesco Rosi (as well as several other political filmmakers) were

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<sup>38</sup> Reproduced in Ajello, p. 536, n. 22. See pp. 537-8 for a list of the signatories. My emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Ajello, p. 409.

<sup>40</sup> The first, symbolic split came from Natalino Sapegno, Gaetano Trombatore, Vezio Crisafulli, Domenico Purificato, Leoncillo Leonardi and Claudio Longo. Some sixteen others aggressively criticized this loss of faith, including Giuseppe De Santis. Cf Ajello, p. 431.

<sup>41</sup> Ajello, p. 452. Significantly Ajello, writing in 1979 – some fifteen years after the death of Togliatti – ends his volume by stating that 'in un certo senso, il dopo-Ungheria dura ancora'.

beginning to emerge alongside the ‘fathers’ of neo-realism. With this brief historical introduction in place, I will turn now to more specific, textual instances that developed from the PCI’s approach to political aesthetics at the beginning of the Italian Republic.

## **ii. Marxist Aesthetics**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the essentially varied nature of the political intellectuals of the period, the limitations of a purely leftist model of interpretation will become gradually clear. Nevertheless, I will begin with the fundamental lessons of Marxist aesthetics as a running thread through these issues, where they not only grounded the earliest representations of organized crime but moreover played their own part in the eventual fragmentation of *impegno*’s agenda. As such, though returning to theorists such as György Lukács, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno today appears outmoded, such a move is necessary to decode early committed cinema, and eventually to view the lasting impact of Marxist theory that continues down the ‘fault lines’ of *impegno*.

Some of the base issues that are faced in the application of Marx’s theory to a work of art can be in fact introduced via a series of highly self-conscious attempts to reconsider the Marxist background in late, global capitalism. Made in the 1970s, these films address the difficulties of harmonizing such an ideology with everyday life. This includes Giuseppe Bertolucci’s *Berlinguer ti voglio bene* (1977) and Nanni Moretti’s *Io sono un autarchico* (1976), from the latter of which I transcribe a brief scene, in which Michele (Moretti) discusses a new purchase with Fabio (Fabio Traversa), a *compagno*:

Fabio, ti piacciono questi pantaloni nuovi, eh? Fabio? Oh! Ti piacciono?  
Sono da bancario.

Da bancario? Come da bancario?  
Sì, da bancario, ma guarda...il colore, la riga.... Da bancario.  
[Pausa; Michele fissa i pantaloni].  
Da bancario. Da bancario? Vabbè, che c'entra, scusa, ci sono anche dei  
bancari seri, compagni.

This amusing exchange illustrates metaphorically the question facing a Marxist artist: how can one produce an artistic creation which has a use-value rather than functioning as a simple purveyor of capital, in particular within a money-led industry such as the cinema? Michele's response to Fabio's spurn – the trousers are 'da bancario', and implicitly have no use-value – is to politicize them – 'un bancario serio, compagno'. Though the point of the scene is to ironically undermine those who posit themselves as left-wing authorities, the scene uses the trousers as a metaphor of the frenetic need for political art in Marxist circles. Moretti's film then continues to problematize the politicization of aesthetics in his on-screen world via, on the one hand, Fabio's play which, even if righteous, gains mostly negative and disconnected reviews (when invited to a discussion, one audience member flees, crying 'no, il dibattito no!'); and on the other via the snobbish derision (foaming at the mouth) of Lina Wertmüller's cinema.<sup>42</sup>

These symbolic responses to aesthetic creations reveal two issues: firstly a simple rejection of autotelic aesthetics, only the politically viable (clothing) is acceptable; and secondly the very problematic implication that a work of art can only be considered 'politically successful' when it is critically acclaimed (and by the *right* critics). Consequently two fundamental questions arise: why does an aesthetic work desperately need political qualification, and how can it become politicized (correctly)?

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<sup>42</sup> The questions that these scenes implicitly raise about the unhappy pressures and contradictions between popular and mainstream formats of art undoubtedly have much relevance, and are issues that I will turn to later in this discussion. The raising of these issues, and at this particular time (1976), might incline us to take Moretti's film as a sign of the fragmentation of political ideologies in Italian film.

In order to answer the first question, I turn to György Lukács, who in his work on aesthetics uses the metaphor of the river:

If we imagine everyday life as a great river, then reality's receptive and reproductive forms of a higher order, science and art, branch off, become differentiated from it, and develop in accordance with their peculiar aims, achieving their pure forms in this peculiarity which was brought into existence by the needs of a social life, only to join once again the river of everyday life by virtue of their influence upon the lives of men. This (the great river) then, constantly enriched by the most remarkable accomplishments of the human mind, assimilates them [...] to branch off once more as higher objective forms of new questions and demands.<sup>43</sup>

The 'great river' symbolizes the interaction of a work of art with human life, in-fitting with the schema of a progressive society: the work of art functions accumulatively in favour of the progression of humanity. This model evidently has a great deal in common with, first, the definition and aims of neorealism outlined by Pasolini, cited above, and secondly, consequently, can be located at the root of the foundations of *impegno*.

To offer a happy example, I turn to Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* in light of the direct traces which it left on Italian society. Many critics take this film to be his 'masterpiece'<sup>44</sup> which 'still commands critical attention as the starting point for everything that is distinctive about his work'.<sup>45</sup> Even Rosi has sustained this sentiment, stating that his adaptation of the eponymous bandit's life 'was the first film in which I felt I had mastered the balance between reality itself and an interpretation of reality'.<sup>46</sup> The importance of the film in terms of its interaction with the political reality of Italy certainly justifies the hype: the controversy prompted by the film led to an official investigation of the links between the

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. György Lukács, *Ästhetik*, 4 vols (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1972), I, pp. 9-10; translated text taken from Béla Királyfalvi, *The Aesthetics of György Lukács* (Princeton; London: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 41-42.

<sup>44</sup> Ben Lawton, 'Salvatore Giuliano: Francesco Rosi's Revolutionary Postmodernism', in *Poet of Civic Courage: The Films of Francesco Rosi*, ed. by Carlo Testa (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1996), pp. 8-42 (p. 8).

<sup>45</sup> Stuart Klawans, 'Illustrious Rosi', *Film Comment*, 31.1 (1995), 60-65 (p. 62).

<sup>46</sup> Klawans, p. 62.



carabinieri, the mafia and bandits in Sicily and eventually triggered an Antimafia Commission.<sup>47</sup> This case is particularly striking as it offers an instance which renders explicit the purpose of a heterotelic creative product as defined by Marxist criticism. The link to the metaphor of the river is clear in the direct relationship between the film and social reality, not to mention that the film has inspired other ‘branches’ of similarly themed, artistic products, including a film, a novel, and an opera.<sup>48</sup>

This example illustrates explicitly how a film might engender a reaction that reverberates across society; quite evidently, such a powerful reaction cannot be anticipated from any single text. Lukács’s model of progressive aesthetics, which I use to inform the direction of this first chapter, instead plays subtly on the process of interpretation in order to illustrate how a text might trigger reactions on the micro level of a single spectator. Central to this is an understanding of the three ‘stages’ of engaging with art: ‘(1) the receiver’s inner state before the effect, (2) the aesthetic effect (catharsis) itself, and (3) the after-effect’. Királyfalvi explains, ‘[the] “before” of the effect is extremely important because “the receiver never faces the art-work as tabula rasa”; rather he “comes from life, more or less loaded with impressions, experiences and ideas”, all of which continue to play an important role both in the catharsis and the after-effect’.<sup>49</sup> Though the emphasis placed on the spectator’s prior experience is very welcome,<sup>50</sup> this model quite clearly illustrates the central position of the artistic text, in the moment of catharsis,

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<sup>47</sup> Wood, p. 17; Gary Crowds, ‘Francesco Rosi – Italy’s Postmodern Neorealist’, *Cinéaste*, 20.4 (1994), 19-27 (p. 21).

<sup>48</sup> These emerged during the 1980s. Cf. *The Sicilian* (Christopher Lambert, 1987); Mario Puzo, *The Sicilian* (Leicester: Charnwood, 1986); the opera in one act, *Salvatore Giuliano*, was written in 1985 by Lorenzo Ferrero.

<sup>49</sup> Királyfalvi, pp. 116-17; cf. Lukács, *Ästhetik* 1, p. 749.

<sup>50</sup> I assume throughout that the spectator of a text is not passive, and that the interpretation of a text is affected directly by her prior experiences. I return to this issue throughout the thesis, and in particular during my discussions of the ‘horizon of expectation’ in the following chapter.

as the pivot in some kind of *change* in the ‘receiver’. The power that a text can thus wield, if this change is political, is therefore made apparent: this is the central assumption of Lukács which explains the need for an aesthetic work to be politicized.

Approaching an answer to the second of the questions posited above, of *how* a text may be politicized will, of course, require lengthier discussion. The model of catharsis evidently places a pointed emphasis on the (formal) text itself – the second stage, what Lukács refers to as the ‘aesthetic effect’ – yet the two parenthetical stages force this to enter into dialogue with *external* realities. Marcuse offers a further definition of the aesthetic space that allows us to move towards an understanding of its position within this process:

The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image (schöner Schein) of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behaviour while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. [...] The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions.<sup>51</sup>

Marcuse’s phrasing here allows us to refine our notion of Lukácsian ‘stages’ of artistic experience as *realities*. There are several points that emerge in this citation through the theorist’s prudent phrasing. First, we note that the formal construction of the alternative space must be crucial, given that it is to offer ‘another reason, another sensibility’: it cannot remain one-dimensional. Second, it is evident that the emancipatory possibility of the text comes through its montage with the world, whereby ‘experience’ (the first stage) is subverted to ‘the world formed by art’. Third, quite crucially, the links between the stages are made in terms of

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<sup>51</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, trans. by Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 6-7.

*recognition*. Thus, the valid political response can emerge from a text that carefully produces a recognizable and believable reality, that challenges or contrasts the viewer's experience. Immediately, Rosi's statement that *Salvatore Giuliano* 'mastered the balance between reality itself and an interpretation of reality', put in implicit terms of its position as *impegnato*, illustrates coherency with the Marxist model.

In the following sections, I trace some of the problems and questions that emerge from Lukács's model of the aesthetic effect and the cathartic process. Given, as I have suggested, that the Marxist notion of aesthetics widely is intrinsic to the base vision of Italian engaged art, this will allow a better conception of cinematic *impegno*'s original agenda. The films of Rosi that I analyse below ultimately do begin to illustrate the fragmentation of *impegno*, both in aesthetic and political terms; however it is hoped that approaching this thematically will clarify usefully this process. I will begin by picking up on the importance of 'realism', in producing an alternative 'reality' to that of the spectator that is both recognizable and prudently constructed.

### **iii. Realism**

Some initial clarification is required: there is perhaps a risk, when approaching György Lukács' predominantly literature-based theory, of assuming that it translates easily across media. Though he wrote little with regard to cinema, he was acutely aware of the power of film afforded by its mass accessibility and therefore the danger of its use as a tool of political manipulation, in terms of 'reinforcing the

[capitalist] structures of ordinary life and institutionalised power'.<sup>52</sup> This is consequential of the two characteristics which differentiate it from other media: firstly a fragmentary structure which reflects the disintegration of society; and secondly an 'essential aesthetic specificity' in its 'closeness to perceptual reality', giving it 'a genuine "authority"', which Lukács refers to as the *Stimmung*, the German word for 'mood' or 'atmosphere'. This is, in essence, both a danger (in that it allows for effortless propagandistic manipulation) and an advantage for the medium: the *Stimmung* being 'the source of film's emancipatory potential through "making people reflect seriously about a past or present situation and confront it with their own"'.<sup>53</sup> Following the logical assumption that cinema is already particularly well suited to represent an external social reality, it is little surprise that as a mode of filmmaking which makes this link even more emphatic, realism is prioritized extensively by many of the Marxist theorists. Marcuse, for instance, identifies six manifesto-like theses of aesthetics which emphasize the importance of political art (that supports class revolution), and which culminate in 'Realism (in various senses) is considered as the art form which corresponds most adequately to the social relationships, and thus is the "correct" art form'.<sup>54</sup>

The centrality of realism in Italian political cinema evidently relates, indeed is related to the long importance of the neorealist movement that is at the roots of *impegno*. The notion of realism that is intrinsic to neorealist cinema is one of an implicit, casual, observation: as Zavattini has (by now famously) stated that for the aesthetic of neorealism, 'bisogna che lo spazio tra vita e spettacolo diventi nulla'

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth-Century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 90. Aitken offers a very useful translation of Lukács's theory from literature to cinema, including what exceptions and alterations are necessary, cf. pp. 83-94.

<sup>53</sup> Aitken, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> Marcuse, p. 2.

and that ‘il banale non esiste’.<sup>55</sup> Pasolini’s definition of neorealism, and in particular his comments on the particular aptitude of cinema to represent reality – ‘possedendo tutti i requisiti necessari al gusto della realtà cui sopra: non c’era niente di più paratattico, mimetico, immediato, concreto, evidente di una inquadratura’<sup>56</sup> – are strikingly similar to Lukács’s description of cinema. Certainly, as Zavattini’s words illustrate, the notion of neorealist cinema as mimetic, and thus better able to assume an emancipatory political function, is a common reading of this period.

Like Pasolini, Rosi has strong links to the neorealist movement in post-war Italy, where he gained his first directorial experiences (for instance, as assistant director to Visconti on *La terra trema: episodio del mare*, 1948). Both in terms of certain key mise-en-scène techniques, such as the use of non-professional actors and location shooting, and in the thematic continuation of ‘brutal humanism’, for example constituted in the prioritized corpse of Salvatore Giuliano,<sup>57</sup> Rosi is a clear ‘erede legittimo di neorealismo’.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, though, the ‘realism’ of both Pasolini and Rosi went beyond the mimetic model of neorealist filmmaking. As mentioned, Pasolini – who, again like Lukács, placed film theory very evidently into a literary legacy, for instance as ‘la lingua scritta della realtà’<sup>59</sup> – continued to

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<sup>55</sup> Cesare Zavattini, *Neorealismo, ecc*, ed. by Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 1979), p. 104.

<sup>56</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘Nota su *Le notti*’, in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull’arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 699-707 (pp. 702-3).

<sup>57</sup> Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision. The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 208. Cf. my discussion of ‘brutal humanism’ in the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>58</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano. Volume quarto: dal miracolo economico agli anni novanta 1960-1993*, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), IV, p. 254.

<sup>59</sup> The description of cinema as the ‘lingua scritta’ is reached by mapping it over the connection between oral and written language. Oral language, he suggests, is original in the sense that it is both ‘naturale’ and ‘esistenziale’, and has constantly existed alongside man, where ‘la lingua scritta è una convenzione che fissa tale lingua orale’, literally a substitution (of ‘il canale bocca-orecchio’ with ‘[il] canale riproduzione grafica-occhio’). Reality, then, equates to oral language; in terms of man’s ‘actions’ Pasolini states that it has always existed, and once again did so naturally. The cinema, however, is both more recent and is a reproduction of ‘action’, hence Pasolini’s (titular) comparison

theorize the cinema as an approximated form of reality. Unlike the neorealists, he takes account of the possibility to create a cinema that self-consciously invokes a certain reality through specifically cinematographic techniques, such as montage.<sup>60</sup>

Rosi, too, makes an explicit use of a kind of realism that foregrounds a self-conscious attempt to ‘mount’ reality, and a useful instance of this can be taken from his fourth feature, *Le mani sulla città*.<sup>61</sup> The film recounts the difficulties faced by construction entrepreneur Edoardo Nottola (Rod Steiger) after the tragic collapse of one of his sites. The scene which introduces Nottola offers a carefully constructed and self-conscious stage with little accentuation of the banal. The soundtrack undulates in and out of the film’s diegesis: initially a voice-over accompanying an establishing shot, the camera then cuts inside where Nottola omnipotently interacts with the voice, and the spectator eventually realizes that it belongs to a man hidden behind the camera’s point of view. The first shot of Nottola in the scene is symbolically framed in line with a surreal blueprint of Naples; the map is later revealed to be a door into this otherwise mysteriously dislocated setting. The magnificent panorama across Naples affords the location a mythical status, as a modern Mount Olympus from which the *pezzi grossi* can monitor the city. The camera movements are kept simple, predominantly tracing Nottola’s movements in line with the gazes of his colleagues, subordinating them along with the spectator. The image and its possible political manipulation is then subtly hinted at through

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with written language. Cf. Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘La lingua scritta della realtà’, in *Saggi*, 1, pp. 1503-40, (p. 1513).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Pasolini, ‘La lingua scritta della realtà’; and ‘Osservazioni sul piano sequenza’, in *Saggi*, 1, pp. 1555-61.

<sup>61</sup> Though *Le mani* does not explicitly depict the mafia in the same way as, for instance, *Salvatore Giuliano*, I have included it here and below based on the same observation made by Anna Paparcone that through the corruption of political and economic forces, it depicts ‘the true nature of the Camorra’. Anna Paparcone, ‘Francesco Rosi’s *Hands Over the City: A Contemporary Perspective on the Camorra*’, in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Dana Renga (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), pp. 226-33 (p. 227).

the pile of Nottola's mug shots on the floor, and in particular his complaint that with the use of a flash he resembles Mussolini.



Figure 3: Nottola 'over' the map of Naples in *Le mani sulla città* (00:18:12)

Through both his metacinematic comment on the image, and the carefully constructed shots and setting, then, Rosi's sequence carries out the same foregrounding of a socio-political reality, yet (in the same way as Pasolini theorizes) he does so using self-conscious, formalist techniques. As such, they are distinctly unlike the common conception of the observational neorealist image.<sup>62</sup> This shift from the mimetic to a more complex realist images allows the filmmaker a greater freedom in the realist image to be placed within the cathartic process, prospectively enhancing the possibilities of the aesthetic effect. The same movement thus marks a very important moment of 'maturation' of the engaged image in the history of *cinema d'impegno*. It can be compared to the moment of mature, complex discourses of literary commitment that precedes fragmentation, as illustrated by Burns. It is no coincidence that it is at this historical moment, when the artist takes greater control of the 'aesthetic' aspect of her text in order to bring it together with the intellectual and the moral, that Burns applies the working

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<sup>62</sup> This notion of the neorealist image, while widespread, has been problematized recently for instance in the work of Chris Wagstaff, who illustrates the complex formalism at play in major neorealist films. Cf. *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007).

definition of *impegno* that I have cited above. Further nuances of the development of realism along more evident formalist lines can thus be traced by turning back to the debates that accompanied the crisis of the image in the early 1950s.

In the contributions of Guido Aristarco to these debates, there is a similar implication of a necessary moral *impegno* for directors that is rooted in a left-wing reality, yet (pre-empting the above examples from Rosi and Pasolini) this lacks the sense of exigency for an unadulterated reflection of reality. Aristarco's critiques of Visconti's films, as Francesco Casetti observes, are useful in this regard: already in his reading of *Ossessione* (1943, and a precursor of neorealism), and in *La terra trema*, 'la verità non coincide più con il rispecchiamento esteriore delle cose, ma "si identifica con la creazione poetica"'.<sup>63</sup> The split between the neorealist (or naturalist) mode and the realist mode can be approximated as follows: 'Da un lato si esalta l'immediatezza con cui il mezzo rifletterebbe il mondo (la poetica del pedinamento di Zavattini); dall'altro si sottolineano le mediazioni che sono necessarie ad un vero rispecchiamento (la poetica della ricostruzione di Aristarco)'.<sup>64</sup>

Upon its release, Aristarco infamously defended Visconti's *Senso* (1954) from attacks of being contrary to the neorealist 'pedinamento' ethic, defending it in terms of its subjective view of reality (i.e. matching that of the protagonists).<sup>65</sup> Thus the implicit movement from objective *chance* to the staged reality of the characters is very significant in light of my comments above, in that it allows for a further-reaching definition of realism. As I mentioned in the introduction, rather than simply defending the film from the critiques of the neorealist supporters, Aristarco

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<sup>63</sup> Francesco Casetti, *Teorie del cinema: 1945-1990* (Milan: Bompiani, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Casetti, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 187.



presented *Senso* as an important milestone: ‘Nasce con *Senso* il primo vero e autentico film storico italiano. Se Visconti è costretto a trattare una vicenda del passato, tuttavia, più che abbassare la “bandiera del neorealismo”, continua a portare avanti quella del realismo’.<sup>66</sup> I wish to pick up primarily on Aristarco’s notion of the ‘film storico italiano’, since this guides us usefully back towards the importance of realism in Marxist aesthetic theory (the ‘correct art’, according to Marcuse). Aristarco’s approach mimics that of Lukács, for whom a realistic socio-historical background in a text was pivotal in the completion of the cathartic process. The latter writes:

True great realism thus depicts man and society as complete entities, instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects. [...] Realism means a three-dimensionality, an all-roundness, that endows with independent life characters and human relationships. It by no means involves a rejection of the emotional and intellectual dynamism which necessarily develops together with the modern world. *All it opposes is the destruction of the completeness of the human personality and of the objective typicality of men and situations through an excessive cult of the momentary mood.*<sup>67</sup>

Lukács’s comments evidently allow, if not call for, a wide notion of realism, albeit one with a specific political aim. Thus, at the moment at which the notion of realism in Italian *impegnato* cinema matures, it reaches a strong point of overlap with Lukács’s concept of aesthetic realism. The deliberately and self-consciously non-naturalist, realist text thus becomes central to *impegno* during the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s, before its subsequent fragmentation. The neorealist paradigm, and in particular the tricky interaction between a presumed ‘objective’ or observational cinema, and a subjective reality, will nevertheless continue to dog cinematic texts.

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<sup>66</sup> Aristarco, Guido, ‘Esperienza culturale ed esperienza originale’, in Luchino Visconti, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* di Luchino Visconti, ed. by Guido Aristarco and Gaetana Carancini (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1960), pp. 13-47 (p. 32).

<sup>67</sup> György Lukács, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others*, trans. by Edith Bone (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p. 6, my emphases.

In the following paragraphs I will turn to Rosi's films, beginning with *Le mani sulla città*, to illustrate the construction of formal realities.

Rosi addresses the question of the complexities of objectivity directly, in a statement made about political film:

Un film vede, documenta, denuncia, immagina, racconta. Per fare questo, pensa. Quindi pensa anche la politica. Se pensa la politica, lo può fare in due maniere: esporre e sostenere una tesi, oppure inserirsi dialetticamente in un dibattito politico. Nel primo caso, rischia la propaganda; nel secondo corrisponde meglio alla definizione di 'politico', in quanto la politica è dialettica e dibattito.<sup>68</sup>

Though perhaps his assumptions on the political are not without risk, the 'secondo caso' – 'dialectic' as a model for political cinema – is both very strong and resonant. Indeed as will be illustrated below, Rosi's cinema employs a dialogue between serious political or social issues with a number of style conventions which allow a popular audience to relate to the film. Perhaps what is most striking about the director's statement about film is the first sentence: evidently there is an implicit dialogue constructed between the (pseudo-) objective activities, 'vede, documenta', and the subjective, 'denuncia, immagina, racconta'. This gives an immediate sense of the director's approach to realism, merging and evolving the 'poetica del pedinamento' and the 'poetica della ricostruzione'.

*Le mani sulla città* illustrates well what I will term Rosi's 'dialectical realism', in reference to the above citation. The film's narrative alone functions along three levels of meaning: literally, it is a fictional story, written for the screen by Rosi and Raffaele La Capria; its background strikes a *realist* chord given the political scandals regarding housing during the economic boom in Italy, and it is *allegorical* of the first discussions of 'historic compromise' which the Christian

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<sup>68</sup> Cited in Claudio Carabba, 'L'enigma del vero: il cinema politico di Rosi', in *La sfida della verità: il cinema di Francesco Rosi*, ed. by Aldo Tassone (Florence: Aida, 2005), pp. 75-84 (p. 77).

Democrats were undergoing contemporaneously. In this sense the film engages with a fact-fiction dialectic; this is symbolically represented by the research that the authors undertook for the case: in an interview with Michel Ciment, Rosi explains that, wandering around Naples's streets, they discovered a collapsed building and devised its history, only to discover their story to be surprisingly accurate in later research.<sup>69</sup> The boundaries between fiction and fact in *Le mani sulla città* are further blurred through the use of non-professional and Hollywood actors (the town councillors are played by contemporary Neapolitan town councillors;<sup>70</sup> Nottola is played by Rod Steiger) and combinations of location filming in the city (the collapsing building) and exact reproductions of real sets (the town hall).<sup>71</sup>



Figures 4-7: Active and Passive Camerawork on the Collapsing Building in *Le mani sulla città* (00:07:59; 00:08:01; 00:08:04; 00:08:25)

<sup>69</sup> This is a filmed interview, entitled 'Rosi, La Capria, Ciment' reproduced on the North American *Criterion Collection* special edition of the film.

<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the most striking example is councillor De Vita, played expertly and passionately by the Partito Comunista member Carlo Fermariello, who appears once again in Rosi's *Diario napoletano* (see below).

<sup>71</sup> David Overby, 'Rosi in Context: An Interview with Francesco Rosi', *Sight and Sound*, 45.3 (1976), 170-74 (p. 173).

Rosi's dialectical approach to realism is furthermore illustrated by the alternating camera functions in this film. The shots of the crumbling building, shot simultaneously from a range of long and medium perspectives, testify to this. At times the camera is static, recording the collapse as though from a closed circuit; at others the camera is notably active, for instance assuming the point of view of a brick falling towards a surprised builder. Unlike the scene cited above, the introduction to Nottola whereby the camera readily assumes a subordinated role, the activity of the camera here assumes a complicit role.

The movement of the camera between shots illustrates the director's fluctuating adherence to classical continuity, both in terms of narrative and stylistics. In this regard, the sequence of footage which marks the elections is fascinating: it begins from the perspective of Nottola in the shadows at the back of a Socialist rally, commencing with a match on action from his perspective. Then the camera makes an awkward jump cut forward, breaking the 30° rule and forgetting Nottola's presence entirely. The following sequence of shots feels like a newsreel, splicing together a variety of celebratory shots of the Socialists, implying their victory, yet excluding entirely any spoken dialogue: the only sound is the diegetic murmur and then applause of the crowd. The camera suddenly cuts to a series of people tidying up after the climax of the rally, then to a surreal, high angle shot onto Piazza del Plebiscito, revealing stacks of burning fliers. In a sense this sequence functions as a classic interlude, a 'montage' which forces the passing of time without tiring the spectator. And yet stylistically, in its visuals and sound, the sequence goes beyond any classical function. Overall it combines an objective documentation of events (which is not explicitly fictional nor factual) with a stylized, subjective montage which disorientates the viewer.

The combination of objective and subjective focuses in Rosi's film points to a 'three dimensional realism', a layered image of the contemporary reality with realistic characters. As such, it can be taken as compatible with the citation of Marcuse, above, in reproducing 'a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality', 'another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions'.

Pasolini's 'lingua scritta della realtà' model remains both useful and highly relevant in perceiving the delicate relationship between reality and art, and the merging of one into the other. Mapping this process over the series of changes which must be employed when moving from oral to written language – stylistic or grammatical, for instance – demonstrates the decisions made by the director, forging space for subjectivity. In examining precisely this relationship, albeit under different terms, Lukács established a series of layers of reality, 'totalities', and theorized the process of condensation and mutation which must occur in a work of art. Inspired by Hegel's notions of the 'particular' and the 'universal', Lukács redefines the human world in terms of its 'intensive' and 'extensive' totalities.<sup>72</sup> Where Királyfalvi defines the extensive totality in terms of science (and implicitly the de-anthropomorphic) – and the intensive, the socio-historical snapshot for a specific man, in terms of artistic representation – Aitken, in *Realist Film Theory and Cinema*, offers a more updated definition, with reference to a third 'totality':

[It is] necessary to distinguish the notion of the *aesthetic* intensive totality from that of both *der Mensch ganz* and the 'extensive totality'. For Lukács, that which the work of art must attempt to represent is *der Mensch ganz*, 'man's totality'. *Der Mensch ganz* refers to the relationships which exist between the subject and the social environment during a particular historical conjuncture. *Der Mensch ganz* must also be distinguished from the 'extensive

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<sup>72</sup> Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, p. 100.

totality', which is a more ontological concept referring to all the physical, non-human, aspects of external reality.<sup>73</sup>

Aitken's definition is particularly useful as he re-categorizes the 'intensive totality' as the *aesthetic* intensive totality, more explicitly standing in for a work of art. Bearing in mind that *der Mensch ganz* is almost infinitely complex, he continues:

the role of the aesthetic 'intensive totality', therefore, is not to attempt to represent *der Mensch ganz* in generality but, rather, to portray the crucial factors which figure in any one 'historical here and now'. Lukács does not, therefore, propose [...] that the work of art should, or ever could, create a simulacrum of *der Mensch ganz*, let alone the extensive totality. On the contrary, he makes it clear that the verisimilitude and viridicy of the account produced within any work of art must, necessarily, be influenced, and limited, by a number of determining factors.<sup>74</sup>

The determining factors which Aitken elucidates revolve around issues of limitation: genre, medium, timescale, and *auteurship*; once again there is space for subjectivity in the filmmaker's (artist's) representation of reality. Aitken's definition of the role of the aesthetic intensive totality could be applied quite accurately to *Le mani sulla città*: it is a 'historical here and now', yet, as mentioned, it contains a number of formalist or fictionalizing devices.

Though his stylistic and narrative jumps can be dislocating or alienating to the spectator, Rosi persistently remains close to the reality of 1960s Naples. This is solidified at the film's conclusion, when the final aerial shots of the city are matched with the epitaph, 'I personaggi e i fatti qui narrati sono immaginari, è autentica invece la realtà sociale e ambientale che li produce'. In including this, the director brings to the fore the background, his representation of *der Mensch ganz*, and justifies and concludes the constant dialogue between the real and fictional which has been witnessed throughout. In fact, the words in the foreground and the image in the background epitomize this, with the foreground an act of pure

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<sup>73</sup> Aitken, p. 74.

<sup>74</sup> Aitken, p. 75.

formalism (representative of the fictional characters and events), and the background representing the social reality.



Figure 8: The closing image of *Le mani* as 'type' (01:40:34)

This image does not constitute the entire aesthetic intensive totality though, of course, but rather a representative part: something Lukács theorized under the label of the 'typical'.<sup>75</sup> The type is essentially a section of the 'intensive totality' which refers to a fixed reality; 'the type [...] contains the essence of the universal within a concrete, individuated form'.<sup>76</sup> In the system of a realist text which allows for the fictionalization or staging of a reality, the author must concretize this fiction, according to Lukács, through a dialectic with the type:

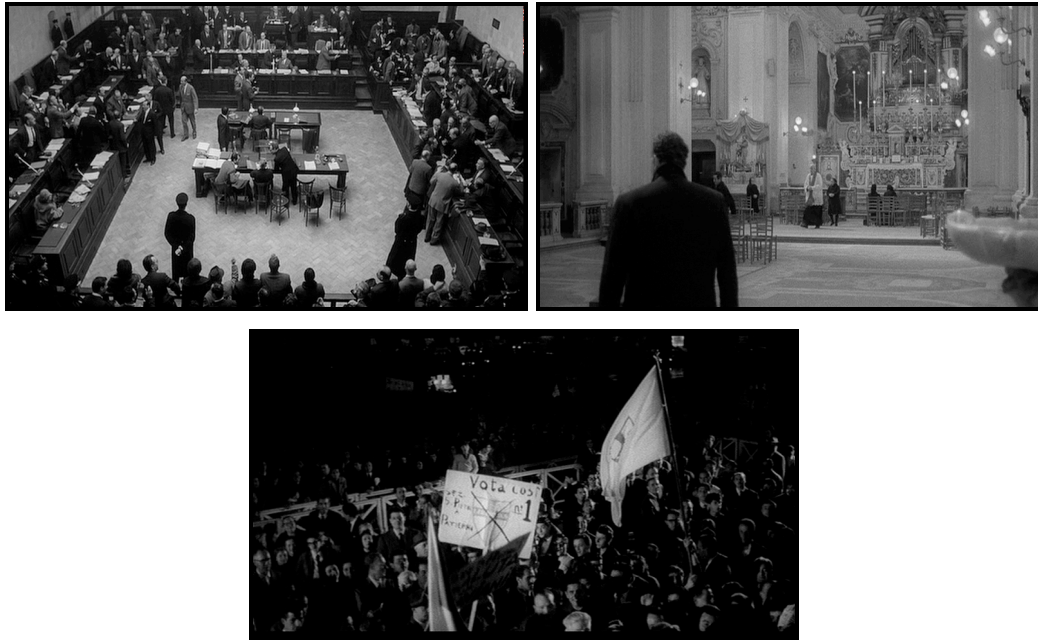
What characterizes the type is the convergence and intersection of all the dominant aspects of that dynamic unity through which genuine literature reflects life in a vital and contradictory unity – all the most important social, moral and spiritual contradictions of a time [...] Through the creation of the type and the discovery of typical characters and typical situations, the most significant directions of social development obtain adequate artistic expression.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, the presence of a type in Rosi's film is literally and emphatically presented by the ending credit, in which the 'typical' equates to the 'realità sociale e ambientale'.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. György Lukács, 'Art and Objective Truth', in György Lukács, *'Writer and Critic' and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Arthur D. Kahn (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1971), pp. 25-60.

<sup>76</sup> Aitken, p. 76.

<sup>77</sup> György Lukács, 'Marx and Engels on Aesthetics', in Lukács, *'Writer and Critic'*, pp. 89-102 (p. 78).



Figures 9-11: The Town Council, the Church, the Political Rally as ‘Types’ in *Le mani* (00:17:02; 01:10:35; 01:18:27)

In a sense, attempting to pick out individual instances of the ‘type’ in Rosi’s film appears almost contradictory: individuating them risks overlooking the complex social tapestry of which they are part. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects such as characters, settings or sequences that could be loosely labelled as ‘typical’, whereby the aim to construct the concrete ‘*realtà ambientale*’. This might include the real politicians, the ‘newsreel’ images of political rallies, or the posters and manifestations, as types that remain recognizable still today. Given its explicit proximity to the reality of post-war Naples, one could even see the collapsing building as a ‘type’, a symbolic referent of the real corruption surrounding the economic boom in 1960s Italy. Rosi uses other instances which demonstrate that the typical need not be so physically explicit: the church, as Gieri writes, ‘does not find a concrete embodiment in any of the characters of the film, but is ever present’.<sup>78</sup> Its lingering, subtle presence – for instance, when the Bishop of the city blesses the construction site in the closing minutes of the film – is enough to echo

<sup>78</sup> Manuela Gieri, ‘*Hands Over the City: Cinema as Political Indictment and Social Commitment*’, in *Poet of Civic Courage*, ed. by Carlo Testa pp. 43-59 (p. 47).



the more universal presence of the Catholic church within this aesthetic intensive totality.

The example of the church points quite usefully to the complex overlaying of the political comment and the type. One of the key instances to which Gieri refers, a typical image of the church, is the concealed altar at Professor De Angeli's house. The critic plays up the importance of this sequence as a central political commentary within the film, describing De Angeli as 'the core and true motor of Rosi's discursive strategy', 'the mastermind behind the film's elliptic and abstract structure'.<sup>79</sup> The sequence revolves around De Angeli's meeting with Balsamo, the doctor and party member who 'sympathizes with those who suffer and are expropriated by heartless political rulers' and complains about Nottola's prospective inclusion in the party (he is typically good, and politically righteous). De Angeli responds almost grotesquely to the doctor's complaint: 'Caro Balsamo, in politica l'indignazione morale non serve a niente. L'unico grave peccato, sai qual è? Quello di essere sconfitti'. The satirical and Dantesque, biting criticism of the Christian Democrat leader – which constitutes the fictionalized part of the narrative – is concretized and tied down to a recognizable reality for the spectator. As such, the power of the scene as an aesthetic effect is increased.

The examples from *Le mani sulla città* demonstrate Rosi's carefully considered relationship with realism, and the dialectical form that negotiates subjectivity and objectivity, through the total and the type. The instances of 'type' provided testify to the director's adherence to the Marxist model, whereby mimetic images (with varying degrees of fictionalization) represent the external reality in order to facilitate the cathartic process for the spectator. More widely, this approach

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<sup>79</sup> Gieri, p. 53.

by Rosi explicitly attests to the importance and influence of Lukács's thought in the culture of Italian political cinema, and in the agenda of *impegno* during this period.

### iii. Metatextuality and Citation

Despite Rosi's denunciation of the corrupt politicians, by the end of *Le mani sulla città* the spectator is left with the bleak sentiment of recommencing precisely where she started. Even thirty years later, when Rosi deals once again with the problems faced by his native city in *Diario napoletano*, they can only be ambiguously resolved at the end as Rosi – for he features himself – imagines the building collapse sequence in reverse. The reassembling bricks might seem to imply a form of resolution or 'hope in the rebirth of the city',<sup>80</sup> though this model remains limited: the concrete political consequences of his *cinema impegnato* are only plausible in an oneiric, metaphoric sequence. In fact it would be possible to read this final scene as a testimony of self-awareness of and pessimism towards the duty of his civic conscience. As this scene illustrates, by the stage at which Rosi made *Diario napoletano*, his approach to the creation of a political film had shifted further, in fact somewhat dislocating the 'types' of *Le mani*, and problematizing the previous film's single political ideology by appearing within the film, thus emphasizing his subjective perspective. Nevertheless, though the inclusion of himself in this film creates a more explicitly personal film, *Diario napoletano* lacks nothing of the director's typical 'profound civic conscience', as Crowdus puts it.<sup>81</sup> The film is built over an interesting pastiche of intertextual clips and citations: 'a variety of cinematic "notes" – interviews, archival footage, fictional scenes, TV news clips, documentary sequences, personal reminiscence, and even a bit of tourist

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<sup>80</sup> Paparcone, p. 232.

<sup>81</sup> Crowdus, p. 19.

sightseeing'.<sup>82</sup> Compared to *Le mani*, then, *Diario napoletano* marks a stark stylistic change, in favour of an interrupted narrative based more on layered memories and quotes than a direct, ideologically constructed, 'master' narrative. As such, the film coheres with the wider fragmentation of *film impegnati* that accompanied post-modernity, and evidence of the disruption of both realism and the Marxist core can be viewed in this mode.

In historicizing Rosi's career, it is clear that there is an aesthetic progression which leads to *Diario napoletano*. Though in the earlier films, he produces newsreel or journalistic images as a means to 'cite' the reality that he is investigating – in other words, performed types such as the political rally in *Mani* – by the 1970s this mode of representation begins to become ironized. *Il caso Mattei*, for instance, which narrates the life of Enrico Mattei, successful head of the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) until his death in a mysterious plane crash in 1962, employs prototypical versions of the same 'cinematic notes', yet built far more explicitly into a Marxist-realist narrative that is closer to Rosi's 1960s films. In the following paragraphs, I will consider first how Rosi plays with 'objective' knowledge through the invocation of 'passive' communication means, before turning to the more 'subjective' footage of his films, before widening this discourse out to a broader understanding of Rosi's citations of other cinematic forms (e.g. genre cinema).

*Il caso Mattei* has three layers: the investigation carried out by Rosi; the fictionalized narrative of Mattei's life, acted by Gian Maria Volontè, which constitutes the majority of the film; and the overlapping sequences in which Rosi is illustrated putting the (fictionalized) film together. Though initially this seems to

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<sup>82</sup> Crowdus, p. 19.

alienate the spectator, by not allowing her into the closed narrative of Mattei's biography, ultimately it seeks to stage a closer link to the reality, by foregrounding the 'live' investigation. As such, these direct 'citations' of an objective reality bring the film closer to Lukács's model of political aesthetics.

A sense of the 'semidocumentary' is achieved once again in the film through Rosi's auto-representation before the camera, prioritizing his own body as a key investigator of the case. The director appears on-screen repeatedly in two situations: either to interview key witnesses within the case, or to illustrate the creation of the film. Both categories play with subjectivity and objectivity in order ultimately to make a claim to, or to stage, reality. The first category includes Rosi's phone conversation with Mauro De Mauro, murdered while researching the case for Rosi in 1970, or his interviews with Michele Pantaleone and Thyraud de Vosjoli, both of whom 'officially' problematize the accepted explanation of Mattei's death. They function as 'objective' witnesses, in practice as *typical* characters, who appear to remain beyond the films fictionalized discourses. An interesting overlap then emerges in a third case, Rosi's interview of a key witness of the plane crash, which occurs, seemingly, the morning after the accident (the film opens with a reconstruction of the plane crash, with interviews of witnesses by the police). Though there is the same sense of objectivity from including an 'official' witness, by deliberately fictionalizing the time period, Rosi blurs the boundaries between the fictionalized part of the film and the 'real' investigation or archive footage.

Rosi's relationship with the documentary in both *Il caso Mattei* and *Diario napoletano* relates to the notion of performance on a number of levels. First, certainly the more recent film (though I would argue that the older film too, in terms of the continuity I mentioned above) can be theorized according to Stella

Bruzzi's 'performative mode' of documentary: they 'confront the problem of aestheticization and accept authorship and stylization as intrinsic', in 'a crucial way of establishing its credibility'.<sup>83</sup> The self-representation of Rosi, the self-consciousness of his investigation (and its limitations), and the foregrounding of the film-as-film are instances of this. Just as the most fictionalized aspects of these documentaries can be articulated as 'performances', in fact through the montage of the film and their subsequent irony, the citations of 'real' texts – newsreels, newspapers, interviews – can be read as 'performed', too.

The use of newsreel-style footage in *Il caso Mattei*, among other films, is a useful point of focus here. To illustrate this, I turn back to a definition of the newsreel itself from Bruzzi and Esther Shub:

The significant observation here is that a clear distinction exists between 'newsreel' and 'documentary', and, following on from this, that whilst the newsreel is limited to showing events, it is the function of a documentary to provide structure and meaning. A documentary, a structured and motivated non-fiction film, does not aspire to convey in as pure a way as possible the real material at its core because this is what newsreel or other comparable forms of amateur, accidental and non-narrative film do.<sup>84</sup>

Evidently the self-conscious application of a structure and meaning to the factual events is precisely the approach of Rosi in his manipulation of a historical event. He employs newsreel footage, such as the death of Mattei, with the assumption that it produces 'pure' information, and moreover that it assumes a spectator who responds relatively passively to what is presented. Thus basic or ground information – in exactly the same way as the typical image – becomes given, within the broader framework of the film which in turn, like the documentary, offers structure and meaning. Thus the viewer function slips between predictable

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<sup>83</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Bruzzi, p. 27.

responses and a more direct engagement that requires a greater intellectual and moral contribution.

The differentiation between Rosi's own film and the media image in the film more loosely is toyed with in the film, once again foregrounding a self-consciously political stance, as noted by Lawton:

Not only does Rosi fill his screen with journalistic images (press conferences, newsreels, news broadcasts, headlines superimposed on the screen, and so on), but also he presents his film as a documentary in progress. On the night of Mattei's death he documents the mobilisation of the news department at RAI as it prepares a newsreel tribute to the deceased president of ENI. He then frames this television film with his own work which will take us far beyond that official and selective presentation of Mattei's life designed only for immediate consumption.<sup>85</sup>

The constant presence of journalists and news reporters, then, serves to identify a specific type of documentation (serving the same function as the newsreels described by Shub and Bruzzi), and moreover to single Rosi out as transcending this function. Once again, then, it exaggerates the relationship of reciprocity with the spectator, only the self-consciousness of the image forces or demands her contribution. The comparison of the journalists with the newsreel footage nevertheless illustrates the extent to which the inclusion of both becomes consciously *performative*, a formal decision, which aims to trigger a bolder response within the spectator, in other words, strengthening its aesthetic effect.

The uses of 'documentary realism' in Rosi's work, as illustrated by *Il caso Mattei*, are evidently employed at emphatic and focused points of political commentary, once again similarly to the individual typical images in *Le mani sulla città* which pointed towards the *Mensch ganz*. The implications of this, in terms of Lukács model of the cathartic process, is that the political aesthetic effect can be

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<sup>85</sup> Harry Lawton, 'Enrico Mattei: The Man who Fell to Earth', in *Poet of Civic Courage*, ed. by Carlo Testa pp. 60-86 (p. 67).

broken down into stages. Recognizing this, Lukács refers to the process as ‘a chain of “cathartic moments”’, with the real point of the work of art being ‘to “unsettle” the existing *Zeitgeist* of the recipient’, ‘to have a “moving shaking effect”, rather than handing out moral codes or prescriptions.’<sup>86</sup> This contributes to the already complex process of constructing a political image within a text. However, as the instances from *Il caso Mattei* illustrate, there is an evident frustration of the viewer in the forced changes of the spectator function. It is worth recognizing, however, that there is a certain idealism intrinsic to Lukács’s expectation of a work of art, in that he expects the cathartic change undergone by the spectator to be straightforward and sudden. Though Brecht advocated ‘alienating’ the spectator to the same end, as will be seen below, he had a slightly different expectation to Lukács in this regard:

For Lukács, the work of art is to bring about a change in the recipient’s whole personality. When the cathartic crisis is utilised by the recipient’s cognitive effort, it is able to effect an ethical change in his/her conduct and attitudes. Brecht, on the other hand, argues that the progressive work produces a conceptual change. The work causes the recipient critically to evaluate the political consequences of his/her conventional views and beliefs.<sup>87</sup>

Brecht’s attempt to prompt a gradual, political change allows a greater freedom on behalf of the filmmaker, who might otherwise be constrained by a Lukácsian, ethical method.

The unsettling of the *Zeitgeist* of the spectator is a process that is repeated throughout the cinema of Francesco Rosi, as I will attempt to illustrate next. Klawans observes an interesting differentiation from the neorealists in the director’s cinema, which has some relevance here:

Like the neorealists, [Rosi] favored shooting on location, often with casts full of nonprofessionals, but he rejected the neorealists’ use of *sympathetic*

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<sup>86</sup> Aitken, p. 80.

<sup>87</sup> Pauline Johnson, *Marxist Aesthetics: The Foundations within Everyday Life for an Emancipated Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 75.

*characters embedded in well-rounded plots, preferring instead to tease and provoke the audience in the name of a critical cinema.* Rosi's story-telling was disjunctive, characterized by brusque editing and jarring chronological jumps. His principal characters were often strangely distant, or even absent from the scene.<sup>88</sup>

The process of 'teasing and provok[ing]', rather than simply shocking his spectator is, I believe, precisely wherein lies Rosi's 'unsettling of the *Zeitgeist*'. In order to illustrate this, we might consider the example of Rosi's absent protagonists, something commented on by many critics (e.g. Overby, who claims that *Cadaveri eccellenti*, is the 'first film in which [Rosi] has moved so close to a man').<sup>89</sup> Rosi often re-emphasizes his intent to trigger a cognitive response in the spectator, often justifying the enforced distance from his characters for precisely this motive.<sup>90</sup> *Salvatore Giuliano* offers an obvious example of this, given that the bandit who lends his name to the title appears so infrequently, aside from as a corpse. This decision forces a detachment on behalf of the audience, who is denied any possible emotional attachment to the story.

The infamy of Salvatore Giuliano's death offers an interesting slant in light of the 'stages' of realities in Lukács's theory, that pre-exist the film within the spectator. It is conceivable, in particular at the time of the release of *Salvatore Giuliano*, that the spectator had some awareness of the real bandit given the widespread, heroic images of the bandit (often compared to Robin Hood in Anglophone work).<sup>91</sup> As such, it is probable the she would bring a certain expectation to the film, already anticipating a similarity between the two realities.

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<sup>88</sup> Klawans, p. 60; my emphasis.

<sup>89</sup> Overby, pp. 172-3.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Crowds, p. 26.

<sup>91</sup> Ben Lawton describes his nostalgic memories of the story, betraying a sense of its infamy: 'As a child growing up in Italy, I can vaguely remember older children talking about Giuliano's adventures, as they had heard about it from their parents. For disaffected, working-class children in an economically depressed country which had just lost a war, he was a very real hero, a Robin Hood of sorts, because – at least according to the generally accepted legend – "he took from the rich and gave to the poor". Later, I remember people talking about his death and about the mysterious death by poisoning of his "cousin", Gaspare Pisciotto'. Ben Lawton, p. 8.



Rosi initially adheres to the expectation, by very deliberately and meticulously recreating historical images of Giuliano in the opening shots of the film, momentarily allowing an instance of recognition. This recognition is soon interrupted, though, as Giuliano proceeds to disappear completely from the diegesis, blocking the confirmation of spectatorial expectation. This is a process of alienation.



Figures 12-13: Salvatore Giuliano's Body, and Rosi's Meticulous Reproduction in the Opening Sequence of *Salvatore Giuliano* (00:02:02)

My choice of terminology in this regard is certainly self-conscious; the overlap between Rosi's approach and the 'alienation' theorized by Bertold Brecht in relation to his 'epic theatre' is quite apparent and has been touched upon by some critics.<sup>92</sup> Brecht, privileged in the position of simultaneous practitioner and theoretician,<sup>93</sup> infamously disregarded the unity of the audience which, he argued, classical theatre produced, and in its place he advocated his own style ('anti-Aristotelian' or 'epic' theatre) which individualized each spectator and treated them

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Freddy Buache, *Le cinéma italien, 1945-1979* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1979), p. 355; John D. Michalczyk, *The Italian Political Filmmakers* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> As with Pier Paolo Pasolini, though there was a conception about both artists on behalf of certain theorists that straddling the two positions was not positive, rather it weakened their credibility: semioticians such as Umberto Eco, for instance, insisted that Pasolini's work was useless and irrelevant given the theorist's lack of specialization within semiotics. Cf. Robert C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 240. Similarly, Brecht was criticized for his independent approach; in terms of politics, he 'always represented an awkward problem for [...] Communist critics, just because he digested politics in his own way instead of accepting the politicians' ready-made aesthetic line', John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1959), p. 204.

as capable of cognitive reasoning.<sup>94</sup> Brecht moreover theorized an important dislocation of the individual spectator – the ‘Alienation-effect’, his interpretation of the need to ‘unsettle’ the spectator’s *Zeitgeist*; this was inspired by Chinese acting methods for their ability to impose self-awareness on the spectator.<sup>95</sup> In a self-conscious state, the spectator is in a ready position to respond cognitively to what she is observing.

This can be applied to *Salvatore Giuliano*, and in particular the film’s opening shots. Brecht states that ‘a representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar’.<sup>96</sup> The initial, familiar image of the bandit in *Salvatore Giuliano* seems to do the contrary, yet as the film progresses, and it becomes more apparent that the corpse has been moved and staged, the apparent ‘familiarity’ with the pro-filmic Giuliano fades and we are left with merely a vague recognition of the man and the context. We are alienated by the absence of Giuliano. In this sense, the body, and the opening sequence more widely, embody the sentiment of the infamous newspaper article by Tommaso Besozzi, entitled ‘di sicuro c’è solo che è morto’.

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<sup>94</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), p. 37.

<sup>95</sup> Brecht, p. 95.

<sup>96</sup> Brecht, p. 192.



Figure 14: The Title Page of *L'Europeo*, 12 July 1950.

Once again in *Salvatore Giuliano*, then, there is the dialectical interplay between ‘objective’ knowledge – the corpse – and the subjective interpretation or fictionalization, by Rosi. As with *Il caso Mattei*, the ‘factual’ knowledge is built into images of the press that bear associations with and informative, passive reaction from the spectator, then the subjective information demands a greater intellectual and moral participation. *Salvatore Giuliano* demonstrates explicitly that the transition into this reciprocal action is undertaken through an alienation effect. I will now turn to focus further on the fictionalized and subjective aspects of the narratives of Rosi’s films.

The fictionalized aspects of Rosi’s film, at least superficially, share certain aspects with what Brecht labels ‘bourgeois theatre’. His definition is as follows:

The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged ‘eternally human’. Its story is arranged in such a way as to create ‘universal’ situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour. All its

incidents are just one enormous cue, and this cue is followed by the ‘eternal’ response.<sup>97</sup>

The playwright viewed the “‘eternal’ response’ to bourgeois theatre as one of empathy, of association with the situation which the alienation effect would otherwise disrupt. Indeed Brecht’s proletariat-favouring epic theatre acts contrarily, offering situations which ‘concentrate entirely on whatever in this perfectly everyday event is remarkable, particular and demanding enquiry’.<sup>98</sup> As such, epic theatre is assumed to be more politically relevant, and indeed Brecht is damningly critical of the bourgeois theatre. In Rosi’s *Salvatore Giuliano*, however – which has thus far been very compatible with both Brecht and the Marxist aesthetic format more widely – there are evidently several characters with whom the spectator is led to empathize. The ‘universal situations’ criticized by Brecht are present, and consciously produced. The production of grief is an instance of this, which Rosi emphasizes through the careful staging of both Giuliano’s death and the Strage di Portella. For both Rosi employed the villagers of Castelvetro and its surroundings as extras (including the role of Giuliano’s mother, played by a local woman who had recently lost a son herself), and similarly realistic props such as the rifle of the original bandit.<sup>99</sup> In the Strage sequence, the proximity to the (tragic) reality of the event was brought forward to the day of the shooting through the grief of another mother and a survivor of the original massacre. Rosi describes the scene: ‘incurante della macchina da presa che era a pochi metri da lei [...] diceva, “dove sono i figli miei?, dove sono i figli miei?” Aveva perso i figli in quell’occasione’.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Brecht, pp. 96-97.

<sup>98</sup> Brecht, p. 97.

<sup>99</sup> John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 210.

<sup>100</sup> Franca Durazzo Baker, “‘Sono lo psicologo del film e non del personaggio’: colloquio con Francesco Rosi”, *Cinema Nuovo*, 261 (1979), 19-21 (p. 21).

As discussed above, the exclusion of Salvatore Giuliano from the film is an explicit mode of alienating the spectator. Yet the absence created is often filled by the character of Gaspare Pisciotta (Frank Wolff), with whom an empathy is procured from the audience through his characterization and narrative arc, and through a visual prioritization that runs through the film. Klawan's description of the character is illustrative:

The title character is largely absent from *Salvatore Giuliano*, but Rosi fills that void with Giuliano's lieutenant Pisciotta [...] who gradually takes on the air of a tragic hero. [...] Clearly he's a villain – a smirking, bullying villain at that. But as Pisciotta begins to understand how many different ways he's been betrayed – by the police, by the government, by the Mafia – his wiseguy manner gives way to defiance, and he seems to grow[;...] he plays out his fate magnificently.<sup>101</sup>

The informal language and indicative descriptions here (such as the 'wiseguy manner') bear witness to the possibility for a spectator both to warm to and empathize with Pisciotta. The contradiction here with the characters who betray Pisciotta, and who elicit very little sympathy from the audience, further contribute to the centralization and empathy with Wolff's character. Though, as I will argue below, the film has a very challenging narrative that deliberately alienates the spectator, the character arc of Pisciotta furthermore ultimately adopts a more dominant, and arguably important role than that of Giuliano, even. This is supported by a clear visual prioritization of Pisciotta in several sequences.



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<sup>101</sup> Klawans, p. 63.

Figure 15: The Visual Prioritization of Pisciotta in *Salvatore Giuliano*  
(01:30:21)

The sequence of the confrontation between the bandit, Giuliano, and the mafioso, Minasola, illustrates well the symbolic central staging of Pisciotta. In the shot reproduced above, each of the aspects on the right of the shot (the angle of the wall, the door frame, and the gaze of the mafiosi) guide the spectator's eye towards Pisciotta. Giuliano, in the foreground, is out of focus and unrecognizable, effectively masking the left part of the frame and further prioritizing the centre of the shot.

In order for the political implication of Brecht's alienation to retain its relevance in this film, the characters of Giuliano and Pisciotta must be considered in terms of the objective/subjective dialectical realism, mentioned above. Of course, unlike Giuliano, Rosi is able to fictionalize and make particular the character of Pisciotta, in order to gain particular emotional responses from the spectator. In doing so, he brings the spectator into the narrative, through empathy. When combined with the other alienating effects within the film, such as form or the absent protagonist, the empathy process furthermore requires that the spectator respond morally and intellectually to the action. This reaches the same conclusion, the un-settling of the *Zeitgeist*, and brings the spectator into the political catharsis process more explicitly. As I will argue in the following pages, the same dialectical process (alienation/empathy) can be read into further 'fictionalizing' sequences, in Rosi's citation of genre iconography.

Throughout his career, Rosi has had a curious relationship with genre. He was not afraid to exploit a number of different styles, as Wood observes:

Rosi [...] takes advantage of popular *filoni*, and his style is both spectacular and generically hybrid. His career also includes a bullfight biopic, *Il momento*

*della verità* (1965), a fairy tale, starring Omar Sharif and Sofia Loren and featuring flying monks, *C'era una volta* (1967), and a war film, *Uomini contro* (1970), in all of which his virtuosity and directorial ability is foregrounded in spectacular set pieces marshalling hundreds of extras in a complex mise-en-scène.<sup>102</sup>

As mentioned above, this range of styles effectively brought Rosi the right fame and, crucially, financial support which allowed him ultimately more creative freedom. Though there is undoubtedly a difference in terms of the political stance of Rosi's 'genre' films, and though this differentiation is vital to place Rosi in terms of the film industry, to some extent, to categorize the two styles of his filmmaking thus is problematic. This is because it risks producing a binary, when in reality the stylistics have an important position in Rosi's dialectical cinema: the genre films often contain poignant political messages; the political films are undoubtedly rich in genre influences. The early features made by Rosi are interesting from this perspective: *La sfida* and *I magliari* are typically considered to be highly influenced by *noir* genre conventions and consequently assumed to have little political relevance.<sup>103</sup> Consider Wood's introduction to *La sfida*: 'Although political in its exploration of how the power of the Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra, acted between peasant farmers and the Neapolitan fruit and vegetable market, stylistically and narratively the film draws on the American gangster film, *film noir*, and the love story in order to make ideas accessible'.<sup>104</sup> The point she makes regarding the accessibility of films is certainly crucial, however I believe that to assume the genre conventions and the political message as disconnected – that the former has an entertainment value and little more – would be too hasty. In fact I wish to argue that it is precisely through drawing attention to genre conventions, via their

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<sup>102</sup> Wood, pp. 124-25. Cf. also p. 203.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Crowds, p. 20.

<sup>104</sup> Wood, p. 17.

amalgamation and evolution, that the director affords them a political value in a number of key films.<sup>105</sup>

A key example of Rosi's politicization of genre can be taken from his 1973 film *Lucky Luciano*, the story of Salvatore Lucania (American name Charles 'Lucky' Luciano) from the early 1930s until his death in 1962. Although, as with *Giuliano*, the reputation of Lucania precedes the film and creates a certain expectation in the spectator, Rosi chooses once again to offer little of the familiar spectacle of the gangster, instead preferring to historicize the social context of his life. In other words, the film does not question the gangster in his own autonomy, but rather the American and Italian contexts which produced him. In a move which recalls the newsreel realism noted above, Rosi opens with a newspaper article which offers the background of Lucania, demonstrating that he prefers to rely on an official record rather than his own filmmaking to provide the 'real' context. He then cuts into the story, immediately revealing a montage which, as in *Salvatore Giuliano* and with similar effects, is unafraid to skip back and forward chronologically.

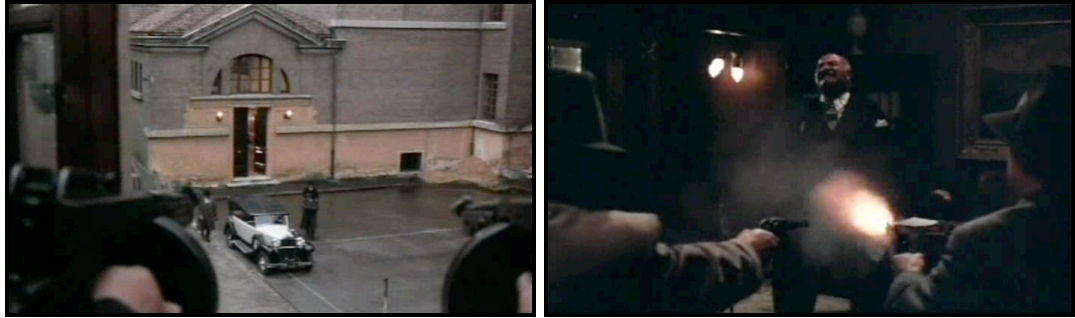
*Lucky Luciano* makes explicit nods to genre conventions throughout. The majority relate to the American gangster film, and in particular *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), released the previous year. The beginning of the film is particularly interesting in this regard, in which the reputation of Luciano is built up through a retrospective sequence that assumes the atmosphere of Coppola's film. The scenes which centre on the Night of the Sicilian Vespers – the assassinations of several major mafia *capi* – are highly stylized in this way: settings of Italian restaurants, rich villas and barber shops; costumes consisting of suits, trench coats

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<sup>105</sup> I return to *I magliari* and *La sfida* below, to analyse this dialectic in relation to their film form.



and face-concealing homburg hats; props of tommy guns, 1930s Fiats and cigars. The cinematography here is striking too, with the murders taking place in slow motion therefore being accentuated within the film's pace.



Figures 16-17: Gangster Genre Stylistics in *Lucky Luciano* (00:10:01; 00:11:06)

The first assassination depicted is of Joe Masseria, who dies in a restaurant as Lucky Luciano disappears into the bathroom, supposedly to wash his hands; the film nevertheless implies what historical records testify: Lucania was responsible for the murder of the *capo*.<sup>106</sup> The context of this undoubtedly echoes the murder of Virgil Sollozzo by Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*, in which the latter uses a weapon hidden in the restaurant's bathroom. The dialogue of the scripts is strikingly similar, with both characters (and the camera movements) accentuating the narrative importance of the protagonist's movement: 'I gotta go to the bathroom, is that alright?' (Corleone); 'If you don't mind, I'm going to the bathroom' (Lucania). Given the historical accuracy of the scene, it is nonetheless worth bearing in mind the dating of Lucania's case, and the inspiration which Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola drew from it, with the result that precisely who is inspired by whom is not entirely clear.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, the general interweaving of fact and fiction and the stylistic overlaps of the scenes are certainly

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Selwyn Raab, *Five Families: The Rise, Decline and Resurgence of America's Most Powerful Mafia Empires* (London: Robson, 2006), p. 28.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Tim Newark, *Lucky Luciano: Mafia Murderer and Secret Agent* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2010).

politically charged: Rosi's explicit reference to the American gangster genre comes at the stage of the film which identifies an American responsibility for Italian social problems, thus ascribing genre cinema with negative connotations.

Despite the overt violence in the opening sequence, Rosi has stated that he was less interested in the mafia's violent methods per se than in analysing 'the reasons why they kill, and what lies beyond and behind the killing'.<sup>108</sup> After the violent opening sequence, though, the director does change abruptly his style, turning away from the spectacular violence. As Crowdus puts it, 'Rosi deliberately downplays the genre's characteristic reliance on gunplay and other scenes of violence', making the introduction, retrospectively, little more than an 'ironic homage to gangster film conventions'.<sup>109</sup> We can thus surmise that the brief inclusion of genre conventions has a dual function: on a simple level it implies the possibility of – perhaps need for – a move away from the Hollywood stylistics surrounding the mafia in political cinema; and crucially it alienates the viewer (in a Brechtian sense) who is frustrated by the change of mood. It is worth noting that again, though ultimately compatible with Brecht's model, this relies on the dialogue between the engaging genre sequences, and the alienating 'factual' inquiry.

Rosi's citation of genre stylistics and non-fiction images evidently relies on certain assumptions about their incapacity to offer political comment, something which has been problematized more recently by work in cultural studies. As I mentioned above, though, even in the very nature of the dialectic of forms that contributes to the cathartic process, there is the possibility to develop a theory of the political in these images too. I will return to *Lucky Luciano* in the following chapter, in order to develop further these issues by placing the film more explicitly

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<sup>108</sup> Crowdus, p. 22.

<sup>109</sup> Crowdus, p. 22.

within a dialectic of art forms. The negative assumptions about genre cinema nevertheless allow Rosi, as I have illustrated, to polarize the political/genre forms, accentuating his political message through an alienating effect produced by then putting them into dialogue. This use of formal conventions evidently corresponds to the hypothesis offered by Umberto Eco in his essay ‘Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà’<sup>110</sup> that if an artist adopts a specific vocabulary, then in doing so she inadvertently attaches the wider cultural baggage of such a language. With the presumption that ‘il linguaggio rispecchia un insieme di rapporti e pone un sistema di implicazioni successive’, he is able to add a further assumption, suggesting that ‘il discorso fatto per le singole parole vale anche per le strutture narrative’.<sup>111</sup> So, if a narrative begins in adherence to a familiar vocabulary, then the spectator will not struggle to predict to where the plot will proceed. In this sense, though the citation of external formal conventions appears quite simplistic, Rosi’s narrative zigzagging assumes a strong political value. In summary, then, these formal conventions contribute to the dialectics of his cinema.

In the following section, I will turn to Eco’s theory more widely, and attempt to analyse the role played by the form of Rosi’s cinema in the construction of its political relevance.

#### **iv. Form and Political Engagement**

The form of *Salvatore Giuliano* is infamously complex and disorientating, seemingly at random tracing a series of intricate narrative points between 1945 and

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<sup>110</sup> The article was originally published in the journal *Menabò*. It has since been published in the seminal *Opera aperta* (1962, with several reprints) but I will refer to the original article in *Menabò* as the reprints do not include the below footnoted reference to *Salvatore Giuliano*. The link to the original version is referenced in P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 200.

<sup>111</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà’, *Menabò*, 5 (1962), 198-237 (p. 221).

1960 which relate to the story of the bandit. Several attempts have been made to restructure the plot in order to give it a chronological bearing, but the fact that these attempts clash is a sign of the task's intrinsic difficulty.<sup>112</sup> Indeed the montage of the film inhibits a clear and easy unravelling of the plot, at times offering a striking cut matched with an explanatory voice over, at others dissolving between decades yet maintaining a theme, rendering impossible a consciousness of the shift. To give an example, Rosi moves from the guerrilla action of Giuliano's bandits on behalf of EVIS (the Esercito Volontario per l'Indipendenza della Sicilia) to the transportation of Giuliano's coffin very abruptly, with the first shot of the latter scene focusing on weaponry and soldiers such that the change of scene and of time period passes initially un-noticed.



Figures 18-19: The Abrupt Cut between 1945 and 1960 in *Salvatore Giuliano* (00:15:12; 00:15:14)

Given that the montage of the film is deliberately disorientating, and therefore forces the viewer to engage cognitively, it is not difficult to read the montage as an 'A-effect'. Yet the political value of the form increases when considering that it moreover functions as a mirror of the contemporary political situation, as Eco has pointed out.

<sup>112</sup> Gili identifies 15 sections; Adams Sitney reduces the total to 11, but defines them in light of the film's stylistics; and Lawton boosts the number up to 17, including an accurate, historical rundown of the events in Giuliano's life. Cf. Jean Gili, *Le cinéma italien* (Paris: Union Général d'Éditions, 1978), pp. 44-48; Adams Sitney, pp. 199-203; Ben Lawton, pp. 13-14.

Eco engages with the notion of ‘alienation’ in some detail in his essay, offering (and adhering to) the term’s Hegelian and Marxist readings, arguing that it is an inevitable consequence of a consumer society and that we are constantly alienated by every relationship (be it with another person, an object, society, etc.). This is because we construct our identities according to our surroundings, all of which are defined in terms of consumption and capital.<sup>113</sup> The importance of Eco’s argument to my own emerges from his comments on form and narrative as a reflection of the political tendency of a work of art. Eco argues that no sooner than an artwork becomes widely acknowledged as obtaining a political function, then its own form begins to bear assumptions – the baggage similar to that of a genre’s language – and it begins typically to alienate its creator and spectator precisely through the strict regulation of form.<sup>114</sup> Consequently new forms of art, those which challenge the regulations, both emerge and continue to evolve in relation to a need to communicate a sense of contemporary man.<sup>115</sup> Eco illustrates his article with reference to Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’eclisse* (1962), suggesting that the form of the film, ‘una indeterminazione del montaggio[:] una scena segue l’altra senza ragione, l’occhio cade su oggetto senza che una causa ve lo determini e una fine giustifichi lo sguardo’, reflects the alienation of the protagonists and their unsatisfying relationship.<sup>116</sup> It is crucially the director’s willingness to play with

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<sup>113</sup> Though his use of the term ‘alienation’ evidently differs from that of Brecht to some degree, Eco in fact cites the Brechtian model (i.e. an enforced self awareness) as a way to ‘alienate’ oneself from the alienation inherent in society. Cf. Eco, p. 203.

<sup>114</sup> One could perhaps offer the instance here of the neorealist movement, which produced a number of pivotal films in the 1940s, but then became a style of filmmaking which proved too restrictive to later directors (such as Rosi, who had a clear neorealist training). In fact, one could almost perceive a sense of alienation in the forced attempts to read neorealism onto later films (which still occurs today), and the inseparability of certain directors (Rossellini, De Sica) from the adjective ‘neorealist’.

<sup>115</sup> Eco, p. 214-22.

<sup>116</sup> Eco, p. 228. Here there is another necessary comparison to be made to Pasolini, who also comments on the cinema of Antonioni in terms of its form matching its content (the neurosis of

conventions of form which generates the overlap between form and content. This has a political relevance which signals Eco's debt to Marxist aesthetic theory, given that he does not insist upon a direct political message in the text but rather imagines a more profound, if perhaps subconscious, effect to be taken from the (formalist) presentation of reality.

There is such a fundamental challenging of formal norms taking place with *Salvatore Giuliano*, where in terms of complexities the alignment of form and content is quite apparent. Eco in fact observes this in comparison with a contemporary example, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Luchino Visconti, 1960), in which 'la struttura narrativa aveva preso la mano all'autore e lo aveva portato a fare, sotto le mentite spoglie di un film di denuncia, un film di consumo e di pacificazione psicologica'.<sup>117</sup> Where *Rocco...* was restricted by a nineteenth century melodramatic form which offers closure, and therefore the audience member departs 'pacificato e contento', *Salvatore Giuliano* leaves no closure at all, and the mysterious sides of Giuliano's story remain unknown. Eco moreover notes the consequences of the film's complex narrative and montage:

Ci accorgiamo così che la particolare tecnica narrativa interviene a titolo di vero e proprio 'contenuto' del film e ne costituisce la dichiarazione più importante: allo spettatore viene raccontata una storia oscura da un autore che è vittima della stessa oscurità e che non vuole ingannare lo spettatore chiarendogli fatti che chiari non sono, ma gli vuole lasciare intatto ogni dubbio. Il regista pare dunque lasciare che il suo film sia *montato dalla situazione* anziché *montare la situazione* attraverso il film.<sup>118</sup>

In the sense that Rosi allows his film to be 'montato dalla situazione', the form of *Salvatore Giuliano* offers a *new* form in line with the contemporary situation: it is not alienated by it. In order to relate this back to the comments made above,

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Giuliana in *Il deserto rosso*, 1964); he labels this 'cinema di poesia'. Cf. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Il cinema di poesia', in *Saggi*, 1, pp. 1461-88 (p. 1479).

<sup>117</sup> Eco, p. 229.

<sup>118</sup> Eco, p. 229.

regarding the construction of the engaged film, it is evident once again that this translates to the careful negotiation of realism in Rosi's work that emerges at the dialectic between the objective and the subjective.

Given that much space has been devoted elsewhere by many of the critics cited here to the complexity of form in *Salvatore Giuliano*, and in order to open this model up to some less obvious and more challenging instances, I will now turn to the form of Rosi's first films. As I suggested above, *La sfida* and *I magliari* are often overlooked as necessary genre vehicles that bought Rosi enough acclaim to develop *Salvatore Giuliano*. Crowdus, for instance, precedes his praise of *La sfida* with 'although its commercial considerations [...] and genre conventions are evident...', and summarizes *I magliari* as having 'a well executed if conventional dramatic format'.<sup>119</sup> Klawans similarly defends Rosi's 'Hollywood' style in *La sfida*, suggesting that few directors 'handled the conventions so adeptly as Rosi did his first time out', and moreover that plenty of other non-Hollywood directors employed used a similar style.<sup>120</sup> While the traditional narratives of both films – *La sfida*'s narrative heads purposefully and rapidly towards Vito's death, and *I magliari* quite simplistically builds and collapses the protagonist's life in a similarly determined sequence of 'acts' – are a far cry from the complexities of *Salvatore Giuliano*, their own negotiation of *impegno* via the same dialectic traced out above has its own importance, as illustrated by the film form of both. This can be noted from some examples: *La sfida*'s wedding sequence, and the conclusion of *I magliari*.

The marriage of Vito and Assunta in *La sfida* is represented by a series of medium shots which sustain a spatial continuity around the church, tracing the

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<sup>119</sup> Crowdus, p. 20.

<sup>120</sup> Klawans, p. 62.

movement of the procession, for instance, towards screen right both outside and inside the church. Once Vito and Assunta sit down, Rosi affords us a close up of the couple, with a brief overlap of time which cuts to weighty vows, that is, those steeped with irony with regard to the film's conclusion ('la moglie [...] è obbligata di accompagnarlo ovunque egli creda opportuno di fissare la sua residenza'; 'il marito ha il dovere di proteggere la moglie'). The movement of the mysterious *camorrista* in the background, and the series of glances exchanged between Vito and his colleague are then drastically prioritized through a sudden break of the classical '180° rule', matching on Vito's gaze, followed by a series of shot-reverse shots which identify then trace the action outside. Though the initial cut is disorienting, the camera soon slips back into a smooth pursuit of the action and thus continuation of the narrative.



Figures 20-25: Jarring Cinematography Followed by Classical Cuts in *La sfida*  
(00:57:46; 00:57:47; 00:57:49; 00:57:52; 00:57:58; 00:58:00)

The closing sequence of *I magliari* employs a similar montage of cuts that shifts between classical and alienating cuts (see Figure 26). Mario, the protagonist, has abandoned his swindler colleague, Totonno (Alberto Sordi, for whom the film



appears to be vehicular), and has a final melodramatic meeting at the dock with Paula, the unobtainable love interest. The conversation between Paula and Mario lasts some six minutes, with the ten cuts passing repeatedly the 180° line, as illustrated in the figure below via the vertical line representing the window. The shifting camera here reflects quite intricately the disintegration of the relationship between the two characters, with the most jarring shots occurring at key moments in their conversation: the statement of love (shot 3-4), her confession that she would not leave with him (shot 8-9). The offer of reconciling structure that is produced by the repeated camera positions in shots 7 and 10, and 8 and 11, serves ironically to emphasize the split. The melodramatic performances and the diegetic music introduced by the jukebox in shot 5 serve to further accentuate this content.

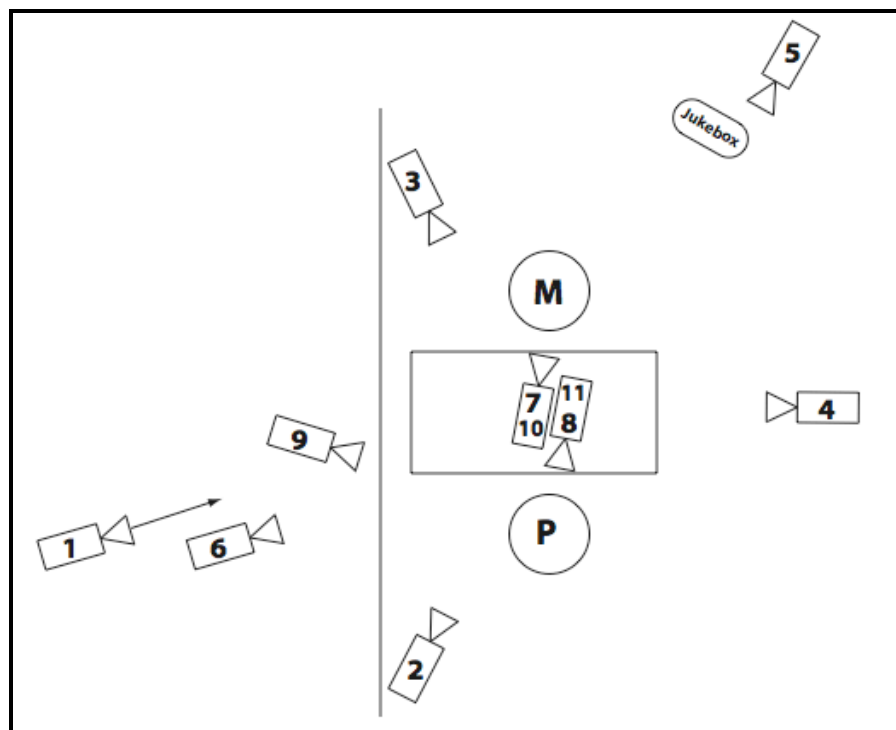


Figure 26: Sequence of Camera shots (numbered 1-11) Tracing Mario and Paula's Conversation in *I magliari*, end sequence

In both of these exemplary sequences, Rosi alternates quite notably between classical continuity editing and disorientating cuts. In doing so, he employs the same function of film form as that noted above, in *Salvatore Giuliano*, whereby the

structure (this time the montage of shots, rather than sequences) illustrates the content of the piece. The cuts at Vito's wedding scene prioritize his relationship with the Camorra over that with Assunta, anticipating the film's conclusion; the camera's inability to remain steady in *I magliari* echoes the alienation of Mario from Paula, constantly distancing them from each other and from the spectator. That Rosi quite deliberately interrupts expectations in sequences that are heavily influenced by romantic and tragic genre iconographies ultimately serves to foreground an alienation effect in both cases, pre-empting the style of *Lucky Luciano*, among other films. Though, once again, the sequences do function within explicitly consumable codes, and thus their political scope is perhaps limited, it is undoubtedly significant that the same political message – the damaging oppression of organized crime on the poor, illustrated by young lovers with whom the audience is to empathize – is highlighted by the alienation effect in both cases. Once again, then, the viewer function shifts into a position that demands a bolder moral and intellectual engagement.

Eco's discussion of the alienation of form evidently finds root in Benjamin's *Reflections*, particularly 'The Author as Producer'. The essay makes explicit many of the points touched upon above, such as the need to evoke reality, to distance the spectator and to make her think, however it sets out a fundamental assumption from the start that, in his words, 'the tendency of a literary work can only be politically correct if it is also literarily correct'.<sup>121</sup> Anticipating Eco's description of the link between formal regulations and contemporary social relations, Benjamin argues for a change of perspective:

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<sup>121</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 220-38 (p. 221), cf. pp. 235-36.

Rather than ask, 'What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time?' I should like to ask, 'What is its *position* in them?' This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time. It is concerned, in other words, directly with the literary *technique* of works.<sup>122</sup>

This citation can be read interestingly in relation to Rosi's films: from the ironic genre citations, such as of *The Godfather* in *Lucky Luciano*, to those carried out to draw in empathy from the viewer, and an example here is the noir stylistics in *I magliari*. The citations of non-fiction aesthetics, such as the newsreel or the documentary form furthermore signal the non-fiction modes of aesthetics of the time of each, but furthermore nod to Rosi's films as a negotiation of the external reality in itself.

This final point raises an interesting question, that leads these comments on form and politics to the original question of the realist mode which, as argued, lies at the centre of the *impegnato* text. I have suggested at various points above that Rosi's cinema effectively traces an interesting evolution of realist modes, from his legacy in neorealist stylistics, to the development and later problematization of fictionalized realism, through to the challenging, staged realities in the narratives of *Il caso Mattei* and *Diario napoletano*. In fact, if we compare these last cases to films such as *Salvatore Giuliano* and *Le mani sulla città*, in which the 'realtà sociale e ambientale' was presumed 'typical' throughout, it becomes clear that later in Rosi's career the capacity of a text to invoke *der Mensch ganz* in realist terms became increasingly problematic. In order to do so, the director relies to a greater extent on forms of unequivocal 'deliveries' of information, such as newsreel or newspaper articles. Yet this continues to be carried out with irony, in order to *position* the texts (as Benjamin puts it) within an evolving discourse on the politicized representation of reality. This change, which occurs between the 1960s

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<sup>122</sup> Benjamin, p. 222.

and '70s evidently points to the fragmentation of monolithic constructions of *impegno* that Burns illustrates in her scholarship: as I argued above, the post-war, neorealist notion of epistemological realism is at this point derailed.

Though Rosi turns more frequently to 'objective', *borrowed* documentary modes, such as the newsreel, in order to invoke the exterior reality, he does so ironically by cutting these into sequences that foreground their staged fictionality (e.g. the self-representation in *Il caso Mattei*). The formal positioning that is declared here thus could be read as corresponding to the point made by Stella Bruzzi, regarding the ultimate futility (or performativity) in any attempt of an objective non-fiction mode. Thus, the films state clearly that during this period of aesthetic production, realism is essentially *only* an artistic form, and cannot transcend this. This can be usefully clarified in the theory of Kristin Thompson, in her manifesto of neoformalism, who attempts to eschew any dichotomic polarizations of realism and formalism as artistic modes: 'Because of its defamiliarizing power, realism is not alien to neoformalism – even though many would probably think of 'formalism' and 'realism' as opposite things. But realism *is* a formal trait that we attribute to art works'.<sup>123</sup> The principal benefit of adopting a neoformalist approach, according to Thompson, is that it allows the critic to jettison any strict vocabularies of analysis and to treat each film as autonomous by beginning with analysis of its form. Inspired by the work of the Russian formalists, she argues that a film offers a purely aesthetic realm which is *deliberately* distant from reality: in the latter we have a 'practical perception', whereby we 'filter from [the world] those elements that are relevant to our immediate actions'; in the former

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<sup>123</sup> Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 198.

we are '[plunged] into a non-practical, playful type of interaction' which is 'separate from our everyday existence'.<sup>124</sup>

From this differentiation emerges the Formalists'/Thompson's crucial notion of 'defamiliarizing', mentioned above. Thompson's definition of this term is worth citing extensively, as it quite apparently echoes and merges the two definitions of 'alienation' touched upon above:

Art defamiliarizes our habitual perceptions of the everyday world, of ideology, [...] of other artworks, and so on by taking material from these sources and transforming them. The transformation takes place through their placement in a new context and their participation in unaccustomed formal patterns. But if a series of artworks uses the same means over and over, the defamiliarizing capability of those means diminishes; the strangeness ebbs away over time. By that point, the defamiliarized becomes familiar, and the artistic approach is largely automatized. The frequent changes that artists introduce into their new works over time reflect attempts to avoid automatization, and to seek new means to defamiliarize those works' formal element.<sup>125</sup>

The Brechtian notion of alienation is incurred by the defamiliarization from the 'practical perception' of life; Eco's notion of alienation is clear in the defamiliarization of weighted formal constraints, and the constant need to renew these.

More than just approximating the comments made above, though, Thompson's theory is useful precisely thanks to the point made above: that 'realism *is* a formal trait'. She makes the assumption that any formal decisions made by a filmmaker can be grouped into one of four 'motivations': compositional, transtextual, artistic or *realistic*. It follows, in light of defamiliarizing processes, that certain formal realistic motivations will become *familiar*, and therefore *imply* realism. As a consequence of this, the notion of realism becomes dependent on the aesthetic trends that are dominant at any given period, thus informing the viewer what connotes a realistic mode. Again, similarly to Eco, she argues that these trends

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<sup>124</sup> Thompson, pp. 8-9.

<sup>125</sup> Thompson, p. 11.

soon become alienated, and give way to new connotative methods: ‘after a period of defamiliarization, the traits originally perceived as realistic will become automatized by repetition, and other, less realistic traits will take their places’.<sup>126</sup> Taking a most extreme case in order to prove her theory, she offers a neoformalist analysis of a pivotal neorealist text: *Ladri di biciclette* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948). She argues that we conceive of de Sica’s film as realistic due to three formalistic areas of realistic motivation, specifically its subject matter, its use of mise-en-scène and cinematography, and in its citation of the Hollywood, anti-realist filmmaking from which it differs itself.<sup>127</sup> The use of the neorealist text as an illustrative example is very striking, in that it challenges the politicized conception of this mode that was originally promoted by Zavattini – the *pedinamento* ethic – thus problematizing quite significantly the potential of a text’s reality-claim to go anywhere beyond the formal, not epistemologically.

The compatibility of Thompson’s reading of realism as neoformalist, and in particular the re-reading of the neorealist classic, with Rosi’s own later style of filmmaking is perhaps not casual. In fact, the two can be conceived as belonging to the same historical period, in which the grand narrative of realist cinema was undergoing a fragmentation; writing in the mid-1980s, Thompson was theorizing (indirectly) what Rosi had been creating since the 1970s. In this sense it is telling that Antonello and Mussgnug, in their conception of *impegno* beyond its fragmentation, cite Thompson and the flexibility of ‘realism’ to illustrate how the term can be employed in relation to films that employ metacinema, typically foregrounding their fictionality.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Thompson, pp. 198-99.

<sup>127</sup> Thompson, p. 205; cf. pp. 203-17.

<sup>128</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, ‘Introduction’, in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug (Bern: Peter Lang,

The instances of Rosi's cinema that most openly illustrate the fragmentation of the discourses of *impegno* that originally informed his cinema are *Diario napoletano* and *Tre fratelli*. Neither of these films engages in any direct manner with organized crime – the former, as mentioned, is an ode to Naples that is rich in pastiche, and the latter a fictionalized film about a family following the death of the mother – and yet each provides engaged images of organized crime. The second sequence of *Diario napoletano*, for instance, revolves around an anniversary screening of *Le mani sulla città* at the Architecture Faculty, University of Naples. After the screening, Rosi, followed by several other specialists and students, addresses the room in order to engage in a debate about the social problems of his city. During his intervention, Rosi makes a comparative reference to Palermo, via the *stragi* of Via d'Amelio and Capaci; at this point, though Rosi's voice-over is not disturbed, the image cuts away to a series of news reportages and images of the destroyed cars and murdered judges. The use of such 'external' (i.e. not filmed by Rosi, presumably) clips continues in the discussion of the city, to include (for the most part) similarly traumatic images: a corpse on the side of the road, bent over with a heroin needle stuck in his arm; protests against the city's putrid water; black and white images of young children who are implicitly involved in the Camorra's activity. As with the 'objective' sequences in previous films, noted above, these cuts away evidently seek to outline, and the force the spectator to acknowledge, a brutal reality which exists in Naples. What remains implicit is that, probably given the sensitive nature of the material, and the director's desire to treat it with the right respect, his own cinema images do not seek to represent this reality. Nevertheless,

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2009), pp. 1-29 (p. 21). The authors use this in order to illustrate how the recent *Gomorra*, which is a metacinematic genre film, can have been labelled 'neo-neorealist'. Both the use of this terminology in the film's review, and the constant renewal of the term realism, illustrate the on-going importance of this mode in discourses on *impegno*.

the continued voice-off here forces a more complex viewer-function, whereby she is called to recognize (acoustically) that this *is* a Francesco Rosi film. As such, though the newsreel shots stage reality, the very staging of this reality through its montage into a different medium is centralized.

*Tre fratelli*, to offer one final example, invokes the reality of the mafia in an almost opposite manner. One of the ‘three brothers’ of the title (Raffaele), who has returned to the family home for his mother’s funeral, is an anti-mafia magistrate. During one sequence, the audience witnesses his murder on a busy bus, on the streets of Rome, by a mafia assailant. Though led into it through previous associations in the narrative, the sequence is very shocking, as it severs the emotional empathy that had been created with the character; this is exaggerated through the brutal realism of the sequence in terms of unflinching content and suffocating, hand-held close-up shots. And yet, when the sequence finishes, Rosi cuts back to Raffaele’s bed, illustrating that this was not reality, but rather a nightmare, based on the judge’s anxieties. In alienating then reassuring the spectator thus, Rosi once again engages a complex moral and intellectual commitment from her, which demands a reflection on the position of the judge. Thus, the aesthetic effect of the sequence, which uses realist tones, is bracketed in its self-conscious presentation as fictional – indeed a fiction within a fiction – and oneiric.

Both *Tre fratelli* and *Diario napoletano* thus embed these powerful images of organized crime, and its effects, in discourses that emphasize or exaggerate their fictionality. Nevertheless, this does not alter their position within Lukács’s cathartic process, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, given their ability to alienate the spectator. What is undone, however, is the possibility to rely on the dogma of



the realist representation that relates to both the assumptions made of the neorealist image, and the direct link between the typical image and the intensive totality. The final point to make, therefore, is that as the ‘monolith’ of *impegno* fragments, Rosi’s cinema evolves alongside it in order to maintain the coherence and importance of its literary and political tendencies.

## **v. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have traced the legacy of political images from the PCI and neorealism through the films of Francesco Rosi. This has sought to illustrate broadly the key aspects of the dogmatic framework of *impegno* in post-war Italy, and establish some of the problematic questions at its basis. These aspects include an urgency to produce *realist* texts, and/or to present the spectator with a clear notion of a social reality; the emotional engagement of the spectator, through alienation; and the centrality of form within the structure of the political text. From *La sfida* to *Diario napoletano*, the instances of Rosi’s cinema have moreover served to illustrate on the one hand, the fragmentation of the *mode* of representing reality, which finds its roots in neorealist aesthetics and ends up being removed entirely from interactive models, fitting instead within the neoformalist one; and, on the other, and the importance of genre coding to the construction of the political message.

Though my analysis has not foregrounded the representation of organised crime within these political images – this is something I will devote greater space to in the following chapters – organized crime and its functions within Italian society have remained implicit in each of the films mentioned above. The mafioso in *Salvatore Giuliano*, whose death marks the film’s finale, is illustrative in this

regard: he acts as the messenger of the mafia power that otherwise remains latent throughout the film, and yet (as his demise illustrates) he, like Giuliano, Pisciotta, and many of the official characters too, is a puppet to the bidding of the criminal unit. As Eco suggests, the disrupted and inconclusive form of the film mimics this ‘*storia oscura*’, yet the very obscurity of it, and the source and subject of the political denunciation, is the mafia. Rosi’s *impegno* widely appears to be built very much on the *absence* of the mafia, who affect the narratives and forms of many of his films, from the death of Mauro de Mauro, and possibly Enrico Mattei, to the dream of Raffaele in *Tre fratelli*, the corruption of *Le mani sulla città*’s councillors and the drug-fuelled minors in *Diario napoletano*. When the mafia is made explicit, such as in *Salvatore Giuliano* or *Lucky Luciano*, the image of the gangsters is problematized and challenging, and forcibly differentiated from their typical glamorization in the Hollywood film. What remains central to the political denunciation of the organized criminal unit in each of the films, however, is the assumption that the spectator can easily fit the ‘realist’ image *with ease* into the stages of a cathartic process and an aesthetic effect, as theorized by Lukács. The very assumption that these mafia images are *real* is central in the construction of *impegno*. This will remain the case across the decades and genres of organized crime film productions, as will be seen below.

The realist image nevertheless altered drastically over the period in which Rosi was frequently producing films. I argued, using Kristin Thompson’s theory of neoformalist film, that the realist image throughout Rosi’s filmmaking altered alongside the maturation, and later fragmentation, of the monolith of *impegno* that began with neorealism. This is attested by the loss of faith in directly ‘realistic’ images, in favour of pseudo-objective citations of documentary, which are

nevertheless deliberately coded as falsified (or ‘performative’). Realism, however, remains central to the production of the political image, despite the breaking down of the ‘grand narrative’ of political realist cinema. Filmmakers like Rosi have simply learned to phrase realism according to the contemporary codes that signal it, by integrating it into complex systems such as ‘dialectical realism’.

Thompson argued that the ‘realist motivations’ of the classical, neorealist film *Ladri di biciclette* could be categorized as the following:

1. ‘Its subject matter draws upon an historically recurring notion that a concentration on the working and peasant classes makes for more realistic action’;
2. ‘The use of non-actors and location shooting makes the style of the mise-en-scène and cinematography obviously realistic’;
3. ‘Finally, *Bicycle Thieves* systematically cites the norms of entertainment filmmaking from which it departs’.<sup>129</sup>

Immediately it is clear, when applying these points to Rosi’s cinema, and the engaged mafia image, that his evolving notion of realism is built over the same three notions. The citation of the contrasting form of filmmaking, which is the Hollywood gangster film, is clearly visible as dichotomically placed in *Lucky Luciano*. Rosi similarly uses set shooting and non-professional actors, as well as ‘real’ props, for instance in *Salvatore Giuliano*. Finally, as mentioned, the subject matter of organized crime and corruption is intrinsically linked into a *cinema d’impegno* that produces its denunciatory message by presenting the scenario as plausible or existent. As such, we certainly can, and indeed should, as I will illustrate below, assume that the theme of organized crime as subject matter ‘makes for more realistic action’.

The major tension that remains at the end of this chapter is evidently a tension intrinsic to the third point, regarding Rosi’s use of genre stylistics: these are used oppositionally in places, to illustrate a realist motivation, but in others the genre

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<sup>129</sup> Thompson, p. 205. I have provided the bullet points in order to emphasize the three motivations.

performance appears dialectically rooted to the very political image. In order to attempt to interrogate this issue further, in the following chapter I will turn to the ‘dialectic’ of mass and modernist images, as theorized by Jameson. By doing so, I hope furthermore to complement my authorial focus in this chapter with a wider array of organized crime images, and to illustrate that the discourses surrounding *impegno* can extend beyond the ‘monolithic’ and Marxist agenda to which Rosi’s films explicitly adhere.

## II. *Impegno* and its Audience, and the Problems of Mass Cinema

The foundations of *impegno* that emerged in post-war Italy took from neorealism a realist aesthetic code and a Marxist ideology. In his discussion of neorealism, which I cited in the introduction to this thesis, Pier Paolo Pasolini stated that this political leaning was established thus thanks to the prominent position of the Marxists: ‘i marxisti – e coloro che ne hanno accettato la discussione – ne sono stati all’avanguardia’. This was by no means casual, however; the Marxists undoubtedly had priority in this cultural shift thanks both to the ‘reactionary’ atmosphere that was oppositional to the fascist *ventennio*, and to the organic compatibility with the thematic ‘decline’ of the long absent ‘Italia quotidiana e bassa, dialettale e piccolo-borghese’.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, just as the realist aesthetic favoured by the neorealists was problematic – and forced to mature into less dogmatic forms – the assumption of left-wing politics for the engaged artist in a dogmatic way is similarly too hasty (this has been suggested above by the composition of the left-wing intelligentsia). Though the importance of the resistance in the creation of the Italian national identity of the First Republic undoubtedly had a lasting influence, as Vincenzo Binetti argues, the composition of the intellectual scene during this period was more varied.<sup>2</sup> What remained central was rather an affinity to the collective that had at its roots a Marxist push:

Si tratta dunque, per l'intellettuale di sinistra, di accettare la propria funzione di operatore culturale in un clima storico-politico nel quale il significato di engagement non implicava necessariamente un'identificazione ideologica o dialetticamente motivata con il marxismo, ma significava piuttosto, in termini

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<sup>1</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘Nota su *Le notti*’, in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull’arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 699-707 (p. 703).

<sup>2</sup> The surprising variety of the political spectrum of filmmakers at this time is something pointed out by Rosi, too, in the citation which I reproduced at the opening of the previous chapter.

più ampi, l'esercizio del proprio ruolo demiurgico di 'funzionario' culturale al servizio della collettività.<sup>3</sup>

As the frameworks of *impegno* ruptured and fragmented during the late decades of the twentieth century, both realist and Marxist impulses were brought into question. It is important, however, to bear in mind that, contrary to widespread assumptions, these impulses did not entirely disappear during this period, but rather (as the model of fragmentation implies) certain central aspects of them came into question, others were carried forward in original forms. Jennifer Burns's metaphor of 'fault lines' illustrates this alteration. The previous chapter demonstrates that any epistemological belief in a direct association between the realist text and the social reality became theoretically implausible, if not unnecessary, as demonstrated by those texts which foreground their performativity; nevertheless, realist modes did not cease to be employed. In turning to the Marxist impulse, which is a broad aim of this chapter, I will argue that while the central, emancipatory message of this ideology surpasses the fragmentation of *impegno*, what became interrupted was the assumption that the engaged intellectual must declare her position as 'funzionario culturale al servizio della collettività'. Where the previous chapter contextualized the evolution of the realist agenda through the films of Francesco Rosi – who I positioned as emblematic of the foundational agenda of *impegno* – in order to illustrate the importance of going beyond a one-dimensional Marxist paradigm I will turn away from Rosi. This will then serve the dual function of opening up my discussion on the imagery of organized crime to consider a wider range of films.

The notion of the 'collective' of *impegno* and the intellectual's position within it is central to the progressive model of art embodied by the Lukácsian metaphor of the river. Latent to much of my previous chapter is the assumption

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<sup>3</sup> Vincenzo Binetti, 'Marginalità e appartenenza: la funzione dell'intellettuale tra sfera pubblica e privata nell'Italia del dopoguerra', *Italica*, 74.3 (1997), 360-74 (p. 363).

(typical in Marxist aesthetic theory) that there is a correct and incorrect manner to contribute to the emancipatory push: Lukács himself was overtly negative about certain art forms;<sup>4</sup> Marcuse, too, is very bold in his assertion that realism is ‘the “correct” art form’;<sup>5</sup> Brecht is similarly pessimistic in regard to ‘bourgeois’ theatre.<sup>6</sup> The work of Adorno and Horkheimer has made more explicit what remains latent here, which is a non-discriminatory dismissal of the entire ‘cultural industry’, that is, forms of culture which are seen to serve no purpose beyond consumption and profit-making. This industry produces forms of culture that are little more than homogenous materials that in turn reflect perfectly the society of monopoly that creates them:

The striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular. Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of this artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors’ incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed.<sup>7</sup>

In these categorical terms, essentially anything produced within a capitalist market and with an eye for profit is uniform and culturally valueless, and serves only to strengthen its parent society. The only acceptable alternative to the culture industry is hinted at by contrast, ‘its counterpart, avant-garde art’: here Adorno and Horkheimer refer to the contrasting (apparent) autonomy of *modernist* art.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> As Aitken observes, he was notably dismissive of naturalism and modernism as literary forms. Cf. Ian Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth-Century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, trans. by Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), pp. 96-97.

<sup>7</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 120-21.

<sup>8</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 128.

Adorno and Horkheimer's work undoubtedly reflects the wider tendency of this ideology to forge a binary system of textual evaluation rooted in a value-based hierarchy, that relates precisely to what Antonello and Mussnug refer to as the 'top down cultural formation' model of *impegno*.<sup>9</sup> As such, and as I argue through this chapter, this cultural model has proven to be highly problematic.

The journalistic and scholarly work on organized crime film that was cited in the introduction to this dissertation illustrates the same ideological hierarchy persisting in judgments on organized crime cinema, where the popular films (from *polizieschi* to more recent action films, such as *Palermo Milano solo andata*, Claudio Fragasso, 1995) are too rapidly dismissed. Such films are created with consumption and profit in mind, and as such they do not cohere with the Marxist model; nevertheless, as I will argue in the first part of this chapter, they contribute to a broader imagery precisely through dialectic with overtly engaged art. The continued relevance of these theoretical works in my discussion comes about for two reasons: on the one hand, as the instances in the introduction show, their influence in Italian culture has been profound, and thus their relevance continues. On the other, as with the previous chapter, I return to these models in order to conceptualize *where* the foundations of *impegno* lie, for which returning to theorists such as Adorno and Lukács is vital.

A second major issue with the Marxist paradigm evidently relates to the spectator. The cathartic process which was introduced in the previous chapter is undoubtedly made problematic by the intrinsic assumption that the spectator passively fits into the three stages, and responds as a good Marxist should. This model leaves no space for alternative or oppositional interpretations of a text, nor

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<sup>9</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussnug, 'Introduction', in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. by Antonello and Mussnug (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 1-29 (p. 21).



for the plurality of spectatorial response. In leading towards a cultural studies approach that opens analysis up to alternative interpretative ‘decoding’, this chapter will furthermore seek to open up the positions of the spectator and her participation within the text for consideration. This will be the focus of the chapter’s second part. My attempt to gauge a better understanding of the spectator of the Italian organized crime film will be rooted in the reader-response/reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss, who proposes the model of the ‘horizon of expectation’. In order to limit my scope, and to bring forward the discourse set out in the first section, I will focus on a single, most pertinent aspect of the horizon of expectation: genre. The chapter will thus signal the broad network of images which have historically influenced the representation of organized crime in Italy, relating them to the central discourse of *impegno*.

### **i. Consumable Texts**

Before illustrating the dialectic which emerges between ‘high’ and ‘low’, or modernist and mass, cultural products, it is worth dwelling momentarily on the reasoning for the Frankfurt School’s rejection of the latter, in order to avoid intimating a similarly universalizing position against modernist culture. Following Jameson, it is important to acknowledge the positions of Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as Marcuse and more widely the Tel Quel group, for their evaluation of the cultural industry and of the consumption of texts in terms of commodification. Their work is central to our understanding of how a work of art can be placed into a terminology of value. This comes about through a careful re-phrasing in terms of repetition and efficiency, which leads to works of art being produced as units for consumption, as a means to an end. The overlap with Eco’s view of form and

alienation is apparent. The common denominator for a work of art as such becomes the monetary system of late capitalism; this is explicit when considering that in essence popular cinema is made with a/the primary aim of wide spectatorship and consequential profit.

Reproducing the widely-cited instance of Auerbach's celebration of the autonomy of every single sentence of Homer's *Odyssey*, Jameson moves from the above theoretical foundation to map the consumption of a work of art over a popular text's form. He contrasts Homer's poem with contemporary books (he takes the detective novel, where the resolution of the opening mystery informs the entire novel, as paradigmatic) which not only do 'you read "for the end"', thus 'the bulk of the pages become sheer devalued means to an end', but this linear process in fact is reflected across, and unifies, the text's overall form:

the materialization of this or that sector or zone of [contemporary commercial art] comes to constitute an end and a consumption satisfaction around which the rest of the work is then "degraded" to the status of sheer means. Thus, in the older adventure tale, not only does the *dénouement* [...] stand as the reified end in view of which the rest of the narrative is consumed—this reifying structure also reaches down into the very page-by-page detail of the books composition.<sup>10</sup>

With a text's form constituting 'sheer means', and, following Benjamin, its form representing its political tendency, the mass produced text seems to offer little to its reader. To understand and illustrate better the commodification of form within cinematic representations of organized crime, I will turn now to three case studies. According to their production and forms, we could categorize Francesco Rosi's *Lucky Luciano*, introduced in the previous chapter, as a 'modernist' text, and Duccio Tessari's *Tony Arzenta* (1973) and Ferdinando Di Leo's *I padroni della città* (1976) as 'mass' entertainment according to the categorizations with which Jameson works. Where, as demonstrated below, the two genre vehicles are quite

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<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 12-13.

easily coded as consumable, straightforward texts, Rosi's film openly rejects certain genre stylistics from the opening sequence (as noted in the previous chapter). As such, the latter conforms to an 'anti-representational' or 'autonomous' definition of modernist art put forward by Jameson.<sup>11</sup>

Set out synchronically, the structures of both *Tony Arzenta* and *I padroni della città* can be qualified as consumable narrative structures where the action naturally leads towards the next section, if not directly to the film's conclusion. They are sequential and straightforward enough that it is possible to read traditional models of dramatic structure, such as the five acts of Gustav Freytag's classical dramatic arc, onto them.<sup>12</sup>

Jameson's analysis of commodified mass culture suggests that the 'means to an end' form reaches into every level of the narrative form. The conclusions of *Tony Arzenta* and *I padroni della città* can be viewed as similarly inescapable: the tragic nature of the former is conveyed by the absence of humour and the *mesto* and *lento* score, and yet our recognition of Tony's skill as an assassin, as well as the sense of justice which accompanies the avenging of his wife and son, lead us to imagine that he will vanquish all if not most of his enemies. The dramatic arc is moreover enacted by the movements of Tony across Europe, from Sicily to Hamburg, reaching the third act in Copenhagen, then descending once again via Milan to Catania (an arc of South to North, then back to South).

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<sup>11</sup> Jameson, p. 161. These definitions are taken from Jameson's attempt of a 'usefully estrange[ing]' periodization of film history, taking inspiration from literary history and evolutions of capitalist culture (see 'The Existence of Italy' in Jameson, pp. 155-229), and in fact the theorist explicitly mentions auteur cinema as modernist *per se*. The three periods offered are Realism, Modernism, and Postmodernism, which I capitalize here for clarification. The insertion of Rosi's cinema into this schema as Modernist should not contradict the observations of the films' realism offered in the previous chapter, where I take the term as a widely applicable cinematic mode, rather than a stylistic dogma.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Gustav Freytag, *Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, trans. by Elias J. MacEwan (New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1968).

| Dramatic Arc           | <i>Tony Arzenta</i>  | <i>I padroni della città</i>  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| ACT I: Exposition      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to Tony's family and job</li> <li>- Tony's decision to retire, discussion with Gusto</li> <li>- Introduction to bosses; decision to murder Tony</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Prologue: murder of Rick's father)</li> <li>• Introduction to characters, Tony's job working for Luigi, rivalry with Beppe (first fight)</li> <li>• Rick's loss at Luigi's game hall</li> <li>• Lo Sfregiato's theft from Luigi</li> </ul>                              |
| Inciting incident      | ⇒ (Accidental) murder of Tony's wife and son   | • Tony's decision to retrieve money from Lo Sfregiato   |
| ACT II: Rising Action  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funeral sequence</li> <li>• Attempt on Tony, first car chase</li> <li>• Domenico's loyalty</li> <li>• Introduction to Sandra &amp; Carré</li> <li>• Murder of Carré on train to Hamburg</li> <li>• revelation of Sandra's help</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rick &amp; Tony's comradeship &amp; theft from Lo Sfregiato</li> <li>• Luigi's departure, fear of Lo Sfregiato</li> <li>• Lo Sfregiato's attack on Luigi's game hall</li> <li>• Beppe's usurpation of power, murder of Luigi, collaboration with Lo Sfregiato</li> </ul> |
| ACT III: Climax        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrival in Copenhagen, trap for Tony</li> <li>• Murder of Grünswald</li> <li>• Introduction to Dennino, double bluff of bosses</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rick &amp; Tony's help from Napoli</li> <li>• Attempt on Napoli's life</li> <li>• Napoli's message to/taunt of Lo Sfregiato</li> </ul>   |
| ACT IV: Falling Action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domenico's (tortured) betrayal of Tony; death</li> <li>• Return to Milan, Sandra's capture</li> <li>• Murder of Cutita</li> <li>• Tony saves Sandra</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rick's murder of Beppe</li> <li>• Tony's provokes Lo Sfregiato</li> <li>• Napoli &amp; Tony's realization of Rick's past, return to slaughterhouse of opening sequence</li> <li>• Rick tricks Lo Sfregiato to meet at the slaughterhouse</li> </ul>                      |
| ACT V: Denouement      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sandra transported to Tony's parents, in Sicily</li> <li>• Gusto's truce with Tony at his daughter's wedding</li> <li>• Dennino murders Tony</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showdown at slaughterhouse</li> <li>• Rick's revenge on Lo Sfregiato</li> <li>• Napoli, Rick, Tony decide to go to Brazil</li> </ul>   |

Figure 27: The Dramatic Arcs of *Tony Arzenta* and *I padroni della città*<sup>13</sup>

Di Leo's film prioritizes a series of protagonists, three heroes (Tony, Rick and Napoli) and two villains (Beppe and Lo Sfregiato). This consequently leads to a slightly more complex narrative structure, where the organization of the different acts is arguable, depending on which character one focuses upon – the above table works for both Tony and Napoli. Nevertheless, should focus shift to a different character, the narrative does not lose any consequentiality: for Rick and Lo Sfregiato, the inciting incident could move to the opening sequence and the climax to the moment at which Rick sets up the false drug deal with the *padrone*; there are even arcs for Beppe and Luigi within the narrative too. Though slightly more stratified, the consumable nature of the narrative is no less present.

<sup>13</sup> The inciting incident is arguable in *I padroni della città*, depending on which character is assumed to be the protagonist. I return to this issue below.

When a text is rendered consumable, Jameson argues that the commodification reaches down into every subsection of its form: ‘Each chapter recapitulates a smaller consumption process in its own right [...], organizing its sentences into paragraphs each of which is a sub-plot in its own right’, allowing the reader to ‘transform the transparent flow of language as much as possible into material images and objects we can consume’.<sup>14</sup> Already quite apparently the subplots surrounding secondary protagonists or supporting characters are transformed into further ‘consumables’ in the above narratives. The individual acts which I have identified above moreover serve similar purposes when viewed individually, precisely thanks to their failure at autonomy out of the context of the narrative. If we deconstruct further the film to the level of the small sequence or individual shot, we can moreover isolate specific instances, even at this atomic level, which foreground the narrative progress.



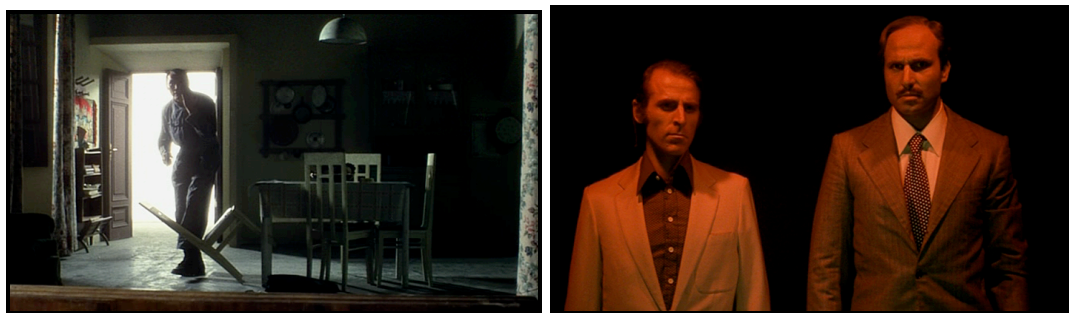
Figures 28-29: Tony on a job, and Rocco Cutita, *Tony Arzenta* (00:07:31; 01:23:31)

The above instances from *Tony Arzenta* are illustrative in this regard. The former is located in the sequence of Tony’s first hit, in the first act, which establishes his work to the audience. The costume is carefully designed to signify formality and organization, foregrounding the skill and morbid professionalism which inform us that his revenge hit on the bosses will continue. In the sequence, Arzenta kills his target without a flinch, at which point an employee of the deceased

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<sup>14</sup> Jameson, p. 13.

enters, before also being murdered, echoing the same unstoppable force of the hit man. The slight tilt of Alain Delon's head here nevertheless betrays a remorse for the second killing that reveals a sense of moral justice; this underlies not only Arzenta's decision to retire but also a (loose) humanity which permits spectator empathy. The second shot is of boss Rocco Cutita shortly before meeting a similar fate in his Milan home. The presence of Cutita's wife and child serves no purpose other than that of a comparison between the boss and Arzenta, echoing the tragedy which will only result in Cutita's death – another step forward in the overall narrative of revenge. Cutita's bodily distancing from his wife, focus away from his son, and the evident danger in which he has knowingly placed them contrasts Arzenta's absolute commitment to his family. The carefully selected mise-en-scène here echoes the whole set: the fish tank, accentuated by the repetition of the empty square frames, reflects the closed-circuit observation of Arzenta across the whole set; eyes and gazes accompany Arzenta's infiltration of the house, and it is not coincidental that the final coup-de-grâce that kills Cutita also destroys the aquarium.



Figures 30-31: Lo Sfregiato injured, and two of his assassins, *I padroni della città* (00:01:11; 00:44:01)

Similar instances can be seen in Ferdinando Di Leo's film. The first shot, taken from the oneiric, slow-motion opening sequence at the slaughterhouse, occurs as Rick's father hurls an object at Lo Sfregiato, after having been shot. The family

home setting is articulated by the mise-en-scène, this is the spectator's only way of identifying the shot man as the boy's father, contributing to the tragedy of the scene and clarifying the revenge story of Rick later on. Aside from being the moment at which Lo Sfregiato (or 'Scarface' in the English dubbed version) gets his name, the careful positioning of Jack Palance in front of the blinding outdoor light frames him as the central focus of the boy's revenge. This is as much for the spectator as for the boy himself, and will act as a driving force of the narrative later on. The second instance is a theatrical use of red lighting on two of Lo Sfregiato's hit men, moments before they murder the actor used by Tony and Rick earlier to rob the boss. Ironically done inside a theatre, the very explicit red serves to underscore the power of Lo Sfregiato and the ruthless bloodlust of him and his men, thus the sense of danger for Rick and Tony. Though the very minor subplot of the actor and his role is ended, the persistence of the motif of revenge will continue to drive the narrative.

These structures stand in stark contrast to that of *Lucky Luciano*. The narrative structure can loosely be fitted into five acts of around twenty minutes but, as with other films of Rosi's such as *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and *Il caso Mattei* (1972), the chronological structure is rejected in favour of an investigative or analytical form. This can be illustrated via further comparison with the traditional dramatic arc (see below).

| Dramatic Arc           | <i>Lucky Luciano</i>   | <i>Lucky Luciano</i> (re-organized chronologically)   |
|------------------------|--|---|
| ACT I: Exposition      | - Cuts between 1946, Lucania's widely reported departure from New York to Sicily and 1931, Lucania's dramatic seizing of power over the mafia underworld.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1931 – seizing of New York underworld by Lucky Luciano</li> <li>• 1944 – US troops in Naples</li> </ul>  |
| Inciting incident      | ⇒ Lucania's return to Italy?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italian mafia/US army deals</li> </ul>   |
| ACT II: Rising Action  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cuts between mid 1940s, Lucania's move to Naples, a 1952 UN conference on drug trafficking, and the American landing in Naples, 1944.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1946 – Lucania's return to Italy</li> <li>• 1952 – Giannini's visit to Italy, work as informant to Siragusa, return &amp; assassination; UN conference on drug trafficking.</li> </ul> |
| ACT III: Climax        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cuts between 1950 arrival of Eugene Giannini in Italy, contact with Lucania and arrest, informant; a 1963 Senate investigating committee meeting in Washington DC (with the Valachi testimony), and the 1952 murder of Giannini in New York.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid 1950s, culmination of Lucania's power – murder of rival, Siragusa in Paris and USA.</li> <li>• 1957 – Mafia meeting in Palermo, chaired by Lucania.</li> </ul>                     |
| ACT IV: Falling Action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cuts from mid 1950s (?) murder of a rival of Lucania &amp; Charles Siragusa working from Paris, to the 1957 meeting of Italo-American bosses in Palermo, to the 1959/60 (reported) death of Igea Lissani &amp; Siragusa's return to the USA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1959 – Igea's death, Lucania's loss of power;</li> <li>• 1960 – Siragusa's return to the USA.</li> </ul>   |
| ACT V: Denouement      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1962 wide arrests and drug seizing, questioning of Lucania, and his death.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1962 – wide arrests &amp; drug seizing; death of Lucania;</li> <li>• 1963 – Senate committee investigation, Valachi testimony.</li> </ul>  |

Figure 32: The Dramatic Arc of *Lucky Luciano*, as Narrative and Chronologically

The reader will note from the third column that, if the narrative is re-structured based on the chronological order of events, following the model established by Ben Lawton and later Laura Wittman for Salvatore Giuliano,<sup>15</sup> there is a more evident narrative arc which centralizes a rise and fall of Lucania. Introducing the story via the Night of Sicilian Vespers, and concluding on the Valachi testimony offers a more comfortable and traditional prologue/epilogue structure, and there are interesting overlaps of rise/fall motifs in secondary characters, in particular the informant, Gene Giannini, and the narcotics detective, Charles Siragusa. Even chronologically, though, the narrative remains complex and

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ben Lawton, 'Salvatore Giuliano: Francesco Rosi's Revolutionary Postmodernism', in *Poet of Civic Courage: The Films of Francesco Rosi*, ed. by Carlo Testa (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1996), pp. 8-42 (pp. 13-14); Laura Wittman, 'The Visible, Unexposed: Francesco Rosi's Salvatore Giuliano', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Dana Renga (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), pp. 211-18 (p. 212).



has unclear sections that are not signposted, or jumps in action which remain unexplained.

With or without the re-organization of the narrative, it is clear that the film is not acting as a commodified biopic, a ‘means to an end’, with sub-sections which do not seek to push forward a cohesive narrative. Through this complex ‘literary tendency’, this film is able to highlight ‘the link between poverty, social backwardness and conservative institutions (the Church) and the presence of illegal organizations’ in order to problematize social issues and alienate the spectator.<sup>16</sup> If we similarly turn to sub-sections of the film, shots or sequences, then the commodification or consumability of the text viewed in the previous examples is, as expected, absent. Consider these instances:



Figures 33-34: Lucania’s Pilgrimage to Lercara Friddi, and the Release of Giannini from an Italian Prison in *Lucky Luciano* (00:15:17; 00:59:24)

The first, taken from the sequence in which Lucania returns to his town of birth and pays respects at a graveyard, is a match on action which explains the disturbing noise of the grieving woman keening. Describing the shot as a ‘beautifully framed, wide-angle long shot’, Mary Wood continues,

Perspectival lines draw the eye from the group of gangsters and dignitaries in the foreground, to rows of tombs and wailing women, dressed in black. In a succession of medium shots, the camera pans over the tomb inscriptions that testify to lives cut short by the mafia. As the gangsters leave, a donkey passes the row of their Mercedes cars, neatly implicating their wealth in the

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 198.

maintenance of rural poverty, demonstrating how figures endow space with symbolic meaning.<sup>17</sup>

Wood's account testifies to the complex shot construction in Rosi's film, and moreover to its powerful denunciation of Sicily's drastically unfair distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, when placing the shot or the sequence in the narrative of the film, Lucania's visit to his hometown has no evident consequence on his later actions, nothing changes or continues as a result of this sequence, and it functions, as this citation demonstrates, autonomously outside of the remainder of the film. The second shot occurs in the sequence in which Giannini is released after a year of prison in Italy, the car contains Charles Siragusa who attempts to convince the gangster to testify against Lucania. The long empty street, reminiscent of the (painted) ash grey Ravenna streets of Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (1964), seems to serve little purpose other than to be aesthetically striking. The obvious metaphor of an open-ended journey, which might otherwise fit a consequential narrative, is frustrated by the essentially fruitless collaboration between Siragusa and Giannini, the latter of whom is killed a few sequences later. In fact, the entire sequence on Giannini is frustrating since its central or climactic position in the film might lead us to anticipate a pivotal function within the narrative, which essentially dissolves as the informant is murdered.

This far in the argumentation laid out in reference to these three films, a hierarchical appreciation that prioritizes Rosi's more complex and seemingly more political text, according to the Marxist negativity towards object commodification, is apparent and understandable. Nevertheless, adopting such a hierarchy risks censoring a dialectical connection which remains between the modernist and the

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<sup>17</sup> Wood, p. 198.

mass forms, and which could lead to a more complex understanding of their political relevance. This connection reveals itself when re-articulating mass culture as different to commodified in specifically oppositional terms, i.e. the modernist text is not just different from the mass text, but it actively tries to reject commodification. Doing so ultimately forges a common denominator in terms of commodification itself (we could almost configure this formulaically, where a definition of the modernist text as *anti-commodified* allows us to understand it in the same regime of the commodity as the *commodified* text). This leads to a wider re-evaluation of the interaction of these two modes, which is Jameson's central thesis:

We must rethink the opposition high culture/mass culture in such a way that the emphasis on evaluation to which it has traditionally given rise – and which however the binary system of value operates (mass culture is popular and thus more authentic than high culture, high culture is autonomous and, therefore, utterly incomparable to a degraded mass culture) tends to function in some timeless realm of absolute aesthetic judgment – is replaced by a genuinely historical and dialectical approach to these phenomena. Such an approach demands that we read high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under capitalism. In this, capitalism's third or multinational stage, however, the dilemma of the double standard of high and mass culture remains, but it has become – not the subjective problem of our own standards of judgment – but rather an objective contradiction which has its own social grounding.<sup>18</sup>

Where commodification is to be understood in terms of the means-to-an-end consumability of a book, this connection is very evidently applicable to the formal differences between the above films, in particular where threads of the narrative of *Lucky Luciano* deliberately frustrate the spectator's expectation. Overall this becomes clear via the depiction of figures of betrayal: Tony Arzenta's betrayals by Domenico and later Dennino have a pivotal role in the movement towards narrative closure and the overall style of the film, as does Lo Sfregiato's betrayal by Rick and

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<sup>18</sup> Jameson, p. 14.

Luigi's by Beppe in *I padroni della città*. In the case of Lucania, there is the more explicit betrayal of the boss by Giannini which, as illustrated, has little direct influence on the remaining narrative of *Lucky Luciano*, and could instead be taken as an autonomous episode. It is fair to take this as a deliberate rejection of narratological expectation in order to differentiate the text itself from the simple functions of pleasure and easy consumption. In fact, this movement from form to genre is very useful to us in better tracing the links between mass and modernist texts in these particular cases. It is possible to view genre conventions, as Jameson does, as a more concretized aesthetic instance of commodification which permeates both modes of representation, either via conformity or rejection. Terming this as a form of 'repetition', in the theorist's work this raises some important issues regarding both the expectation of the spectator and moreover the question of originality or reference. I will now turn to the use of genre conventions in the three films to articulate better the dialogue that subtly connects them.

It was observed in the previous chapter that the opening sequence of *Lucky Luciano* enacts what Crowdus labels 'an ironic homage to gangster film conventions' in order to self-consciously differentiate the film.<sup>19</sup> This has very evident overlaps with Jameson's model in terms of rejection of commodification (repetition), and is very explicitly foregrounded within the film. An initial glance at *I padroni della città* and *Tony Arzenta*, on the other hand, reveals a more predictable set of genre imagery, from the weaponry and car chases of the mise-en-scène, to metropolis settings and the sharp suits or revealing dresses that form the costumes.<sup>20</sup> These can be identified as repetitive 'simulacra', as Jameson writes it,

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<sup>19</sup> Gary Crowdus, 'Francesco Rosi – Italy's Postmodern Neorealist', *Cinéaste*, 20.4 (1994), 19-27 (p. 22).

<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that these are predominantly Hollywood genre stylistics: we might view this as symbolic, in terms of the reputation for consumable cinema in America, though this risks

that do not rely on any primary referent but serve predominantly to form a rigid, commodified framework for the film. Slightly more complex and informed readings of the use of genre in these three films testify to the falsehood of these initial, surface observations, and to the evident impossibility of categorizing the films in the simple dichotomy.

By picking out singularly the ‘ironic homage’ that *Lucky Luciano* makes to the most explicit genre conventions, there is a risk of overlooking both the remaining scenes of the film from a genre perspective, if not the two-fold function that these ironic aesthetics serve. We must also be quite wary that for various motives – from the international setting of the film through, perhaps, to international distribution aspirations – generally the genre conventions which are advanced by *Lucky Luciano* are rooted in a Hollywood vocabulary, which of course differs, to some extent, to the Italian context.<sup>21</sup> An interesting instance in relation to both of these points emerges in the setting of the Gene Giannini sub-plot. After Giannini is killed, the shot very deliberately identifies the 59<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge in the background, before the mobsters are shown moving from East to West across the bridge, where they discard their weapons, into Manhattan as identified by the Empire State Building on the skyline.

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overlooking the prominence of similar iconography in the Italian case: the other films mentioned here are prime instances.

<sup>21</sup> See my findings below for more on this with regard to the representation of organized crime. For wider observations on Hollywood influences in crime film, see also Sebastiano Gesù, ‘La mafia sullo schermo: appunti per una prima ricognizione’, in *La Sicilia tra schermo e storia*, ed. by Sebastiano Gesù (Catania: Maimone, 2008), pp. 119-40; and Mary Wood, ‘Italian Film Noir’, in *European Film Noir*, ed. by Andrew Spicer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 236-71.



Figures 35-36: The shadow of the 59<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge over Giannini's death;  
Lucania at the barber shop (01:06:17; 01:39:31)

Historical records, namely the Valachi testimony, show that Giannini was killed in Manhattan on East 112<sup>th</sup> St., certainly not within eyesight of the Queensboro Bridge, and the weapons tossed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. Bridge.<sup>22</sup> Given the impossibility of mistaking these locations, it is fair to assume that Rosi selected the iconic Queensboro Bridge (albeit about to become all the more iconic with the release of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* some six years later in 1979) for aesthetic motivation. Given the rooting of the film's iconography (the first sequences, referenced in the previous chapter) in the imagery of 1930s New York gangsters, it is moreover possible to conclude that the locations add to this imagery. I would nevertheless argue that the use of genre conventions within the film no longer adheres to the opening, symbolic rejection of the gangster movie iconography, which leads us to conclude that by now it is serving a different, more complex, and better integrated function within the film.

Another interesting example in *Lucky Luciano*, further testifying to the complexity of the film's aesthetic vocabulary, is contained in the second shot, above. In the sequence before Lucania's cardiac arrest at Naples Airport, he is shown at a barber's. This location is very widely used in gangster films (Italian and American), quite interestingly as a highly gendered location that draws attention to

<sup>22</sup> Peter Maas, 'Anatomy of a Cosa Nostra Contract', *New York Magazine*, 13 January 1969, pp. 27-31 (p. 30).

a powerfully performed masculinity (the grooming of the gangster). Typically the location is used either as a private meeting location, where mafiosi discuss important business matters (e.g. *Il giorno della civetta*, Damiano Damiani, 1968) or, drawing from the infamous murder of Albert Anastasia in 1957, it is a location where mafiosi are murdered (e.g. *Mafioso*, Alberto Lattuada, 1962). I argue that it is the latter iconography on which Rosi is drawing in this scene: though Lucania is not murdered at the barber's, his death occurs imminently, and the director's focus on gazes and supervision, reflected ad infinitum in the mirrors, steeps the scene in suspense and expectation. There is evident irony in the barber's comment that 'parevi 'nu muerto prima' which heightens this sense. The unravelling of Lucania's career which occurs up to this point in the plot can be read as a form of alternative and ironically underplayed death precisely by the citation of genre iconography here. Though these stylistics are not straightforward or immediately reproduced or commodified as such, they clearly serve a symbolic purpose within the film. Therefore, they cannot be assumed in a straightforward manner to be an explicit rejection of repetition, as we had said of the earlier references to gangster iconography within the film.

As we might predict, the use of genre conventions in *I padroni della città* and *Tony Arzenta* is in fact not always straightforward, but rather reveals itself as highly complex when investigated more closely. Di Leo's film in fact contains several homoerotic undertones which are revealed or enhanced via ironic genre conventions. The implications of homosexuality emerge from the almost universal absence or rejection of women by the three main characters, Rick, Tony and Napoli, and their subsequent partnership, and they are accentuated via contrasting stylistics. The peripheral characters, in particular Lo Sfregiato, Luigi and Beppe,

are portrayed in a manner which appeals quite explicitly to stereotyped norms of masculinity of gangster films: this includes costume (angular suits with open shirts), mise-en-scène (expensive and elegant cars for the rich gangster, Fiat 500 for the poorer), and simplistic, traditionally ‘male’ settings (billiard halls). This differs very explicitly from that of the protagonists, the most striking instances include Tony’s bright red roofless Puma GT dune buggy or the casual jeans and t-shirt costumes of Rick and Tony. Napoli, by far the campest character, adorns his slightly more conformist suit jacket and chinos with a crimson neck tie, and is often portrayed alone at the beginning of the scene, shifting his trousers in discomfort.



Figures 37 and 38: Napoli isolated in the gangster’s base; Napoli’s ‘queer’ home, in *I padroni della città* (00:53:10; 00:42:21)

The evident differentiation of these three men is moreover accentuated via contrasting settings – the schizophrenic décor of Napoli’s home in the country contrasts the subtle elegance of Lo Sfregiato’s minimalist, white office – and by the typical isolation of the men within the stereotypically male locales. This includes Rick’s failure and *brutta figura* in the casino or his contrasting casual costume in Lo Sfregiato’s office; Beppe’s taunt that Tony is the only gangster in the group that has not slept with Clara; and Napoli’s constant concealing of his collar and chest by the neck tie that contrasts the shirts open as far as the navel of Beppe and his colleagues. By ironically constructing the iconography of a gangster film, only to then introduce and prioritize a contrasting imagery, often relying on comedy, Di Leo’s film actually advances a quite radical and alternative form of masculinity.



This is cemented by the ultimate failure of the mobsters and success of the ‘queered’ protagonists, either in fistfights (Tony), pick pocketing (Napoli) or the ultimate act of vengeance against Lo Sfregiato (Rick).

*Tony Arzenta*’s urban settings, mise-en-scène and costume appeal more directly, and without irony, to the traditional coding of a gangster film. It would be a fair judgement of the film to suggest that this has been implemented with textual consumption in mind, constructing the film in terms of repetitive imagery for a more successful product. Nevertheless, it is possible to read differentiations from the norm in other contexts which, albeit not as radically as *I padroni della città* or *Lucky Luciano*, can be viewed as subversive. An interesting instance in this regard might be the notably eclectic use of music, which appears incompatible with the film as gangster movie. For instance, the opening credits, which follow a normal family birthday sequence, are accompanied by Ornella Vanoni’s ‘L’appuntamento’, the lyrics and tone of which set the scene less for a series of brutal killings than for a romantic melodrama. In fact, music is repeatedly employed throughout the film to exaggerate quite extensively emotional responses to the film – from a kidnapping to the deafening accompaniment of ‘Eine kleine Nachtmusik’ to overbearing, celebratory wedding bells at the film’s deceptive, seemingly happy (almost) end. Even this, though, might be viewed as unusual more in the American or international than Italian context, where negotiations of realist modes with melodramatic styles are typical in Italian noir films, responding to ‘a need to both symbolize and make reference to an actual world’.<sup>23</sup>

Vanoni’s song with retrospect is applicable to the central, tragic ‘inciting incident’ which is the death of Tony’s wife and son. This theme, and the genre

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<sup>23</sup> Wood, p. 42.

conventions which accompany it, in fact dominate much of the film. This is interesting in light of much of the theory of the gangster genre which, since Warshow's seminal article, has tended to view the gangster as a 'tragic' response to the impossibilities and contradictions of a capitalist urge for success.<sup>24</sup> Along these lines, Jameson identifies the ideological function of *The Godfather* as comment on an extreme form of American capitalism, 'in its most systematized and computerized, dehumanized, "multinational" and corporate form'.<sup>25</sup> Here, *Tony Arzenta* is quite individual: though the gangsters who come up against him are influenced by power and money, Tony's central desire is to retire and become a family man. When this fails, he is incapable of anything beyond revenge, and even his second opportunity of love or familial interest is almost casually, and ultimately tragically (presuming we are supposed to take Tony as a semi-positive hero), thwarted. Where Warshow's sense of the failure of the gangster in the American context stands as an accentuation of the tragic contradictions that emerge from the 'American dream',<sup>26</sup> the same model in Tessari's film instead implies tragic contradictions central to Tony's position as father to a happy family. Through the medium of the same strain of genre film, then, the critique implicit to the film shifts focus onto the family as a failing institution. Once again, as with *I padroni della città*, the genre conventions in the film in fact reveal on a quite subtle level a very

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 97-103 (p. 103).

<sup>25</sup> Jameson, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> For Warshow, success and profit are the motivations behind the gangster's activity, symbolic of the pressing urge to prove oneself as individual; failure is inevitable, since the very act of individuality is contradictory to the equally pressing desire for equality: these are the two cornerstones of the 'American dream' drawn together and acted out in the gangster film. He puts it that 'In ways that we do not easily or willingly define, the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects "Americanism" itself' (Warshow, p. 100).

radical and queer criticism of the figure of the father and the family unit,<sup>27</sup> that connects familial harmony to extreme and violent competition.

## **ii. Encoding/Decoding**

The political messages that are inherent to the typically overlooked B-movies analysed here emerge through the application of Jameson's dialectic of artistic forms, something which moreover can be used as a framework to pick out the more subtle genre influences within a 'modernist' text such as *Lucky Luciano*. Though my examples are few, the nature of my argument here attests to the importance of the contribution made by every image of organized crime – genre film or not – and moreover the very open possibility of seeking political commentaries.

It nevertheless remains to contextualize more fully the movement from the specific economic/cultural logic of late capitalism, which is the object of Jameson's analysis, to the specific case of the Italian mafia cinema. Though the critical mistrust of mass-produced mafia films (and TV shows) can evidently be traced to the prominence of Marxist theory in Italy, the notion of value and hierarchy evidently belongs to slightly different infrastructures for mafia films: they are not critiqued merely for their moral hollowness. Rather, it is the continued presence and trauma of organized crime (as I will argue in the following chapter) which renders acutely pressing the need to represent crime on-screen in a responsible manner, and to dismiss those films which do not. Nevertheless, there is an immediate overlap between the manner in which Jameson discusses the dialectic of art forms in relation to 'referents' and repetition that illustrates usefully the compatibility of the theory. The theorist's view of repetition as key to the 'simulacra' of the genre

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

vehicle, and a rejection of repetition as central to the original or 'autonomous' modernist text, can be re-written in terms of referents and absences:

a dialectical conception of this field of study in which modernism and mass culture are grasped as a single historical and aesthetic phenomenon has the advantage of positing a survival of the primary text at one of the poles, and thus providing a guide-rail for the bewildering exploration of the aesthetic universe which lies at the other, a message or semiotic bombardment from which the textual referent has disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

When this is applied to the organized crime imagery, the two sides of the dialectic equate to, on the one hand, the same simulacra of repetitive images that are readily dismissed in terms of their political absence (Eco's theory is relevant here); and on the other, the political text that functions as primary referent of the mafia. Provided we recognize the referent as the accurate, 'realistic', socially relevant image of the mafia (that which the commentaries that I cited in my introduction unanimously call for), the models overlap coherently. The 'common denominator' aspect that lies between the two art forms in Jameson's theory thus can be overlapped with the case of organized crime film: just as the dialectic can be formed through the perception of the mass produced/consumed text as the 'not-modernist', so can we read the 'bad' mafia film as the not-anti-mafia. The determination of the text's 'anti-mafia' status is the common denominator. The key to understanding this difference lies ultimately in Rosi's *Lucky Luciano*, which, in stating its 'modernist' positioning (as mafia film), categorizes itself as 'not a genre vehicle' by using catalogue 'genre' images.

There is a further issue which remains intrinsic to Jameson's theory, and which has relevance to both the capitalist context and to the specific instance of the Italian mafia film: the position of the spectator. Re-reading Jameson's theorization of the cultural dialectic from the perspective of the viewer reveals varied results:

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<sup>28</sup> Jameson, p. 21.

though he assumes plausible a situation in which a reader of (modernist) Kafka or Dostoyevsky might also watch a (mass produced) detective series, generally the figure of the reader is denied any autonomy or originality of thought. The modernist/detective fiction instance is demonstrated by his observation that the reader in the above scenario would be frustrated if presented with 'high cultural demands' when anticipating 'stereotyped formats' by which is intended rigid genre frameworks.<sup>29</sup> This instance is rich in possible insight. First, the process implies a certain contractual relationship between the producer and the receiver of the art, where the latter responds to a text with a certain expectation, and one that is essentially controlled by the artist (for instance, it might be built through a trailer).<sup>30</sup> On the other, it affords, to some extent, a welcome plurality to readership. Nevertheless, the emotional response to the disruption of this aesthetic contract that is outlined by Jameson, 'think of your own consternation at finding that the paperback you selected from the mystery shelf turns out to be a romance or a science fiction novel',<sup>31</sup> seems incompatible with a more contemporary model of a spectator/reader who might have a range of emotional and negotiated responses set out in the work of cultural and literary theorists like Stuart Hall.

This objectification of the viewer seems to have an at best problematic compatibility with the wider discourse on the dialectical model of culture, where the socially based common grounding of different forms of art must also affect the spectatorship. The readings of the films above evidently, through their inclusion of plural genre techniques and the diverse possible interpretations, make space for a plural reception. In fact, given the close overlaps between stylistic impulses, it is

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<sup>29</sup> Jameson, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> This is echoed by Jameson's deliberate differentiation between pre-capitalist 'aesthetic "contract" between a cultural producer and a certain homogenous class or group public' from the contemporary market's wide alienation which creates the 'public introuvable', Jameson, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Jameson, p. 18.

plausible that the spectator is capable of perceiving and responding to the common ground of both. As such, the model of a passive spectator, with limited expectations and simplistic responses to a text, becomes defunct.<sup>32</sup>

The plurality of viewer-response can be better conceptualized by turning to Hall's theory of codification. Separating and differentiating the production and dissemination of a text as alternative stages, as Hall does, allows the foregrounding of form-based, or better text-based analyses, while not losing sight of the spectatorial function. Hall argues that the 'meaningful discourse' of a text is first 'encoded' during its production, then 'decoded' by 're-entry into the practices of the audience'.<sup>33</sup> The encoding process is something which is defined by the institutional structures in which the text is produced: in relation to any mainstream film, then, we might locate these within the conditions of the production company. The finished product can nevertheless only have meaning if it is then decoded:

Before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences.<sup>34</sup>

Hall's model becomes more interesting and valuable when we make the simple but crucial observation that 'The codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly

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<sup>32</sup> Returning to the above instance of the reader of Kafka who is exposed to a detective series is in fact quite timely and relevant here, generally where recent television crime dramas such as *The Wire* (2002-2008) and *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (2007-2012) have very evidently crossed or blurred the high/popular culture divides, thanks to countless external factors ranging from the channel used to broadcast the show through to complex plot narratives and linguistic issues such as English remakes. In fact, a particular episode of 'The Wire' cites Kafka in a rich and meaningful, if loosely-coded manner (his name is read as 'Fonzie Kafka'), the understanding and appreciation of which relies quite explicitly on some understanding of the author.

<sup>33</sup> Stuart Hall, *Culture, Media Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies* (London: Hutchinson; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1980), p. 130. It should be noted that the context used by Hall to illustrate the theory is the television and specifically advertisement, however I am following the wider assumptions that have followed the essay that its context is widely adaptable and applicable to many if not all conditions of production.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, p. 130.

symmetrical'.<sup>35</sup> While we can interrogate the conditions of a text's production/encoding with relative ease, as soon as we turn to its reception/decoding, we are faced with many of the same problems mentioned above, where it is a specific personal or group response to a text that informs its decoding (history, society, culture, psychology). To investigate these we must turn to useful techniques that render more straightforward our understanding of the 'decoder', such as the horizon of expectation.

The issue of symmetry between the en/decoding practices leads Hall to observe and illustrate three interpretative positions, which can be summarized as following:

- the dominant code: 'When the viewer takes the connoted meaning [...] full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer *is operating inside the dominant code*'.
- the oppositional code: 'it is possible for a viewer to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference'.
- the negotiated code: 'Decoding with *the negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations [...], while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule'.<sup>36</sup>

While it is easy to view how specifically the dominant/oppositional codes could be used to define reactions to strongly ideological texts such as propaganda, or even radical or polemical readings of texts, the importance of Hall's work lies in his emphasis on the universality of the model. In that regard, it is my view that the implications here for the case of the Italian mafia film are wide, and very important.

Hall puts it that:

In speaking of dominant meanings, then, we are not talking about a one-sided process which governs how all events will be signified. It consists of the 'work' required to enforce, win plausibility for and command as legitimate a

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<sup>35</sup> Hall, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> Hall, pp. 136-37.

*decoding* of the event within the limit of dominant definitions in which it has been connotatively signified.<sup>37</sup>

Though we can clearly trace the roots within Hall, where both make reference to the capitalist modes of production outlined by Marx, of Eco's notions of alienated form, in this case we are going beyond a reading which simply suggests that a text whose production is steeped in a capitalist coding will be interpreted precisely thus (to his/her detriment) by the reader who is similarly constituted by the same coding. It is quite significant in this regard that Hall actually picks out both naturalism and realism as the result of a specific 'discursive practice'.<sup>38</sup> I would argue that the organized crime films that are universally acknowledged as important and correct – from *Salvatore Giuliano* through to *Testimonio a rischio* – are instances of a dominant code of production (be it capitalist or not) that is not questioned by the spectator, and interpreted within the same coding. I stress that my point here is absolutely dislocated from any ethical judgment – I do not wish to suggest that this process is wrong, merely that it is important to recognize.<sup>39</sup>

It is in fact possible to illustrate the three positions of the decoder via the interpretations of the films given above. *Lucky Luciano*, first, quite evidently positions itself within a framework of a very specific interpretation in relation to its citation of genre. Reading its genre citations as performed oppositions, and

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<sup>37</sup> Hall, p. 135.

<sup>38</sup> Hall, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> Some further insight on the pressure to conform to a specific codification of (anti-)mafia movie will be offered in the following chapter, in relation to the notion of trauma. It is nonetheless useful at this stage to rationalize the mafia film in relation to what Jacques Rancière calls the 'ethical' regime of art. Though it is the contrary 'aesthetic' regime which should be the aim of the artist, and which encourages the most freedom of interpretation (an active spectator), the theorist warns of the dangers of artists whose work foregrounds the ethical, educational approach which risks suppressing the spectator. Where the compatibility between these regimes and the codes of Stuart Hall are quite explicit, I see it to be quite symbolic that Rancière makes these comments in the volume entitled 'the emancipated spectator'. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: Fabrique, 2008), pp. 56-92; Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 154.



subsequently assuming the film to be politicized, is a dominant reading.<sup>40</sup> My interpretation of *I padroni della città*, into which I read a strong queer subplot, could be framed as an oppositional reading where we could understand the film in terms of its formulaic narrative and central ideological purpose of entertainment/profit. Such a reading is arguably beyond the film's immediate horizon of expectation, and moreover, as observed, relates to a chosen framework of decoding which is individual to myself as the critic. My interpretation of *Tony Arzenta*, then, might well be viewed as a negotiation: the assumptions made about family and violence tread the careful line between the presentation of patriarchy that is common to the mafia film (as observed by Jameson, see above) and, thus assumed dominant, and an exceptional or oppositional view of violence in positive terms.

Both Jameson and Hall have made crucial steps that allow us to conceive of the positions of spectatorship in somewhat clearer and fairer terms. Hall, in particular, is valuable in his model of decoding which allows us to complicate the typical passivity that is attributed to the reader in the models viewed above. In itself, though, opening up interpretation thus raises a great deal more inconvenient questions about the very nature of interpretation and (thus) the response to *impegno* in these texts, both of which risk, theoretically, becoming overbearingly free. In the

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<sup>40</sup> As mentioned in this chapter, though, to follow suit with a dominant decoding risks overlooking the use of crime movie genre conventions later on, such as the setting of the barbershop. As such, we might ultimately argue the case for a negotiated reading of this film. This raises a series of very interesting questions about expectation and interpretation of the modernist film, which regrettably I have not had the space to address. Jameson touches upon this point in reference to the spectator who would be frustrated by high-cultural demands: we might well pose to ourselves the question of the response of that spectator who *expects* high-cultural demands. It seems fair to argue that a spectator of Francesco Rosi who has a horizon of expectation formed by the oeuvre of the director might expect a modernist film, and as such that Rosi does not follow suit with a the generic codes witnessed in the opening scenes (Fiats, tommy guns, etc.) will perhaps be not so surprising after all. We might well enter into a subsequent discourse about how the frustration or Brechtian alienation of the spectator is, after all, not only a prerequisite to a modernist text of this nature but moreover entirely anticipated by the spectator.

following section, I will re-address these issues by turning to useful models of reception, and employing them with the aim of better conceptualizing the expectations of organized crime cinema in Italy.

### **iii. Horizons of Expectation**

In the second half of this chapter, my aim is to further problematize the strict delineation between high and low forms of art by turning to the spectator and the process of interpretation. As soon as the autonomy of the viewer is brought into the discussion, very many traditional twentieth-century readings of political art – especially those which have been mentioned in the previous chapter – are quite seriously undermined. For Lukács, the cathartic process undertaken by the reader overlooks to notable extents the space for her/his autonomous reactions or rejections of the text; we can suggest that Eco's and Brecht's notions of alienation both depend on a well-conditioned spectator, intended socially as well as in terms of their intellect; even Thompson, whose formalist focus on the film itself apparently excludes the reader entirely, raises philosophical questions (can a text exist without a reader?) and contradictions (Thompson's place/authority as reader herself) which remain far from resolved.

In turning to spectatorship, there are two crucial steps: first, following Burns in her lucid evaluation on the reader-centric paradigm on *impegno*, it is vital that we acknowledge the sheer breadth of different reader (/viewer) styles, and the ultimate futility in making any universal claims; at best we can aim to recognize that the '[viewing] position or function is unknowable but perhaps predictable or

malleable'.<sup>41</sup> The second step is to begin to consider how this function could be mapped out tentatively, albeit cautiously. In scholarship on film spectatorship, various attempts have been made to outline a spectator or spectatorial habits and these might, following Judith Mayne, be rationalized via their relation to 'apparatus theory'.<sup>42</sup> In essence, taking the cinema as an 'apparatus' – in Agamben's definition, 'un insieme di prassi, di saperi, di misure, di istituzioni il cui scopo è di gestire, governare, controllare e orientare in un senso che si pretende utile i comportamenti, i gesti e i pensieri degli uomini'<sup>43</sup> – paved the way for Althusserian notions of *ideological* apparatus that dialectically constructs an ideal spectator who is subjected to ideological manipulation. This is often rooted in psychoanalytical theory. Nevertheless, this approach to theory shares with its Marxist predecessors a universal notion of guided or passive interpretation; as Mayne notes: 'Virtually all theorists of the apparatus assume a monolithic quality to the cinema, that is, the cinema works to acculturate individuals to structures of fantasy, desire, dream, and pleasure that are fully of a piece with dominant ideology'.<sup>44</sup> The cinema in this model can thus be taken as an enactment and an endorsement of the dominant ideologies of the society that formed it, for instance rooted in white, male, middle class hegemonies, and as such adhering to the passive spectator role was a symbolic act of affirmation. The crucial consequence of this approach is that both the dominant ideology and the spectator are to be located within, are latent to, the formal attributes of the film.

Various theorists have taken the notion of the immanent spectator as too restrictive. Alternatives to the monolithic apparatus model that Mayne includes in

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<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Burns, 'Re-thinking *Impegno* (again): Reading, Ethics and Pleasure', in *Postmodern Impegno*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug, pp. 61-80 (p. 63).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2006), p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Mayne, p. 18.

her history of film spectatorship theory include empirical, historical, and feminist models.<sup>45</sup> Each of these enacts a turn towards a more concrete notion of the spectator: through empirical research rooted in ethnography of cognitivism; through the historical or cultural location of the spectator/audience via intertextual, exhibition, social or reception studies; or through re-writings of audiences or films in relation to women. These modes of considering spectatorship are never completely removed from the apparatus model, however, since (simplifying a great deal) the ideological structures that inform the institutional understanding of the cinema can never be entirely done away with. In light of this, Mayne refutes a dichotomized model of spectatorship. Instead she attempts to combine the various approaches in a way which foregrounds their tensions and contradictions:

Institutional theories of spectatorship have been criticized for being too homogenous, too monolithic. Too frequently it is assumed that if homogeneity is monolithic, then heterogeneity must be at the very least a potential site for resistance. The most significant challenge for the study of spectatorship is [...] a recognition that the cinema functions in contradictory ways, and that in order to understand how institutions are open to change, there must be simultaneous attention to their resistance to change. The competing claims of domination and resistance, of structure and agency, of homogeneity and heterogeneity, have resulted in the foregrounding of a series of concepts meant to understand spectatorship as comprising 'both' the cinematic institution 'and' possible excesses and resistances.<sup>46</sup>

By integrating readings of both the dominant ideologies which have informed a text and the possible reactions to it, an understanding of the ethical or political status of it becomes at once more comprehensive and more fragmentary.

A useful framework for the assembly and evaluation of a text's disjointed spectatorship is Hans Robert Jauss's 'horizon of expectation'. Facing up to the difficulties and contradictions which emerged in the attempts to combine a Marxist emphasis on history with a Formalist foregrounding of aesthetics, Jauss turned to

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mayne, p. 7; pp. 53-76.

<sup>46</sup> Mayne, p. 76.

reception (specifically the ‘Aesthetic of Reception’, to cite the title of his major work) in order to seek some resolution.<sup>47</sup> This emerges from an analysis of consciously synchronic samples based on the text itself and its surroundings, which together form what he labels the ‘horizon of expectation’ brought by the spectator. To offer a loose definition, as Jauss does not rely on a fixed one, Holub puts it that “‘Horizon of expectations’” would appear to refer to an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a “system of references” or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text’.<sup>48</sup> This could then be used to create a value-based categorizing framework for texts, used to define its success/failure according to whether the horizon is surpassed, not reached, broken up or altered. The horizon of expectation is to be very definitively placed historically, yet is nonetheless rooted in the aesthetic where the expectations brought to the text by the reader are based on previous aesthetic experiences. Though this model can by no means be taken as providing a concrete record of spectator response, mapping horizons of expectations allows us to rationalize slightly more the feasible interpretations of a text. It also very usefully responds to the tensions behind the three key areas that have informed my analysis up to this point: the form, the historical background, and the spectator.

In more specific terms, Jauss suggests that the horizon of expectation of a text can be brought into focus by considering its ‘historical moment’, via ‘a pre-understanding of the genre, of the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language’.<sup>49</sup> I also propose that the horizon of expectation can be appreciated beyond the limitations of the text.

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<sup>47</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 59.

<sup>49</sup> Jauss, p. 22.

Mayne cites this and Jauss's theory more widely as a crucial part of reception studies, considered by her merely 'The fourth significant direction in historical studies of spectatorship'.<sup>50</sup> I would be inclined even to subvert this sub-categorization, instead viewing the three other branches of historical studies named by Mayne – intertextuality, film exhibition and viewing communities – as further aspects of an individual's horizon of expectation.<sup>51</sup> Since the horizon of expectation will undoubtedly provide insight into the process of interpretation of the text, it will be possible, in analysing specific instances as I will do below, to work backwards from certain texts (through investigations of the several aspects of it that inform the horizon of expectation, such as genre) in order to offer a prospective framework of interpretation. Doing so, as will be shown, opens up the text to speculation on wider readership positions and interpretative possibilities. In effect, the formal and genre-based analysis, and the investigation of a mainstream political ideology (the popular/modernist debate) that was carried out above was precisely an exposure of segments of the films' horizons of expectation.

Before turning to some specific films, to view how their political function can be better appreciated in light of the horizon of expectation, there is a final point of contextualization that is useful to raise. The purpose of Jauss's article is to review the process of writing a literary history. Placing emphasis on the individual horizon of expectation allows a very innovative approach to this, in that it intersects, in his terms, diachrony and synchrony: 'it must also be possible to make the literary horizon of a specific historical moment comprehensible as that synchronic system in relation to which literature that appears contemporaneously could be received diachronically in relations of noncontemporaneity, and the work could be received

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<sup>50</sup> Mayne, p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Mayne, pp. 64-66.

as current or not, as modish, outdated, or perennial, as premature or belated'.<sup>52</sup> The interaction of synchronic and diachronic approaches to the conceptualization of a text essentially allows the critic to forge a more comprehensive literary history. For Jauss, in brief, the issue is one of reconciling the Formalist emphasis on the aesthetic, and the Marxist foregrounding of history, to which an evaluation of the horizon of expectation is the solution.<sup>53</sup> The chronological approach to literary history will incur absences and oversights: 'For the quality and rank of a literary work result neither from the biographical or historical conditions of its origin [*Entstehung*], nor from its place in the sequence of the development of a genre alone, but rather from the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame, criteria that are more difficult to grasp'.<sup>54</sup>

As I have argued in my introduction, the typical history of the Italian mafia film is enormously restricted by a series of assumptions: first and foremost, these typically begin with Pietro Germi's *In nome della legge* (1949), a neo-realist (inspired), naturalistic and loosely anti-mafia story.<sup>55</sup> From the key text within the neorealist period, these mafia genre histories leap to *Salvatore Giuliano* (1961), and then follow chronologically a range of *impegnato* texts that peak in both the late 1960s with *A ciascuno il suo* (Elio Petri, 1967) and *Il giorno della civetta* (Damiano Damiani, 1968), and then again in the 1990s with, for instance, *La scorta* (Ricky

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<sup>52</sup> Jauss, p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. in particular the essay 'Literary History as a Challenge', in which Jauss more elegantly articulates the fusion of these critical approaches (Jauss, pp. 3-45).

<sup>54</sup> Jauss, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Albano, Fava and Zocaro each adopt this approach; Gesù also adopts a chronological perspective, but crucially begins in the early years of cinema; cf. Vittorio Albano, *La mafia nel cinema siciliano: da 'In nome della legge' a 'Placido Rizzotto'* (Manduria: Barbieri, 2003); Fava, Claudio G., 'Le origini: dal western all'istant movie', *Rivista del cinematografo e delle comunicazioni sociali*, 66.3 (1996), 13-15; Ettore Zocaro, 'Resistenza e Mafia, temi ricorrenti', *Cinema d'Oggi*, 14/15 (2000), 9; Gesù. In fact, many of these histories adopt the periodizing approach favoured by major Italian film historians, that outline the major, important moments from the neorealist period, through the *autori* of the boom years, to the more contemporary crisis. See Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 4 vols (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993); Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York; London: Continuum, 2001). Leading the way for 'alternative' or 'Jaussian' histories of the cinema is Mary Wood's *Italian Cinema*.

Tognazzi, 1993), *Un eroe borghese* (Michele Placido, 1995) and perhaps the TV series 'La piovra' (1984-2001, various directors commencing with Damiano Damiani).<sup>56</sup> Needless to say, and indeed as mentioned above, while valuable for a chronological outline, these histories are not comprehensive enough to do justice to the films themselves or evidently to the omitted texts. An alternative history of the genre which takes inspiration from Jauss's horizon of expectation makes this very clear.

In the following section, I focus on one key aspect of the spectator's horizon of expectation, genre, and do so not by focusing on the iconography of the mafia film *per se*, but rather attempt to seek the variety of generic influences that are present in the *filone* of organized crime film. As in the above instances, where the use of genre in *Lucky Luciano*, *Tony Arzenta* and *I padroni della città* revealed complex layers of interpretation, I will offer some insight on the mafia film via three subordinate nodes of genre (western, comedy and the *giallo*) and then expand out to view the wider influences that affect this network of expectation.

### The Western

At first glance, the western iconography certainly does appear to lend itself quite readily to the Sicilian mafia film: the essential cop/robber plotline set across landscapes of absence. This is certainly the case for Germi's *In nome della legge*, which, as well as being typically placed at the root of the Italian mafia film, is commonly commented upon in terms of its western heritage.<sup>57</sup> Peter Bondanella,

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Emiliano Morreale, 'Storia e illustrazione del mafia-movie', *Lo straniero*, 82 (2007), 40-53; Gesù; or the chronological outline implicitly afforded by the articles in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Renga.

<sup>57</sup> Hipkins observes the extent to which the reliance on this genre iconography has been foregrounded critically, 'The film's director Pietro Germi was defined as the most "American" director, and his use of the western genre to treat a distinctly Italian subject matter has been



for example, writes about the film via the influence of the westerns of Ford – ‘a director Germi admired, and whom he had imitated in his first major work, *In nome della legge*’;<sup>58</sup> Roy Armes, too, observes how the film’s narrative constitutes one of the ways in which the film is a ‘stylised Italian [equivalent] to the American Western’:

Guido [Schiavi, the *magistrato*] arrives in Capodarso like a new sheriff aiming to clean up the town. Friendless and alone, he finds himself confronted by a smiling villain on a white horse. Unarmed he faces the armed gang which opposes his right to establish the rule of law and, with the aid of a faithful henchman and the love of a good woman, he wins through in the end.<sup>59</sup>

These critics are by no means incorrect in their observations: several of the formal aspects of the film seek to evoke a western imagery, from the music to the setting of the Sicilian village, as is demonstrated by Mario Sesti:

Il villaggio, come nei western, è ridotto a una serie di luoghi caratteristici in relazione tanto sicura quanto indeterminata tra di loro: la “main street” su cui è concentrato lo sguardo collettivo (e che nel film è la piazza abbacinante e dissestata di Sciacca[...]), il bar-tabacchi (che, come nel saloon, assiste alla più alta concentrazione di antagonismo dialettico, fisico, drammatico, perlopiù incarnato da sguardi fissi che si incrociano e si sfidano), la pretura (l’ufficio dello sceriffo, la sede istituzionale della Legge, dove abitano l’eroe e quei pochi, il maresciallo, che si schierano al suo fianco), la villa nobiliare (ovvero la residenza del potere che si oppone al rispetto della Legge, in cui è praticamente reclusa la donna che il desiderio dell’eroe vuole liberare, conseguenza naturale della sua azione di giustizia).<sup>60</sup>

The framework of the ‘westerner’, entering into the lawless village, virtually free of all possessions and links to the outside world is evidently complementary to the film’s protagonist Guido Schiavi who arrives in precisely this manner.<sup>61</sup> On a superficial level, we are even presented with a typecast interplay between sheriff

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repeatedly underlined ever since’; Danielle Hipkins, ‘Which Law is the Father’s? Gender and Generic Oscillation in Pietro Germi’s *In the Name of the Law*’, in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, pp. 203-10 (p. 203).

<sup>58</sup> Bondanella, 2001, p. 85.

<sup>59</sup> Armes, p. 140.

<sup>60</sup> Mario Sesti, *Tutto il cinema di Pietro Germi* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1997), p. 167.

<sup>61</sup> This coheres with Warshow’s definition, in his seminal article, of the westerner who appears with few material associations, who ‘is on the side of justice and order’ and whose righteous image ‘can be presented as clearly in defeat as in victory’. Cf. Warshow, p. 111.

(Schiavi) and the group of Native Americans (the mafiosi, ‘who are shown from time to time galloping on the horizon like a group of mounted Indians’).<sup>62</sup> This framework is at times formally accentuated in scenes of confrontation between Schiavi and the mafia boss Turi Passalacqua, where the matches between medium shots of the two men, followed by medium and long shots of the mafia assume the function of ‘show-downs’ at two points during the film:



Figures 39-44: The Two ‘Showdowns’ in *In nome della legge* (00:40:49; 00:40:56; 00:41:39; 01:35:38; 01:35:42; 01:35:49)

Though evidently the final showdown between Schiavi and Passalacqua mimics very closely the first, with both ending on an almost identical shot, the montage of shots betrays a different power balance. The first sequence, taking place in the countryside ruled by the mafioso, offers a more lingering focus on Passalacqua, and belittles the forces of order (Schiavi’s maresciallo and lawyers) by confronting them with high angle shots of the mafia, and their departure (the third image above) is taken as a sign of the mafia rejecting Schiavi, offended. In the latter, the action takes place in the town, where Schiavi, having summoned the mafiosi to him, dominates both screen time and the narrative action. As such, in the

<sup>62</sup> Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 88.

final shot of the film, (the sixth reproduced above) the mafia are symbolically retreating, apparently subordinate to Schiavi's authority.

We might comfortably assume that the spectator is being asked to evoke a Western showdown scenario here in order to facilitate a good/bad moral dichotomy and favour the hero. Yet quite evidently the complexity of the narrative must ultimately take us beyond this reading: the notion that Schiavi somehow vanquishes Passalacqua overlooks first and foremost the essential collaboration of the latter's men in capturing Francesco Messina, let alone that the crime Messina committed was commissioned by the board of mafia *capi* presided over by Passalacqua; it moreover simplifies the wider, complex social interactions and (false) relationships between the mafia and political entities such as Barone Lo Vasto and his wife, or the guilt of the *omertosi* inhabitants of the town.

This point is useful to illustrate the dangers of a simplistic reading of the film in a linear, chronological film history. For Roy Armes, in his chronology of neo-realist films, *Patterns of Realism*, 'these Sicilian films of Germi [*In nome della legge* and *Il cammino della speranza*, 1950] are best regarded not as works in a pure realistic tradition but as stylised Italian equivalents to the American western'. Armes takes issue specifically with the final scenes of *In nome della legge*, viewing the 'trite conclusion' of the film as part of its 'major defect of the handling of the Mafia'.<sup>63</sup> In essence the failure of the film, the compromise which is employed between hero and anti-hero, fails in the same terms identified in the introduction to this thesis that are regularly applied to representations of organized crime: it is not politically engaged enough as it is not realistic enough. The genre vehicle, the

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<sup>63</sup> Armes, p. 140.

western, is thus (casually) used as a resolution to the failures of the film in prescriptive, realist terms.<sup>64</sup>

In order to construct more efficiently the horizon of expectation of *In nome della legge*'s spectator we can search within the film further genre impulses. A useful starting point is Mary Wood's observation that the film contains elements of film noir, which contributed to its box office success.<sup>65</sup> Formal instances of this might include the overt use of chiaroscuro employed in interior locations, which often contrasts the blinding 'desert' of exterior shots. We could similarly note the influence of the hardboiled detective, apparent in Schiavi's unfaltering commitment to legal justice and an unfalteringly immaculate suit.



Figures 45-46: Noir/Gothic Iconography via Costume and Setting in *In nome della legge* (00:29:36; 01:13:50)

We might then extend these stylistics into a slightly different direction, as Danielle Hipkins does, by viewing further genre interpretations in light of a *gothic* impulse. The need to expand the genre impulses within the film emerges from another 'critical perplexity', which is that of the female protagonist. For Hipkins, a

<sup>64</sup> Armes is not alone in his use of the genre as a further qualification (negative or not) for what otherwise might fit more comfortably into a neorealist canon. Where both Fisher and Reich qualify the film as 'neorealist western'; under the second appendix, diplomatically entitled 'Some characteristics of the films called neorealist', Chris Wagstaff's 13<sup>th</sup> characteristic is, 'for Germi: using the contemporary narrative and figurative schemes of the Hollywood western to portray contemporary social and political problems'. Cf. Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 32-33; Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 67; Christopher Wagstaff, *Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), p. 411.

<sup>65</sup> Wood, p. 12.

wide oversight of this role, the consequence of ‘the film [having] been read within a male-dominated critical and generic framework’ results in the complex gendering codes of the narrative subjects remaining impenetrable.<sup>66</sup> The enigma surrounding Teresa, wife of the *Barone* and romantic interest (of sorts) for Schiavi, emerges from her non-sexuality: ‘Teresa is dressed modestly, and not shot to exude a powerful sex appeal. [...] Her interactions with Guido are rarely physical, but largely sentimentally loaded attempts to warn him away from the town’.<sup>67</sup> Taking into account the necessity to include a romantic relationship for the protagonist as a (late 1940s) ‘heterosexual alibi’ (ibid) that facilitates the fluctuating femininity of Schiavi as well as his relationship with Paolino, the complex romance with Teresa moreover adopts a central Oedipal function. Hipkins notes that ‘the emphasis on romantic music in the soundtrack [...] situates her firmly in the pre-Oedipal, maternal sphere of the aural and emotional, as opposed to the sexual and visual’, and thus in her reading ‘she represents a mother figure who ought to be rescued, and union with her is both inviting and instinctive’ – fits Teresa’s role is thus fitted into a wider Oedipal model of symbolic paternal conflict with Passalacqua.<sup>68</sup>

Hipkins argues that the strong contrast between the scenes featuring Teresa, typically interior or exterior by night, and those in relation to Passalacqua and Schiavi’s position as *pretore* reflect the film’s hybrid genre codes of western/paternal/exterior and gothic/maternal/interior. Key to this interpretation is the mansion depicted in the second shot, above:

One principal location for these discoveries, conforming to the classical gothic location, is the ‘beast’s castle,’ in this case, the house of the baron. [...] The hero appears dwarfed against the large wrought iron gates of his neighbour’s residence, and the film thus spatially aligns him with the gothic heroine,

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<sup>66</sup> Hipkins, p. 204.

<sup>67</sup> Hipkins, p. 206.

<sup>68</sup> Hipkins, p. 206.

overwhelmed by her encounter with the space of her new master (see Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, 1940).<sup>69</sup>

This is furthermore accentuated, for Hipkins, by the canny use of actor Massimo Girotti, whose 'typically masculine strength [...] combined with a feminine grace and delicacy [...] enabled him to cross between action and sentimental roles, appealing to audiences of all persuasions'.<sup>70</sup> The star is evidently a contribution to the spectator's horizon of expectation. Schiavi's role as a gothic *heroine*, which functions contemporaneously to that of a western sheriff, climaxes at the film's conclusion with the death of Paolino (who mutates into a son figure for Guido rather than a lover). Ultimately this leads Schiavi both to adopt, or be afforded, the paternal power from Passalacqua, who empathizes with the *pretore* in terms of fatherhood; and to abandon Teresa, with whom Schiavi was about to depart and who appears last in tears, withdrawing from the scene.



Figures 47-48: The Sacrifice of the Mother in *In nome della legge*, (01:33:55; 01:33:59)

Relying on a broader notion of genre-based interpretations of the film, all of which form a part of the spectator's horizon of expectation, ultimately allows us a more complex reading of the film's conclusion than has otherwise been allowed. Where critics might have written off the 'compromise' ending as a symbol of a social criticism that has succumbed to genre stylistics in the name of a more

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<sup>69</sup> Hipkins, p. 206.

<sup>70</sup> Hipkins, p. 208.

profound box-office success,<sup>71</sup> I side with Hipkins in the perception of a more subtle critique of a patriarchal, mafia society.<sup>72</sup> This reading allows us to frame the discrepancies noted above, such as the contradictions of the mafia's orders, in an ultimately more pessimistic light, perhaps suggesting that the punishment permitted against Messina is less as murderer than as the cause of the continued presence of the hardboiled man of the law. As such we might even review the final shot of the mafia on horseback as less of a vanquished retreat than as an ominous promise to return.

The reading of gothic or noir stylistics into *In nome della legge*, through their tracing as a prospective horizon of expectation, allows us to observe the clear limitations of the western model. Though I have singularly on *In nome della legge*, the same limitations are present in other instances of 'Sicilian westerns', such as *Il giorno della civetta*. Once again, the western impulses here are both clear and valid – the configuration of Franco Nero's character, Captain Bellodi, as the sheriff; the 'handsome stranger [...] who has come from afar to bring the rule of law to this wild frontier'.<sup>73</sup> This final point is crucial in particular to Bellodi, who at the end of Damiani's film 'disappears into the sunset',<sup>74</sup> though defeated by the mafia, his status as 'uomo', as labelled by Don Mariano remains intact. This is accentuated by the final scene, in which the Don observes the replacement police chief, 'Bellodi era un uomo, chisto me pare un quaquaraquà'.<sup>75</sup> Both Garofalo and Morreale

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<sup>71</sup> It was the third most popular of the 61 films released in the 1948-9 season (Wood, p. 88).

<sup>72</sup> 'When we acknowledge the role that gender, as well as the gothic genre, has to play in this – the hasty exclusion of the feminine underlining the superficial nature of this shift in Guido's narrative from regressive to progressive – we can confirm that ultimately the ending does make a telling social commentary: which law is the father's? Mafia law' (Hipkins, p. 209).

<sup>73</sup> Piero Garofalo, 'Damiano Damiani's *The Day of the Owl*: A Western Flirtation', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Renga, pp. 252-260 (p. 253).

<sup>74</sup> Garofalo, p. 253.

<sup>75</sup> This dialogue re-invokes Don Mariano's five categories of men, set out directly to Bellodi earlier in the script: 'io divido l'umanità in cinque categorie: ci sono gli uomini veri; i mezzi uomini; gli omicicchi; poi, mi scusi, i ruffiani, e in ultimo come se non ci fossero, i quaquaraquà. Sono

furthermore point out the horizon of expectation that accompanies Damiani's *autore* persona: moving from his recent westerns to this film, and mimicking the stylistic close-ups on the same stars (Nero and Lee J. Cobb).<sup>76</sup>

What the western-based reading of both of these films overlooks emerges in a theory of time and, I would argue, geography. In his essay on the westerner, Warshow argues that the image of honour that accompanies the genre's protagonists needs by definition to be articulated in a 'past-historic' discourse, as the spectator recognizes its essential simplicity and falsehood:

The Western hero is necessarily an archaic figure; we do not really believe in him and would not have him step out of his rigidly conventionalized background. But his archaicism does not take away from his power; on the contrary, it adds to it by keeping him just a little beyond the reach both of common sense and of absolutized emotion, the two usual impulses of our art. [...] Above all, the movies in which the Westerner plays out his role preserve for us the pleasures of a complete and self-contained drama [...] in a time when other, more consciously serious art forms are increasingly complex, uncertain, and ill-defined.<sup>77</sup>

The differentiation, or parenthesizing of the past in order to reign in common sense and absolutized emotion which are connected to the western film is the point at which compatibility with the majority of mafia films, even quite specifically *Il giorno della civetta*, breaks down. Should a western depend upon an 'impulse of realism' that overpowers a nostalgic and fictional if unilateral and socially underdeveloped depiction of the West, Warshow argues, the interest of the spectator would be lost. While certain films typecast Sicily into a framework of this underdeveloped nature, the ultimate death or exile of the sheriff figure which occurs in numerous films requires a specifically *present-tense* depiction of a complex and

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pochissimi gli uomini, i mezzi uomini pochi, già molto di più gli ominicchi – sono come i bambini che si credono grandi, quanto ai ruffiani... stanno diventando un vero esercito, e infine, i quaquaraquà: il branco di oche. E lei, anche se mi inchioda, è un uomo.'

<sup>76</sup> Garofalo, p. 253; cf. Morreale, p. 43.

<sup>77</sup> Warshow, p. 124.



morally ambiguous society in order to comment critically upon it.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the under-developed nature of the Sicilian landscape forms a part of the political commentary in the early mafia film. Following Elizabeth Leake, we might view the Sicilian mafia in terms of a series of archetypes set out in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's 1958 novel, *Il gattopardo* (or Visconti's 1963 adaptation), where the tensions between present and past are at root of the continued mafia domination. The key line of dialogue is, of course, Tancredi's infamous statement, 'Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi'.<sup>79</sup>

For Garofalo, the ultimate failure of Bellodi at the conclusion of *Il giorno della civetta* 'shares more with the western than the crime genre'.<sup>80</sup> This point categorically overlooks the tragic, futile impulse which informs a large amount of Italian crime fiction, more than anywhere else in the works of Leonardo Sciascia, who of course wrote the novel on which this film is based,<sup>81</sup> and the vast majority of the Sicilian-western films.

### The Comedy

A second common framework for representations of organized crime is the comedy. Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso* (1962), for instance, plays up contemporary stereotypes of Italy's North and South through the story of a Sicilian worker (Nino

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<sup>78</sup> In fact, the under-developed nature of the Sicilian landscape forms a part of the political commentary in the early mafia film.

<sup>79</sup> Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il gattopardo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1958, 1960), p. 42. Cf. Elizabeth Leake, 'Prototypes of the Mafia: Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard*', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Renga, pp. 234-242.

<sup>80</sup> Garofalo, p. 254.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by Mirna Ciconi and Nicoletta Di Ciolla (Newark; London: University of Delaware Press, 2008); in particular Ian Morrison, '*Il giorno della civetta* to *Il cavaliere e la morte*: Continuity and Change in the Detective Fiction of Leonardo Sciascia', pp. 99-114.

Badalamenti, played by Alberto Sordi)<sup>82</sup> in a Milanese factory who returns home with his family for a holiday. As with *In nome della legge*, the influences of contemporary productions can be observed within the film's stylistics, and taken as a frame of expectation for the spectator. Fournier Lanzoni, for instance, places the film within trends of the *commedia all'italiana*, comparing it specifically to *Una vita difficile* (Dino Risi, 1961) 'for its serious tone, which proved once again that Italian comedies were able to offer valuable prospects in their approach to social critique' and 'the inherent ability of tackling difficult subjects with the powerful device of entertainment and humour'.<sup>83</sup> In fact, scholarly responses resoundingly prioritize the film's treatment of social difference in Italy over that of the mafia.<sup>84</sup>

The comedy within the film takes place across a range of registers, from simple visual gags that are almost slapstick in nature (the unfortunately moustachioed sister of Nino, or Marta's shock at the size of her dinner portion) to verbal play (when Nino hears Trento instead of Trenton, New Jersey as his boss's hometown) as well as more complex ironies and satire. A crucial instance of the latter might be the slightly discontinuous beach scene, in which a number of

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<sup>82</sup> The contribution to the spectator's horizon of expectation that is brought by the star persona of Alberto Sordi, a common figure in the *commedia all'italiana*, should also be noted.

<sup>83</sup> Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style: The Golden Age of Film Comedies* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 117; p. 162.

<sup>84</sup> Moe foregrounds the blurring of geographical stereotypes and the issue of capitalist modernity in Italy; Bondanella describes it as an 'interesting and original mafia movie' that is rooted in 'an examination of Sicilian emigration to the industrial North in an era of rapid social change'; that Marco Ferreri was originally due to direct it (he is credited for the screenplay) is important to Aprà, who describes it as 'Ferreriano alle origini, *Mafioso* lo è anche per la capacità di elaborare un apologo che sintetizzi icasticamente le tensioni del mondo contemporaneo'. The film is quite interestingly referenced in a few volumes such as John Foot's *Milan Since the Miracle* in order to back up the historical or social analysis, and is phrased in volumes such as Landy's *Italian Film* and Nowell-Smith's *Oxford History of World Cinema* in sections analysing the representation of the *Mezzogiorno*. Cf. Nelson Moe, 'Modernity, Mafia Style: Alberto Lattuada's *Il mafioso*', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Renga, pp. 219-225; Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 192; Adriano Aprà, *Alberto Lattuada, Il cinema e il film* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), p. 18; John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 83; Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 144-48; Morando Morandini, 'Italy: Auteurs and After', in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 586-96 (p. 592).

Sicilian men ruminate on the cause of alienation of Southern Italians, putting it down to an issue of miscommunication in particular with women. This takes place, ironically, over the sand-sculpture of a nude woman with accentuated breasts and lips. Any possible progression here is denied, as Lattuada concretizes the judgment on the Sicilian men who, when listening to Nino describe ‘le femmine a Milano’ and a particular love affair, turn an eroticized gaze upon Marta in her swimsuit. Once again, the humour of the scene emerges from Nino’s blindness, explicitly facing the opposing direction to the other men, precisely as he says ‘a Milano dicono: faccia smorta, coscia forte’ before the camera cuts (via reverse shot and with a zoom, emphasizing the eroticized gaze) to, precisely, Marta’s thighs. Though the regaling of his conquests permits a typically ‘male’ promiscuity, when he catches the men ogling his wife – who intimates enjoyment with the flirtation by wanting to join the men – Nino becomes hypocritically annoyed, telling them off, ‘io vivo a Milano ma sicilianu sugnu’ and blocking her ‘un sorriso e basta, vieni via’. As Landy puts it, ultimately ‘[t]he question of masculine honour is tied to the female body as male property’.<sup>85</sup>



Figures 49-51: Nino’s Blindness / the Objectifying Gaze on Marta in *Mafioso* (00:58:16; 00:58:20; 00:58:22)

It is through the foregrounding of such ironies and contradictions as these, and in making a kind of tragic humour out of them, that the film fits into a schema of the *commedia all’italiana* of that period. Central to this art of the spectator’s expectation is the film’s use of tragedy. As Enrico Giovacelli observes, ‘[è] tipico

<sup>85</sup> Landy, p. 148.

della commedia all'italiana annullare sempre più la distanza fra comico e tragico',<sup>86</sup> we might indeed consider a film such as *Il sorpasso* (Dino Risi, 1962) as similar and representative in this regard. It is *Mafioso*'s conclusion – when Nino has been smuggled to New York to kill a man in a barbershop on behalf of the mafia, before returning home and travelling back to his same old life in Milan – where the tragi-comedy reaches an expected peak: returning a pen to a colleague that Nino had accidentally stolen at the film's beginning, the colleague responds, steeped in dramatic irony, 'se tutti fossero come lei, si vivrebbe meglio'.

The process of tragi-comic social critique in the film in fact relates only casually to the function of the mafia within this society, once we move beyond a reasonably straightforward comment on the tragedy of universal, patriarchal power. Once again, wider and more complex genre hybridity conceals more complex interpretations. In *Mafioso*, this is centralized on the New York sequence, which downplays the comedy of the rest of the film in favour of a series of horror stylistics.<sup>87</sup> We can moreover observe a re-codifying of the protagonist as childlike, in order to accentuate the nightmarish experience. This is foregrounded by the repeated line of dialogue, 'mamma chiede, e picciotto va e fa' – said first by Don Liborio, echoed by Don Vincenzo (the mafia capo, the 'mamma'), and then later repeated to himself by Nino when en route.<sup>88</sup> Throughout the journey, Nino is positioned as the childlike figure – both in the sense of naivety as well as his

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<sup>86</sup> Enrico Giacovelli, *La commedia all'italiana: la storia, i luoghi, gli autori, gli attori, i film* (Rome: Gremese, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Judith Crist has noted *Mafioso* as 'a rare film in that it goes from comedy to horror and back to everyday life without a break. What begins as a pleasantly sophisticated domestic comedy suddenly turns into a chiller; the man in the button-down collar becomes the tool of mafia terror'. Judith Crist, *The Private Eye, the Cowboy, and the Very Naked Girl: Movies from Cleo to Clyde* (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 89.

<sup>88</sup> The figure of Don Vincenzo is recurrent in the dialogue from the start, when Nino's boss asks him whether he remembers the Don, and Nino immediately recalls childhood playing at his villa; through to Don Liborio's interrogation of 'rispetto per i vecchi amici' to Nino, who responds 'per me, prima vengono mia madre e mio padre, poi viene Don Vincenzo... anzi! Tutti insieme vengono'.

subjugation – via careful high angle shots and controlled staging, and he is first scolded and then praised like a child when he responds to the home-movie footage of the assassination target. This triggers uncomfortable narrative parallels between Nino who guides his children into Sicily, and Don Vincenzo (as mother) who guides Nino to New York.



Figures 52-53: Nino Positioned as Subordinated Child (01:16:28; 01:24:39)

The suspense that led to this climactic sequence builds throughout the film via subtle nods to horror iconography throughout the film, in particular through Piero Picconi's clever score. To give an instance, the second half of the beach scene depicts the Badalamenti family relaxing in a boat, with Nino – again, wonderfully ironically – renouncing all his worldly cares. As the camera reflects a close-up of his face, the *placido, leggero* strings score mutates into an *inquietante*, menacing slow crescendo of sharp notes and chords which underlie the shouts of 'Nino Badalamenti', summoned to see Don Vincenzo. This section of the score, repeated during the film for instance when introduced to the character of Don Liborio, adopts the function of a horror film cue, 'subconsciously recognized by the audience, creating certain feelings of horror and dread'.<sup>89</sup> This establishes Don Vincenzo and his number two, Don Liborio, as the figures of power and intimidation.

<sup>89</sup> Brigid Cherry, *Horror* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 70.

The sensation of horror is moreover introduced in the New York sequence via the construction of suspense. Derry observes that ‘the creation of suspense demands that enough information be revealed to the spectator so he or she can anticipate what might happen; suspense then remains operative until the spectator’s expectations are foiled, fulfilled, or the narrative is frozen without any resolution at all’.<sup>90</sup> Though the spectator is ignorant to the specifics of the hit, the film has at this point made it explicit that the ‘hunting trip’ is a farce designed to explain Nino’s prolonged absence. The appearance of Don Liborio, unbeknown to Nino, recalls the sensation of horror, such that the sudden presence of the ominous black cat, causing the protagonist to stop in his tracks, assumes a more symbolic role, and temporarily frustrates the suspense. Soon after, the re-appearance of Don Liborio, shot from a menacing low angle, builds it once again.

The innocent child figure is then led into a suffocating, expressionist nightmare in which he is visibly frightened and disoriented, first menaced by the mafia Dons, then locked in a claustrophobic crate and flown to New York to commit a hit. The comedy by this stage has almost completely vanished. The ongoing horror is emphasized visually through distorted focuses, claustrophobic angles and close-ups or extreme close-ups on Nino and the other mafiosi, obscured views, chiaroscuro contrasts, as well as a deafening jazz soundtrack and (threatening) linguistic confusion. The shift in location, from the rural village to the metropolis, contributes to the claustrophobic menace, and undoubtedly plays on a further expectation horizon of New York as the location of (serious) classical gangster films.

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<sup>90</sup> Charles Derry, *The Suspense Thriller: Films in the Shadow of Alfred Hitchcock* (London: McFarland, 2002), p. 31.



Figures 54-59: The Arrival of Don Liborio (01:14:30); The Menacing Extreme Close-ups on Nino and Don Vincenzo (01:16:16; 01:18:09); Nino's Blinded Perspective in the Crate (01:21:33); the Mirror/Trompe l'oeil Crowd from Disorienting Low-angle (01:27:36); the Linguistic Confusion and Confrontation (01:37:34)

Nino does, eventually, murder the man, though the suspense is accented until the last instant since the victim gets his gun caught under the barber's cover. Where the protagonist is depicted from the start as a hero, a morally good figure,<sup>91</sup> and given his clear reluctance in this act, I would argue that the expectation is in fact built for him not to go through with the hit – this is precisely why, relying on Derry's terms, the scene is so tense. The fact that he does eventually kill the man, then, is essentially a frustration of expectation, alienating the spectator and disallowing the heroic moral resolution of the tale and replacing it with tragedy. Yet this tragedy is facilitated by the precipitation of Nino into an alien environment and the accordant, typical actions, which are reflected formally in the drastic shift in the film's stylistics.<sup>92</sup> Thus horror and suspense stylistics accentuate the political, anti-mafia message. Once the sequence has finished, and Nino has been rushed back to his family in Sicily before they return to Milan, Lattuada nevertheless does not

<sup>91</sup> It is possible to read opening sequence, in which Nino instructs a worker at the Milanese factory *not* to work at the highest rate of efficiency, in favour of less risk of injury, as a (minor) rejection of negative, capitalist values in favour of a moral, humane persona.

<sup>92</sup> The movement of Nino into an alien environment evidently assists the spectator, too, in not rupturing entirely our empathy with the comic lead: though the alienation occurs, through our shock, the absence of empathy towards the murdered party and the geographical dislocation functions to 'soften the blow'.

allow the sequence to go forgotten, instead cutting in nightmare flashbacks of New York as much for the spectator as for the protagonist.

What is most intriguing about the construction of the nightmare/horror sequence is undoubtedly the categorization of parent-child, and specifically the configuration of the mafia as mother where typically it is reasoned singularly in terms of patriarchal power. This is not to suggest that patriarchal dominance is absent from the film, which is quite evidently not the case, but rather that mafia power is codified in the duality of individual patriarchs (Don Vincenzo, Don Liborio, Nino's boss in Milan, the American mafiosi) within a broad framework of motherly dominance ('mamma chiede, picciotto va e fa').<sup>93</sup> Within this duality it is possible to locate a more profound social commentary in the film. Immediately a loose Oedipus complex can be read over the narrative through Nino, who when re-infantilized will return to the underdeveloped desire for the mother figure, and thus more readily follow her bidding. The mafia's dominance can moreover be read in terms of castration anxiety, where the fear of emasculation for the male character equates to being cast-out (or murdered) by the criminal organization on behalf of the threatening 'patriarchal' individuals. To avoid castration, the male illustrates strict loyalty and obedience to the mother: 'chi non conosce Don Vincenzo? Lo conoscono tutti, e lui conosce a tutti noi, e a tutti noi ci tiene nel suo cuore'. Quite evidently, described in these terms the film presents a paradigmatic model of organized crime and corruption, where the normal everyman such as Nino is swept up and overpowered. Presenting it as coerced through a dominant mother figure

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<sup>93</sup> As with the horror music cues, and many of the visual effects and cinematography of the film, the maternal control in Lattuada's film once again recalls Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), where dominance and the murderous impulse are pushed into a performance of motherhood.



becomes ultimately an unmitigated and damning, satirical critique of organized crime and corruption in Sicily, and indeed internationally.<sup>94</sup>

*Mafioso* can be quite interestingly read, following Jameson's theory of the dialectic of art forms, as a mediation between high- and low-brow mafia comedies. Though generally the mafia comedy is given little critical attention, for the reasons I outline in the introduction to this thesis, the critical little work that is done is facilitated by *autore* readings: as such, there is some work on film such as Nanni Loy's *Mi manda Picone* (1984), Lina Wertmüller's *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore* (1972), and Daniele Cipri and Franco Maresco's *Lo zio di Brooklyn* (1995) and *Totò che visse due volte* (1998).<sup>95</sup> This work nevertheless overlooks a series of lowbrow comedies, such as Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia vehicles *L'onorata società* (Riccardo Pazzaglia, 1961) or *I due mafiosi* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1964), released contemporaneously to *Mafioso*, that a reading based on the horizon of expectation forces back into focus.

Relying on the terms provided by Umberto Eco that are set out in the previous chapter, it is not difficult to view *I due mafiosi*'s *alienated* form: the narrative pattern simplistically echoes and exaggerates the trip of Nino Badalamenti to New York, only with Franco and Ciccio sent to Paris instead.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>94</sup> The trip to New York is evidently crucial to this model. Though *Mafioso* ultimately seeks to outline a universal critique of organized crime through the whole film, the emphatic importance of the New York episode in this satire of the mafia perhaps leads us to pinpoint specifically the Amercian city, like the Sicilian countryside, as a location that is dominated by the mafia patriarchy-matriarchy duality. This, once again, makes recourse to a wider horizon of expectation that ties to the classical American gangster film (and has relevance in the post-*Godfather* films, too).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Bondanella, 2009, p. 502, on Loy; Thomas Harrison, 'Smaller and Larger Families: Lina Wertmüller's *The Seduction of Mimi*', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Renga, pp. 261-69 on Wertmüller; Luana Babini, 'The Mafia: New Cinematic Perspectives' in *Italian Cinema: New Directions*, ed. by William Hope (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 229- 50 (p. 239) on Cipri and Maresco.

<sup>96</sup> The same narrative patterns of false romantic interests, friendships, and ultimate failures of the protagonists are then echoed in different time periods and countries in the spin-offs, *I due mafiosi*

reading this parody in dialectical terms illustrates not only that Simonelli anticipates his viewer recognizing the parodied text, thus communal to both films, but moreover builds on this knowledge to construct comedy, and in certain cases some strikingly similar political commentary. This is best illustrated via an example. The opening sequence of *I due mafiosi* establishes the film's subject matter of the Sicilian mafia through the clichéd sound of the *scacciapensiero*<sup>97</sup> and a very explicit visual echo of *In nome della legge*:



Figures 60-61: Parodies of the 'Showdown' & Subordinating Camerawork, *I due mafiosi* (00:03:05; 00:03:55)

The conversation between Franco, Ciccio and Don Calogero that follows is farcical, with the 'contadinotti' enacting/imagining an entire conversation with a corpse in order to highlight (and render absurd) the mafia's persuasive power. The film is then quick to paint this power in familiar terms of motherhood, as Franco and Ciccio attempt to thank the mafia capo for their newly attained status as *piciotti*:

Franco: Grazie, Don Calogero, grazie. Un padre siete per noi!

Don Calogero: Prima di tutto, viene la mamma.

Franco: Ma noi orfani siamo!

Don Calogero: Da questo momento la mamma per voi è la nostra onorata società.

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*nel Far West* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1964), *I due mafiosi contro Goldginger* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1965) and *I due mafiosi contro Al Capone* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1966).

<sup>97</sup> This small musical instrument is the acoustic accompaniment of the mafioso *par excellence* since its appearance in the ambush sequence of *Salvatore Giuliano*. A further, valuable example of its use is Dino Risi's mafia based parody of *I nuovi mostri* (Risi, Mario Monicelli & Ettore Scola, 1977) entitled 'Con i saluti degli amici', the pace of the *scacciapensiero* underlies the rhythm and suspense of the assassination attempt, then finally for a culminating comic effect underscoring the punch line of the soon-to-expire mafioso.

Most striking about this exchange is of course the overlap with the gendering of parental power which is taken from *Mafioso*, albeit accentuated and parodied thanks to the quick and humorous interjections of Franchi. It is not coincidental that this sequence, as with *In nome della legge* and *Mafioso*, makes use of high angle shots to accentuate the power.

Though space prevents a more detailed expansion of this issue, what my comments here have sought to demonstrate is that in essence parodied forms such as comedy – though also any ‘alienated’ genre form which takes its cue from forms of repetition and exaggeration – can, as well as offering its own political insight, be hugely valuable in the discerning and mapping out of a ‘vocabulary’ of mafia film. The sequence from *I due mafiosi* attests this through the mimicry of audio and visuals from other mafia films as well as the parodying of the representation of mafia power.

### The Giallo

Taking *Salvatore Giuliano* as the essential political-mafia film – ‘Con il film di Rosi comincia il cinema politico italiano, di cui il cinema sulla mafia rappresenta il sottoinsieme più cospicuo’ – Emiliano Morreale then questions the position of *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo* as two similarly defining ‘political’ texts. He argues that together the films constitute a kind of trinity of the Italian mafia film, where the latter two in fact hark back to contrary genre influences:

Il film di Petri è in effetti legato, più che a Rosi, a un certo grottesco tipico dei film siciliani di Germi (*Divorzio all'italiana*, 1962, *Sedotta e abbandonata*, 1964) e Lattuada (*Mafioso*). [...] Nel film di Damiani [...] la vicinanza col western è evidente fin dalla sequenza iniziale e dalla musica di Giovanni Gusco [...]. Insomma alle radici della *mafia-movie* pare esserci un bizzarro triangolo: *Salvatore Giuliano* (e diciamo il giornalismo ‘democratico’, stile inchieste dell’*Europeo* più che *L’Ora*), echi della commedia grottesca e ritmi e

paesaggi dello spaghetti-western, che proprio in quel momento conosce l'apogeo.<sup>98</sup>

There are, of course, bound to be limitations to this model: the presence of external genres such as the gothic or horror being the most obvious, in light of the above. We might also question the author's eagerness to assume three very explicitly *impegnati* texts, albeit the lesson of Jameson demonstrates that less overtly political, mass produced texts are latent within this schema. Nevertheless, this tripartite model of genre influences at the root of organized crime cinema is fruitful, as my focus on two of the three (the western and the comedy) above hopes to testify. The third point of the triangle nevertheless remains problematic, and I would argue that this requires a slight re-alignment away from 'giornalismo "democratico"' or the *cine-inchiesta* towards, simply, a looser criminal-investigative impulse – along the lines of the *giallo* (at least, in the bibliographic sense rather than the cinematic horror form) or the detective film. Enacting this shift offers a less restrictive model that creates space for a vast majority of Italian mafia films: modernist, like *Salvatore Giuliano* and *Lucky Luciano*, which are both investigations of sorts; and popular, such as the organized crime *poliziotteschi* vehicles. This shift in definition is supported, as will be demonstrated, by a brief examination of the films' horizons of expectation.

Beyond the evident point that the *cine-inchiesta* is a very limited strain of cinema (it extends little beyond Rosi and Giuseppe Ferrara's cinema), the problematic absence of the crime genre within Morreale's model is moreover illustrated by the author's insistence upon Petri's *A ciascuno il suo* as a comedy, in particular as emblematic of the comedy strain of mafia film (a role which *Mafioso* would more readily adopt). While there is a certain tragedy to the film's conclusion

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<sup>98</sup> Morreale, pp. 42-43.

that is not unrelated to the *commedia all'italiana*, I would hesitate somewhat to qualify this film thus since it quite evidently relies predominantly on different genre stylistics. The humour of the film is neither central nor straightforward, and as such comparisons to a film like *Mafioso* are tenuous.

From its opening sequences, *A ciascuno il suo* is constructed as a criminal investigation, and Gian Maria Volontè's character, Paolo Laurana, as an alternative detective.<sup>99</sup> The film adopts several narrative techniques from the detective-noir, yet it dislocates them from their typically metropolitan setting and relocates them in the Sicilian countryside. A very widely repeated tendency of this subgenre, moreover, appears to be a final distancing of the spectator, frustrating them at the film's conclusion (either the specific 'whodunit' is never clarified, or in some other way *legal* order will not be restored and mafia rule will persist). The crime that is introduced at the opening of *A ciascuno il suo* is the murder of two men – Arturo Manno and Antonio Roscio – and what remains of the narrative is a continuous push to solve the mystery that is guided by clues and evidence. It is possible thus to trace the traditional dual structure of the detective fiction that is observed by Tzvetan Todorov: 'At the base of the whodunit we find a duality [...] The novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation'.<sup>100</sup> The first story of *A ciascuno il suo* is the film's prologue: the framing of the pharmacist, Manno, who is receiving anonymous, newspaper cut-out

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<sup>99</sup> There are some further comments to be made about the figure of Gian Maria Volontè being used in this role in relation to the horizon of expectation. Quite evidently his reputation for political and westerns will assist in the configuration of the character within the audiences' viewing position; probably the film is seeking to echo his first major role as Salvatore Carnevale in *Un uomo da bruciare* to some extent. Anton Giulio Mancino phrases Volontè's roles as 'maschere sociali', accentuating the weight and social function of the roles which he prudently selected (Anton Giulio Mancino, 'La maschera sociale', in *Un attore contro. Gian Maria Volontè. I film e le testimonianze*, ed. by Franco Montini and Piero Spila (Milan: BUR, 2005), pp. 59-83, see in particular p. 82 for an outline of these roles).

<sup>100</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p. 44.

letters that threaten his life; the pharmacist's shameless infidelity; and his death alongside the doctor (Roscio) on a hunting trip. The second is Laurana's investigation. We might not class the film as a "pure" whodunit', in Todorov's words, since the stories do overlap via Laurana and Roscio's friendship (and the all important first clue). Nevertheless, the shift of protagonist from Manno to Laurana, in addition to the audience's window onto both stories, does betray an adherence to this model.<sup>101</sup>

Though the film includes no flashbacks, typical to the detective movie, there is nonetheless some toying with gaps in information that can be comprehended, following David Bordwell (who follows Propp and Shlovsky), in accordance with controlled communication between *syuzhet* (narrative in the film) and *fabula* (the plot in chronological order). Bordwell writes: 'The fundamental narrational characteristic of the detective tale is that the *syuzhet* withholds crucial events occurring in the "crime" portion of the *fabula*',<sup>102</sup> which triggers an on-going question; in this case, it relates to the mystery identity of the murderer of Roscio and Manno. Here the film, characteristically to the genre, delays communication between plot and narrative until the conclusion (such as the revelation of the affair between Luisa, Roscio's wife, and Rosello), and it moreover employs 'retardatory material' (the instances Thompson offers are comedy, romance, and the commission of more crimes: in this case the romance between Laurana and Luisa is key)<sup>103</sup> and red herrings (here we might include the assumption that Manno was the

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<sup>101</sup> Evidently the opening sequences of *I padroni della città*, with a mystery to be resolved (who was the boy in the opening sequence?) echoes this structure.

<sup>102</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 64.

<sup>103</sup> Bordwell, p. 64. It is evidently possible to trace post-War American noir influences in the construction of Luisa as a 'femme fatale' who betrays Laurana and leads him to his death, as a consequence of the blindness brought about by her erotic interest. Though space prevents expanding this point, this might also raise some very interesting questions about the social function of the character in relation to the femme fatale of 1940s noir, widely viewed as an embodiment of male anxieties about place and work in post-War American culture. Given the social function of Laurana

focus of the hit, which turns out to be part of the ploy established by the real killers).

The film's cinematography underscores these absences and retardations. The opening sequence, for instance, very explicitly prioritizes the anonymous letter as it is delivered by the postman – it is of course not coincidental that the letter becomes a central clue which both spurs the investigation and forms a presumed part of the denouement (the framing of Manno as objective to the assassination).<sup>104</sup> The letter appears first in the hands of the postman, whereby it is framed twice via harsh zooms (the second time in a bag disallowing us to forget its presence); then it is given an extreme close up on the table as it is handed to Manno; we then follow it being opened with another close up; then as he hands it to a colleague sitting outside a further harsh zoom is used. Then the letter is handed around between four friends, before finally being framed over the face of Laurana:



Figures 62-64: The Visual Prioritization of the First 'Clue' in *A ciascuno il suo* (00:02:20; 00:02:50; 00:04:15)

What follows is a series of clever camera work that establishes tension via prospective leads to the inevitable murder: 'in a detective film, almost anyone may turn out to be the culprit'.<sup>105</sup> This ranges from a first glance of Raganà to Manno's wife – who is reading a detective novel in bed, ironically played up in the dialogue

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as a specifically left-wing, intellectual male who is for the most part de-sexualized, we can conclude that this reading would be a very fertile area for an analysis of similar anxieties within this context.

<sup>104</sup> There is perhaps a link to be made here between the Petri's film and the 'Purloined Letter' of Edgar Allan Poe's novel, and specifically Lacan's reading of the paper as a pure signifier (with the details within the letter being essentially irrelevant) that was published one year before the film. Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Bordwell, p. 64.

– and even at one stage the ominous music and a slow pan seems to suggest something menacing about Roscio himself at the beginning of the hunting trip. Quite evidently the suspense and the use of these techniques demonstrates that the ‘whodunit’ aspect is central to the spectator’s expectation of the film.<sup>106</sup> When the murder itself occurs, the audience is offered a privileged spectatorship – we observe it, and even catch a glimpse of an unfamiliar killer – though the absence of communication between *fabula* and *syuzhet* remains in place as we have not yet been able to explain the murder.

Reading this film in terms of a horizon of expectation built around detective fiction provides very intriguing results. First of all, this leads to a prioritized reading of Laurana as the detective. Though not the cliché, hard-boiled figure of noir fiction, it is not difficult to read Gian Maria Volontè’s character as cathartic to the resolution of the questions raised throughout, that is, the re-alignment of the two narratives or the *syuzhet* and *fabula*.<sup>107</sup> Daniela Bini observes an interesting departure from the text from which the film is adapted – the eponymous novel by Leonardo Sciascia, from 1966 – in relation to the motivation of the protagonist. Whereas for the literary professor, the resolution of the murder is rooted in ‘intellectual curiosity’ of a man who ‘reasons, reflects, reads and does not act’, ‘an inept man, cut off from reality’, Bini notes that

the philosophical and Sicilian core of Sciascia’s text is, in fact, taken over by the political commitment of Elio Petri’s Laurana, who wants to go to the Palermo police and denounce the assassin, proclaiming ‘a murderer is a murderer that must be caught and punished’.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> We might note here how the suspense is created, as was the case in *Mafioso*, according to an absence of knowledge and an expectation of some resolution/frustration, coherent with Derry’s model, mentioned above (Derry, p. 31).

<sup>107</sup> For a useful outline of the hardboiled cop, cf. Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 72-73.

<sup>108</sup> Daniela Bini, ‘The Failure of the Intellectual: Elio Petri’s Filming of Leonardo Sciascia’s *To Each His Own*’, in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Renga, pp. 243-251 (p. 244).



The inspector with the stronger social conscience that is to be found in Petri's film evidently assumes more prominently a traditional role of instilling social order. His role as an outsider ('astratto'/'distratto', according to the misunderstanding of his mother), who works for the most part in Palermo and who is politically isolated (by association with a communist member of parliament, and labelled with a derisory tone by his nemesis, Rosello, to another politician) nevertheless remains central to his investigative role.

The social role and the failings of Laurana are supported by an on-going motif within the film of sight and blindness that centres and culminates on the 'inspector', which, etymologically, implies someone who watches or oversees. In relation to Laurana, this is first introduced in the final shot reproduced above, as Volontè quite deliberately lifts the anonymous letter up in front of his face, masking the character and symbolically foreshadowing the blindness to the letter's true author that will directly lead, eventually, to his death. In fact the film quite ironically presents Laurana as having an ability to see/inspect through comparisons with seemingly 'blind' characters, such as (most explicitly) Roscio's father, the now blind 'oculista famoso'; (more subtly) characters such as Rosello and Luisa who often 'hide' their sight through sunglasses, unlike Laurana. This motif is strongly grounded in the cinematography and mise-en-scène, often including shots that include masks or false/missed matches on action that leave us blind, or reproducing eyesight imagery through the camera or the set.



Figures 65-67: Surveillance, Sight and Blindness in *A ciascuno il suo*  
(00:17:07; 00:44:47; 00:53:39)

As well as fitting into the wider schema of withheld knowledge and non-communication on which this genre is built, the symbolic blindness or the rejection of sight of the characters in the film ultimately enters into the director's comment on the *omertà* within this society. This can be illustrated through various encounters with the 'chorus' of the town, with the ordinary people who quite evidently understand a great deal more about the power structures of the village. This includes the postman in the first sequence, whose shaded eyes contrast (again ironically) the 'sight' of Manno, who is blindly approaching his death. The most explicit interplay of blindness and *omertà* is the encounter between Laurana and the aunt of Rosina, from whom the detective hopes to procure a witness that would effectively save the innocent arrestees from the false accusation of the murders. Nevertheless, not only does Rosina refuse to speak to Laurana (still observing him from the window via a point-of-view surveillance shot), but her aunt then contradicts herself in the name of *omertà*:

Laurana: Ma il giorno del delitto, dell'omicidio, vostro fratello e vostro nipote  
ond'erano?

Zia: Cca erano

L: Cca?

Z: Sì.

L: Ma... E chi li ha visti?

Z: Tutti l'hanno visti

L: Tutti chi? [pausa] Li avete visti pure voi? Eh?

Z: No. [pausa] Io non c'ero. Non c'ero io.

Though quite evidently the woman has understood exactly the scenario, undoubtedly saw, and would be an alibi, the local power frightens her into silence. It is precisely this power to which Laurana is blind, and of course it is not coincidental that it is precisely this power that he is inspecting, as the film's detective.

The knowledge and sight of the secondary characters in this film in fact challenges (or perhaps simply re-writes) the reading of inspection genre codes: it is

almost certain that the expectation of the spectator is to know precisely ‘whodunit’, just as the Sicilians in this film do. From early in the film, as soon as Laurana understands the mafia associations of Rosello, then the later discovered attempts of Roscio to denounce the lawyer; or perhaps even before since, as mentioned, we see the neutral, anonymous killer’s face, it is clear that the culprit is less a defined character than simply ‘power as such’, to borrow O’Leary’s epithet for the mafia.<sup>109</sup> In fact, the broad assumption of mafia culpability as an almost contradictory, ‘spoiler’ motif that undermines the investigation is common to the vast majority of detective-narrative mafia films. This includes, for instance, Damiani’s *Come si uccide un magistrato* (1976) and *Un uomo in ginocchio* (1980). The historical-biographical films of Ferrara (e.g. *Giovanni Falcone*, 1993), Scimeca (e.g. *Placido Rizzotto*, 2000) and Squitieri (*Il prefetto di ferro*, 1977), though the bleak ending and mafia culpability is never in question, often similarly employ investigative narratives. In fact, retrospectively we can even observe the investigatory strain within *Lucky Luciano*, *I padroni della città* and, to a lesser extent *Tony Arzenta*. Since in each of these films the revelation of the guilty individual typically remains an enigma, though the culpability (and denunciation) of the mafia is pre-destined, the films undermine the possibility of a dramatic dénouement. The investigation still takes place, however, despite the predictability that this entails.<sup>110</sup>

Given the frequency of this outcome in this strain of films, it is worth acknowledging a strain of the detective film ‘all’italiana’, which, while limited (to

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<sup>109</sup> Alan O’Leary, ‘Power as Such: The Idea of the Mafia in Francesco Rosi’s *Illustrious Corpses*’, in *Mafia Movies: a Reader*, ed. by Renga, pp. 279-86.

<sup>110</sup> Perhaps in a wider process that stands up to the alienation of form, in some films the audience is offered surprising twists at the end, such as in *Gente di rispetto* (Luigi Zampa, 1973), in which the mafia are not responsible for the main murder; or in both *In nome della legge* and *Il giorno della civetta*, in which the ‘detective’ unusually survives.

some extent)<sup>111</sup> in its ability to offer shocking revelations, makes use of this formula to offer an ultimate critique on the mafia. Put back into the terms used by critics of detective fiction such as Todorov, in these films we do still have a reconciliation of the two narratives, and a completion of communication between *favola* and *syuzhet*. And yet unlike the great inspectors of the genre such as Poirot or Philo Vance who ‘we cannot imagine [...] threatened by some danger, attacked, wounded, even killed’,<sup>112</sup> the risk of injury or death is much greater for the Italian ‘inspector’. We can conclude as such that the two narratives in the Italian version *do not* maintain the same mutually exclusive value. As such, these films repetitively and accumulatively enforce the same bleak, conclusive message about the omnipotence of the organized crime which has been traced out through the tragicomic suppression of the protagonist in the mafia-comedy, and the defeat and re-location of the sheriff figure in the mafia-western.

#### iv. Conclusion

Though the films analysed above share much, such as this bleak ending, re-reading them in terms of alternative genres and the expectations that these create of them has illustrated that the term ‘mafia movie’ does not suffice to describe them. Doing so has moreover stood to mark the complexity of the interpretative process for each film, which in each case is undoubtedly guided by a broad set of expectations. The gothic factor of *In nome della legge*, for instance, can be taken as signalling an expectation that ultimately challenges the typical reading of the film’s optimistic

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<sup>111</sup> *A ciascuno il suo* does nonetheless offer some surprise in its denouement through the revelation of Luisa’s affair with Rosello; other films such as Zampa’s *Gente di rispetto* (1975) plays with this expectation through the whodunit genre to have a surprising conclusion where it is not the mafia who murder a crude man (he insults Jennifer O’Neill’s character in the opening sequence, leaving her open to accusations of murder) but rather a traditional, embittered old lawyer (played by James Mason).

<sup>112</sup> Todorov, p. 45.

ending; similarly the horror stylistics of *Mafioso* serve to contrast the film's humour, thus pushing a more demanding message of engagement. Yet what the films do share – the bleak ending, the imagery of patriarchal omnipotence, or the unquestioned, but also un-vocalized, knowledge that the mafia is responsible for local crime – stands to illustrate the horizon of expectation of the mafia film as an emergent 'filone' that bears its own expectation. The final case, *A ciascuno il suo*, could in fact be read as an application of this horizon to the genre of detective fiction.

This chapter has traced an evolution in the conception of the spectator, from a passive figure who is due to respond dutifully to the messages inherent in a political text, as suggested by Lukács; to the implicit understanding that spectators seek different texts for different motives, in Jameson; to the free interpreter who responds actively and individually to any text, that matches Hall's model. Yet making these re-evaluations, as mentioned, nonetheless brings with it much difficulty in the very pinning down of patterns of interpretation: a theoretically viable scenario would be that in which each viewer responds to a text according to *different* negotiated or oppositional codes, thus rendering any broad comment on the political interpretation of a text difficult. The concerns raised about spectatorship halfway through this chapter, articulated best by Burns, therefore remain; as she states, the issues of plurality of readership and interpretation are, fundamentally, irresolvable. Forging patterns of reception, or horizons of expectation, thus functions as a final theoretical model to be implemented here, in order to help (rather than to resolve *per se*) these problems.

The emancipation of the spectator that has been traced here, much like the 'emancipation' of forms of realism which I discussed earlier, quite evidently fits

historically in that same period in which, as Burns writes, *impegno* is becoming fragmented. It is by no means coincidental that she, as well as Antonello and Mussgnug, looks to *impegno* studies in the last decades of the twentieth century via ‘reader-centric paradigms’.<sup>113</sup> Indeed as I have hinted throughout this chapter, the location of *impegno* must increasingly be not (only) in the ‘engagement’ of the author/director – her ‘moral, intellectual and aesthetic commitment’ – but also, or instead, in the process of interpretation that is undertaken by the spectator. Turning to the act of interpretation thus marks the same shift from macro- to micropolitics that Antonello and Mussgnug associate with ‘post-hegemonic *impegno*’.<sup>114</sup> My readings of *I padroni della città* and *Tony Arzenta* have sought to illustrate this, where *impegno* was perhaps not the primary focus of either Ferdinando di Leo or Duccio Tessari. With this in mind, both the intrinsic problem of ‘openness’ that is raised by Hall’s theory, and the possibility to focus or clarify analysis that is facilitated by Jauss, can apply to the discourses surrounding *impegno*. A central question, which will be faced in the remainder of this thesis, arises here: can we outline a ‘horizon of expectation’ that is built over a committed text? If so, what criteria can be employed in order to do so, given that *impegno*, like the representation of organized crime, cannot be pinned down to a genre, but is better classed as a topos or *macro* topos, that spans across a number of films? Will the horizon of expectation that relates to the engaged text ultimately shape itself according to the same impulses within the press that choose ‘modernist’ films as better qualified to comment on society, thus overlooking the popular text entirely?

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<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), p. 35; Antonello and Mussgnug, p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> Antonello and Mussgnug, p. 11.

As stipulated at the beginning, a secondary aim of this chapter has been to bring into question the Marxist framework as the ideology of *impegno*. I suggested that, like realism, this foundational impulse behind the agenda of political commitment will not disappear altogether, but rather that certain dogmatic assumptions will come to be undermined. The identification of a dialectic of cultural forms that is identified by Jameson performs precisely this function: the categorical dismissal of popular forms of art, that which is mass-produced and mass-consumed, is brought into question in its direct association with modernist art. I argue that the same dialectic is intrinsically linked to the dismissal of popular forms of organized crime cinema in favour of socially engaged texts in Italian society. Consequently, the two forms cannot be dislocated from one another, and the influence of popular images of the mafia must therefore be taken into account in any broad analyses of engaged cinema. The rigid attitudes of critics such as Adorno, Brecht and Lukács, and the ideological reading of texts that they promote, is thus problematized. What remains of the Marxist ideology, however, is undoubtedly the understanding that central to committed art is its ability to offer an alternative image of society which could trigger a cathartic process. Though the broad framework of the aesthetic affect has altered, its moral framework cannot be entirely dismissed.

These first two chapters have thus raised and problematized the foundational agenda of *impegno*. My focus has widely been up to the 1970s, at which point the fragmentation began to occur. The model of *impegno* that can be pinpointed here, then, still will take root in the three impulses of the ‘moral, intellectual and aesthetic investment’ that I posited at the beginning of the previous chapter. What has changed, though, is the very process of ‘artistic communication’, and key to

understanding this is the term 'negotiation': *impegno* is to be found in the negotiation of interpretation between the author, the text, and the viewer.



### III. After 1992: Traumatic Images and the Performance of Realism

The recent turn to the ‘anni di piombo’ in Italian film that has been marked by films such as *Buongiorno, notte* (Marco Bellocchio, 2003), *La meglio gioventù* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2003), *Mio fratello è figlio unico* (Daniele Luchetti, 2007) and *La prima linea* (Renato De Maria, 2009) has triggered a series of interesting discussions about the nature of cultural memory, and the representation of national trauma.<sup>1</sup> Despite the self-evident similarities in terms of cast members, directors and aesthetic styles, scholarship on organized crime film has been extremely hesitant in pushing these films into the same debates. To give some examples: Fabio Vighi has offered challenging analyses of films such as *I cento passi* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000) in terms of its rendering of traumatic loss as Lacanian *jouissance*, thus taking trauma out of a directly social context;<sup>2</sup> Dana Renga has more recently posed the very valuable question of whether trauma can even exist in this area:

Trauma formation [...] is contextual and involves a process, it is not ‘a thing in itself.’ In other words, the originary event itself does not produce the traumatic effect, but the memory of it and its acting out, as Cathy Caruth points out in her discussion of trauma, memory and survival: ‘the fact that, for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*.’ Thus, reacting to, working through, moving on or surviving makes the event implicitly traumatic. Paradoxically then, one must return to the past in order to leave it behind, which is particularly challenging in the case of the Mafia, as it remains, as of yet, without a conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alan O’Leary, *Tragedia all’italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970-2010* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011); Elena Caoduro has presented provocative work on this topic, for instance in the paper ‘The Canonization of an Inconvenient Memory’, presented at the ‘A New Italian Political Cinema?’ workshop, London, 27 November 2010. Information available online: [http://soton.academia.edu/ElenaCaoduro/Talks/29741/The\\_canonisation\\_of\\_an\\_inconvenient\\_memory\\_the\\_anni\\_di\\_piombo\\_in\\_recent\\_cinematic\\_representations](http://soton.academia.edu/ElenaCaoduro/Talks/29741/The_canonisation_of_an_inconvenient_memory_the_anni_di_piombo_in_recent_cinematic_representations) [accessed 3 November 2011].

<sup>2</sup> Fabio Vighi, *Traumatic Encounters in Italian Film: Locating the Cinematic Unconscious* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006), p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> Dana Renga, *Unfinished Business: Screening the Italian Mafia in the New Millenium* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, forthcoming).

The absence of a ‘conclusion’ of the mafia, thus preventing its conception as a past event, makes it difficult to phrase it within typical models of trauma that then are worked through, or otherwise trigger psychological problems. This ‘historical lacuna’ certainly complicates comparisons with the terrorism films for these motives: organized crime cinema cannot be read as functioning in the same way in the post-traumatic process within a cultural memory.

However, in attempting to explain the very specific and rigid critical response to organized crime cinema in Italy – that which applies a polarizing, value-based conception of the films as *either* engaged *or* a ‘polpettone’ – then it becomes immediately clear that this is triggered by the pressure to take the task of representation seriously and respectfully. This drive is undoubtedly linked to the constant renewal of the trauma inflicted by the organized crime on Italian society: those films which do not present a serious or respectful enough image are assumed to be offensive to the victims of the trauma.<sup>4</sup> A split thus emerges between the original traumatic event and its post-traumatic representation, yet the two evidently cannot be entirely dislocated.

Tracing engaged representations of the mafia that take account of this trauma thus requires a theoretical shift. The critical tendency to polarize organized crime films can be read as what Leo Bersani terms the ‘culture of redemption’, whereby we seek somehow to justify or improve negative aspects of history: ‘a crucial assumption in the culture of redemption is that a certain type of repetition of experience in art repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience’.<sup>5</sup> Adopting Bersani’s theory, Adam Lowenstein applies it to film studies in order to ‘shift

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<sup>4</sup> An example is the recent case of *Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male* (Michele Placido, 2011), which was criticized for being insensitive to the families of the murdered police officers at the *Strage di Dalmine*. I return to this case below, in the chapter to follow.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 1.

cinema's relation to history from compensation to confrontation'. This allows him to alter the significance of the relationship between text and trauma:

Rather than offering reassuring displays of artistic 'meaning' validated as 'productive' in the face of historical trauma, [certain films] demand that we acknowledge how these impulses to make productive meaning from trauma often coincide with wishes to divorce ourselves from any real implication within it. In short, these films invite us to recognize our connection to historical trauma across the axes of text, context, and spectatorship.<sup>6</sup>

In the following paragraphs, I intend to make the same theoretical shift. I seek to go beyond the common critiques of the Italian organized crime film in terms of its *impegno*, assuming them to be 'redemptive' in the same way. The work undertaken in the previous chapter contributes to this already, where genre cinema self-consciously has not the same aims of being socially 'productive' (and it is significant here that Bersani views 'redemptive culture' as 'a more or less explicit dogma of modern high culture' that 'persists in our own time as the enabling morality of a humanistic criticism').<sup>7</sup> I argue below that taking Italian organized crime films as 'confrontation' of the trauma of organized crime, rather than 'compensation', facilitates this link between social history and cultural representation. My argument will furthermore implicitly promote a reading of individual lines or fragments of trauma that can be related to specific historical events, such as the assassinations of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, that trigger specific threads of cultural response (the turn to images of the anti-mafia magistrate that I traced in the introduction is an example of this).

As will become clear, in fact, I take 1992 as a particularly significant historical event, and the confrontation of these murders in particular has become centralized within the representation of the mafia-as-trauma. This chapter thus enacts a notable

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<sup>6</sup> Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Bersani, p. 7.

shift, away from the agenda of *impegno* that I took as foundational in the cinema, to predominantly contemporary films. The two decades that have followed 1992 will remain the focus for the remainder of this thesis. My aim, in doing so, is to illustrate that in the wake of these killings the approach to representation of the mafia has, to some extent, doubled back on itself. Thus, while the 1990s mark a historical moment at which the fragmentation of *impegno* is well underway, and the new codes of ‘post-hegemonic *impegno*’ must be employed in order to understand how the engaged text works today, I argue that the latter constitutes only a part of the full story in relation to mafia images. The weight and importance of the traumatic event of 1992 can be interpreted as pivotal in organized crime cinema as the marker of a return to the foundational codes of *impegno*: from this period, as I have mentioned above, the polarizing response to the mafia film returns, becomes re-enforced, and moreover prioritizes a strictly moral ideological code and a strictly ‘realist’ aesthetic code.

The chapter’s structure aims to construct prudently this argument. I will begin with the events of 1992, then turning to two films released in the wake of the bombings (*Giovanni Falcone*, Giuseppe Ferrara, 1993) and *Il giudice ragazzino* (Alessandro di Robilant, 1994) in order to trace out the ‘confrontation’ of the events via a vocabulary of trauma. This will be centred on a sketching out of the ‘compulsion to repeat’ an instance of brutal realism, such as the assassination sequence; I will focus too on how the viewer function is engaged through melodramatic sequences which bracket the above, and foreground empathetic responses. The chapter then attempts to theorize the return to this aesthetic code through its phrasing as ‘traumatic realism’, borrowing the terminology of Michael

Rothberg.<sup>8</sup> Rothberg's suggestion that a historical trauma (such as the Holocaust) will trigger a shift in aesthetic codes (as either realist or anti-realist) will prove to be pointedly compatible with the mafia case.

Returning to the questions raised at the conclusion of the previous chapter, this discussion will serve to interrogate the formation of a specific 'horizon of expectation' that relates to the contemporary *impegnato* mafia film. By assuming that the trauma of the mafia can affect the construction of theoretically anachronistic, realist texts, in the following section I will pose the question of whether a horizon of expectation can be forged according to the same terms. From the overlap which would emerge between the two, which could be read in terms of a 'dominant' code, following Stuart Hall, I will pose the possible interpretative category of 'performative realism'. Following the work carried out above, I will continue to presume that realism in these texts is formal, indeed staged. Here I extend this argument by suggesting that the realist mode ultimately becomes *performed*, following J. L. Austin's theory of performativity, in that it not only describes that reality but moreover *invokes* it. In order to illustrate, however, that the representation of the mafia is essentially fragmentary and that no dogmatic 'guidelines' exist, I will then compare the performances of realism with alternative cases of recent films that make no such claims to historical truth, rather depicting history in a manner that foregrounds its unavoidable fictionality.

A final point of recognition that needs to be made is that, in shifting directly to the 1990s, I have generally omitted a decade of film history. Since the 1980s illustrate the process of fragmentation of *impegno* that I have signalled in the previous two chapters, that is, where the dogma of realism and Marxism begin to

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

disintegrate, this has been an unfortunate consequence of my space limitations. It is nevertheless vital to recall that, as mentioned in the introduction, this marked a period in film history at which the boundaries between genre film and the engaged film ultimately did become more blurred than ever before – and images such as *Mi manda picone* (Nanni Loy, 1984) and *La piovra* are the strongest evidence of this; though the traumatic events of 1992 will stand to rupture this connection indefinitely.

### **i. The Compulsion to Repeat**

Falcone, his wife Francesca Morvillo and three bodyguards (Rocco Dicillo, Antonio Montinaro and Vito Schifani) were killed on 23 May 1992, by a bomb planted under the A29 motorway at Capaci by the mafia. Borsellino was assassinated less than two months later, on 19 July 1992, by a bomb planted in a car outside the house of his mother, in Via D'Amelio, also ending the lives of his escort (Emanuela Loi, Agostino Catalano, Vincenzo Li Muli, Walter Eddie Cosina and Claudio Traina). Together these two assassinations caught and froze the attention of the Italian people and media like no mafia killing had previously: 'The Capaci bomb brought Italy to a standstill', writes Dickie; 'Most people remember exactly where they were when they heard the news, and in its aftermath several public figures declared themselves ashamed to be Italian'.<sup>9</sup> Despite the relatively small number of casualties, and the history of mafia assassinations both recently (Salvo Lima's death occurred two months before Falcone's), and more historically, of men in similar positions to these judges (Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, 3 September 1982), the shock

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<sup>9</sup> John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 14.

of this specific event has garnered comparisons to the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001 and in Madrid on 11 March 2004.<sup>10</sup> These comparisons, and the forging of a ‘flashbulb memory’,<sup>11</sup> evidently signal the particular and greater significance of this event within the national memory.

The attacks resonated so profoundly in Italy because of the powerful symbolic images of the two men and of the mafia: ‘[in] murdering Falcone, the Sicilian mafia rid itself of its most dangerous enemy, the symbol of the fight against it’.<sup>12</sup> The public image of the judges built on their presumed patriotic devotion and utterly committed, methodical approach to breaking the mafia, and this emerged publicly in particular thanks to their unprecedented success at the Maxi trials in the late 1980s. Puccio-Den speculates that the heroic status of the martyred civil servant was quickly applied to these men (beginning with Dalla Chiesa) since Italy, being relatively young and in light of the extreme and suppressive politics of the *ventennio* and the early years of the First Republic, lacked national heroes.<sup>13</sup> Not only were the *stragi* a symbolic defeat of the heroes, but they were a dramatic, physical eradication of the men (through explosions) that, to the public, ‘seemed an assertion of total invincibility’ of the mafia. Stille continues:

The mafia was showing that it was prepared to kill anyone – no matter how important or well protected – that the state might send up against it. By killing Falcone in Palermo and not in Rome, where Falcone worked during the last years of his life, Cosa Nostra declared that it and no-one else was in charge in Sicily. [...] By blowing up an entire, bullet-proof motorcade on one of the most heavily travelled stretches of highway in Sicily, the mafia made a spectacular demonstration of its complete control of its territory.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Deborah Puccio-Den, “‘Difficult Remembrance’: Memorializing Mafia Victims in Palermo’, in *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, ed. by Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 51-70 (p. 54).

<sup>11</sup> Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 53-54.

<sup>12</sup> Dickie, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Puccio-Den, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Stille, *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 7.

Thanks to the dramatic, almost cinematic nature of the explosions and their staging, these assassinations constituted a quasi-mythological spectacle, whereby Borsellino and Falcone were configured as heroes defeated in a land dominated by the invincible mafia. The event was then projected further and more quickly than any previous mafia killings, thanks to the present mass-media frameworks, thus triggering the flashbulb effect within a small period of time and for a vast audience. It is the universality, moreover, of the shared emotional response which allow us to articulate the events in terms of trauma, affecting a much wider public since the ‘mafia was showing that it was prepared to kill anyone’.<sup>15</sup>

Re-phrasing the events in terms of a traumatic event necessitates their framing within a historical progression; and focusing on the immediate emotional reactions engendered in the flashbulb effect is useful where it points us towards the model of ‘confrontation’ over ‘compensation’. Citing Freud, Leys offers a fruitful preliminary outline of progressive trauma/post-trauma:

It was not the experience itself which acted traumatically, but its delayed revival as *memory* [...]. More specifically, according to the temporal logic of what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit*, or ‘deferred action,’ trauma was constituted by a relationship between two events or experiences – a first event that was not necessarily traumatic because it came too early in the child’s development to be understood and assimilated, and a second event that also was not inherently traumatic but that triggered a memory of the first event that only then was given traumatic meaning and hence repressed.<sup>16</sup>

Locating the *stragi* within a process of trauma thus requires a more detailed picture: a diachronic framing of original event and *Nachträglichkeit*, the two ‘events or experiences’; and a clarification of the figure of the ‘child’ for whom this psychological progression occurs, since this cannot be read as an individual or personal process. Dana Renga, following the theoretical work of Kai Erikson, has suggested that key to reading the traumatic process on a *collective* level is the notion

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<sup>15</sup> Stille, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 20.



of community: ‘collective trauma is distinct as it entails a complete alteration of communal identity, and of bonds between members thereof’.<sup>17</sup> As the descriptions cited above demonstrate, by rupturing the symbolism of the fight against the mafia, and moreover individuating the population of Italy by illustrating, in effect, that nobody is safe, the attacks of 1992 can be taken as a national-collective trauma. This will be my assumption throughout the following discussion, as, again following Renga, I take cinema, in light of its mass reception, as key to an investigation of the *aftershocks* of this communal trauma.

The films produced in the wake of these events are of use to signal more clearly the historical positioning of the event and its after-effects, though this requires a clarification of their presumed function. Freud suggests that a role of the psychoanalyst is to bring to light the trauma through the talking cure, to bring about its recognition within the patient, and thus to interrupt the latency period before further psychological damage or reverberations of the trauma occur.<sup>18</sup> In other words, she must positively alter the *Nachträglichkeit*. As Mayne has illustrated,<sup>19</sup> there is a tendency to read film as apparatus, capable of affecting the viewer: to do so in this case would be to suggest that the films serve the purpose of the psychoanalyst in Freud’s scenario. This is certainly possible, where, in this case, they assume typically a ‘memorializing’ function and thus appear to prevent any national-psychological repression.<sup>20</sup> This reading, however, undoubtedly fits within the culture of redemption, in that it seeks to *compensate* for the traumatic event. To

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<sup>17</sup> Renga, *Unfinished Business*, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘The Aetiology of Hysteria’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols, (London: Vintage Hogarth Press, 2001), III, pp. 191-221 (pp. 193-4).

<sup>19</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 9; pp. 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Millicent Marcus, ‘In Memoriam: The Neorealist Legacy in Contemporary Sicilian Anti-Mafia Film’, in *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*, ed. by Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), pp. 290- 306.

eschew the dangers both of such ‘salvation’, and the subsequent dangers of presumptions of interpretation, the films must be read less as interventions than simply as a part of the *Nachträglichkeit*. Taking them as symptoms rather than solutions, or perhaps as a mode of ‘confronting’ the trauma that is intrinsic to the collective response will ultimately reveal a great deal more about the patterns of interpretation and the text’s position as ‘engaged’, as I will argue here. The mapping of trauma via its symptoms can be done by identifying the compulsion to repeat, embodied in certain formal tendencies within the films.

The significance of the repetition compulsion emerges for Freud in his attempts to reveal subconscious impulses that were not related to pleasure.<sup>21</sup> The need for this theory emerged from Freud’s observation of the compulsion of certain patients to repeat painful experiences, such as the soldier who is haunted in dreams by memories of the sufferings of war.<sup>22</sup> The term has become widely applicable to psychological behaviour – from recurrent nightmares to subconscious actions, and to situations in which patients seek similar social situations to that of the trauma – and has moreover become a critical term in cultural studies, too.<sup>23</sup> An illustrative example in the Italian context is that of Liliana Cavani’s *Il portiere di notte* (1974), in which the protagonist, a concentration camp survivor, seeks to compulsively re-

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<sup>21</sup> The results of this, in the essay ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, were the identification of the ‘death drive’ (Thanatos).

<sup>22</sup> Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, in Strachey, Freud et al, xvii, pp. 7-64 (see p. 12, pp. 18-23). The first use of his term ‘compulsion to repeat’ appears in the 1914 essay ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’, in Strachey, Freud et al, xii, pp. 147-56 (p. 150).

<sup>23</sup> For examples that illustrate its wide application, see its use in reference to film sequels, in Carolyn Jess-Cooke, *Film Sequels: Theory and Practice from Hollywood to Bollywood* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 9; to uncanny horror cinema in Valerie Weinstein, ‘Henrik Galeen’s *Alraune*: The Vamp and the Root of Horror’, in *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany’s Filmic Legacy*, ed. by Christian Ragowski (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 198-210 (p. 207); and in relation to gender roles in David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 31.

enact a sadomasochistic relationship with the ex SS-officer from the camp.<sup>24</sup> The case which I will focus on in the following paragraphs is the extremely repetitive sequences of assassinations, which I view as a post-traumatic response to the bombings of Capaci and Via D'Amelio; doing so ultimately helps us to reveal and to interrogate the links between the socio-historical event and its cultural representation.

The repeated scenario is effectively the murder of a 'heroic' character – the 'anti-mafia martyr'<sup>25</sup> – with whom the audience has created an empathic relationship, and who is murdered by the (faceless) mafia. Famous and historical martyr figures who appear on screen include Falcone and Borsellino (*Giovanni Falcone, Excellent Cadavers/I giudici\**, *Gli angeli di Borsellino\**, *Giovanni Falcone: l'uomo che sfidò Cosa nostra\**, *La siciliana ribelle, Paolo Borsellino\**), Rosario Livatino (*Il giudice ragazzino, Luce verticale. Rosario Livatino, il martirio*), Giorgio Ambrosoli (*Un eroe borghese*, Michele Placido, 1995), Placido Rizzotto (*Placido Rizzotto*, Pasquale Scimeca, 2000), Peppino Impastato (*I cento passi*), Gaspare Pisciotta (*Segreti di Stato*), Pino Puglisi (*Alla luce del sole*), Leonardo Vitale (*L'uomo di vetro*, his death is reported, rather than represented), Giancarlo Siani (*Fortapàsc*), or films which feature multiple deaths such as *Il divo* and *Cinque delitti perfetti\**. The heroic death motif can also be observed via the assassination of honest (or morally superior to the mafia) fictional characters (Maria in *Gomorra*, Frasca in *La scorta*, Titta in *Le conseguenze dell'amore*), or in the exaggerated isolation and lengthy suffering of those whose lives are drastically

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<sup>24</sup> The term is used in reference to the film very widely. Some instances: in Áine O'Healy, 'Theatre and Cinema, 1945-2000', in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. by Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp 254-266 (p. 264); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 14; Domietta Torlasco, *The Time of the Crime: Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Italian Film* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> The term is used by Renga in *Unfinished Business*, forthcoming.

altered by the mafia (*Testimonio a rischio, Angela, Una vita tranquilla*).<sup>26</sup> Formally, the deaths are unanimously portrayed through a combination of brutal realism and very tragic, melodramatic tones, the latter typically accentuated to a great extent by the soundtrack. I will turn now to two instances: *Giovanni Falcone*, Giuseppe Ferrara's 1993 biography of Falcone, and *Il giudice ragazzino*, Alessandro di Robilant's 1994 biography of Judge Rosario Livatino.

*Giovanni Falcone* offers perhaps the most explicit and fitting example. Ferrara's film narrates in very straightforward terms the history of Falcone from the beginning of the anti-mafia pool, in the early 1980s, to the death of Borsellino in 1992. The film moves chronologically according to major events in his life, such as the assassinations of Dalla Chiesa, Rocco Chinnici and Antonino Cassarà, the collaboration with Tommaso Buscetta, and the maxi-processo, and these are narrated generally in a realist mode that adopts very melodramatic tones. The death sequences – there are eight, with some ten further implicit assassinations – illustrate exaggerations of this. Focussing specifically on four exemplary 'heroic' deaths – Calogero Zucchetto, Ninni Cassarà, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino – it is very apparent that they are framed in an extraordinarily specific and uniform way.<sup>27</sup> There is a repetitive sequence of five key motifs:

1. an aspect of normality (this often recurs through the sequence);
2. foresight of the murder, from the perspective of an unknown mafioso;
3. the murder, filmed explicitly, with a shot of the gruesome cadaver;
4. an exposition of grief;
5. an allusion to a consequence of the assassination.

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<sup>26</sup> This list includes some made-for-TV films, which are denoted with the asterisk (\*).

<sup>27</sup> The other major omission from this is the murder of Dalla Chiesa, which constitutes a slightly particular case since Ferrara cuts in material depicting the assassination from his earlier film *Cento giorni a Palermo* (1984). He nonetheless integrates this within a similarly framework of original material, that follows the same patterns and sequences that the other sequences do.

In the first sequence, the aspect of normality that associates the audience with Calogero Zucchetto is the sandwich he buys from the bar, which then ironically appears later in his hand, outlined in chalk. The murder is very briefly foreseen by the audience only, as the mafioso's hand anonymously enters the left of the screen; the violent shooting then occurs and the body is portrayed immediately. Cassarà appears suddenly, and is prioritized both in the diegesis ('fate passare!') and by the close-up shot, as he expresses his grief ('bastardi, bastardi!'). The film then cuts to the Palazzo del Tribunale in Palermo, invoking a sense of renewed *impegno* of the judges in revenge. In the second case, the murder of Cassarà, the ironic normality is constituted by his wife and child, whose presence also accentuates the suspense and, later, the tragedy of the scene. The mafiosi are featured from the start, leading the spectator to anticipate the ambush, which occurs soon after the arrival of Cassarà, and Ferrara adopts their perspective with high-angle shots from the building. The gruesome body, shot and extremely bloodied, and the grief overlap with the arrival of his wife and, later, Falcone, who inadvertently gets his friend's blood on his hands (in an unsubtle metaphor). The consequence is alluded to first in the insert from Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1957) featuring the game of chess with the figure of death, a repeated, oneiric insight into Falcone's psyche that uncomplicatedly pre-empted his own end; this is then followed by another jump cut to the Palazzo del Tribunale.

The pattern repeats itself for Falcone and Borsellino, the former of whom is given a very lengthy sequence, allowing the tragedy and grief to play out more extensively. This is symbolically introduced by the moment of *The Seventh Seal* in which death can be heard to state 'ho vinto'. The first motif, of normality, is designated by the familiarity and comradeship of the judge with his escort,

commented on by Falcone, and the husband-wife relationship built through mundane discussion of plans for later that day; for Borsellino the normality is a visit to his mother. The anticipation of the murder comes by a lengthy set-up of the bomb underneath the motorway using the infamous skateboard, visual clues to Sicilian geography, and close-ups on the detonation device for Falcone; and the detonation device only for Borsellino. The murder takes place; we are given explicit shots of the impact on Falcone and Morvillo, followed by shots of charred bodies in both cases. For the first sequence, the grief process is related first by a carabinieri who calls out to Rocco Dicillo, then by Borsellino in the hospital, and later, through news footage, by Rosaria Schifani's touching speech at the State funeral. The assassination of Borsellino portrays another burnt corpse, followed by an exposition of grief from his daughter, who, in tears, emerges and demands to see her father's body. The consequence of the murders for both judges is left for the most part implicit: apart from hints to the imminent political scandals through physical altercations at the funeral, and the jarring (mid-sentence) cut to a scrolling subtitle after Borsellino's death that reveals the fates of Totò Riina, Benedetto Santapaola and Claudio Martelli, little else is depicted. This absence of consequence perhaps ultimately seeks to reinforce the biting critique on the Italian State and society that is vocalized in the third statement of the 'epitaph': 'Gli italiani attendono la verità sulle stragi siciliane dopo aver già atteso 25 anni per le altre stragi che hanno insanguinato l'Italia.'

The visual motifs (illustrated in the shots below) are accompanied by three stages of parallel, emotionally manipulative music: suspense-building drums, overbearing strings during the murder, then grave brass instruments to signify the patriotic grief. What is very interesting here is the stylistic combination of

melodrama, in the emotional bracketing of the event itself, and the realistic mode that assumes first the surveillance point of view, then an unflinching observational perspective. The combination of melodramatic and realistic styles is central to the post-trauma, as testified by its continual re-employment even outside of the explicitly Falcone/Borsellino-centric scripts.



Figures 68-87: The 'Repetitive' Death Sequences of *Giovanni Falcone*: Calogero Zucchetto (00:18:53; 00:18:45; 00:19:08; 00:19:18; 00:19:31), Ninni Cassarà (00:55:36; 00:55:39; 00:56:38; 00:57:22; 00:57:24), Giovanni Falcone (01:47:19; 01:48:21; 01:48:42; 01:51:14; 01:52:33) and Paolo Borsellino (01:53:21; 01:53:29; 01:53:56; 01:54:24; 01:54:31). Rows are numbered 1-5 according to the motifs of 1) normality, 2) anticipation of the murder, 3) the gruesome body, 4) grief, and 5) the consequence of the murder.

Further instances of this compulsive repetition can be observed in Di Robilant's *Il giudice ragazzino*, which narrates the life of the 'young judge', Rosario Livatino, who attempts to block ruthlessly the Stidda agrigentina, ultimately being assassinated for his efforts on 21 September 1990. Though the context is a different criminal organization, the film's centralized theme of the position and role

of a judge, and the contemporaneity of its setting invokes the national-traumatic assassinations of Falcone and Borsellino with ease. The film adopts a less explicitly historic-realist approach to the narrative than that of *Giovanni Falcone*, which in fact leads to a slightly more profound and interesting tale, however the post-traumatic nature of *Il giudice ragazzino* can nevertheless be sought in its construction (and destruction) of the heroic protagonist.

The sequence depicting the murder of Livatino is constructed according to a similar aesthetics. The film first re-establishes a 'normality' of the judge, in his tense conversation with Angela Guarnera, his love interest. Then, as the judge begins his journey to Agrigento, we are offered shots of his car on the open road (the SS640), accompanied by slow-paced oboe music; both image and sound have been recurrent throughout the film. The director dissolves to and from a series of shots first of Angela, then of the speech delivered by Livatino at the beginning of the film – another recurrent sequence. As Marcus observes, here the young, attractive faces of Giulio Scarpati (Livatino), and Sabrina Ferilli (Angela), contrast the 'aging fleshiness of the chronically overfed', and by doing so 'Di Robilant gives visual meaning to the moral terms that underlie his critique'.<sup>28</sup> At this point the non-diegetic music dominates, before Di Robilant cuts back to the road as the unknown vehicles appear, overtake, and block the judge, opening fire on his car. When Livatino flees from the car, the music is removed and the diegetic soundtrack reinstated, such that the footsteps, gunshots and futile cries of the judge are exaggerated. The bleak content and naturalistic style is accentuated here by a hand-held camera which chases the action, forcing the spectator to confront the judge's very violent death. Very soon after the judge has been assassinated, though, Di

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<sup>28</sup> Millicent Marcus, 'In memoriam', p. 294.



Robilant cuts out the diegetic sound once more and returns to the oboe music, before eventually cutting gradually away from his body to an aerial view of the Agrigento area.

The combination of an un-flinchingly realist diegesis with exaggerated melodrama in the montage, and the soundtrack, overall produces a strikingly similar effect to the many assassinations in Ferrara's film. The sequence is finally followed by an audio-flashback, alongside the music and the aerial views, to the speech from the opening sequence:

Il Giudice deve offrire di sé stesso l'immagine di una persona seria, equilibrata, responsabile; l'immagine di un uomo capace di condannare ma anche di capire; solo così egli potrà essere accettato dalla società: questo e solo questo è il Giudice di ogni tempo. Se egli rimarrà sempre libero ed indipendente si mostrerà degno della sua funzione, se si manterrà integro ed imparziale non tradirà mai il suo mandato.

Here the film finishes, similarly producing a subtitle over black that relates the film to the historical person, and points out that 'I mandanti sono tuttora sconosciuti'. That Di Robilant ultimately chooses to return to the theme of the moral and social role of the judge in Italy, in a scene steeped in pathos, both repeats the effects of the trauma of 1992 and expands it in order to encompass further men who have sacrificed their lives in order to stand up to the mafia.

My argumentation thus far leaves implicit an assumption that the imprints of trauma are to be sought in specific, major historical occurrences, and are less present within the entire, widely fictionalized narrative of a single film. This is hinted at by the parenthetical, melodramatic scenes around the above sequences, that very evidently rely more on a coding rooted in emotion than the realistic mode which seeks to present the event of trauma itself as a historical occurrence. This assumption is, however, problematic. It is certainly not straightforward to detach the 'emotion-based' scenes from the 'events' since they serve very evidently to engage

the spectator, and to make accessible and accentuate the trauma. Understanding the relationship between the differently toned stylistics here can be facilitated by conceptualizing it as a model of remembrance, according to sub-categories of memory that Mieke Bal adopts from Pierre Janet. On the one hand, we have ‘traumatic recall’, which is the ‘painful resurfacing of events of a traumatic nature’; on the other are ‘narrative memories’, which are ‘coloured, surrounded by an emotional aura that, precisely, makes them memorable’.<sup>29</sup> Before considering more widely the relationship of these and the function of trauma within this collective memory, I wish to focus attention on specific instances of narrative memories that invite the spectator to partake in memory process, and become complicit within the collective trauma. This can be done by focusing on the representation of the family.



Figures 88-89, Internal/External Perspectives in *Il giudice ragazzino* (00:21:13; 00:22:46)

Di Robilant’s film powerfully centralizes the family through a series of sequences set at the Livatino house. The use of famous and recognizable actors Leopoldo Trieste and Regina Bianchi as Livatino’s parents establishes a familiarity and comfort to the setting. The majority of home sequences take place around the dining table, and through this we enter into normality and daily routine through accessible emotions for the spectator: frustration of a son towards his parents, as well as love, and parental anxiety for the son’s safety outside of the home. Like

<sup>29</sup> Mieke Bal, ‘Introduction’, in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. vii-xviii (pp. vii-viii).

Tognazzi, Di Robilant makes extensive use of continuity editing to move between establishing shots of the family scene and medium close-ups that identify and prioritize individual contributors to the conversation. Significantly, the latter shots are each taken from an angle that focuses inwards to the centre of the table.

Using this location, Di Robilant plays with exteriority and interiority, constructing a space of comfort within the home that is gradually disrupted by the outside world. In the first home sequence, in which the characters appear comfortable and happy around the dinner table, Di Robilant begins with an establishing shot of the three family members and then cuts inwards, magnifying the emotional responses to the conversation. He returns to the establishing shot at the end of the sequence, as Livatino reveals his symbolic, social rebuff of the offer by Antonio Forte – a local mafioso – to pay for patisserie goods. After focussing on the concerned faces of the parents, the move outwards to the table symbolizes a move away from the interior comfort. The same movement occurs in the subsequent family sequence. The scene is introduced through shots of the 1954 Kirk Douglas/Anthony Quinn peplum *Ulisse* (Mario Camerini), which the family are watching, before Di Robilant cuts to medium close-ups of Livatino, then his mother. The scene begins introvertedly. Then, soon after he cuts to the establishing shot of the table, the doorbell sounds, signifying an interruption. The anxious glances prove further symbolic, as the interruption comes from a *picciotto*, ordered to deliver another favour to the judge (a crate of Sicilian wine). As Livatino returns to the table, Di Robilant lingers on the same establishing shot of the table, before framing Livatino in a final medium close-up that, significantly, is angled from the centre of the table outwards. This is matched by the recurrent, sombre oboe music that reaches a crescendo as the *picciotto* smashes each bottle on the wall outside, the

sound of which ultimately intrudes into the family scene. The shift from internal to external continues and escalates sequentially throughout the film, as the danger of Livatino's job slowly penetrates the comfort of the home.

Though Ferrara's film quite evidently prioritizes more pointedly the historical chronicle stylistic over that of melodrama, and thus tends less to dwell on 'narrative memories', there are a few sequences that present either husband and wife, or the anti-mafia commission, as familial. Instances include the sequence at Addaura, when a bomb is found at Falcone's holiday villa, or at the dinner table in Palermo, as Morvillo muses that Dalla Chiesa's wife was killed by the mafia (breaking taboo) for having shared in his information. In both cases, poignant music and reaction shots build the emotional tension, and the spectator is included in the action through the use of dramatic irony. Ferrara furthermore constructs an alternative 'civic' family of Falcone, Borsellino, Chinnici and Cassarà, however this is shot for the most part through medium close-ups and plan-américains that prioritize the continuity of the conversation over the involvement of the spectator.

What the engagements with the family in these films construct is first, within the narrative, a more pronounced integration of the spectator into the on-screen community, thus leading to a more powerful rupture and grief process when the traumatic event occurs. Two conclusions can be reached here: first, though the specific traumatic event might be constituted by a compulsion to repeat within a single or series of shots, ultimately the process of trauma expands over the entire duration of the film. The second is that this engagement with trauma recalls the same tension between a push for realism and a fictionalization that distances reality that has been at the root of mafia representations throughout history, as observed in the previous chapters.

The varying use of narrative and traumatic memories in these movies – and of course the instances go far beyond my brief rundowns – point to a complex and intricate web of history, memory, trauma and representation. Van der Kolk and van der Hart have observed that in the work of both Janet and Freud, ‘the compulsion to repeat the trauma is a function of repression itself’, that ‘if a person does not remember, he is likely to act it out: “he reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without knowing, of course, that he is repeating, and in the end, we understand that this is his way of remembering”’.<sup>30</sup> In these films, the association with the national-traumatic events of 1992 is played out through both narrative memory, in which the lives of the judges are made accessible to the audience, *and* through traumatic recollection, which functions as repetitive reproduction of the same series of brutal images. The compulsion to repeat thus reveals vital nodes within a larger collective memory that, though somehow subconscious, when mapped together form a very revealing image of the unconscious effects and reverberations of trauma. Yet as the citations of Freud in the above quote of van der Kolk and van der Hart attest, at least in the period that followed immediately the *stragi*, the compulsion to repeat reveals ultimately that the trauma has not been worked through or narrativized, and instead remains as a kneejerk response. The consequences of the events for Italian society and the State if narrated outside of this compulsion, or made more explicitly conscious, would presumably have been very difficult to bear.

The consequence of the model of trauma within memory evidently has bearing more widely when tracing the mafia in Italy as a traumatic event. Given the constant renewal of the mafia, which continues to exist today, a model of trauma that

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<sup>30</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, ‘The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 158-182 (pp. 166-67).

typically relies on the original, trigger event being located concretely within the past is, essentially, impossible.<sup>31</sup> Yet if we take organized crime cinema as a wide model that memorializes the mafia through an intricate combination of narrativizing and traumatic recollection, we can pinpoint certain synecdochical ‘fragments’ of trauma – such as Falcone and Borsellino, as above – within a wider, incomplete map. The incomplete map allows us to consider the mafia as an on-going trauma, whose negative psychological damage *as well as* its repeated symptoms remain present. This furthermore accounts for the notable continuities and discontinuities to be found by looking at organized crime film synchronically: from the plural models of specific characters, to the overlaps and extensions of plots in sequels and re-visitations.<sup>32</sup>

Much contemporary trauma theory has argued for a legitimization and a narrative integration of traumatic memory as a means of working through the trauma.<sup>33</sup> For the ‘fragment’ of Falcone and Borsellino, it is evident that this has been, is yet to be, a lengthy process, since the echoes of the *stragi* are still being felt today. Seeking alternative modes of working through this specific trauma is not, however, impossible, as is arguably testified by the case of Paolo Sorrentino’s *Il divo*. Where the above films compulsively reproduce the imagery of Falcone and Borsellino, Sorrentino’s film very boldly and conscientiously rejects this imagery.

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Italy’s several Mafia are by no means things of the past, and continue to grow stronger and adapt to the times. In sum, Italy has yet to experience a period of post-mafia latency necessary for trauma creation. As Bernhard Giesen argues, collective traumas “require a time of latency before they can be acted out, spoken about, and worked through” that Italy has yet to witness. Such a historical lacuna disavows trauma creation and makes it near impossible to acknowledge, and let alone attempt to alter, the Mafia’s social, political and economic causes so to “prevent its recurrence as well as enable forms of renewal”’. Renga, *Unfinished Business*, forthcoming.

<sup>32</sup> A striking discontinuity is the representation of Placido Rizzotto’s girlfriend, who shifts from the heroic victim of rape in *Placido Rizzotto* to the criminal accomplice of her rapist, Luciano Liggio, in ‘Il capo dei capi’. A notable continuity is Ferrara’s use of the Dalla Chiesa assassination sequence from *Cento giorni a Palermo* in *Giovanni Falcone*; significant too is the extension of *Il giudice ragazzino* into *Testimone a rischio* (Pasquale Pozzessere, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Bal, p. viii.

The infamous scene of the skateboard – representing the one slipped underneath the A29 where Falcone was killed – rolling through the corridor of the government and interrupting the ministers can be taken as a bold symbol of the movement from traumatic recollection to narrative memory, and as such as a coming to terms or a working through.

Tensions within the various modes and needs of representation, in particular the issue of the real and the fictionalization, at this point remain. In the following section I will turn to the further questions that relate these two, regarding in particular the ‘urgency’ of realism as a result of trauma, and the implications of this on history, given the implicit emphasis that a traumatic reading of these texts places on a link to some historical reality.

## **ii. Traumatic Realism**

The tensions between real referents and fictionalizations within these films can be better contextualized and investigated in reference to wider theory of trauma and the contradictions of its representation. In order to trace this textual coding, it is necessary to linger for the moment on a strain of trauma theory that engages with the Holocaust. An extensive comparison of the traumatic nature of the Nazi genocide of the Second World War and the mafia in Italy, specifically in recent decades is, for evident reasons, neither wise nor indeed my aim. In terms of the issues that surround their representation, and their cultural-historical function, however, there are some interesting points to be followed and applied to the latter case. For instance, the contradiction observed in the previous paragraphs is shared. As Michael Rothberg observes, ‘approaches to the Holocaust are riven by a series of seemingly irresolvable contradictions: between the event’s “uniqueness” and its

“typicality,” its “extremity” and its “banality,” its “incomprehensibility” and its susceptibility to “normal” understanding’, but that it is precisely these ‘mutually exclusive claims on understanding’ that produce fertile tensions.<sup>34</sup> Rothberg suggests that attempts to represent the Holocaust can be broadly categorized in two ways, the ‘realist’ and the ‘antirealist’ approaches.

By realist I mean both an epistemological claim the Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe. [...] By antirealist I mean both a claim that the Holocaust is not knowable or would be knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge and that it cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata. [...] This tendency removes the Holocaust from standard historical, cultural, or autobiographical narratives and situates it as a sublime, unapproachable object beyond discourse and knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

Coherencies of these observations with mafia and its representations are not immediately striking: the question of the ‘knowability’ of the mafia would appear to be far less conscientiously approached in these texts. Rather, it would appear that these texts take for granted that the mafia can be known with ease by their audiences. While the question is not raised in precisely the same terms, however, it is clear that many comparable contradictions between the implicit claims of each category – e.g. that it can be quotidian or that it is unapproachable – do exist in the mafia case too. To give an uncomplicated instance, we might compare the introspection of the familial image in *Il giudice ragazzino* with the alienating, grotesque masculinity of Cipri and Maresco’s films.

Rothberg continues by suggesting that taking a synchronic and interdisciplinary view of Holocaust imageries provides a theoretical model of a ‘system of understanding’ whereby the antirealist and realist strains are united. He suggests that this overlap emerges as a focal point that illustrates trauma. Re-framing the realist strain of texts – which he nevertheless acknowledges as apparently out-dated

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<sup>34</sup> Rothberg, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Rothberg, pp. 3-4.



and anachronistically urgent<sup>36</sup> – over the wider framework of *both* anti- and realist representation, and of knowability or the contrasts of the everyday and the extreme, he offers a renewed definition of the traumatic aesthetic itself. This he terms ‘traumatic realism’: ‘By focusing attention on the intersection of the everyday and the extreme in the experience and writing of Holocaust survivors, traumatic realism provides an aesthetic and cognitive solution to the conflicting demands inherent in representing and understanding genocide’.<sup>37</sup>

Though, again, the precise issue of the knowability of trauma is not articulated according to the same terminology in mafia film, the urgency to foreground realism – or better, a ‘realist motivation’ that is built on a historical referent – on top of a contradictory or anachronistic theoretical or cultural backdrop denotes a very similar concept of traumatic realism. If this is the framework that informs each text, then we must look beyond the differentiation of two films which denote contrary modes of representing the mafia trauma, such as *La scorta* and *Lo zio di Brooklyn*, to focus on such tensions within one film itself. This is something already observed, above, in assassination sequences of the early 1990s films: it was noted that each time the murder was introduced by an image of normality, with which the spectator can associate. This endows the scenario with melodramatic, fictionalized tones that soon dissolve into the assassination itself, being shot in hyper-realistic tones which, as argued above, shock the spectator and reproduce the trauma of the event itself. This, then, is the extremity of the trauma. In a further reiteration of the definition of traumatic realism, Rothberg writes:

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<sup>36</sup> ‘I single out in particular the persistence of the question of realism [...] as one of the central problematics that Holocaust forces back into view. Since the poststructuralist attack on mimesis in the work of Roland Barthes and the *Tel Quel* group, realism has all but disappeared from theoretical discussion [...]. But the need for a rethinking of realism is signalled by the emergence in the last decade of various new forms of testimonial and documentary art and cultural production’. Rothberg, pp. 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> Rothberg, p. 9.

[it is] a realism in which the scars that mark the relationship of a discourse to the real are not fetishistically denied, but exposed; a realism in which the claims of reference live on, but so does the traumatic extremity that disables realist representation as usual.

This definition is fundamental to understanding the representation of the mafia in Italy. It can be illustrated through the sequences which I above labelled ‘repetitive-compulsive’: the ‘scars’ of the assassinations are brought to the fore; at the same time, they are parenthesized and cushioned by sequences that are steeped in fictionalized discourse. More widely, this model overlaps uncomplicatedly with the notion of memory of the mafia, which is bound to both fragments of recollected trauma and fictionalized or narrativized memories which rely to a lesser extent on a foregrounded historical referent. As such, the representation of the mafia in Italian film can be taken as traumatic-realist.

In the following, I will investigate in some further detail how, in the wake of the 1992 bombings, the cinematic representations of the mafia can be taken as traumatic realism. The assumption, following Rothberg, that the trauma of the events leads to the tension between representations of historical referents and fictionalized memories will remain central to my argument. Where I differ from Rothberg and his analysis of the Holocaust case, however, relates less to the mode in which mafia representations can be interpreted subjectively as such than to the difficult issue of their coding, which was raised throughout the previous chapter. I have argued that the production and in particular reception of organized crime films in Italy is informed by an urgency to ‘take seriously’ the subject matter, leading to a critical polarization of images that can be symbolized by *Testimone a rischio* and *Il capo dei capi*. Public reception (e.g. in newspapers, journals) of the films was demonstrated to be informed by this framework, which furthermore associated the ‘seriousness’ of the subject matter to un-adorned, realistic or naturalistic aesthetics,

and a concrete referent. Following the two examples, *Testimone a rischio* was ‘Uno dei migliori film civili degli ultimi anni’,<sup>38</sup> since it portrayed a real story that engaged the critical response of a spectator; *Il capo dei capi* was deemed too much of an exaggeration, a glorification of Riina’s life, and thus taken as ‘worse than pornography’. I suggested then that the reception of these films according to ‘codes’ of realism was a process of ‘dominant’ decoding, following Hall, given that the production of the film and its reception can be seen as overlapping, both informed by ‘realism’. This critical framework – which in itself could be taken as a symptom of trauma<sup>39</sup> – has led to a pointedly anachronistic and conclusive presentation of the films as realistic, as I will demonstrate in the first section, which ultimately downplays the (no less present) ‘traumatic extremity that disables realist representation as usual’. In the second section, I will turn to those films which refuse association with realism, as I demonstrate in relation to their liberal interaction with history as well as formal experimentalism.

### Performances of Realism

Millicent Marcus takes *Il giudice ragazzino* as one of three films which locates a ‘memorialist impulse’ – the other two are *Placido Rizzotto* and *I cento passi* – that is, attempts to commemorate martyred, national heroes (precisely as did, as she notes, a number of neorealist pictures). Marcus foregrounds the ‘epitaph’, the closing piece of text that appears on screen at the end of the film, informing the spectator of the ‘post-script’ of each story, ‘cinematic tomb inscriptions designed to

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<sup>38</sup> Curzio Maltese, “Io, testimone ed eroe per forza”, *La Repubblica*, 4 February 1997, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> This point would require a great deal more space to expand it justly, however at this stage we might speculate that, though the notion of an event as traumatic is undoubtedly enough to justify a realism-based critical framework, at the same time Italy constitutes a special case given an historic tendency to prioritize realism in a vast majority of cinematic criticism (trauma-based or not). For more see Alan O’Leary and Catherine O’Rawe, ‘Against Realism: On “a Certain Tendency” in Italian Film Criticism’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16.1 (2011), 107-28.

transmit the legacy of moral engagement and social justice for which their protagonists died'.<sup>40</sup> These epitaphic post-scripts, in the three mentioned films, are:

Il giudice Rosario Livatino è stato assassinato la mattina del 21 settembre 1990 lungo la superstrada Canicatti-Agrigento. I mandanti sono tuttora sconosciuti.<sup>41</sup>

Di Placido Rizzotto oggi non rimane neanche una tomba sulla quale si possa versare una lacrima e i suoi miseri resti giacciono dentro un sacco nei sotterranei della corte d'appello dei tribunali di Palermo.<sup>42</sup>

Peppino Impastato è stato ucciso il 9 maggio 1978. Nel 1997 la Procura di Palermo ha chiesto il rinvio a giudizio di Gaetano Badalamenti come mandante dell'omicidio.

In functioning as 'memorialist', the texts go beyond a passive historical reconstruction, instead bringing that history to the present and forging a continuation. The concretization of the link to the past is made explicit specifically, as she observes, in *Placido Rizzotto* which 'serves not only as epitaph but as the very grave that history denied him', and in *I cento passi*, 'when Felicia Impastato exalts in the spectacle of the angry protest march on the day of her son's funeral: "Non se lo sono dimenticato"'.<sup>43</sup> History here is not viewed as complete, it is brought to the present, and the significance of the martyred lives is continued.

The continuation of history nevertheless must occur over an implicit – but notable – assumption: that the fictionalized text and the historical referent can be approximated. It is quite significant in this regard that they occur as post-scripts, as a conclusive gesture that confirms to the spectator that what has been observed on-screen is neither distinct nor separate from the reality that exists outside. In this

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<sup>40</sup> Marcus, 'In Memoriam', p. 292.

<sup>41</sup> This information has since become false: the killers were revealed by Piero Fava, an ocular witness of the assassination, as is narrated in the film of the latter's life, *Testimone a rischio*.

<sup>42</sup> Though this is the last, the film actually includes post-scripts for three other key figures in the story: the mafioso Luciano Liggio, and further anti-mafia martyrs Pio La Torre and Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa.

<sup>43</sup> Marcus, 'In Memoriam', p. 292. *Placido Rizzotto*'s tagline foregrounds this concretizing process: 'C'era 'na vota c'era e c'è ancora un contadino ca di Corleone era. Placido Rizzotto si chiamava e Placido Rizzotto si chiama ancora'.

sense, the use of the epigraph in these films can be taken as a further formal function, a surprisingly simplistic one, which opens up the ‘scars’ of the (traumatic) reality to the spectator despite the evident difficulty and contradiction in representing the traumatic event itself.

The use of the epitaphic post-script is not limited to the cases isolated by Marcus, though in other cases it does not necessarily have a ‘memorialist’ function.<sup>44</sup> To give a few instances, a surtitle that offers continuation of the narrative and a link to the real life is given in the following films: *Giovanni Falcone, Un eroe borghese, I giudici* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1998), *Angela* (Roberta Torre, 2002), *La siciliana ribelle* (Marco Amenta, 2008), *Fortapàsc* (Marco Risi, 2009), *Gomorra* (Matteo Garrone, 2008), *Il divo* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2008); and a similar textual invitation to a social reality is found at the beginning of *La scorta* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1993), *Il camorrista* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1986) and *Cento giorni a Palermo* (Giuseppe Ferrara, 1984) (the latter is a voice over, rather than a surtitle). These moments of the film are significant as they can be taken as a very explicit performance of realism, where the distance between the pro-filmic and the historical chronicle of each biography is reduced.

The choice to include a post-script at the end of the film is one of a series of textual (and epi-textual) techniques which invoke a reality that is exterior to the film. At its foundation is the same formalist technique that is observed by Kristin Thompson, that she labels the ‘realist motivation’. Instances that she provides in reference to *Ladri di biciclette*, as illustrated above (chapter one), include specific subject matter, location shooting, non-professional actors, and explicit rejections of

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<sup>44</sup> Though I am identifying the post-script as a specific formal tendency that performs realism, it should also be observed that this technique fits into a wider tendency of mafia film in Italy that is biographical, or based on historical events; as such the historical referent is bound to be fairly explicitly foregrounded.

oppositional forms of cinema.<sup>45</sup> Where these techniques are used thus to define or describe reality, I would argue that the realist motivations identified by Marcus achieve more, in fact more explicitly invoking that reality by connecting it to the spectator's own. As such, they can be taken as *performative*, adopting the term from Stella Bruzzi's work.<sup>46</sup> The notion of performance brings with it a dual meaning which requires qualification. On the one hand, it intends that sense of staged performance or exhibition which coheres with Thompson's neo-formalist understanding of film. On the other, though, there is the phenomenological function of the performance, whereby the performativity of techniques implies that 'they function as utterances that simultaneously both describe and perform an action'.<sup>47</sup> This use of the term is rooted in J. L. Austin's theory of performative utterances.<sup>48</sup> The post-script, like the performative utterance, both narrates a reality and enacts it, persuasively suggesting to the spectator that what she has witnessed can be easily overlapped with the reality of her own situation. Thus the performance of realism conceals a political action: by blurring the film and reality, it manipulates more liberally the spectator's notion of that reality.

The suggestion that a reality-effect somehow phenomenologically produces reality is quite evidently a very problematic assumption, and one which, returning to Rothberg, is (in terms of theory, at least) anachronistic. Nevertheless, firstly, the effects of the film on the reality of the present – for instance, the commemoration of the victim in the national consciousness and the continuation of history – demonstrate that the fiction-reality boundary is by no means defined. Secondly, and

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<sup>45</sup> Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 205.

<sup>46</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 187.

<sup>48</sup> The most illustrative instance of these being 'I do', said at a wedding. See John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

once again in light of Rothberg, there is an argument to suggest that, in light of the traumatic nature of the events and the urgency to represent them in a serious manner, the text is both encoded and decoded as though it is realistic. This latter point is tricky to substantiate without empirical evidence. However, I argue that it can be supported both by the public-critical responses to the texts, which often take for granted that the reality represented is ‘realistic’; and moreover, following Jauss once again, that a ‘horizon of expectation’ based on the formal techniques of these films allows us to trace an imagined spectator that follows this assumption. With this notion of encoding and decoding in mind it becomes possible to argue that much of the realistic content of several of these films is transmitted according to a *dominant* decoding, following Hall, where the preferred reading of the author overlaps with the executed interpretation of the reader.

The notion of performative realism can be explored further through one of the examples selected by Marcus: *I cento passi*, the 2000 film by Marco Tullio Giordana. The film is a fictionalized reconstruction of the life of Peppino Impastato, an anti-mafia martyr who, though born into a low-level mafia family, rejects this heritage and looks to grassroots politics and pirate radio to denounce the mafia. As mentioned, Marcus foregrounds the important act of Peppino being *not* forgotten, embracing within this act both the attendees of the funeral and the spectators of the film. The epitaph itself extends beyond the post-script, involving a lengthy sequence that carefully constructs the film-reality link. Following the words of Felicia, Giordana cuts to the funeral sequence; this portrays in sepia then black and white tones the friends and colleagues of Peppino as they march his coffin through the streets of Cinisi in demonstration against the mafia. This then cuts away intermittently to a series of ‘home-movie’ inserts, in colour, of Peppino laughing

and playing at Radio AUT. The sequence fades to black, then presenting the two lines of post-script on the screen in a bold, white text, before fading into a series of five of photographs of the historical figure of Impastato. Some of these are animated slightly, via pans or zooms, in order to pick out and prioritize the film's protagonist. Altogether, the sequence plays with two acts of mimesis: the first, most explicit, is the visual association of actor Luigi Lo Cascio and Peppino Impastato, which is foregrounded to the spectator through direct visual comparisons, typically close-up shots.<sup>49</sup> This is one motive for the inclusion of the 'home-movie' footage. The second act of mimesis overlaps the construction of the funeral sequence with the historical event, where Giordana very evidently directs his actors to reproduce a photograph of Impastato's funeral in 1978:



Figures 90-91: Giuseppe Impastato's Funeral; the Funeral Sequence of *I cento passi* (01:44:33)

These similarities evidently serve to expose the trauma of the loss of Peppino to the community of Cinisi, and to involve the spectator within that collective. Just as we can ultimately read this entire sequence as having a memorialist function, in that it keeps Peppino alive through the shots cut into the funeral sequence, then

<sup>49</sup> Salvo Vitale, a colleague and friend of Impastato who features in the film too (played by Claudio Gioè) has observed the striking physical similarity of the two men: 'Luigi Lo Cascio, [...] che recita la parte di Peppino, cui somiglia in modo impressionante'. In Vitale, *Nel cuore dei coralli: Peppino Impastato: una vita contro la mafia* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino Editore, 2002), p. 247.



quite literally overlaps the past and the present, we can further argue that, in the same way, it implicitly performs realism. We can take the individual images of Peppino (character) and Impastato (historical figure) alone as simple descriptions, but it is in the montage of these shots that a narrative becomes constructed that ultimately leads us to progress from one to the other. As such, the film presents its individual representation of Impastato as close to a historical reality.

The mimetic reproduction of the historical event, in this case Impastato's funeral, is a technique used on further occasions within Giordana's film in order to perform history. An interesting instance is the film's interaction with the *caso Moro*. This figures first as a chronological coordinate, relying on the spectator's realization that the bodies of Impastato and Moro were discovered on the same day and thus figuring as a tragic foreboding when the kidnapping of the DC leader occurs. Here the film form matches the director's intention to integrate an apparently objective historical event, where he includes within the diegesis the black and white newsreel footage of the bullet-ridden and blood-stained Fiat 130 from the attack at Via Mario Fani. Once again the montage here is central to the integration of history: the previous is the film's dream sequence, which culminates in Peppino awakening in his bed, feverish. From this medium close-up, we cut straight to the Moro footage, very evidently tracing a movement from the oneiric to the film's reality, then to a historical reality. The *telegiornale* footage then shifts from filmic to profilmic, pushed to the back of the Cinisi bar from which locals watch on, allowing Peppino to enter into the scene and exaggerating the dramatic irony. The historical footage is then brought directly into the diegesis once more, before it disappears as the attention of the men in the bar turns to Peppino and Salvo, shouting accusatory abuse.

It is of course striking that the historical recreation or citation of the funeral sequence and the Moro case are introduced into the film in black and white, as if to do so implies a more serious historical engagement. As was the case for the funeral sequence, here the historical document is defined by its grey scale, but mobilized and endowed with meaning through its montage into the film's diegesis. This brings it into the film's and the spectator's present reality.

*I cento passi* makes repeated use of citations of music in order to frame and define the historical period. From the beginning, the period of the late 1950s/early 1960s is revealed by the quotation of Domenico Modugno's 'Volare', sung by Peppino and his brother in the opening sequence. The use of artists such as Janis Joplin and Procol Harum later in the film's soundtrack seeks to frame – and perhaps perform – the political context of the period, and further work has been done elsewhere on the use of literature for this purpose too.<sup>50</sup> Props serve a similar function: the Alfa Romeo Giulietta (a vehicle produced between 1955 and 1965) that masks the bomb which kills Cesare Manzella is evidently employed thus.

To read these instances as 'performative' is certainly not straightforward, particularly when working with the use of the term in documentary studies. For Bruzzi, the performative mode of documentary refers to 'a mode which emphasises – and indeed constructs a film around – the often hidden aspect of performance, whether on the part of the documentary subjects or the filmmakers'.<sup>51</sup> Her examples – such as the documentaries of Nick Broomfield – very clearly relate little to *I cento passi*; rather the claims that Giordana's film makes to historical accuracy or truth

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<sup>50</sup> Marcus ('In Memoriam, pp. 299-303) illustrates the political message which emerges from the literary citations, including Dante, Pasolini and Majakovsky. The use of music to illustrate Peppino's and *I cento passi*'s 'coscienza utopica' is demonstrated in Emanuele D'Onofrio, 'Percorsi di identità narrativa nella memoria difficile: la musica in *I cento passi* e *Buongiorno, notte*', *The Italianist* 30 (2010), 219-244, in particular pp. 223-228.

<sup>51</sup> Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 185.

would (for the sake of argument) appear to cohere more comfortably to the observational mode of documentary that Bill Nichols polarizes with the performative.<sup>52</sup> At least superficially, then, these techniques cannot be taken as performative. However, if instead we take these tendencies as the singular, descriptive utterances, and then widen scope to consider how they are received, the act of performance takes place: if the spectator does not question the authenticity of the realism with which they are presented, then the description of the ‘truth’ takes on a more active position. This is an apparently contradictory tension which must be intrinsic to *performative realism*.

As will be explored further in the chapter to follow, where I more closely analyse the political message of the film, *I cento passi*’s claim to historical truth in fact quite contradictorily masks a wider historical inaccuracy. We might linger on the representation of Cesare Manzella and his role within the film to offer an instance of this. The opening set of scenes, which introduce the extended Impastato family at a wedding reception, firmly establishes Peppino’s uncle, Cesare, and Don Tano (Badalamenti) as the representative poles of ‘good’ and ‘evil’; a decent father figure against a cold, ruthless mafioso. Giordana illustrates this in an early scene, in which the uncle takes Peppino for his first, jerky drive around the courtyard, ultimately scattering the other guests as they flee the oncoming Fiat. Don Tano, though, remains firmly where he stands, unable to consent himself the merest sign of weakness even in what is simply a child’s game. This symbolic power struggle, and the subsequent exchange between the two, cements lasting emotional attachments which are severed at the tragic murder scenes of both Zio Cesare, scenes later, and ultimately Peppino.

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<sup>52</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 31-2. Bruzzi, of course, argues that this distinction is undermined by the inevitable performativity even of the most observational of documentaries. See Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, in particular pp. 1-5.

The film quite interestingly suggests that Tano was responsible for the murder of Cesare, made explicit both through the widow's violent reaction to Don Tano at the funeral, and Stefano Venuti's statement, 'quelli come lui l'hanno scannato. Quelli che vogliono prendere il suo posto'. This promotion of Zio Cesare almost entirely overlooks the biographical associations with the historical Cesare Manzella, a mafia *capo* who moved in the same circles as Badalamenti, and was involved with identical criminal activities: Badalamenti was his second in command. Yet, as Salvo Vitale testifies, the explosion of the Fiat Giulietta was an unrelated revenge killing,

la risposta di Angelo La Barbera alla scomparsa di suo fratello Salvatore, di cui il Manzella, secondo una sentenza istruttoria dell'8 maggio 1965 contro Greco Salvatore, avrebbe, in concorso con lo stesso, premeditato la morte e occultato il cadavere.<sup>53</sup>

The filmmakers evidently want to create an image of Zio Cesare which is entirely incompatible with that accounted by the *carabinieri* at the time, according to whom he was 'di carattere violento e prepotente'.<sup>54</sup> Through his association with the Communist, Stefano Venuti, and their joint objection to the airport, Zio Cesare is painted as a traditional, honest (grand-)father figure, 'sono contrario a questa nuova pista. Lo dissi al Sindaco: affare sbagliato! Troppo cemento, troppo traffico, troppo rumore'. This characterization aligns Zio Cesare to a (false) self-aggrandizing image constructed by the mafioso himself, 'Manzella [...] riceve molto consenso sociale creandosi un'immagine di benefattore, di finanziatore di istituti di beneficenza e di cittadino onesto'.<sup>55</sup>

We might speculate that the dramatization is done in order to underscore a romanticized motive for the *impegno* of Peppino, as triggered by the grief of this

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<sup>53</sup> Vitale, p. 55.

<sup>54</sup> C.f. Vitale, p. 55. The carabinieri report furthermore outlines his associations with Badalamenti.

<sup>55</sup> Vitale, p. 54.

loss,<sup>56</sup> and it furthermore moulds the film into an international model of mafia movies, perhaps garnering a more popular success. In terms of the latter, we might observe specifically the positivist father figure<sup>57</sup> and the moral polarization of generational mafia families,<sup>58</sup> both of which have been prolific in mafia films in particular since the release of *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972). Though we ought not to be surprised that a film fictionalizes history, in light of the performances of realism certain moral questions do arise due to the extent to which this normalization of history extends.

The performance of a text as realistic can occur beyond the text itself. It is my contention that realism can be performed in what we can label the film's 'paratexts', that is, 'those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that mediate between book, author and reader', or more specifically in the 'epitexts', 'elements [...] located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under the cover of private communications',<sup>59</sup> borrowing the terms from Genette. If we return once again to Kristin Thompson's explanation of the realist motivation, which 'ask[s] us to appeal to our knowledge of

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<sup>56</sup> This romanticized reading of Impastato been re-articulated since the film's release by Peppino's brother, Giovanni, in a recent interview, who recalls 'Peppino molto traumatizzato. Ricordo quando eravamo davanti al luogo dell'attentato, davanti alla devastazione, e Peppino disse: "Ma questa è veramente mafia? Se questa è mafia io per tutta la vita mi batterò contro queste cose...". Cesare Picciotto, 'Condivideo ma non ho lo stesso coraggio', *Girodivite*, online: <<http://www.girodivite.it/Condivideo-ma-non-ho-avuto-lo.html>> [accessed 10 April 2012].

<sup>57</sup> The characterization of Manzella – like that of Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* – combines maternal, protective characteristics with traditional masculinity that encourage the spectator to affiliate her/himself with 'the gang'. See Fred L. Gardaphé, *From Wiseguys to Wise Men: The Gangster and Italian American Masculinities* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), p. 32; and Chris Messenger, *'The Godfather' and American Culture: How the Corleones Became "Our Gang"* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), in particular pp. 209-28.

<sup>58</sup> This tendency is to portray older generational mafia families in terms of tradition and honour, and thus more positive in moral terms, and to contrast this with a younger generation – typically involved in a ruthless, capitalist drug trade – who no longer deal in honour.

<sup>59</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. i; p. 5.

the real world',<sup>60</sup> then we can forge a similar understanding of those factors that are exterior to the text itself, that nonetheless affect our conception and reception of the text. In numerous cases of organized crime cinema, as I will illustrate, the paratextual discourse surrounding the realism of the film is at times exaggerated and deceptive in relation to the film's aesthetics. This once again leads to the understatement of the limitations of representation of the mafia as trauma, which are nonetheless present.

An interesting starting point is the press pack which accompanied the release of *Gomorra* at Cannes, in which both Saviano and Garrone offer statements that introduce the film to the spectator. The former writes

The stories you are about to see were taken from real life. These facts happened and continue to happen in Neapolitan districts such as Scampia or in the area of Caserta. There, as in other places, the lives of thousands of men and women, many very young, are controlled and ruled by criminal forces and their violence.<sup>61</sup>

The function of this statement as introduction to the film can evidently be aligned with those post-scripts observed above, in that it describes a historical scenario and yet at the same time blurs together its boundaries with that of the film. *Gomorra's* epitext is a series of statements and facts that inform the spectator of the reality of the Camorra, relating them in comparative statistics that render them accessible.<sup>62</sup> The post-script, which precedes the credits, unites the various threads of the film and overlaps them with the shocking reality of the Camorra.

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<sup>60</sup> Thompson, by little coincidence, picks out non-professional actors and location shooting as realist motivations, (p. 198).

<sup>61</sup> From p. 6 of the press pack. This can be accessed at the Biblioteca Luigi Chiarini at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Rome; also available online: <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/14718907/GOMORRAH-IFC-Films-Press-Notes>> [accessed 14 April 2012].

<sup>62</sup> 'In Europa la Camorra ha ucciso più di ogni altra organizzazione terroristica o criminale: 4000 morti negli ultimi trent'anni. Uno ogni tre giorni. / Scampia è la piazza di spaccio di droga a cielo aperto più grande del mondo. Per un solo clan la fattura è di circa 500mila euro al giorno. / Se i rifiuti tossici gestiti dai clan fossero accorpati diverrebbero una montagna di 14.600 metri. L'Everest è alto 8850 metri. L'aumento del cancro nei territori avvelenati è del 20%. / I proventi delle attività illecite vengono reinvestiti in numerose attività legali, che si estendono in tutto il mondo. La Camorra ha investito nelle azioni per la ricostruzione delle Torri Gemelle a New York.'

The use of local inhabitants as protagonists, supporting cast and extras, and indeed the local shooting at the Vele di Scampia housing complex within the film can be taken to perform realism formally.<sup>63</sup> These aspects moreover feature heavily within the epitexts, relating the proximity of the film and its social environment. Writing from a period a few years after the release of the film, we can furthermore trace this rhetoric of reality through the various news reports regarding the film. This includes in particular reports of the arrests or legal issues of members of the cast, such as Giovanni Venosa, Salvatore Fabbicino and Bernardino Terracciano, all of whom acted as camorristi in the film, and were later arrested for drug or firearm-related crime.<sup>64</sup> The case of Venosa – who plays the role of the camorrista ‘Giovanni’ (nicknamed ‘Piselli’) who ultimately kills Marco and Ciro – is reported in the featurette *Gomorra: cinque storie brevi* (Melania Cacucci, 2008) that accompanies the UK-distributed DVD. In order to show the real brutality of the man, the documentary shows actors Marco Macor and Ciro Petrone who appear to be genuinely intimidated by the camorrista and his pushy desire to be present in the murder sequence. The case has become anecdotal for the director, who defends his conscious employment of a *camorrista* in terms of an honest, accurate representation of the reality.<sup>65</sup>

The director’s note that Garrone contributes to the press pack bears further weight and insight:

The raw material I had to work with when shooting was so visually powerful that I merely filmed it in as straightforward a way as possible, as if I were a passer-by who happened to find myself there by chance. I thought this was the

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<sup>63</sup> Thompson, p. 201.

<sup>64</sup> See Antonio Tricomi, ‘La Maledizione di *Gomorra*, arrestato un attore, è il terzo’, *La Repubblica*, 5 January 2009, p. 5. This news has furthermore ‘travelled’ internationally, being reported in international newspapers from *The Daily Mail* to *Le Figaro*, the *New York Times* and *Der Spiegel*.

<sup>65</sup> At a post-screening interview held at the University of Washington Rome Center, December 1, 2010, Garrone made these comments.

most effective way of reproducing the feelings I experienced during the time I spent making the film.<sup>66</sup>

Garrone's notion of how the film functions stylistically is echoed by the director of photography, Marco Onorato, who has stated elsewhere that 'noi dovevamo semplicemente essere il più possibile invisibili, sia come regia che come fotografia, un occhio che segue quello che succede e basta'.<sup>67</sup> These statements suggest that the aesthetics of *Gomorra* fit an 'observational', fly-on-the-wall mode, something which even a superficial examination of the film reveals as problematic. Nevertheless, in a large part of the subsequent material published on the film this very description of its cinematography remains. On the one hand, we can trace this to many interviews with the director and other members of the crew. Garrone suggests that 'verosimilitudine'<sup>68</sup> is central to the representation of content of this nature, and defines the act of 'elimina[re] ogni desiderio di far sentire la mia presenza come regista' in *Gomorra* as 'reportage di guerra'.<sup>69</sup> This is quite striking when recalling the root of this process in trauma, and the recurrent urgency to represent objectively a traumatic image. On the other hand, this notion remains common to many more general reviews and comments on the film. A notable instance here is Silvio Graselli's review:

La prima caratteristica appariscente è infatti una certa giustissima brutalità delle narrazioni. Non ci si riferisce qui alla crudezza di uccisioni e violenze, ma all'assoluto anti-didascalismo – davvero raro nel cinema italiano tanto corrotto dai diktat della tv – secondo il quale vicende, personaggi e luoghi vengono 'semplicemente' mostrati, mai spiegati. [...] In questo sistema testuale, tanto forte e coerente, però, si percepisce una fondamentale mancanza. Stando

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<sup>66</sup> From p. 4 of the press pack.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Domenico Monetti and Luca Pallanch, 'All'essenza delle cose: conversazione con Marco Onorato', in *Non solo 'Gomorra': tutto il cinema di Matteo Garrone*, ed. by Pierpaolo De Santis, Domenico Monetti and Luca Pallanch (Cantalupo in Sabina: Edizioni Sabinae, 2008), pp. 91-96 (p. 94).

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Maurizio Braucci, 'Gomorra il film: conversazione con Matteo Garrone', in *Non solo 'Gomorra'*, pp. 65-75 (p. 72).

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Carlo Chatrian and Eugenio Renzi, "'Il reportage di guerra e la fiaba': conversazione con Matteo Garrone", *Panoramiche—Panoramiques*, 9.1 (2009), 53-56 (p. 54). The reportage style is also noted by Francesco Cripsino, 'Gomorra', in *Non solo 'Gomorra'*, pp. 45-53 (p. 49).



davanti allo schermo si fatica a dare al regista un posto 'dentro' il film [...] Garrone sembra sottrarsi, sfuggire a una posizione dialogica con lo spettatore, cancellare le tracce del suo proprio sguardo.<sup>70</sup>

Grasselli's comment is striking both in that it relates brutal (traumatic) content to an objective mode, and moreover in that this mode is 'anti-didascalico', that it observes but does not comment. Taken together, the descriptions of the cinematography of *Gomorra* suggest that its observational style allows the spectator to infiltrate the reality of the Camorra, from where they are free to respond to the footage individually and without prejudice.

I take for granted here the assumption, and the lesson from Bruzzi, that no sequence can definitively be utterly objective. Indeed even brief formal analysis of *Gomorra* demonstrates that the cinematography is in fact far more complex and constructed than these descriptions would suggest. Francesco Crispino has noted that of the film's 350 takes, 14% are taken with a still camera, and 61% with a steadicam.<sup>71</sup> This might indeed suggest a sense of observation or tracking that coheres with the *anti-didascalismo* or fly-on-the-wall descriptions offered above. There are certainly a number of instances where this form of filmmaking is apparent, for example the sequence which frames the surveillance of the camorristi over the 'Vele', where the camera takes a high-angle, 'CCTV' position; or the opening shots of Roberto and Franco in the sequence at the house of the debilitated farmer, where the camera is partly obscured by the wall. As Figures 92-93 illustrate, these shots are filmed according to a sense of passive observation that allows the spectator to integrate her/himself into the scene.

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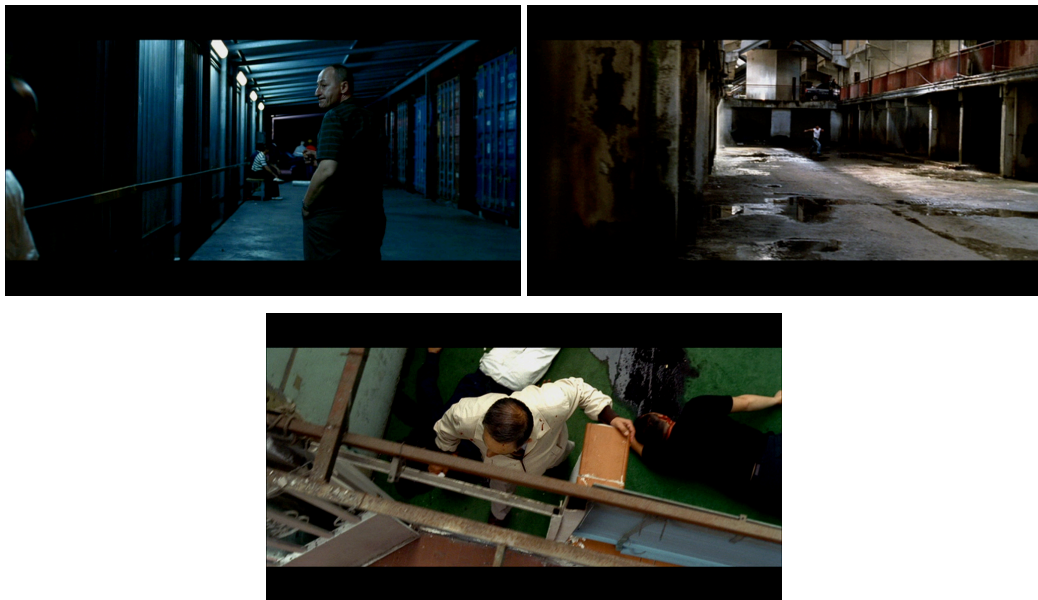
<sup>70</sup> Silvio Grasselli, 'Gomorra', *Film*, 92 (2008), 2-3 (p. 3).

<sup>71</sup> Crispino, p. 49.



Figures 92-93: Surveillance and Observation in *Gomorra* (00:11:20; 01:48:13).

In addition to these shots, though, Crispino observes a further 25% of takes that he describes as ‘i rari, ma comunque estremamente significativi movimenti “attivi” della macchina da presa’, that, more than passively observing, ‘descrivono spazi o interpretano le azioni rappresentate’.<sup>72</sup> The shots to which he refers go beyond a simplistic claim to objective reality. He includes three examples:



Il carrello laterale che chiude l'inquadratura in cui Pasquale è avvicinato per la prima volta da Xian, il movimento elaborato (carrello S/D + dolly B/A) che descrive l'operazione di recupero degli ovuli di cocaina da parte di Totò, il movimento di *louma* che segue la fuga di Don Ciro a strage appena compiuta.<sup>73</sup> (Figures 94-96: Active Camera Movements in *Gomorra*, 00:26:30; 00:27:31; 01:47:24)

Though by no means a majority, there are further key instances of this style of shot: here one could include the complex pan/track that follows Pasquale into his truck at

<sup>72</sup> Crispino, p. 49.

<sup>73</sup> Crispino, pp. 49-50.

the end of this story-thread, or in fact a number of the shots of Franco and Roberto that explore the space with which they interact, such as the quarry or the port. In each of these cases, it is of course significant that a major plot pivot is occurring, or culminating. The use of the camera here, as well as its accentuation of and involvement in key narrative passages, illustrates an active function that cannot be viewed in any way as observational.

In fact, the careful planning and realization of these shots points to a wider tendency in the film to stage the action. Many of the shots effected from an observational-realist point-of-view can be reviewed, revealing that they too are by no means casually put together or improvised. Paolo Russo has illustrated the theatrical nature of the climactic scene in the storyline on Totò, where fixed location of the camera is necessary in order to frame the walkway of the *vela* as a stage.<sup>74</sup> The position of Totò and the opening door of Maria's house mask the entrance onto the scene of the two assassins, emerging from the ascending walkway behind Totò and the path behind Maria's door respectively, adding to the shock of the scene and, perhaps, its traumatic nature.



Figures 97-98: Staging in *Gomorra* (01:41:24; 01:27:41)

Further instances of staging which contradict the suggestions that *Gomorra* is observational include the scene of Don Ciro trying on the bullet-proof vest in his

<sup>74</sup> Paolo Russo, 'Complex Narrative, Genre and Mise-en-Scène in *Gomorra*', paper delivered at the conference 'Contemporary Representations of Organised Crime in Italy and Beyond', University of Kent, 9 June 2011.

bedroom, where the multitude of mirrors are placed to reflect his features and accentuate the emotional turmoil (his fear, our pity). The shots of the eerie tanning salon, the vast quarry, or the cemetery into which Xian's car crashes each reveal a similar tension between observational photography and the pre-empted staging.

Each of these shots – and indeed those ‘active’ shots detailed above – furthermore reveal that *Gomorra* can by no means straightforwardly be considered ‘anti-didascalico’. Suffice it to consider the shock of the assassination of Maria and the camera's complicity with Totò throughout the sequence to contradict this suggestion. While it observes Totò, it also forces the spectator into complicity and carefully manipulates the action, leading us into shock and grief for the good character. The camera that pans backward and forward into Pasquale's truck, foregrounding the ironic, illuminated ‘jolly’ sign coerces our involvement in his tragic fate; and even the observational positioning in the tanning salon leads to our own shock at the violence. Though the message is a straightforward one – the Camorra is utterly morally corrupt – this message is nonetheless very powerfully enunciated.

*Gomorra* illustrates as well as any recent mafia film that the tensions inherent to ‘traumatic realism’ are apparent in this cinema too. Nevertheless, the responses to the film, and in particular the way in which it is articulated by the crew, betray a desire to exaggerate only the film's engagement with realism. The shots and sequence to which I have referred demonstrate that this performance only accentuates the more pointed contradiction which lies within the claim that a film can invoke an external reality. Nevertheless, in doing so the film's paratexts (like the formal content of *I cento passi*) construct a persuasive discourse that is very straightforwardly – dominantly – decoded by the spectator, who, I contend, is

typically quite willing to accept that such a reality exists. I will speculate further on the motives for this passive interpretation below.

*I cento passi* and *Gomorra* are two particularly interesting cases of recent, critically successful organized crime films that, while built on the same contradictions of traumatic realism noted by Rothberg, place exaggerated emphasis on realistic modes, *performing* a contradictory realism. Though I have focussed on just two, many further cases could be picked out that use similar techniques: from the re-creation and brutal violence of the Strage di Torre Annunziata in *Fortapàsc* to the use of the authentic telephone threats to Giorgio Ambrosoli and the latter's own voice over the credits in *Un eroe borghese*; and the relationship between Marco Amenta's documentary *Diario di una siciliana ribelle* (2002) and feature film *La siciliana ribelle*, and the foregrounding of the director's local knowledge, in particular in its epi-texts.<sup>75</sup> It is worth reiterating that the performances of realism, though dominant in these cases, are interwoven within a wider approach to realism and thus should not be taken as the unique mode of representation (often this difference amounts to a question of self-consciousness in the director's approach).

### Anti-realism

In the following paragraphs, I will turn to two key instances of self-conscious rejections of history – *Romanzo criminale* (Michele Placido, 2005) and *Tano da*

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<sup>75</sup> Amenta typically states quite boldly this link in interviews: 'Sono palermitano, ho lavorato sia come fotoreporter che come regista di documentari, ho fotografato morti ammazzati, ho incontrato i figli di Riina, ho conosciuto magistrati e poliziotti. Perciò qui non mi sono rifatto all'iconografia classica del cinema mafiologico, ma alla realtà concreta. Mostrando, come ha già fatto *Gomorra*, come nella criminalità organizzata non ci sia nessun romanticismo alla *Padrino*'. Claudia Morgoglione, 'Storia di Rita "La siciliana ribelle" che a 17 anni osò sfidare la mafia', *La Repubblica*, 25 February 2009, online: <[http://www.repubblica.it/2009/02/sezioni/spettacoli\\_e\\_cultura/siciliana-ribelle/siciliana-ribelle/siciliana-ribelle.html](http://www.repubblica.it/2009/02/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/siciliana-ribelle/siciliana-ribelle/siciliana-ribelle.html)> [accessed 5 May 2012]. The argument that a filmmaker who creates stories about the mafia must be *local* in order to understand it is also presented by Amenta himself in the radio interview for 'Guardie o Ladri' (Radio 24, 5 January 2008) that is cited in the introduction.

*morire* (Roberta Torre, 1997) – in order to illustrate the breadth of cinematic reactions to the traumas of organized crime. Both of these films are loosely based on historical events, but ultimately reject historical chronicle in favour of accentuated genre-based codes. *Romanzo criminale* is in fact an adaptation of an adaptation of historical events, from Giancarlo De Cataldo's 2002 eponymous novel. The film narrates the rise and fall of the Banda della Magliana in 1970s-80s Rome, and though it constructs a historical background, it plays with the central narrative events liberally. *Tano da morire* is set around the Vucciria market in Palermo, that depicts the murder of butcher and mafioso Tano Guarrasi, yet in doing so favours grotesque musical trends that powerfully reject notions of historical reality.

*Romanzo criminale* focuses on the gang leadership of three protagonists: Libanese (Pierfrancesco Favino), Dandi (Claudio Santamaria) and Freddo (Kim Rossi Stuart). Through chronological similarities, even more strikingly in the novel, it is quite apparent that respectively these characters are adaptations of criminal figures Franco Giuseppucci, Enrico De Pedis and Maurizio Abbattino.<sup>76</sup> It is very apparent nonetheless that Placido makes little effort to present the film as historical or referential, instead characterization is mapped over the ironic citation of norms of the gangster genre. This is rooted early on within the oneiric sequences at the beach which parenthesize the film, and to which Placido intermittently returns. It is never made clear if this location is memory, history, dream or an afterlife. Here the three – four, really – gangsters have their characters first defined as they choose their own nicknames. The fourth boy (who appears only in this setting) begins the conversation about nicknames in saying that he should be called 'Grana', 'per via dei sordi: sono er primo mio pensiero quando mi svejo'. The second, having joked

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<sup>76</sup> See Giovanni Bianconi, *Ragazzi di malavita: fatti e misfatti della banda della Magliana* (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai Editore, 2005), and Giancarlo De Cataldo, *Romanzo criminale* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

that for the same motives he should be called Ursula Andress, justifies his name ‘Dandi’ since ‘da grande vojo essere come Fred Astaire, er frac pure a colazione... se dice così, no? un dandi.’ The third interjects ‘so solo che io mio vojo chiamare Libanese, come ’sto spino, perché il mio sogno sarebbe quello di fumare sempre e non vedere lo schifo che c’è intorno’. The fourth chooses ‘Freddo’, and though he does not justify it, he defends it (‘cazzi mia’) when questioned. Stella Bruzzi has observed that ‘the desire to conform to an already established model that will be instantly identifiable to characters and spectators alike is conventionally distilled into shorthand devices like the use of nicknames in gangster films’,<sup>77</sup> and indeed this dialogue very explicitly does precisely this. Libanese’s name is rooted in the rejection of the world, foregrounding a presumably difficult upbringing that recalls figures like Tom Powers (*The Public Enemy*, William A. Wellman, 1931); Grana designates the desire for material wealth, like countless figures from Bull Weed (*Underworld*, Josef von Sternberg, 1927) to Tony Camonte (*Scarface*, Howard Hawks, 1932);<sup>78</sup> Freddo bears the classical, ‘cool’ or impenetrable exterior of a determined gangster, following along the lines of Rico Bandello (*Little Caesar*, Mervyn LeRoy, 1931). ‘Dandi’ suggests the passion for sharp costume, perhaps signalling what Bruzzi labels ‘the clothes-fetishist gangster’, and indeed will be defined thus by the cinematography which dwells at times on his clothing.<sup>79</sup> We can evidently furthermore trace the construction of the comradeship of the gang leaders from a young age in this sequence – which is singular to the film, not occurring in

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<sup>77</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Though Grana appears to die at the very beginning of the film, this does not underplay this more universal of gangster traits, which nonetheless continues to haunt the other men. As Daniela Turco observes, ‘non smetterà di circolare tra loro come “ragione sociale” della banda e come ossessione comunitaria impossibile, di amicizia condivisa per sempre, destinata inevitabilmente a infrangersi nel tradimento’, ‘The unforgiven’, *Filmcritica*, 560 (2005), 547-551 (p. 549).

<sup>79</sup> Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, p. 72.

the novel or the more recent television adaptation – as an echo of the same, early-age construction of comradeship in *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy* or *Dead End* (William Wyler, 1937), for instance.<sup>80</sup>

A further trait of the classical gangster movie is of course predestination, intending the ultimate descent and demise of the gangster.<sup>81</sup> This too established from the oneiric opening scene of *Romanzo criminale*, and even more specifically by returning to it at the film's conclusion, once the final man has died. By rooting the film's discourse within rigid genre codes, then it is evident to the spectator that the same fate that Grana appears to meet at the very beginning furthermore awaits Libanese, Dandi and Freddo. The death sequences certainly continue the characteristics established early on: Libanese fast adopts the persona of the dominant and powerful leader – it is no coincidence that his other nickname is 'L'ottavo re di Roma'; he is later betrayed, literally stabbed in the back in a *vespasiano*. He then stumbles into one of Trastevere's central piazzas, where the melodramatic soundtrack, stumbling p-o-v camera and soft focus contribute to a fitting end to the natural leader: 'muore, escluso e solo, trafitto dalle coltellate, come un imperatore romano di fronte al bagliore cupo dell'oro dei mosaici di Santa Maria in Trastevere'.<sup>82</sup> Though the chronology of Libanese (read as Giuseppucci) fits historically, the location of his death is moved into this dramatic setting in order to

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<sup>80</sup> Many of the same relationships between the young, coming-of-age gangsters can be traced over the relationships between the gangsters in *Romanzo criminale*, too. Joe's dangerous loyalty to Rico in *Little Caesar*, for instance, is echoed in Freddo's blind commitment to Libanese; similarly we might expand some of the queer subtexts of these films to include Libanese, who follows the exact pattern of both prioritizing male bonding and mostly rejecting women. See Thomas Doherty, *Pre-code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 146.

<sup>81</sup> The death is typically taken either as a straightforward lesson that crime does not pay, see 'Rushing Towards Death: The Gangster Film' in Doherty, pp. 140-57; or, as observed in the previous chapter, the inevitable conclusion of the tragic contradictions of the capitalist push for success, see Robert Warshow, 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero', in *The immediate experience: Movies, comics, theatre and other aspects of popular culture* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 97-104.

<sup>82</sup> Turco, p. 548.



exaggerate this characterization.<sup>83</sup> The death of Freddo – which is in part suicidal, having used the dirty syringe but nevertheless being shot by an unknown government agent – goes entirely against history, as Abbattino remains alive today. For Freddo the *tragic* end that fits the model of so many classical gangsters becomes established once he has lost everyone close to him, after the deaths of Roberta, Gigio and Libanese. The death of Dandi is, in fact, a notable historical exception: he is murdered outside one of his clothing boutiques in the historical centre of Rome (via dei Cappellari).<sup>84</sup> In this case, though, there is a straightforward argument that the mythologized status and death of De Pedis was compatible enough with the character of Dandi that little change was needed here.

*Romanzo criminale* nevertheless quite specifically invokes a historical period as backdrop throughout the narrative, via costume, mise-en-scène (particularly props), setting, the soundtrack and, occasionally, historical events such as the Caso Moro (1978) or the bombing of the Stazione Centrale di Bologna (1980). Through the combination of the historical setting and improvised narrative, the film can be taken as an instance of what Linda Hutcheon labels ‘historiographic metafiction’.<sup>85</sup> There is an important consequence of this dislocation of referent: the overlap between reality and fiction is fundamentally problematized. This process moreover raises a series of implicit questions about the form of both the text and the historical event:

Issues such as those of narrative form, of intertextuality, of strategies of representation, of the role of language, of the relation between historical fact and experiential event, and, in general, of the epistemological and ontological

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<sup>83</sup> Giuseppucci was murdered in Piazza San Cosimato. Cf. Bianconi, p. 55.

<sup>84</sup> De Pedis died in the same way. Cf. Bianconi, p. 216.

<sup>85</sup> See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), in particular pp. 105-23.

consequences of the act of rendering problematic what was once taken for granted by historiography – and literature.<sup>86</sup>

What is crucial to us, though, is that in *adapting* history, the film ‘redefine[s] intellectual history as “the study of social meaning as historically constituted”’. This point can be best illustrated through a closer analysis of *Romanzo criminale*’s (dis)engagement with history in the abduction of Moro in 1978. Though the event is used loosely to indicate chronology, it nevertheless functions *within* the closed narrative of the film rather than simply to perform realism. In the plot, the leaders of the *Banda della Magliana* are approached by a mysterious Italian G-man and asked to locate the body of the missing DC leader. Before this, we are confronted with a scene in which Placido cuts together a sequence of shots of the gang in a disco with familiar newsreel footage of Via Fani; interestingly including disparate visuals but the same voice-over as used in *I cento passi*.<sup>87</sup> This evidence of audio-visual deconstruction is coherent with O’Rawe’s analysis of the scene, in which she illustrates how inconsistencies between the two settings, along with the soundtrack, ‘Lady Marmalade’ by Labelle, reveal ‘a profound commentary on the narrative’.<sup>88</sup> Though the references to Moro do signal a concrete historical period, this is only a coincidental function of the footage and is certainly not unproblematic: the chronology of the newsreel events is distorted (we move from the famous photo of Moro inside the ‘people’s prison’ *back* to via Fani, 16 March), and the date of the Labelle song, 1974, means that its inclusion ‘is [...] not used as a precise temporal

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<sup>86</sup> Hutcheon, p. xii.

<sup>87</sup> Specifically, Massimiliano Menichetti’s words ‘Il presidente della Democrazia Cristiana, l’onorevole Aldo Moro, è stato rapito poco fa a Roma, da un commando di terroristi’.

<sup>88</sup> Catherine O’Rawe, ‘More More Moro: Music and Montage in *Romanzo criminale*’, *The Italianist*, 29.2 (2009), 214–26 (p. 222).

marker'.<sup>89</sup> Quite apparently the historical event is not foregrounded in order to perform realism, but rather manipulated so as to offer political comment.

This is further demonstrative of the film as a form of historiographic metafiction. Whereas the performance of realism attempts to distance the fictionality of the text, so as to persuade the viewer to overlook it, here the accentuation or performance of fictionality seeks to dislocate the historical chronicle. 'Historiographic metafiction', notes Hutcheon, 'problematizes the activity of reference by refusing either to bracket the referent [...] or to revel in it'.<sup>90</sup> This technique allows a representation of history in which fictionalization and historical chronicle are not mutually exclusive, and value-based, and the need for a hierarchical analysis of either is undermined. Such an interactive review of the past becomes a tentative act of appropriation, paradoxically prioritizing and problematizing this key historical context: in this sequence the same, familiar newsreel footage of the *strage di Via Fani* is rewritten, enshrined in a 'new context', and yet as such it is opened to interrogation. As O'Rawe notes, 'the Moro montage points up the gaps in knowledge about the event, leaving the spectator with a full visual and aural experience, but with a troubling sense of these aporias'.<sup>91</sup> We could construct a similar argument in relation to the representation of the Strage di Bologna – the bomb placed at the railway station on 2 August 1980, taking eighty-five lives. Following a technically enhanced and manipulated shot of the explosion, Placido introduces the real historical newsreel footage of its aftermath, granting, as O'Leary argues, 'the seal of historical truth to the fiction'.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, Placido

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<sup>89</sup> O'Rawe, p. 217.

<sup>90</sup> Hutcheon, p. 119.

<sup>91</sup> O'Rawe, p. 221.

<sup>92</sup> Alan O'Leary, 'Moro, Brescia, Conspiracy: The Paranoid Style in Italian Cinema', in *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy, 1969-2009*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O'Leary (London: Legenda, 2009), pp. 48-62 (p. 59n).

manipulates this footage by bracketing it with shots that expand on the narrative, featuring and giving culpability to the character Il Nero, and furthermore superimposing Freddo over the action. As such, he is demonstrating quite literally how the historical context is pushed into the background, and the narrative takes precedence: revelling in the referent.

*Tano da morire* has an extraordinarily different approach to the representation of the mafia, almost casually fitting its characters into sequences that ironically play up stereotypes: from the ladies at the hairdressers who become a chorus stylized as though in an ancient Greek drama, to the shoot-out at the wedding which feels closer to a black, hallucinogenic comedy like *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Terry Gilliam, 1998). The characters as such do not belong to any particular historical period, and neither soundtrack nor props designate this with any consistency. As with *Romanzo criminale*, there is an underlying implication of history: the film is based on the night that butcher/mafioso Tano Guarrasi is murdered in 1988. The film makes recourse to subtitles throughout, that give a sense of time, for instance, of Franca Guarrasi's wedding, or the murder of Vincenzo Puglisi. The precise dates nevertheless have even less pertinence than in *Romanzo criminale*, other than to allow a re-construction of the jumping narrative and, as Marcus observes, appear moreover to fit into the film's overall rhetoric of pastiche: 'In her recourse to captions that provide the exact coordinates of place, date and time (down to the minute), Torre spoofs the thriller's pretensions to scientific precision in its investigatory procedures'.<sup>93</sup> Despite this extensive rejection of any realism though, quite strikingly the critical response to the film has nevertheless

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<sup>93</sup> Millicent Marcus, *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 243.

welcomed its ability to ‘demystify’<sup>94</sup> the mafia, or to somehow reveal its foundations, the ‘terreno di incubazione e diffusione’.<sup>95</sup>

We can once again root the eschewal of historical or realistic representation by tracing the attempt to exaggerate the genre conventions of the film. The narrative is based on flashbacks and flashforwards that relate the relationship of certain characters to Tano Guarrasi, such as his sisters, particularly Franca, adopted son, or friend, and each of these will be configured according to its own tone and loose historical period: from the 1970s style disco of the ‘Simm’a mafia’, to the *West Side Story* stylizations of the protagonist’s rap, ‘O’ reppi’t ano’, or the 1950s crooner at the party that celebrates Tano’s involvement in the mafia.

It is worth noting that Torre’s representation of Tano Guarrisi, as in the case of Marco Amenta’s treatment of Rita Atria, took root in a documentary two years beforehand entitled *Appunti per un film su Tano*. The reliance on the documentary is nevertheless quite differently dealt with. The film begins with a series of sequences to which it will return intermittently throughout, and which are similarly rooted in pastiches. These are: a celebratory funeral procession, which appears to be a direct citation of *Lo zio di Brooklyn*; a first person, documentary-style interview shot with Enzo, the narrator; an animated, fantasy-gothic style sequence of skulls; and the discovery of the corpse of Tano and the repetitive screams of men and women, shot from the corpse’s point of view. It is significant that the second shot of the film introduces it as though a historical documentary – ‘Questa è una storia vera [...] questa è la storia di Tano Guarrasi, uomo d’onore della famiglia di Passo di Rigano, ucciso nella sua macelleria con sei colpi di pistola in tutto il corpo’. Though the

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<sup>94</sup> Luana Babini, ‘The Mafia: New Cinematic Perspectives’, in *Italian Cinema: New Directions*, ed. by William Hope (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 229- 50 (p. 233).

<sup>95</sup> Goffredo Fofi, ‘Una nota’, in Roberta Torre, *Tano da morire, un film: soggetto e appunti di Regia* (Palermo: Edizioni della Battaglia, 1995), p. 25.

following sequence, highly surreal, immediately informs the spectator that no such chronological or historical monologue will take place, the foundation of Enzo's narration initially plausibly plays with the expectations from the spectator.

A similarly contradictory engagement with a typecast, realistic form is included in the film's interaction with the newsreel, when the intrusive reporter appears at the scene of Tano's murder and attempts to interview the locals on what they know. As we have seen above, this is often a technique which is employed to signify a specific temporal marker, or invoke a kind of *reportage* realism; once again the (this time ironic) designation of 'realism' is employed through greyscale aesthetics. Here, though, the reporter is forced away from the scene of the crime, and gains no access to the local community who, through *omertà*, refuse any knowledge. The expectations of the spectator are once again frustrated, then. Moreover, by cutting to and from the scene repeatedly, and giving us extra information to which the news reporter is not privy, Torre appears to be bringing into question the very capacity of the (news) camera to encapsulate any reality.

*Tano da morire* and *Romanzo criminale* lead us back in an interesting manner to the very questions of representation which are present throughout Rothberg's investigation of 'traumatic realism'. His coining of the term emerges from the two major tendencies to represent the Holocaust: on the one hand realistic, on the other anti-realistic. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, in the case of representation of the mafia, the approach to realism and the claims to historical truth are by no means individuated, rather they overlap and combine, at times contradictorily. Nevertheless, it is no doubt possible ultimately to map the differentiation between performances of realism and historiographic metafiction or grotesque comedy over a similar distinction between the urge for the real, and its

rejection. *Tano da morire* can evidently with some ease be taken as an anti-realist text in the terms intended by Rothberg: it simultaneously suggests that the mafia ‘cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata’, and it offers ‘radically new regimes of knowledge’ that, as the reviews of the film suggest, are not unsuccessful.<sup>96</sup> The historiographic metafiction film, such as *Romanzo criminale*, makes no effort to claim that it represents accurately the histories on which it is based, instead going to efforts to bring that history into a series of genre conventions, often consequently explicitly manipulating or rejecting the original referent. Though not ‘antirealist’ in precisely the same terms, since it *is* relying quite specifically on traditional frameworks of representation, the rejection of history which is taking place here might no less be qualified as a refusal of the real in light of the acceptance that its ‘realist’ representation is ultimately impossible.

### **Conclusions: History and Trauma**

This chapter has sought to outline an interesting development in the production and critical response to the mafia film in Italy. I suggested, in the first chapters, that there is a foundational model of *cinema d'impegno* that emerges after the Second World War, and pointed to the broad fragmentation of its dogmatic ideological and aesthetic codes into the *riflusso*. Though there has been a consistent push for a more rigidly ideological, ‘top-down’ model of *impegno* in the production of organized crime cinema, generally the two ‘filoni’ of engaged and organized crime film have progressed in correlation. Nevertheless, in the wake of the murders of Falcone and Borsellino, the production and reception of several of these organized crime films altered, in fact *returning* to the codes of realism and rigid moral ideology that are

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Fofi, p. 25

rooted in the tradition of *impegno*. A fork in patterns of representation thus emerged, between those that adhere to postmodern and post-hegemonic models of *impegno*, and those which take root in the foundational agenda of engagement.

This fork can be both explained and contextualized through an application of trauma theory to this cultural production. It was necessary to do so across two levels: a macro understanding of the trauma of the mafia, which is problematic because of the continual regeneration of damaging events; and the micro level instances of progressive temporal instances of traumatic events. The first section of this chapter picked out specific ‘nodes’ of trauma which fit into a theoretical model of repetitive compulsion and which moreover imply a chronological process of traumatic event, (re-)trigger, remembrance, and working through. It soon becomes clear that while specific scenes betray a more open relationship with the original traumatic event, these ‘nodes’ could not be entirely individuated or separated from the more comprehensive discourse of a traumatic framework. As illustrated, this relationship between what can be termed the ‘traumatic recollection’ and the ‘narrative memory’, whose relationship is dialectical, ties in intimately to Michael Rothberg’s model of traumatic realism, where both are built on tensions between realism (or historical chronicle) and dramatization (or narrative memories). The second half picked out a series of additional instances which not only further testified to the existence of the same tensions of traumatic realism, but moreover indicated that in the Italian case the films tended to foreground self-consciously their approach according to one of the two poles of realism and anti-realism.

Throughout this chapter, the theory of time which is implicit in trauma and its working through – the two/three events referred to by Freud, cited above – has been shown to bear several implicit difficulties of chronology. On the one hand, the



movement between the event, the trigger memory, the traumatic relapse and the working through are an unavoidably diachronic model. On the other, taking a singular traumatic text, such as *Giovanni Falcone*, forces us into a synchronic instant, a snapshot, which brings various historical discourses (via fragments of trauma) into one historical moment, i.e. that in which the spectator spectates. This is essentially that ‘peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma’ that Cathy Caruth has argued can lead to different paradigms of history itself:

The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. [...] I would propose that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma—both in its occurrence, and in the attempt to understand it—that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history which is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma, [...] we can understand that a rethinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, of precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not.<sup>97</sup>

Caruth illustrates her argument with a reading of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* that overlaps the context of the text itself with the historical effects of Freud’s movement from Austria to the UK in 1937, thus constructing a complex and layered model of history and its latent effects. The instance she offers, then, overlaps diachrony and synchrony by combining the personal case with the wider historical discourse. The new paradigm of history that Caruth offers coheres both with the articulation of the mafia on film as a national memory, specifically the complex interaction of ‘nodes’ of trauma with comprehensive narratives. We can trace this in the mafia case across the numerous connections mentioned or implied above, including overlapping characters, documentary-dramatization adaptations, sequels,

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<sup>97</sup> Cathy Caruth, ‘Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History’, *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991), 181-92 (pp. 181-2).

the reproduction or citation of other mafia films, and the parallels of each of these with the constantly evolving mafia history.

It seems strikingly relevant here that for Jauss a key form of history – the historicity of literature – materializes at ‘the intersections of diachrony and synchrony’.<sup>98</sup> His foregrounding of the spectator into the historicizing process that the texts create serves in this case, given the traumatic nature of the content, to enter the spectator into the process of history/memory. As we have seen, key to this involvement is the emotional manipulation of the spectator, through shock and grief, which in turn emerges from the possibility to relate to the mafia. The involvement of the spectator into the historical process illustrates the relevance of the mafia’s *traumatic* nature, or specifically why the traumatic reading of these films is pertinent to a discussion of the political significance of these films. The relationship between spectator and history is in constant change and evolution. This is first and foremost due to the nature of the trauma of the mafia which, as mentioned, in itself is undergoing constant renewal. As Renga has argued, this complicates deeply the working through of the mafia which currently, and crucially, remains ‘Unfinished Business’.<sup>99</sup>

Though the tensions between the push for mimetic representations, or epistemologically ‘realistic’ understanding of the mafia and the organic ‘narrativization’ of plots and memories remains, there is an unanswered question in the Italian case: how can we explain the absence of self-consciousness that often leads to ‘performances’ of realism? I have argued that the performativity of realism in the Italian case emerges where the claims to mimesis not only describe a reality, but furthermore enact or invoke it for the viewer. I have speculated that this occurs

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<sup>98</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 37.

<sup>99</sup> Renga, *Unfinished Business*, forthcoming.

over a process of ‘dominant’ decoding, whereby she perhaps is more willingly open than otherwise to accept the film’s persuasive rhetoric.

The motives which lie behind ‘performativity’, I would suggest, nonetheless remain complex and plural. As mentioned above, it is important to take into account the specificity of the Italian case here where, after neorealism, a critical framework which is built on realism has lingered, and is undoubtedly used in the reception of these films.<sup>100</sup> We might speculate that, as well as a certain pleasure within the spectator that comes with the act of thoughtlessly accepting the films as ‘real’ and its equation to a political ‘participation’ in the anti-mafia movement, the decoding of these films as realistic might in its own terms be thought of as ‘traumatic’. Returning to the final point made in the first section, in which I suggested that films like *Giovanni Falcone* required straightforward, seemingly non-challenging and ‘anti-didascaliche’ representations of the ‘nodes’ of trauma, such as the bombings of Via d’Amelio and Capaci, it is just as straightforward to suggest that for the same motive of trauma the spectator will *desire* unchallenging representations. The same traumatic process which leads to the encoding of the ‘compulsion to repeat’ could be located at the root of its dominant decoding, its monological interpretation.

The choice of a particular political participation in the film draws together the traumatic construction and deconstruction of the text and the tacit acceptance of the anachronistic model of realism. This participation is very interestingly charged, however, for two reasons: first, in despite of the brutality of the images portrayed, the process of ‘sharing’ the political message can procure a form of pleasure for the spectator, in the guise of a kind of *buonismo*. This emerges from the viewer’s self-positioning *within* the ‘culture of redemption’, to return to Bersani’s term with

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. O’Leary and O’Rawe.

which I began the chapter. This leads to the second point: the act of redemption, the location of a moralistic reading of a traumatic text, and moreover taking *pleasure* out of the participation within some *community* of moralist redemption is, in itself, a political activity. This leads to a further question, and one which I will turn to in the following chapter: if a text can perform a reality, which in its dominant decoding leads to a political activity, then can further techniques of political engagement, beyond simply realism, be taken as performative?

#### IV. Post-Hegemonic and Performative *Impegno* since 2000: from *I cento passi* to *Vallanzasca*

La situazione politica generale in Italia è molto meno chiara oggi di quando ho fatto i miei primi film. Vent'anni fa, quando girai *Salvatore Giuliano* e *Le mani sulla città*, il mio scopo era quello di partecipare alla vita pubblica realizzando dei film che si occupassero di problemi della collettività. La realtà allora era più chiara e più semplice, e potevo raccontare storie sulla collettività e sulla società usando semplicemente i fatti. La situazione ora è più complessa e c'è bisogno di affidarsi maggiormente agli eventi sociali per poter esprimere un'analisi.<sup>1</sup>

Some thirty years ago, in 1982, Francesco Rosi commented quite astutely that his early *film impegnati* were built according to a specific agenda which was fitting to the time. The means to access public life was via 'collettività' of political constituencies which could be spoken to and spoken about in unitary terms; collectives of audiences who functioned within the unilateral process of *denuncia* or *impegno* in his films. Rosi's approach to *impegno* fits, as I have illustrated in the first chapter, with twentieth-century Marxist aesthetic theory, which takes for granted precisely these collectives. Twenty years after his first films, though, as Rosi observes, society is so fundamentally altered that the social film needs to find a new voice, to produce a pluralistic response to the complexities of contemporary politics. Focussing on a period which begins more or less when the interview with Rosi took place, Jennifer Burns writes that the move into postmodernity, and the accompanying disintegration of the foundational frameworks of *impegnato* art, such as realism or modernism, can be traced over a progressive fragmentation of the 'monolith' of the original, communist *impegno* project. The 'bits and pieces' produced by the progression of fragmentation generate a disconnected and

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Crowds, 'Personalizing Political Issues: An Interview with Francesco Rosi', *Cinéaste*, 12.2 (1982), 42; quoted in Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, 'Introduction', in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 1-29 (p. 17).

rhizomatic image of contemporary commitment that is, as Burns states, ‘All very postmodern’.<sup>2</sup>

As Rosi’s words illustrate, what this postmodern moment brings with it is the disavowal of unitary political collectives, and with it the disavowal and collapse of ‘grand narratives’. Without a single ideological aim, then *impegno* in any collective terms becomes enormously problematic, and requires a theoretical overhaul. Yet the consequence of the entrance into postmodernity is certainly not a disintegration of commitment in film but rather, as is widely recognized by now, a shift downwards towards models of *impegno* at the micro level. Rosi suggests that it is the ‘evento sociale’ itself which must be turned to in order to produce political art; this is one means of relocating *impegno* within an individual fragment, and one which has been illustrated extensively in the previous chapter in relation to the 1992 bombings of Via D’Amelio and Capace.

At the end of the chapter I posed what I see as a crucial question of whether *impegno* can be performative. In many senses, though, the answer is apparent: not only is it possible for political commitment, just like realism, to be performed, but we should not be at all surprised that this is so, in light of *impegno* becoming ‘all very postmodern’. In *The Postmodern Condition*, the earliest major attempt to contextualize postmodern knowledge, Lyotard observes the dissolution of the grand narratives of modernity, and poses performativity as *the* alternative mode of political legitimation.<sup>3</sup> Information can only be recounted with any authenticity, following the widespread problematizing of antecedent transmissions of knowledge (grand narratives), if it is done through a ‘performance’, whereby the utterance

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

given by one person to the other is rooted in the social criteria that inform both parties. The use of ‘performativity’ in this context owes as much to the linguistic notion set out by J. L. Austin as it does to the technical understanding of efficiency (a ‘good performance’): the transmission of a certain amount of knowledge is deemed successful if *performed* without interruption.<sup>4</sup>

Lyotard illustrates, very importantly, the effects of this ‘input/output ratio’ on the construction of alternative narratives, and two of his points are worth unpacking here. First, the theorist argues that traditional narratives in the performative delivery can be taken as ‘positive or negative apprenticeships’, according to the ‘successes or failures greeting the hero’s undertakings’. He continues:

The successes or failures either bestow legitimacy upon social institutions (the function of myths), or represent positive or negative models (the successful or unsuccessful hero) of integration into established institutions (legends and tales). Thus the narratives allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed within it.<sup>5</sup>

Assuming that the transmission of mafia narratives takes place according to a performative process – this I will better explain below – it is clear that the input/output codes can be read into them with ease. The ‘unsuccessful hero’, the anti-mafia martyr, in dying, fails to ‘bestow legitimacy’ upon Italian society, and thus the narrative’s ‘negative apprenticeship’ unfolds according to common codes.

The second relevant point relates to the ‘transmission of narratives’, whereby the presentation of a text depends on both the ‘speaker’ and the ‘listener’, both of whom must perform within this action.<sup>6</sup> In assuming the possibility of a performance of *impegno*, then we must come back to the assumption that there is a

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lyotard, pp. 9-11; 14-17.

<sup>5</sup> Lyotard, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Lyotard defines the ‘threefold competence’ that bracket the performance of a narrative: “‘know-how,” “knowing how to speak,” and “knowing how to hear” [*savoir-faire, savoir-dire, savoir-entendre*]. Lyotard, p. 21.

plausible construction of engagement that is both produced and consumed, or, as I have phrased it above, *dominantly* encoded and decoded. A useful comparison here is O’Leary’s identification of the ‘engaged constituency’. Relying on statements made by the creators of *La meglio gioventù* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2003), and observing the aesthetics of the film, he suggests that ‘*La meglio gioventù* is at once an effort of interpellation or hailing of a certain constituency in Italian society and at the same time is an organic expression, so to speak, of the makers’ own part in that constituency’.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the film is at once setting out a particular political message and making it clear to whom this message is aimed, by situating the filmmakers within that same constituency. This specific ‘circle’ is ‘traced according to the terms and discourse of *Impegno*’.<sup>8</sup> In identifying this particular process of reception, O’Leary implicitly outlines the horizon of expectation of the viewer of this particular, self-consciously engaged text; this is moreover a transmission of *impegno* that appears likely to function as a *performance* according to the same terms of ‘performative realism’ that I have argued in the previous chapter.

I suggested at the end of the previous chapter that the performance of realism goes unchallenged by the viewer who, by investing in the reality presented cinematically, participates within a process of *impegno* and experiences a form of pleasure in doing so; I referred to this as a kind of *buonismo*. Within this process, the mutual acceptance of realism takes place over a further shared (and unconscious or un-vocalized) assumption, that the epistemological truth claims are fundamentally flawed. Though we recognize film to represent a falsehood, we ignore this in order to participate in the film’s political message, and gain pleasure

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<sup>7</sup> Alan O’Leary, ‘Marco Tullio Giordana, or The Persistence of *Impegno*’, in *Postmodern Impegno*, pp. 213-232 (pp. 224-5). For further discussion, I refer the reader to O’Leary’s *Tragedia all’italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970-2010* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), in particular ‘Constituencies of Moro’, pp. 185-228.

<sup>8</sup> O’Leary, ‘The Persistence of *Impegno*’, p. 226.



from doing so. This process can thus be read in terms of a performance in the same terms as Lyotard, whereby the input and output align in despite of themselves, and can produce a certain ‘efficiency’ in terms of the spectator’s pleasure. Both the engaged constituency and the pleasure of participation for the viewer evidently signal the strong possibility, however, that a performative model of *impegno* becomes inefficient (the ultimate ‘preaching to the converted’, to borrow Adorno’s dictum). If *impegno* is performed efficiently and legitimately, then is the real prospect of a Lukácsian cathartic effect fundamentally undermined? To respond to this question, which is the aim of this chapter, requires sketching out a more complex image of the various influences and impulses at play in the construction of an engaged text and its spectator or constituency in Italy today.

My approach to *impegno* in postmodernity makes recourse to the model of ‘post-hegemonic *impegno*’ provided by Antonello and Mussnug. An issue of compatibility thus presents itself: are post-hegemonic and performative *impegno* mutually exclusive? My impression is that they are not. Reproducing the definition provided in the introduction, Antonello and Mussnug write that ‘Progressive art, in this context, is not defined as the struggle for a new hegemonic affirmation – the transformation of plurality into a new *habitus* – but as a challenge to any form of hegemony’. Certainly the legitimization that emerges through the performance of *impegno* cannot straightforwardly be taken as ‘progressive’, and presents itself as a renewed hegemonic affirmation. Nevertheless, the conscious effort of the reader, or critic, to apply this emancipatory critical key even to performative *impegno* will produce interesting results. Then, of course, it is fundamental to recognize that though performance might be taken as latent within many narrative forms today, there is massive variance between the individual claims of single texts, thus at best

performative *impegno* can be taken only as a single tendency of a much broader network of *cinema d'impegno* (all of which can be interrogated from a post-hegemonic point of view).

The following argument will necessarily draw upon much of what has been argued in the previous chapters, both in terms of my theoretical models, and the socio-historical context that has brought about this specific environment of repetitive performances of organized crime images. The chapter will be structured loosely in two sections. In the first section I will consider the production and construction of *impegno* in relation to the figure of a by now famous anti-mafia martyr, Peppino Impastato. Here I return to *I cento passi* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000), taking the film as an important example that 'performs' *impegno* in order to legitimize it, according to the model outlined above. I then make comparison with an alternative script of the same story, *Nel cuore della luna*, which was ultimately never produced, in order to emphasize the conditions which required the construction of the engaged text. In order to then bring the discussion into a broader network of *impegno* today, I will compare the case of Impastato with a second film, Paolo Sorrentino's *Le conseguenze dell'amore* (2005). The latter marks a striking point of comparison in its outright rejection of *impegno*, in favour of a performance as a 'quality' film. Presenting together these two instances will allow me to point to the disintegration of *impegno* as a 'grand narrative', instead picking out some of the crucial factors, such as the positioning of a film within the current cinematic industry, which affect the production of an organized crime film today.

With an outline of the framework of *impegno* in place, in the third section I will return to some of the questions raised at the beginning of this thesis about the possibility of a 'return to *cinema d'impegno*' in the case of *Gomorra* (Matteo

Garrone, 2008). Here, I return to Lyotard to consider how, in light of the disintegration of grand narratives, we can conceive of the apparent contradiction of the ‘return’, and more broadly conceive of how the film is a particular and important case. I argue that Garrone’s film forges a ‘partnership’ between the kinds of filmmaking that are observed in the previous parts of the chapter, and calls for both engaged and quality constituencies. In order to consider the possible influences of the film in terms of a dialectic between these, I turn to two brief case studies – *Fortapàsc* (Marco Risi, 2009) and *Una vita tranquilla* (Claudio Cupellini, 2010) – and trace out the negotiations of aesthetics within them. To round off the investigation, I finally turn to Michele Placido’s *Vallanzasca: Gli angeli del male* (2010) in order to bring together the issues of developing frameworks of *impegno* to which the chapter attests and to speculate on the longer effects that this might have.

#### **i. Legitimizing *Impegno*: The Case of Peppino Impastato**

At a certain point during *I cento passi*, Giordana introduces the final shots of Francesco Rosi’s *Le mani sulla città* into the film’s diegesis. The setting is the ‘Musica e cultura’ youth group, at which Peppino Impastato screens Rosi’s film before attempting to provoke debate and discussion about the film. The final shot, which Giordana prioritizes by including it within his own diegesis, shows us *Le mani sulla città*’s ‘post-script’, which states: ‘I personaggi e i fatti qui narrati sono immaginari, è autentica invece la realtà sociale e ambientale che li produce’. In order to exaggerate further the significance of these words, Peppino vocalizes them and then, after a brief interruption from Vito who ‘tests’ the music, adds ‘un film è sempre un’opera d’arte; non riproduce mai la realtà così com’è, ma attraverso un

certo sguardo, un certo taglio interpretativo; appunto la reinventa questa realtà, la trasfigura, e la carica di senso'. The montage of this sequence, which is introduced via an acoustic resolve from the closing shots of the titular 'cento passi' scene, thus overlaps already the *impegno* of Rosi's film with that of Giordana's, and of Peppino himself.<sup>9</sup> The second point to be made here is that of Millicent Marcus, who observes that Giordana, in citing and expanding on Rosi, is offering his own 'manifesto for engagé art'.<sup>10</sup> Beyond the apparent contradiction between the post-script of Rosi, which signals both historiographic metafiction and dialectical realism, and that of Giordana himself (mentioned in the previous chapter), which is a one-dimensional and unambiguous claim to historical truth, this instance interestingly signals the move from a performance of realism to that of a performance of *impegno*. This occurs through the straightforward assimilation of Rosi's style, which is evidently coded as 'engaged', onto that of Giordana, who renders his film engaged by proxy. Once again, this occurs through a synchronization of the spectator (mimicked in the metacinematic viewer in this case), and through the creation of a redemptive interpretative key (as argued for by Peppino in the statement quoted above), which the audience of Giordana's film is to adopt. This leads to a similar pattern of dominant coding to that viewed in chapter three, in relation to realism. In fact, the contradiction that emerges in the comparison between the two post-scripts further illustrates this performance. As we have seen (in the first chapter), the post-script of Rosi constitutes the relationship

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<sup>9</sup> The interruption of Peppino's efforts, by Vito, could be read in terms of a sceptical critique, on behalf of the director, of the distraction of popular culture, though it is worth noting that the latter is not viewed as entirely negative.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus suggests that the manifesto is Peppino's, however, following the association made in the previous footnote, I believe we can extend this to Giordana with ease. Millicent Marcus, 'In Memoriam: The Neorealist Legacy in Contemporary Sicilian Anti-Mafia Film', in *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*, ed. by Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), pp. 290-306 (p. 303).

between type and intensive totality that can be read as a constituent of a film that invokes a master narrative (of Marxist realism). This master narrative is no longer functional, of course. Instead, Giordana must turn to alternative, easily ‘decodable’ modes of political discourse for the viewer; as I have argued in the previous chapter, the performance of realism in the film’s post-script assumes precisely this role. Thus, the dominant decoding of the realist performance becomes also a political performance, and therefore legitimized.

As this introductory instance illustrates, the performances of *impegno* that take place in *I cento passi* occur often, quite strikingly so, through pluralistic citation. In addition to *Le mani*, we are presented with mention or direct citation of other films (e.g. *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1959, Alain Resnais), authors (Giacomo Leopardi, Vladimir Majakovsky, Miguel de Cervantes, Dante Alighieri and Pier Paolo Pasolini), and songs (‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’ by Procol Harum, ‘Summertime’ by Janis Joplin, ‘House of the Rising Sun’ by the Animals, among others) that borrow from or emanate political messages from within each one. Work has been undertaken elsewhere that illustrates the political function of these citations. Millicent Marcus has illustrated how the elliptical absence of Majakovsky’s communist poetry, that marks the shift from Peppino’s childhood to his adulthood, forms an ‘ellipses’, an ‘exemplum that replicates itself in the life of the listener’.<sup>11</sup> The viewer, she argues, recognizes the gap thus as provided the context of the protagonist’s political development as a communist activist. Emanuele D’Onofrio, too, has offered a very valuable analysis of the music in Giordana’s film, according to two categories of implicit political-social contexts: the (chronologically) first category is first introduced by the film’s use of Domenico Modugno’s song ‘Nel blu

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<sup>11</sup> Marcus, p. 296.

dipinto di blu', which, as D'Onofrio observes, originally belonged to the 'boom' era of Italy and as such embodied the 'ottimismo, in buona parte propagandato, della nuova nazione "fanciulla" nel piano del miracolo economico'. No sooner than this optimism declined and revealed itself as false, though, 'per molti il brano divenne l'emblema di una disillusione: così fu certo per molte generazioni di giovani, che lessero "Nel blu dipinto di blu" come uno dei simboli della mitologia borghese che intendevano distruggere'.<sup>12</sup>

The second category is the the leftist, revolutionary ideology of 1968, which is staged through the soundtrack. The 1960s revolution pop music, from artists like Janis Joplin and Leonard Cohen to The Animals, attempts to construct this sensation within the film by drawing on the historical memory of the audience.<sup>13</sup> As D'Onofrio observes, the extent to which this music dominates the soundtrack is such that it risks anachrony, and indeed has misled critics in the past about the film's historical coordinates.<sup>14</sup> As such, I would argue that it features as a broader performance of the 1968 movement into which the spectator is willingly drawn; in this case her pleasure emerges from the nostalgia for the period. We might view the lengthy Pasolini citations as a part of this ideology, too.<sup>15</sup> By foregrounding an ideological core that favours a form of 1968 leftism through citation, I would assert that *I cento passi* is constructing a performance of *impegno*. As their anachrony implies, the efforts to which Giordana goes in order to stage/perform a genealogy of *impegno* nevertheless cover a series of 'normalizations' that in turn raise ethical questions about the approach to political art. Building on the comments in the

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<sup>12</sup> Emanuele D'Onofrio, 'Percorsi di identità narrativa nella memoria difficile: la musica in *I cento passi* e *Buongiorni, notte*', *The Italianist*, 30 (2010), 219-244, (p. 224).

<sup>13</sup> As D'Onofrio notes, the mis-dated music, mostly from the 1960s, has led many critics to assume the action is taking place earlier than it actually is (in the 1970s). See D'Onofrio, p. 226.

<sup>14</sup> D'Onofrio, pp. 226-27.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Marcus, pp. 299-300.

previous chapter about similar limitations masked by the performance of realism, I will now turn to consider how these might affect the political position of the film and its interpretation.

A useful first instance to access the film's political engagement might be the radio station, Radio AUT, established by Peppino and his friends. The radio immediately functions as an allegory of the political background of contemporary Italy, through the *Radio libera* movement; indeed, many comparisons with *Radiofreccia* (Luciano Ligabue, 1998) are made in relation to *I cento passi* based on this shared subject matter.<sup>16</sup> The sequences shot at the radio station typically vocalize political messages in which the spectator is asked to participate, thus quite simplistically offering the film a further means of 'performing' *impegno* through metatextuality. An important example of this, and a further literary citation in the film, is Peppino's appropriation of Dante, 'La cretina commedia'. Though it evidently serves the same purpose to the above citations of 'performing' the political context of vocalized *denuncia* that is common to Dante, this citation stands out both in its re-writing of the original text, and the disembodiment of the voice where Giordana cuts to reaction shots across a range of listeners. The evolved poem, adapted for the screen from a real version written by Impastato, rewrites several stanzas from *Inferno* X,<sup>17</sup> whereby the pilgrim and Virgil enter into the city of heretics and interview Farinata degli Uberti: there is critical relevance already, given Impastato's harsh criticism of the Democrazia Cristiana party. The City of Dis

<sup>16</sup> See Marcus, p. 297. She notes, 'Umberto Eco estimates that there were over one thousand such independent stations in Italy by 1978, and they included Radio Alice of Bologna, Onde Rosse of Rome, and the fictitious Radiofreccia of Reggio Emilia'.

<sup>17</sup> Though the re-scripting of the *Commedia* does not thematically focus on this canto alone, it seems to be a purposeful choice made evident by certain sections of the text being directly reproduced:

Ed el mi disse, "Volgiti, che fai?  
Vedi là Farinata che s'è dritto:  
da la cintola in sù tutto la vedrai."  
*Inferno* X lines 31-33

...e il mio Maestro: "Volgiti, che fai?  
Vedi il vicesindaco s'è desto,  
dalla cintola in su tutto il vedrai..."  
transcribed from *I cento passi*.

becomes Mafiopoli, with several characters given inventive nicknames, such as Tano Seduto (mimicking ‘Toro Seduto’ the Italian translation of American Indian chief Sitting Bull). As with the reference to Pasolini’s ‘Le ceneri di Gramsci’ that Giordana similarly includes, the lengthy citation of Dante bears the entire political context of the writer, where the denunciation of Trecento Florence is modernized and adapted to contemporary Cinisi. The importance and weight of this canonical text can only add great stress to the film’s political statement.

The screenplay of *I cento passi*, by Claudio Fava and Monica Zapelli, adapts this citation from historical sources: the original recordings of Peppino’s show ‘Onda pazza’.<sup>18</sup> The original recordings are extremely different from their cinematic adaptation, not only where Giordana has combined a variety of different episodes<sup>19</sup> but moreover in the style of the recordings. In some of the most shockingly cutting lines that appear (with some edits) both in original and reproduction, Peppino grossly derides local businessman-mafioso Giuseppe Finazzo:

E c’era don Peppino Percialino,  
 artista d’intrallazzi e di montagne,  
 che s’annusava un po’ di cocaino  
 Sì, di cocaino al naso, come si dice sniffava...  
 no, no, pisciava, non so se pisciava...  
 cacava, non so se grugniva o se sparava  
 e gridava: ‘Sono sempre un galantuomo,  
 amico degli amici e di Pantofo:  
 presiedo una congrega: l’Ecce Omo,  
 e adesso nel mio cul tengo un carciofo’.

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<sup>18</sup> Certain recordings were released to the public, on a CD, with the publication of Salvo Vitale, *Nel cuore dei coralli: Peppino Impastato: una vita contro la mafia* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino Editore, 2002). This was my source for reference. They can also be found on the website of the Centro Siciliano di Documentazione “Peppino Impastato”, at [http://www.centroimpastato.it/conoscere/onda\\_pazza.php3](http://www.centroimpastato.it/conoscere/onda_pazza.php3) [accessed 13 March 2010].

<sup>19</sup> For instance, ‘La cretina commedia’ is taken from the Onda Pazza recording of 3 March 1978, however the solemn end to Peppino’s outcry, ‘...e chi lo sa, forse in questo momento sta recitando un atto di dolore per tutti i peccati che ha commesso, così che si potrà perdonarlo assieme a tutto il popolo di Mafiopoli’ echoes (with a notable, de-politicizing omission), the recording of 28 April 1978, ‘in questo momento sta recitando un atto di dolore per tutti i peccati che ha commesso, affinché venga perdonato dalla santa Dc e dal popolo fratello di Mafiopoli’ (transcribed from audio CD that accompanies Vitale, *Nel cuore dei coralli*).



Within the film, the gravity of these words is weighted by a lingering pan to close-up of Don Tano's face, and a second shot where the mafioso stops the barber from shaving him. As with the earlier scene, Don Tano's face remains calm but the slow movements, squinted eyes and the echoes of violence brought by the razor above his neck betray a latent anger and menace (see Figure 100, below). The gravity of Peppino's own situation is emphasized by the isolating shots of the character alone in a darkened room. The original recording of Onda Pazza, on the other hand, is a hugely farcical collaborative effort by Impastato and his friends, and this very stanza takes several attempts to complete as it is repeatedly interrupted by comic, slapstick sound effects such as a flushing toilet. The grim denunciation in the film which comes from the hugely offensive scatological remarks and sombre air has been invented, rendering unrecognizable the original ridicule.

The re-staging of this scene can be read as a performance of *impegno* in terms that approximate Lyotard's reading. The original recordings of Onda Pazza evidently belong to a form of commitment that makes recourse to an ideological 'grand narrative' of the left. Today, however, this political engagement needs to be staged in a manner that will be recognized and consumed straightforwardly by the spectator, thus Giordana rephrases it in a process of *normalization* (the term itself implies the familiarity of the viewer, and her political constituency). In producing thus a sequence with a clear 'engaged' agenda that is familiar and comforting to the spectator, who decodes it without question, the process becomes both performative and legitimized.

In the previous chapter I argued that the performance of realism masked a wider rejection of historical accuracy, in a risky manner. It is worth reiterating that I

am not outlining fault within the film purely based on the rejection of historical accuracy; rather I wish simply to identify the moral questions raised within this process. This can be illustrated by returning momentarily to the case of Cesare Manzella who, as mentioned, is depicted positively in *I cento passi*. Posing Manzella as an allegorical mafioso is very risky, where his figure embodies, as mentioned, a positivist nostalgia- and tradition-based notion of the mafia. In order to illustrate clearly further examples of this problematic relationship, I will turn to a comparison between *I cento passi* and a further screenplay that dealt with the story of Peppino Impastato. The screenplay is entitled *Nel cuore della luna*, and was written between 1996-98 by Antonio Carella.<sup>20</sup> The two scripts competed for executive production during 1998, and eventually the Fava-Zapelli screenplay gained the support of Rai, in part thanks to the appointment of Giordana as director.<sup>21</sup> I will return later to the issue of the conditions of a film's financial support and production, or not, and the consequences of this for *impegno*.

On the surface, Carella's script shares a great deal with that of Fava and Zapelli. The story is guided by a different protagonist, Enrico, a journalist based in Naples who returns to his home town, Cinisi, to investigate the case of Impastato some twenty years after his death. As such the narrative is constructed of flashbacks, that are combined with documentary-style interviews with the friends and family of Impastato, set in the present. The author's note, included in the script, tells us that Carella wrote the script in collaboration with the people who surrounded Peppino in life, having spent much of two years in Cinisi; this is confirmed by a hand-written note, included, from Giovanni Impastato.<sup>22</sup> Many of the characters

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<sup>20</sup> Antonio Carella, *Nel cuore della luna*, (1998). The unpublished script can be consulted at the Biblioteca Luigi Chiarini, at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Rome.

<sup>21</sup> See Michele Anselmi, 'Omicidio Impastato: duello di copioni', *L'Unità*, 9 December 1998, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> This in itself would make for quite an interesting paratextual performance of realism.

overlap (though with some name discrepancies, such as Cesare Mastella and Tano Patriarca), and *Nel cuore della luna* makes a strikingly similar use of literary, cinematic and musical citations.<sup>23</sup> Carella's script furthermore attempts to construct more boldly the Oedipal reading of Peppino and his relationship with his mother, including a scene of early sexual development, the boy being bathed by Felicia. It moreover includes some strikingly similar fictionalizations, such as the assumption of guilt of Tano for the murder of Mastella, made explicit by the montage of the death sequence (scene 40) after a meeting of mafiosi, including Tano, at which Mastella rejects the construction of the airport (scene 38).

The image of the mafia that emerges from both films can be formed by examining the representation of the patriarchal society through the film's father-son relationships. In *I cento passi*, this configuration takes place in simplistic terms of good (Zio Cesare, Stefano Venuti) against bad (Luigi Impastato, Don Tano). There is a constant prioritization of the 'good' father figures, and rejection of the 'bad', both constructed within the narrative and thanks to the film's cinematography. The visual comparison of Tano and Cesare when each man is being shaved at the barber's is interesting in this regard: both actions are interrupted, the former in order to bring Peppino outside ('amuni a fare i comunisti!') and engage with Venuti about the pollution produced by the airport, demonstrating the traditional values of family and community linked to Zio Cesare; the latter interrupts the barber in order to focus on the radio broadcast of Peppino's 'Cretina commedia'. The serious tone

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<sup>23</sup> This ranges from a citation of Camus's essay *L'Homme révolté*, 'piuttosto morire in piede che vivere in ginocchio', that overlaps with the death of Zio Cesare, to a projection of Pasolini's *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964). Carella also includes very specific musical inserts, that move from Mina ('Il cielo in una stanza' and Bob Dylan ('Blowin' in the wind') to Fabrizio de Andrè ('Tutti morimmo a stento') and Pink Floyd ('Wish you were here'). There is a stronger sense of continuity between the music and the chronological period, where (though it jumps very rapidly between dates) much of the action in *Nel cuore della luna* takes place in the late 1960s.

(which in the next shot is enhanced by the inclusion of sombre music) here defines Tano's offense and anger, and the implicit latent violence.



Figures 99-100: The Interrupted Shaves of Cesare (00:08:59) and Tano (00:54:01) in *I cento passi*

The location of the barbershop in this visual comparison is significant, it being (as noted in the second chapter) a typical location in mafia films at which male identities are created. In both cases the 'male' activity of shaving is interrupted, then revealing seemingly contrasting masculinities. Though both men function as patriarchal figures of sorts, we take one positivistically as a grandfather, the other negatively as a violent criminal. In this way the film appears to support the patriarchal family, and reject the mafia.

The construction of the family in *Nel cuore della luna* occurs over a more complex and challenging combination of mafia and anti-mafia. The character of Tano Patriarca appears little within the plot; instead the negative image of fatherhood is posited entirely on Luigi. Here Luigi Impastato bears nothing of the nuanced tragedy of Luigi Maria Burrano's character in *I cento passi*; instead sinful characteristics such as the suggestion of theft (scene 25) and an extra-marital affair (scene 31), as well as repeated fights with both Peppino and Felicia, depict Luigi in almost universally negative terms. There is moreover a very similar construction of the mafia versus the communists (the latter represented by Zio Matteo and to a lesser extent Venuti) in simplistic terms, however the figure of Mastella, and in

particular his relationship with Peppino, complicate this framework. Once again, Peppino as a child is linked to Mastella, however this time this relationship is articulated very much according to his uncle being a (bad) mafioso. Luigi makes this explicit in conversation with Felicia: ‘Mastella lo tiene in grazia, [...] sarà galantuomo’.<sup>24</sup> Carella furthermore includes a scene of Peppino and his friend Richetto stealing some acetylene and making a bomb (pre-empting Mastella’s own death), and when Luigi attempts to discipline his son for this (criminal) activity, Mastella defends the boy. The bolder link made by Carella between the child Peppino and the mafioso Mastella, as well as the more local tensions between Mastella and Luigi, and the introduction of Peppino’s communist uncle, Zio Matteo, create a far more complex and stimulating image of the family as an allegory for the Sicilian family, and for political relations widely during the 1970s. In comparison with *I cento passi*, this then illustrates certain limitations of Giordana’s film in its representation of the patriarchal and mafioso relationships, that nevertheless might be read in terms of a more comfortable and performative process of *impegno*.

*Nel cuore della luna* furthermore constructs an image of Peppino, in more complex terms. As well as devoting some screen time to the political development of Peppino via the more gradual introduction of the left-wing characters into his life, the film also boldly addresses the protagonist’s sexuality. Though it has remained notably clandestine until after the release of *I cento passi*, the homosexuality of Peppino Impastato has now been more publicly acknowledged. This is thanks to the brief or coded allusions to his own love affairs with other young men in his youth group that appear in his published diaries and creative writing,<sup>25</sup> colleagues of Impastato, such as Umberto Santino, have also recognized that he was gay in

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<sup>24</sup> Carella, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Peppino Impastato, *Lunga è la notte: Poesie, scritti, documenti*, ed. by Umberto Santino (Palermo: Centro di Documentazione Giuseppe Impastato, 2006). See in particular pp. 116-20.

interviews.<sup>26</sup> By depicting Peppino struggling in heterosexual relationships and failing in attempts to define himself in relation to the hetero-norms of his family, Carella constructs a nuanced image of Peppino's sexual development in the script that interweaves with the protagonist's political activity. This reaches a dramatic peak towards the conclusion of the film when, following the abduction of Aldo Moro, Peppino has a kind of breakdown. Here I reproduce at length this excerpt from the script:

PEPPINO

HO PAURA ENRICO! HO PAURA! ... non m'era mai successo...non me ne frega niente se mi fanno fuori... la mia è una paura più profonda... radicale... è la paura del fallimento come politico e come uomo... non so più niente e non m'è rimasto niente... non riesco più a stare con una donna e non so neanche se mi piacerebbe... quando una donna si avvicina comincio a sudare... anche le mani... come adesso... vedi?... forse non sono un uomo... e non voglio ammetterlo... qualche tempo fa sono stato al mare con un ragazzo del circolo... un ragazzo giovane, alto... e quando abbiamo fatto la doccia ed ha incominciato a insaponarmi la schiena... ho sentito dei brividi di piacere... è stata una sensazione fortissima... che non avevo mai provato... mi è ritornata in mente mia madre quando mi faceva il bagno... e mi accarezzava con le sue mani delicate... lungo tutto il corpo... quel ragazzo... mi sorrideva... con i suoi grandi occhi neri... puliti... mentre le sue mani con dolcezza infinita risvegliavano in me un mondo di emozioni che giacevano sepolte... inascoltate... ho lasciato che facesse... fino a perdermi in un estasi che non avevo mai conosciuto... capisci come sto?... forse mio padre aveva ragione a dirmi che avrei fatto la fine di un pezzente... un fallito... guardami! Ho 30 anni e non ho ancora combinato un cazzo!... non sono neanche riuscito a laurearmi [...]

[PEPPINO è sprofondato sul divano, lo sguardo sperduto, inebetito. ENRICO gli è accanto preoccupato. Tenta di farlo ritornare in sé...]

ENRICO

Peppino! Cazzo! Chiamo un dottore? Che cazzo ti succede? PEPPINO?

[PEPPINO ha un attimo di lucidità, cerca di rialzarsi].

PEPPINO

Adesso passa...! Adesso passa... ABBRACCIAMI ENRICO! Abbracciami! Non mi lasciare!... abbracciami! Ho bisogno che tu mi abbracci...

[ENRICO abbraccia PEPPINO, che si rasserenava. PEPPINO accarezza il volto di ENRICO. Comincia a baciare delicatamente, senza che ENRICO opponga resistenza. I due amici rimangono stretti e silenziosi per alcuni lunghi istanti,

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<sup>26</sup> Anna Paparcone, 'Echoes of Pier Paolo Pasolini in Contemporary Italian Cinema: the Cases of Marco Tullio Giordana and Aurelio Grimaldi' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 2009), pp. 108-09. I am very much indebted to Dana Renga for providing me access to this dissertation.

mentre la macchina da presa passa dai loro primi piani alla luce della lampada alle loro spalle. Da una vetrata che separa lo studio di ENRICO dal resto dell'appartamento, BIANCA osserva la scena sgomenta. Si ritrae non vista].<sup>27</sup>

It is striking that this moment of self-acknowledgment for Peppino is mapped over the two, interweaved themes of sexual development (through the reference to the earlier, Oedipal scene of the young Peppino bathed by his mother), and political shortcomings, and specifically the fear of failure 'come politico e come uomo'. In the part of the quote which I have elided, Peppino even relates this personal crisis to the kidnapping of Aldo Moro and the moral corruption of the *Brigate Rosse*. Though this crisis does not allow for an entirely uncomplicated queer reading of the text (are we to relate his political shortcomings to Peppino's homosexuality, or his self-repression?), the section of Peppino's speech in which he articulates himself as a 'failed' model of masculinity ('forse non sono un uomo') and in particular in contrast to his father ('mio padre aveva ragione') allows us an alternative key to re-reading the family in this screenplay. Through Peppino, we can retrospectively associate the leftist, anti-mafia fight and martyrdom to queered, anti-normative relationships. This is enhanced through the influence of non-familial, or non-normative fatherly figures, such as Peppino's uncle, and the recurrent deconstruction of the nuclear family within the narrative (Bianca and Enrico's implicit separation, Felicia's outspoken criticism of Luigi). The disintegration of the relationship between Enrico and Peppino, and the ultimate crisis and death of the latter that occurs a few scenes later, function as a political message which denounces the suppression of the politically oppositional – queered – figure in patriarchal Sicily. The phone call that Enrico receives at the end of the narrative, informing him that his newspaper has lost interest in Peppino, serves to bring this

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<sup>27</sup> Carella, pp. 113-4; the typography and punctuation is taken from the original. To offer some context, Bianca was Enrico's wife at the time, and the scene retrospectively explains both their separation and the hasty disappearance of Enrico from Cinisi shortly after.

bold and complex political message to the present, where it invades the life of the spectator.

The figure of Peppino Impastato in Giordana's film is emphatically more 'normalized'. The suggestion that he is homosexual is kept to one or two implicit hints. This includes, for instance, the protagonist's suggestion that he envies the 'normalità' of his brother; when Salvo responds, 'Appena incontri quella giusta, vedrai che riesci anche tu', all Peppino can reply is 'Non lo so. Non credo'. The further two references to a possible homosexuality are even more subtle than this.<sup>28</sup> Giordana has notably justified his exclusion of romance for Peppino by suggesting that in this way the film is more realistic, and moreover that it contributes to the image of the protagonist's 'sacerdozio' in the fight against the mafia.<sup>29</sup> In fact, it is not only a censorship of the sexuality of Peppino Impastato that normalizes his character: in contrast with the historical reports that he was sullen, introverted and at times aggressive, in the film Peppino is mostly happy, sociable and well-adapted.<sup>30</sup>

The reason for this normalization of Peppino which is made particularly explicit in its comparison with the slightly bolder *Nel cuore della luna*, can

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<sup>28</sup> The published script of the film helps to make these occasions slightly more explicit: the arrival of the 'tre ragazze ventenni, belle come apparizioni di un altro pianeta' is a case in point, since the script highlights that 'solo Peppino ostenta molle e scontroso immobilità: resta afflosciato sulla sedia senza nemmeno guardare', and makes explicit his spoken reaction that contrasts the other men, 'Non l'avete mai vista una donna? Non lo sapete che sono fatte così?'. We also can pick up on a possible suggestion of a boyfriend for Peppino in the character of Mauro; once again this is made more explicit in the script. The character appears only once (unlike Giovanni's girlfriend), he is for the most part alone, and the scene takes place at night. Even here, the stage directions reveal much more than the visual representation, 'È uno della Comune ma nell'atteggiamento verso Peppino non denota nessuna aggressività, nessuno spirito di competizione. Al contrario, è come se in lui operasse una serenità che permette di arrivare subito al cuore'. Claudio Fava, Marco Tullio Giordana and Monica Zapelli, *I cento passi* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2001), p. 82; p. 108. These subtle references to Impastato's homosexuality are nonetheless a step forward from the original, 1998 script written by Fava and Zapelli, in which there is no question of Peppino's heterosexuality and rather his relationship with Anna is foregrounded. In fact, the film was originally to be entitled 'Amore Non Ne Avremo', after the acronymic poem written by Impastato in honour of Anna. This script (Claudio Fava & Monica Zapelli, *I cento passi*, 1998) is available to consult at the Biblioteca Luigi Chiarini, at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Rome.

<sup>29</sup> Eugenio Bruno, 'Intervista con Marco Tullio Giordana' in *Film discussi insieme*, 41 (2002), 104-06 (p. 106).

<sup>30</sup> Tom Behan, *Defiance: the Story of One Man who Stood up to the Sicilian Mafia* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p. 133.



evidently be explained as a process of inculcating spectator empathy and thus a greater ‘consumability’ of the film. This must then be related to a broader construction of performative *impegno*, whereby the characterization of the protagonist matches the hegemonic code of the hero in Italy (straight, white, male) that is expected by the audience. The film speaks to a very clear horizon of expectation that is defined by a specific constituency, and queering the protagonist would ultimately problematize the straightforward performance of *impegno*, risking a de-legitimation of the political comment.

The case of Peppino Impastato therefore raises some interesting questions about the central issue of a film’s position and its negotiations within the cinema industry. We can conclude that *Nel cuore della luna* has a bolder and more powerfully enunciated political message, whereas the *impegno* of *I cento passi* has undergone a series of normalizations that undoubtedly deduct from the impact of its political message. Nevertheless, while Carella’s script never entered into production, the Fava-Zapelli script now exists as Giordana’s film, and is undeniably accessible to large audiences. It is tricky, if not implausible, to speculate as to whether the normalization techniques in *I cento passi*, or indeed the more explicit representations of, for instance, homosexuality can be considered as the cause for the choice to produce ultimately the Fava-Zapelli script, or *not* produce *Nel cuore della luna*. Antonio Carella’s statements quite enigmatically point to the real possibility of his script being filmed, having had support from Rai and producer Carlo Degli Esposti, though he suggests that it was ultimately blocked from funding from the Ministero dello Spettacolo in Italy due to ‘pressioni politiche’.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In personal correspondence, Carella wrote to the author, ‘Il Ministero dello Spettacolo, su evidenti pressioni politiche, nel 1999 mi ha negato il finanziamento del film, che avrei dovuto dirigere’ (email, dated 11 January 2011).

Whether or not we are inclined to justify the censorship of the ethically challenging issues within *I cento passi*, it is important to acknowledge the importance of the industry in the production and diffusion of an *impegnato* text. The box-office fate of *I cento passi* is striking in this regard. The film's release overlapped with its première at the Venice Film Festival, on 1 September 2000. Initially, reviews of the film were warm, though not outstanding.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the film's recognition at the festival, being nominated for the Leone D'Oro, and winning the Pasinetti, Osella, Little Golden Lion and 'Cinemavvenire' awards, slowly brought the film from fourteenth in its first week in the charts to eighth in its third, before gradually descending back down the box-office chart. It was then the announcement, made in early November 2000, that *I cento passi* was to represent Italy for Best Film in a Foreign Language at the US Academy Awards the following spring that triggered a revival of ticket sales. Following this, the number of spectators rose again from 23,705 per week to 56,757; before the announcement the greatest number of spectators per week was 46,840.<sup>33</sup> With these changes in mind, we can acknowledge the importance of a series of external factors, such as festival award success, in the distribution of a film, and thus the diffusion of its political message.

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<sup>32</sup> In the report on the festival in *Bianco e nero*, for instance, the reviewers clearly favoured Pasquale Scimeca's *Placido Rizzotto*, which was released contemporaneously. The review in *Cinemasessanta* was more scathing, suggesting 'ci pare [...] che il vero interesse di Giordana sia [...] quello di essere un bravo soldatino ideologico', and that 'Giordana non lo vede neppure col binocolo il "far cinema" di Rosi, il "far cinema di denuncia" di Rosi'. Gianni Canova, 'La vetrina italiana: Venezia 2000', *Bianco e nero*, 61.5 (2000), 85-94; Renzo Gilodi, '*I cento passi* di Marco Tullio Giordana', *Cinema Sessanta*, 256 (2000), 58-59.

<sup>33</sup> The statistics, represented in Figure three, are taken from the 'Borsa Film' of *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo*, respectively 10 November 2000, p. 5; 1 December 2000, p. 5; 22 September 2000, p. 5. The total number of spectators over this period (not including the 2001 season) is 551,876. 'Borsa Film', *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo*, 22 December 2000, p. 21.

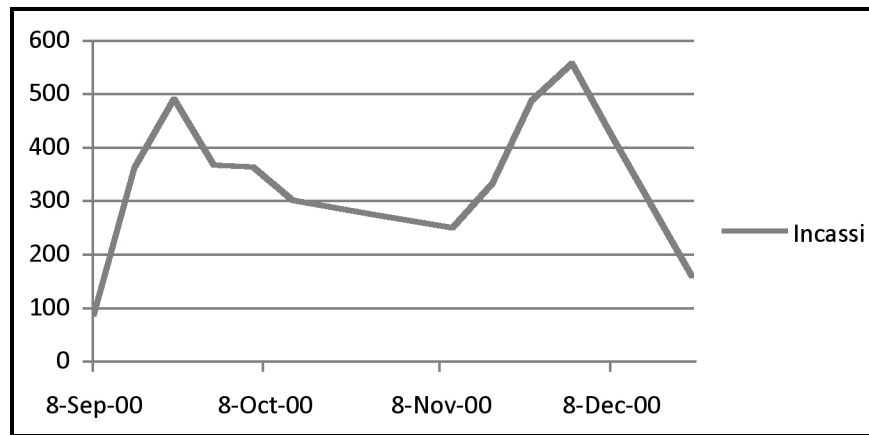


Figure 101: Weekly Box-Office Takings of *I cento passi* in Millions of Lire, Late 2000. Note in particular the second peak, which follows directly the announcement that the film would represent Italy at the Oscars the following year.<sup>34</sup>

Having observed in some detail how *impegno* is constructed through performance, and despite some censoring normalizations that function in favour of the film's popular distribution, I will now turn to a second case which assumes an altogether different approach to engagement.

## ii. Post-Hegemonic *Impegno*: *Le conseguenze dell'amore*

Sorrentino's *Le conseguenze dell'amore*, released five years after *I cento passi*, shares very little with its precedent in terms of its narrative form and its aesthetics, its thematic content, or its overt presentation of political engagement. The performance of historical models of *impegno* is entirely absent, and rather the film is driven by its stylization, in terms both of the baroque pro-filmic space and the extravagant cinematography. This style can be linked to the positions of the film

<sup>34</sup> The statistics on which this graph is based are taken from the 'Borse Film' segments of issues 25-37 of *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo*. These are: 8 September 2000, p. 6; 15 September 2000, p. 5; 22 September 2000, p. 5; 29 September 2000, p. 4; 6 October 2000, p. 13; 13 October 2000, p. 7; 27 October 2000, p. 15; 10 November 2000, p. 5; 17 November 2000, p. 5; 24 November 2000, p. 23; 1 December 2000, p. 5; 8 December 2000, p. 5; 22 December 2000, p. 21.

and the *autore* within the market. Mary Wood has highlighted the significance of this film, his second feature, as a crucial stage in Sorrentino's career:

Armed with critical recognition [of his first feature, *L'uomo in più*] for his originality and visual style, Sorrentino then needed to make his name, while aiming at the mass audience in order to access a larger budget. These ambitions entailed a bid to enter the quality sector of the film industry. This is the top end of the authorial and art cinema market, and is characterized by big budgets, stars, international distribution, and, visually, by spectacle.<sup>35</sup>

*Le conseguenze dell'amore* was successful in reaching Sorrentino's bid: the subsequent three films which he has produced have gained international distribution, included international stars including Toni Servillo and Sean Penn, and developed for him an immediately recognizable style. The aesthetics of *Le conseguenze*, and the comparatively complex plot (that has some non-linearity and information withheld) can be linked both to its 'quality' positioning, and its production and distribution companies.<sup>36</sup> The consequence of this turn to the artistic or aesthetic in terms of the film's political commitment is that the spectator cannot seek an explicit framework for *impegno* in the way of, for instance, *I cento passi*, where the narrative was the predominant source for political commentary. The narrative and its action become interiorized to the protagonist of *Le conseguenze*, and as such it is in this interiorization and symbolism that the film's *impegno* is to be sought.

The 'quality' status of *Le conseguenze dell'amore* might moreover leave us reticent to qualify it immediately as a mafia film, since its claims to genre cinema do not fit as repetitions, but rather are employed ironically. The narrative of the film tells the story of Titta Di Girolamo, played by Toni Servillo, an ex-broker for the

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Wood, 'Lipstick and Chocolate: Paolo Sorrentino's *The Consequences of Love*', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, ed. by Dana Renga (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), pp. 354-362 (p. 357).

<sup>36</sup> As Wood notes, for this film this emerges from a happy partnership between Indigo, who produced *L'uomo in più* (2001), and Fandango, 'a large Italian company specializing in producing quality, authorial art films'; the latter then led by association to further production and distribution funding from Medusa, a member of the Fininvest Group. Wood, p. 354-55.

mafia who, having lost extortionate amounts, has been exiled to Switzerland's Canton Ticino. He has lived in a hotel here for eight years, and regularly pays in suitcases of money delivered to him by the mafia into a private account. The mafia is present, though: first embodied by two mafiosi who appear unannounced at the hotel, stay briefly in Titta's hotel room, carry out their hit and then depart. Their brief return later leads to the unravelling of the narrative arc, leading to the second appearance of the mafia in the conclusion. This time Titta returns to Southern Italy, presumably Sicily,<sup>37</sup> to confront Nitto Lo Riccio (the mafia capo).

The image of the mafia that is located in *Le conseguenze dell'amore* is pointedly dissimilar to that of *I cento passi*. The notion of traditional patriarchy of which Zio Cesare is emblematic is absent; instead there is an unglamorous (albeit somewhat spectacularized) representation built on the transference of fear and the exertion of dominance. Sorrentino's allegory of criminal power is constructed slowly, through occasional inserts into the narrative that gradually contribute to a wider network of expression of the mafia. The mafia's dominance is symbolized in Titta's very existence – it is directly thanks to them, and through them, that he lives here – and yet we are not made aware of this until some forty minutes into the film when the sudden appearance of the two mafiosi interrupts the film's other central narrative thread (Titta's relationship with Sofia). This is quite strikingly symbolized, and again creates further suspense, through the abrupt interruption of the fast-paced, *allegro* violin piece of the soundtrack ('Titta', by Pasquale Catalano).

Close analysis of the construction of the character of Niccolò, one of the two mafiosi who arrive at this point, usefully illustrates the director's complex image of the mafia. The viewer is introduced to Niccolò through his pairing with the other,

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<sup>37</sup> The specific location is deliberately not specified, however there is mention to the mafia organization being *cosa nostra* (in Titta's confession to Sofia), and the mafiosi speak with a strong Sicilian accent, thus we can work with this assumption.

unnamed, mafioso, whom Titta sees first when entering the room. The unnamed gangster is depicted in a manner familiar to the contemporary gangster genre: the plain-tone suit, and the light, open shirt. This costume is strikingly similar to those of Cinisi's mafiosi in *I cento passi*. This character is immediately built into a rhetoric of intimidation and suspense: this includes his large build, and the prop of a handgun which he is cleaning, in combination with his silence, choosing not to respond to Titta's questions ('Siete venuti per me?'). Niccolò, on the other hand, undermines our expectation since he is constructed as exact opposite of his companion: he is skinny to the point of appearing frail and skeletal, and appears first as a disembodied arm in a match on Titta's gaze. His face appears from the bath, casually eating a chocolate bar, and this deconstruction of the genre norms is exaggerated by his nudity, then re-articulated in the following shot of his disembodied feet. The camera then continues to prioritize Niccolò in the fleeting shot of him zipping up the shell-suit top.



Figures 102-05: the dressing of Niccolò in *Le conseguenze dell'amore* (00:43:05; 00:43:10; 00:43:41; 00:44:04)

Quite evidently the costume that is foregrounded in this jarring shot is strikingly different to the stereotyped suits of the mafia film.<sup>38</sup> Despite, or perhaps due to the seriousness Niccolò, the unimaginably normal (if not tacky) attire undermines the construction of suspense with which Sorrentino had been playing until this point.

With no reason for the hit given – we share Titta's ignorance – Sorrentino then constructs the following assassination sequence through a very careful and deliberate construction of a ritual that illustrates the deadly precision of the mafioso. After offering hints of a dark comedy, in the two men hiding un-subtly in the car, Niccolò then silently enters the house of his victim. With his arm already raised, he poses his cigarette on the edge of the table, adjusts his glasses, and then shoots the man, before picking up the cigarette once again. The brutal precision and apparent professionalism is once again undermined with dark humour as he uses a broom handle to ensure the victim is dead.

In the shots of the second murder, the ritual is repeated, with even more direct shots demonstrating the precision with which Niccolò places his cigarette on the table (we get an overhead close-up of the cigarette on the table), and pushes up his glasses (his face is taken in close-up). Such coding tells the audience that the man in the wheelchair will be killed. At the last minute, Niccolò shifts his aim and fires at the wheelchair, toppling the man out. An aspect of the ritual is then repeated a third time, as the man struggles onto the sofa, and Niccolò adjusts his glasses (over two shots, moving from medium to close-up) and raises his firearm. This third time, though, the ritual is interrupted and the mafioso relaxes his arm, thus neutralizing our expectation. The bold interruption arguably plays into the sympathetic emotion

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<sup>38</sup> See Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 67-94.

of the spectator, who undoubtedly wishes the innocent, disabled man to be spared. Nevertheless this expectation, too, is dramatically undermined when the mafioso ultimately does shoot, only this time the action takes place shockingly, undermining the painstaking ritual witnessed before by excluding it altogether. We can furthermore read the two sequences as the construction of a code of performance, which is then quite deliberately interrupted and problematized.



Figures 106-09: The Construction of Ritual in *Le conseguenze dell'amore*  
(00:46:01; 00:46:59; 00:47:13; 00:47:14)

The manner in which Sorrentino continually and brutally shocks and reassures the spectator in this scene through suspense, the expectation of a ritual, and dark comedy, constructs an unrelentingly remorseless image of the mafioso. It is my contention that by producing an image of the mafia that is based on the interruption of expectations, here Sorrentino is essentially re-enacting in a more subtle manner what Francesco Rosi does at the beginning of *Lucky Luciano*, by contradicting the audience's typecast expectation of the mafia with an almost absurdly normal image, that is nonetheless – or perhaps, consequently – brutal and beyond emotion.

In *Le conseguenze*, then, the politicized image of the mafia that emerges from the scenes of Niccolò, as well as those set in Sicily at the film's conclusion, is articulated as male-dominated and patriarchal; this furthermore appears compatible



with the mafia observed above in *I cento passi*. In fact, in its subtle discourses of gender, the film also shares much of the political comment on mafia patriarchy that I observed in Antonio Carella's alternative script of Impastato's story. This is illustrated by noting first how Sorrentino polarizes the geographical locations of the film in gender codes: the South is the patriarchal and male-dominated land of tradition; the North is the elegant and controlled space in which Titta's life is almost entirely dominated by women.<sup>39</sup> Pushing this metaphor a little further, we can read the Northern location as affecting Titta and the life he leads in Switzerland by directly *feminizing* his body: his easy and dominant movement around the hotel, including over the other men, and his ceaseless elegance illustrate this. When Titta is forced to return to Sicily, the contrast between his masculinity and that of Pippo D'Antò is made explicit in the comparison of their bodies. Though ultimately Titta is murdered by the mafia, the 'rocambolesco' manner of his death is portrayed as a courageous and heroic act that, as Taglini argues, reaffirms the protagonist's own identity.<sup>40</sup>

Despite these initial points of comparison, though, *Le conseguenze* evidently differs greatly from *I cento passi*, from the complexity of its narrative, which raises minor and often insignificant stories only to forget them for several sequences, then finally pick them up almost casually later on; to the prioritization of its aesthetic formula and the intricacy of its generic codes that categorize the film as 'quality'.

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<sup>39</sup> As well as Sofia, the love for whom leads Titta to the 'conseguenze' of the film's title, this includes Isabella, who castigates Titta for having embarrassed Carlo, or the female teller in the bank who 'finds' the missing \$100,000 in the suitcase. Yet even the minor actions that influence Titta's life appear to be feminine: on the phone to his family he speaks only with his wife and daughter, his son remains mute; the female maid comes close to discovering the protagonist's gun, hidden behind the TV; though the mafia is universally male, it is a woman who delivers his suitcase; it is two women who oust Titta from his usual seat in the hotel bar, and, in reading from a volume, inspire him to write the 'detto' that doubles as the film's title; it is even a woman who cleans his blood.

<sup>40</sup> Giacomo Taglini, 'Le conseguenze del vissuto', in *Lo spazio del reale nel cinema italiano contemporaneo*, ed. by Riccardo Guerrini, Giacomo Taglini & Francesco Zucconi (Genoa: Le Mani, 2009) pp. 91-103 (p. 103).

Because of this, the political statements made by Sorrentino's film, which can be sought via the allegorical image of the mafia that it presents, are dissimilar to those of *I cento passi*, which tends towards overpowering and explicit statement. In this sense, the two films cohere with contrasting models of political commitment: *Le conseguenze dell'amore* with the postmodern, and *I cento passi* with the past, 'Rosian' realism.

Burns pinpoints two tendencies of postmodernism that help in our understanding of how ethical literature functions in recent decades:

One is that it describes a general loss of faith; in reason and its systems of expression. Doubt is cast upon history, philosophy, ideology, science – the grand narratives of western civilization. In a sense, this book describes the breaking down of the grand narrative of political commitment in literature by writers who are sceptical about whether their work can really make a difference in society. A second thing to say is that postmodernism involves the privileging of the aesthetic over the cerebral, of desire over reason.<sup>41</sup>

The compatibility of Sorrentino's film with this description is very apparent: its representations both of gender and of the mafia demonstrate that it does not invest in any single ideological agenda, instead offering a pluralistic and layered, as well as personal commentary on both. The film furthermore breaks down overarching narratives in favour of recurrent fragmentations. The second point, the privileging of the aesthetic, is particularly explicit also; indeed as my analysis has shown, the photography, mise-en-scène and setting have been central if not dominant in the construction of meaning. My analysis of the text has moreover sought to illustrate its coherence with Mussgnug and Antonello's model of 'post-hegemonic *impegno*' that I introduced above: certainly the film does not adhere to an over-arching ideological agenda, rather it functions quite explicitly through a plurality of discourses, of which gender and organized crime, which I have picked out, are just two. The re-codification of masculine and feminine interactions in the film is a key

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<sup>41</sup> Burns, p. 181.

instance of how the film constructs ethical messages based on informative repetitions. By addressing violent, patriarchal masculinity as well as the omnipotent domination of the mafia, Sorrentino's work can be taken literally as a challenge to hegemonies.

Sorrentino's notion of the mafia bears a typically bleak outlook which can be compared easily to the wider framework of mafia narratives in Italy since the 1960s. Nevertheless, in a move which perhaps anticipates *Gomorra*, in particular its opening sequence, Sorrentino complicates the generic imagery of the mafia, using black humour to render the most frightening aspects of the mafia almost absurdly normal. This is combined with a series of other questions – most of which are given little closure – about gender, social relations, the global economy and crime, and North/South or international/domestic relations. In doing so, I think the film relates very interestingly to the citation included as incipit to this chapter, from Francesco Rosi, who lucidly observes that due to a 'situazione politica generale [...] molto meno chiara oggi', widely-arching, collective frameworks of analysis are defunct, and instead 'c'è bisogno di affidarsi maggiormente agli eventi sociali per poter esprimere un'analisi'.<sup>42</sup>

There is an unresolved issue, however, in the relationship between Sorrentino's film and the performance of *impegno*. Quite evidently, the film does not present itself to the same engaged constituency as does *I cento passi*, nor indeed does it make use of the traditional codes of *impegno* in order to phrase its presentation of organized crime. And yet, as Lyotard writes, performativity remains intrinsic to the postmodern era in those narratives that seek legitimacy. On the surface, then, we can suggest that Sorrentino's film quite simply is not performing

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<sup>42</sup> See above; citation taken from Antonello and Mussgnung, p. 17.

*impegno* in the same manner as *I cento passi*, as it does not demand the same authentication. Its approach to engagement is more subtle, and functions on this post-hegemonic level. And yet to completely dislocate the film from discourses of performativity would be unwise, in that it risks dichotomizing the two films in a hasty manner. In fact, we might argue that (returning to the discourses of Jameson, outlined in my second chapter) that *Le conseguenze* is able only to disrupt the performances of *impegno* in *opposing* them, thus calling for a dialectical ‘common denominator’ reading. This could be illustrated once again through the creation of ritual, which appears to construct a manner of transferring knowledge via expectation (which is a performance), only to then ultimately disrupt it.

At surface level, *I cento passi* appears to make the same, anti-hegemonic claims made by *Le conseguenze*. What differs, though, is that Marco Tullio Giordana’s film approaches *impegno* from what we could view as precisely a ‘top-down’ cultural formation approach, which constructs itself over a binding narrative informed by a single ideology: that matching Peppino Impastato’s.<sup>43</sup> The definition given by Antonello and Mussnug of the monolithic *impegno* model of the post-War – ‘a communal project based on strict ideological premises and tied to emancipatory and potentially revolutionary action’<sup>44</sup> – is entirely applicable to *I cento passi*. In fact, as I have argued above, the film quite deliberately ‘stages’ political engagement according to codes that pre-date it, for instance channelling Pier Paolo Pasolini or Francesco Rosi. As I have suggested above, this process constitutes a phrasing of the content that forges an engaged constituency, and more

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<sup>43</sup> It would be possible to construct an argument to suggest that *I cento passi* is a postmodern text in that it reproduces history consciously to its own present, effectively functioning as ‘historiographic metafiction’. The political messages thus work through irony and nostalgia. As has been observed in the previous chapter, however, the film performs itself as ‘realistic’, in a move which, in my opinion, undermines its irony. As mentioned, this can be phrased as a consequence of the traumatic impulse to treat seriously / mimetically the content of organized crime.

<sup>44</sup> Antonello and Mussnug, p. 9.

crucially a *familiar* engaged constituency, thus allowing the film to function performatively. As I have suggested, in moral terms much of the decisions made by the film are somewhat problematic - particularly significant here is the suppression of Peppino Impastato's homosexuality, fitting into a wider framework of 'normalized' gender codes which at times risks presenting a favourable image of the traditional, patriarchal ideology of the mafia (Cesare Manzella). These limitations are made more explicit in comparison with *Nel cuore della luna*. Nevertheless, the coding and dominant decoding of the film function to provide legitimacy in the construction of its *impegno*, and in fact this very legitimation becomes phrased precisely as humanistic (it belongs to the culture of redemption, and equates to what I labelled *buonismo*, above).

However, despite the apparent anachrony and contradiction of *I cento passi*'s approach to *impegno*, and the limitations of its constituency, it is problematic to undermine the film's position as an engaged text. To explain this, it is worth recalling that, crucially, in the act of performance there is a phenomenological aspect that illustrates the concretizing of *impegno*. This is clear through the citation of earlier engaged texts: as Marcus has argued, through its citations the film presents itself as the subsequent entry in a line of *impegnati* texts. Following this, we might argue that, similarly to the critic's observation on the intervention of the text in the present of the spectator via the 'memorialist function', this process brings the text into a position to directly affect the spectator's historical moment. As such, the description of the political (con)texts that the film cites moreover *enacts* the same function, once again proving the 'performativity' of the citation (as per the

performative utterance of ‘I do’, as Austin notes).<sup>45</sup> Thus the citation of *impegno* works phenomenologically to construct a physical, political engagement.

The reasons for the emergence of a ‘performativity’ of *impegno*, I believe, can in themselves be sought within an interesting combination of tensions, one of which is ultimately the tendency to reproduce pastiches based on citation or parody of the past that is a feature of postmodernity. This evidently points to the model as being ultimately more complex than a simple description of previous modes of *impegno*. Two further factors must be taken into consideration: firstly, the traumatic experience of the mafia which, as argued in the previous chapter, leads to an individual urgency to represent the mafia seriously and ethically; I believe that performances of realism and *impegno* are intrinsically connected here. Secondly, it is worth taking into consideration the Italian critical context which, as mentioned in the previous two sections, favours both canonical, modernist art and artists and the realist mode, in particular neorealism. As Antonello and Mussgnug put it, ‘There has been a sustained tendency – still visible now – to associate *engagement* or *impegno* with figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre or Pier Paolo Pasolini’;<sup>46</sup> this is in quite precise terms what is taking place in *I cento passi* (Pasolini, as well as Dante, Rosi and Majakovsky are the citations here).

Speculating on the political importance of a text will ultimately be restricted by the issues of spectatorship that have haunted much of my above consideration, in particular at the beginning of the second section. *I cento passi*, however, is a very interesting case where, arguably, we can trace a very direct correlation between the high audience figures and a notable increase in the prominence of the figure of Peppino Impastato and the grassroots activism that assumes his name as a mantle.

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<sup>45</sup> See the previous chapter for my argument on this process in relation to realism, rather than *impegno*.

<sup>46</sup> Antonello and Mussgnug, p. 9.

As instances of this, we might consider the debate surrounding the controversial re-naming of a library in Bergamo, whose new name (Biblioteca Peppino Impastato) was forcibly removed by the town's mayor.<sup>47</sup> Further evidence can be observed in the exponential increase in attendees of the annual demonstration and march in Cinisi that has taken place virtually every year since 1978. In 2002, the second protest after the film's release, this was converted into a major, three- or four-day manifestation named 'Il Forum Sociale Antimafia', later 'Il Forum Sociale Antimafia "Felicia e Peppino Impastato"'. The size of this event has continued to increase throughout the 2000s. It is evidently possible to use this information, along with the statistics that attest to the box-office popularity of the film, to suggest that the 'performance' of *impegno* is something which functions as a contemporary form of political commitment, and as such is no doubt worthy of further study.

What makes the case of *I cento passi* more striking and intriguing is that, despite the text having produced an unusually notable political impact, it is possible to identify within it a series of attempts to *normalize* the characters, thus notably *reducing* its political impact. This includes, as mentioned, the representation of gender identities, but it also expands over the simplification of narrative, and the drastic re-envisioning of the historical events or sources, such as the Radio AUT broadcasts. This is undoubtedly due to a desire to render more accessible or popular the film, producing a greater profit (successfully, as I have pointed out above). Here we have an interesting contrast to *Le conseguenze dell'amore*, which makes little effort to simplify its own political message, and which (consequently?) garnered a

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<sup>47</sup> 'Bergamo, via la targa a Peppino Impastato', anonymous article from *Corriere della Sera*, 10 September 2009, online: <[http://www.corriere.it/politica/09\\_settembre\\_10/ponteranica\\_targa\\_impastato\\_sindaco\\_lega\\_85cbd826-9e22-11de-8f8c-00144f02aabc.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/politica/09_settembre_10/ponteranica_targa_impastato_sindaco_lega_85cbd826-9e22-11de-8f8c-00144f02aabc.shtml)>, [accessed 6 May 2012].

more humble box-office profit.<sup>48</sup> There might be a temptation therefore to phrase the different industry positions of these two films in terms of high/middle-brow productions, or perhaps even go so far, as I have elsewhere, as to call it a ‘popular-political film’,<sup>49</sup> or ‘*cinema d’impegno popolare*’. Ultimately, though, and in light of the work undertaken in particular in the second section, above, I think that such labels will only prove restrictive, and not allow us to take into account the continuum of impulses at work behind a contemporary film production. What these two instances do quite valuably demonstrate, however, is the importance of taking into account the position of a text within the industry in relation to its political commitment, and moreover to acknowledge that a film which makes ethically questionable choices can ultimately produce a more widely diffused, emancipatory message.

Taken together, *I cento passi* and *Le conseguenze dell’amore* provide a snapshot of the complexity of *impegno* during the 2000s, which takes form at the centre of a series of tensions: between historical pastiche and original aesthetics, linear narratives and rhizomatic stories, financial profit and quality filmmaking. Though neither of these cases should be taken in universalizing terms, perhaps most striking in the comparison of these films is the clash between old and new: *I cento passi*’s foregrounded recourse to key historical and literary sources of *denuncia*, such as *Le mani sulla città*, and *Le conseguenze*’s very original depiction of the mafia. Further intriguing is how the common denominator of these approaches,

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<sup>48</sup> By the July following its release, *I cento passi* had taken a total of 6,224,914,000L (‘Borsa Film’, *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo*, 13 July 2001, p. 5). To offer a comparison, in the April of 2005 that followed *Le conseguenze dell’amore*’s 2004 release, the film had grossed €1,549,880 (Statistics taken from IMDB, online: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0398883/business>>, accessed 23 May 2012); using the exchange rate when the Lire became obsolete, the takings of the latter film are around 2,627,843,680L, or 42% of those of the former.

<sup>49</sup> Dom Holdaway, ‘*The 100 Steps / I cento passi*’, in *Directory of World Cinema: Italy*, ed. by Louis Bayman (London: Intellect, 2011) pp. 244-46 (p. 245).



though oppositional, is *impegno*: in *I cento passi* the performances become as exaggerated ‘sites’ (sights) of commitment and *Le conseguenze*’s originality *eschews* the very possibility that it be taken as engaged.

### iii. *Gomorra* and its Influences

This connection brings us back towards the tension which I highlighted at the beginning of the thesis, raised in relation to Matteo Garrone’s *Gomorra* and its twin, Paolo Sorrentino’s *Il divo* (2008). In one of many of the media exaltations of these films, Natalia Aspesi praises the films for their capacity to ‘rimettersi a guardare il nostro paese senza paura, scavando nella sua realtà e attualità, nelle sue ombre, vergogne, misteri e tragedie e sapendolo raccontare in modo innovativo, geniale, personale’.<sup>50</sup> Here Aspesi draws attention to the two sides of the approach to *impegno* (old and new), in reference to the return to a previous act of political art, ‘rimettendoci a guardare’, that was nevertheless ‘innovativo’, original. The question that I posed at beginning of this thesis, of precisely whether films such as *Gomorra* can be taken as a ‘return’ to *cinema d’impegno* at all, remains problematic in the shadow of this tension between the present and the past. What *I cento passi* demonstrates is an enforced facing up to the trauma of the mafia that equates very explicitly to the ‘(ri)mettendoci a guardare’, and yet, as I have argued, it does so with little originality in that it borrows political codes from other sources. *Le conseguenze* is original, but dislocates the explicit referent of Italian society (geographically, and through spectacle) such that the act of social re-examination is

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<sup>50</sup> Natalia Aspesi, ‘Il riscatto italiano’, *La Repubblica*, 26 May 2008, p. 1. The suggestion that the two films are ‘gemelli nello stesso ventre’ was made by Sergio Castellitto, who was a member of the jury at the 2008 Cannes film festival; cf. Laura Putti, ‘Penn: Ecco il cinema italiano che sa raccontare il mondo’, *La Repubblica*, 27 May 2008, p. 38.

undermined. And yet precisely in their application to *Gomorra*, Aspesi's words indicate a very fruitful mode of understanding how Garrone's film, unlike *I cento passi* or *Le conseguenze*, could accurately be defined as a 'return' of sorts: precisely through a dialectical negotiation of the forms of cinema that I have analysed above. In other words, it does so by combining the original aesthetic with the political action, by appealing to both an 'engaged' constituency and the 'quality' audience too.

Though the lasting influence of Garrone's film remains to be seen, and I do not wish to risk any broad assumptions about the film, in the immediate years after its release *Gomorra* has had a notable effect both on representations of organized crime, and on the contemporary fragments of *cinema d'impegno*. This is demonstrable thanks to the ripples the film has left across Italian culture: not only in its amplified praise in the press (illustrated in my introduction), but also in some notable changes in more recent organized crime cinema. By first commenting briefly on how the form of *Gomorra* can be read in terms of the above negotiation, and then turning to a series of films released after Garrone's film, I will attempt to trace a substantial line of influence. I do so, however, following the assumption that the breaking down of grand narratives that I have illustrated above fundamentally prevents any direct or straightforward 'return' to *cinema d'impegno*: instead we are faced with a range of diverse 'fault lines', or 'fragments', each of which effectively embodies both a 'return of sorts' (be it explicit or not) to previous or foundational modes of *impegno*, combined with original content and aesthetic modes.

In discussing the evolution of forms of knowledge in this 'weak' field of postmodernity, Lyotard identifies the scenario in which scientific theories (the development of knowledge) can be taken as 'progressive': they rely on a similar

legitimation via the convergence of input and output. 'When a denotative statement is declared true, there is a presupposition that the axiomatic system within which it is decidable and demonstrable has already been formulated, that is known to the interlocutors, and that they have accepted that it is as formally satisfactory as possible'.<sup>51</sup> This process can once again be read over the politically viable artistic text, and in particular the scenario of organized crime which I have outlined here: the axiomatic system is the strict critical framework of reception of these films. Lyotard then suggests that alternative fields of 'scientific' thought can take influence from one-another, and as such adopt rules according to similar 'legitimation' processes. He refers to these as 'partners', suggesting that partnership can result in new and acceptable 'moves' or 'propositions'. Beyond the quality and engaged aesthetics which I focus on here, we might tentatively put forward alternative modes or categories of filmmaking (documentary, engaged film, the b-movie) as alternative fields, which can (and do) overlap in partnership.

This network of influences, arising as a consequence of postmodernity, leads to a striking conclusion (that has much relevance here). Lyotard writes that a result of the pragmatics of thought, 'there are two different kinds of "progress" in knowledge: one corresponds to a new move (a new argument) within the established rules; the other to the invention of new rules, in other words, a change to a new game'.<sup>52</sup> Continuing to apply Lyotard's theory to organized crime film, this becomes the key question that emerges in relation to *Gomorra*, and that which I will now attempt to contemplate: does the film constitute a new 'rule', built on alternative partnerships; or will the plurality of these partnerships ultimately signal the shift to a new 'game' in Italian engaged film?

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<sup>51</sup> Lyotard, p. 43.

<sup>52</sup> Lyotard, p. 43.

When analysing *Gomorra*, it should be kept in mind that understanding the film's significance and influences necessitates its placement within the broader framework of what we might call 'il caso Saviano'. Since the publication of Saviano's written exposé on the Camorra, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra*, a number of subsequent volumes, films and TV series have emerged that testify to the width of this political tendency.<sup>53</sup> Though its narrative ultimately shares little with the original text, the adaptation of *Gomorra* that Garrone part-wrote, alongside Saviano and a team of others, and then directed, constitutes just one factor of this broader movement.

The film nods to its roots and the figure of Saviano through the eponymous character in the Franco and Roberto story. Roberto (Carmine Paternoster) is a young apprentice to the waste manager Franco (Toni Servillo), and as the story progresses the young man moves from being complicit within the activity of the Camorra to symbolically rejecting it and ousting himself from this world. It is possible to suggest here that in including Saviano figuratively, Garrone is performing the realism of the world exterior to the film. As I argued in the previous chapter, however, the performances of *impegno* (which more widely are situated in the text's public presentation and reception) mask a mode of filmmaking that is by no means constantly realistic. The same applies in the Franco and Roberto story, which evidently seeks to deliver a shocking truth to the spectator and yet does so through exaggerated spectacle.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006). Further instances that illustrate the breadth of the Saviano or *Gomorra* movement include Saviano's subsequent volume, *La bellezza e l'inferno: Scritti 2004-2009* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010); the four episodes of the TV series *Vieni via con me*, presented by Saviano and Fabio Fazio in 2010, and the publication which followed: Roberto Saviano, *Vieni via con me* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011); and the long-awaited TV adaptation of *Gomorra* which is set to emerge in 2013, co-written by Saviano and Paolo Sorrentino and with the latter attached as director.

The political message of this story is very explicit: it illustrates the negative effects of the Camorra's investment in waste management business on the people of Campania. This message is built and delivered through the on-going association of the spectator with the figure of Roberto, in terms of witnessing, participation and denunciation. Roberto's act of witnessing is emphasized in two sequences: first, in the lorry driver who is injured by a tank of toxic waste; second by the dying farmer who, it is implied, was afflicted by the waste dumped on and under his land. In both sequences, the cinematography explicitly aligns the spectator's point of view with that of Roberto, and as such we too witness the sick bodies. And yet though, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the sequences illustrate an observational quality which appears at first realistic, it is clear that the cinematic mode employed goes beyond anything remotely 'documentary'. In the farm sequence, for instance, there is heavy symbolism built over the figures that Roberto observes: the dying, bed-ridden farmer continues to reach for Franco's hand, in a symbolic bid for help from the Camorra, and Servillo's character remains reticent or superficial in his response, effectively detaching himself from the sick man. In its negotiation of this real referent through a staging of *impegno*, then, the sequence in fact makes recourse to a 'foundational' form of engagement. It is not coincidental that this sequence echoes powerfully the descriptions of 'brutal humanism' that I mentioned above in reference to neorealism and to Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), in terms of the enforced testimony to the biopolitical oppression.<sup>54</sup>

If we take these individual sequences within the story of Franco and Roberto, and indeed within the film of *Gomorra* more widely, however, it becomes clear how Garrone's approach to *impegno* transcends a simplistic imitation of these

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Humanism. The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)

approaches to *impegno*. This is done through an ironic use of pleasure, that occurs on two levels: the spectacle of the Camorra, which tempts Roberto into desiring Franco's lifestyle; and the spectacle of the sequences which can be assumed 'pleasing' to the spectator.



Figures 110-113: Spectacle and Pleasure in the Franco and Roberto Story, *Gomorra* (00:39:52; 00:18:58; 00:19:40; 01:04:07)

Figure 110, here, illustrates the first instance of this. Franco brings Roberto on a business trip to Venice, and both city and experience are framed as 'perks' of the job that the men do, and the pleasure afforded to Roberto as he gazes around Venice ('ti piace viaggiare Robe'?' 'Come no!' 'Viaggeremo ancora.') is exaggerated by the comparative indifference of Franco. In addition to the other, subtler pleasures to which Roberto is introduced by Franco, such as an expensive car or elegant clothing, this functions as the reason for which the young man is drawn into the unethical and oppressive line of work.

This is matched by the spectacular sets that Garrone uses, repeatedly, to introduce or to return to the Franco and Roberto story within the film. I have reproduced some of these in Figures 111, 112 and 113. In the first two cases, the vast, empty spaces that the men are searching through to find possible landfill sites

mark a spectacular introduction to the story of the men. The void both involves and represents the interest of the spectator, which is caught up by this slightly alienating, but enigmatic and unknown opening. Figure 111, the first shot of the story, is particularly striking in this regard, as the fixed camera and long-shot combination mean that the entrance of the men onto the scene, from underground, goes almost unseen, though not unheard. The same occurs, to a more pointed extent, in the sequence around Figure 113. Having first been introduced by some jarring and unrecognizable shots of waste transportation that occur during the night time, Garrone then cuts to the port in order to view Franco and Roberto emerge in the alien protective suits. This takes place with the sound focalized on Roberto, subjectively, such that originally all that can be heard is his breathing (even over a shot of the port, and nothing else, that does not appear to match on action). Only when the suit is opened does this become clear, and the diegetic sounds of the port are introduced. Once again, this functions to create an enigmatic intrigue for the viewer, drawing her into the story.

The use of spectacle thus serves not only to justify the fascination and involvement of Roberto into the activity of the Camorra, but also to force the spectator into a similar process of intrigue and pleasure, and ultimately participation. Since his bearing witness to the traumatic effects of the trauma lead Roberto to his moment of crisis, responsibility and political denunciation, then this journey is undertaken too by the spectator. Being drawn into the activity of the Camorra via spectacle thus assists in leading to our eventual rejection of it; I think there is a certain degree of pleasure, again, in sharing in Roberto's denunciation. This process, I argue, constitutes a means of negotiating between overtly engaged cinema (that appeals, like *I cento passi*, to an engaged constituency), and the

international audience of a quality film (like *Le conseguenze dell'amore*), to whom the spectacle of the vast locations is addressed.

*Gomorra* furthermore plays with an ironic, participation/denunciation pairing through spectacle and *impegno* in its citation of gangster film stylistics. This can be observed in the Marco and Ciro story, for instance, in which the references to American films such as *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990) and *Scarface* (Brian de Palma, 1983) in the imitations of the young camorristi serve to address and involve the spectator who takes a certain pleasure in recognizing these intertexts. And yet, as with the previous instances, and as Antonello has noted, these citations come to achieve a second purpose:

By making all these inter-filmic, inter-cinematic references, Garrone is not trying to play a clever post-modern game with the audience. Instead, he attempts to convey the particular short circuit between reality and fiction that was highlighted by Saviano in his book (and that have already been parodically explored in *The Sopranos*). The gangsters have such a deep desire to be represented and glamorized by the movie industry that they borrow their mannerisms and general attitude from what they see on the screen.<sup>55</sup>

In discussing the people to whom Marco and Ciro correspond in the book of *Gomorra*, Saviano states unambiguously that the manner in which such men imitate cinematic gangsters means that it becomes impossible to differentiate between the fictional and the real. As he puts it, 'Non è vero che il cinema è menzogna, non è vero che non si può vivere come nei film e non è vero che ti accorgi mettendo la testa fuori dallo schermo che le cose sono diverse'.<sup>56</sup> We can thus speculate that the citation of familiar gangster genre pieces functions first to engender the pleasure of recognition, and then, in light of this 'short circuit', in fact to bring the same enjoyment into question by rendering it into an accusation of culpability. Though this story ends with the same violence against Marco and Ciro with which they lived

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<sup>55</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello, 'Dispatches from Hell: Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*', in *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, pp. 377-385 (p. 382).

<sup>56</sup> Saviano, *Gomorra*, p. 279.



their short lives, and thus the spectator is denied a guided moment of denunciation as in the case of Roberto, the fact that their enjoyment of cinematic violence has been challenged brings about a different, but no less poignant, political reaction.

Rather than now pursuing the variety of ways in which *Gomorra* negotiates spectacle, pleasure and *impegno* – of which there are several, that go beyond the cases of genre and quality filmmaking – instead I will devote the remaining space to a consideration of how this shift in an approach to *impegno* can be considered influential beyond the limits of this single text. Though as I will illustrate, I do not wish to suggest that *Gomorra* is the single source of influence for these films, I will turn to two films released after Garrone's own – *Fortapàsc* and *Una vita tranquilla* – and begin to raise some questions about how this dialectic of engaged formats might be taken as a new 'rule' or a new 'game' of *impegno*. In particular when paired together, Marco Risi's 2009 film *Fortapàsc*, and Claudio Cupellini's 2010 film *Una vita tranquilla* constitute critical case studies, because they individually appear to make recourse to the same constituencies as *I cento passi* and *Le conseguenze dell'amore*, respectively. In their analysis, though, I will demonstrate that the structures of the films transcend these one-dimensional categories, substantiating further my emphasis on *Gomorra*. As I move to the conclusion, I will turn to one further case study, *Vallanzasca: Gli angeli del male*, Michele Placido's biopic of Renato Vallanzasca which premiered at the 2010 Venice Film Festival, and posit it as a film which negotiates more openly the impulses of spectacle and engagement, nevertheless pointing to some of the issues of reception that continue to mar the development of *impegno*.

### Fortapàsc

Marco Risi's *Fortapàsc* is named after a pejorative nickname for Torre Annunziata ('Fort Apache'), home town of the protagonist, *cronaca nera* journalist Giancarlo Siani. The film narrates the final years in Siani's life, tracking his promotion from the Torre to the Naples office of *Il mattino*, his written denunciations of the Camorra and specifically his speculations on the arrest of boss Valentino Gionta that led to his assassination in September 1985. Like *I cento passi*, the film is a true story; it delivers the narrative through a straightforward plot (almost entirely in a chronological flashback), and using familiar codes of realism and melodrama. It also codes its anti-mafia martyr as a 'giovane normale',<sup>57</sup> and similarly articulates the fight against organized crime within a generational discourse,<sup>58</sup> and the destruction of the innocent and engaged youth marks the base of the film's political message. *Fortapàsc*, like many films viewed in this thesis, furthermore concludes on a lengthy post-script that reproduces a photograph of the real man, and a subtitle stating 'Giancarlo Siani è stato assassinato il 23 settembre 1985. Aveva 26 anni'. This indicates the traumatic event at the root of the narrative, and moreover performs both realism and *impegno*; the eventual fade of the first sentence, leaving the information about his age, accentuates the pathos of the film.

At surface level, at least, the film also demonstrates an explicit influence of *Gomorra*: most notably it illustrates the trend to turn away from the Sicilian mafia and show an awareness of alternative or international mafia organizations. While

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<sup>57</sup> Anton Giulio Mancino, 'Carta canta, contiene e (in)chiude', *Cineforum*, 484 (2009), 27-29 (p. 28).

<sup>58</sup> In *Fortapàsc*, once again mimicking Giordana's film, the generational discourse is presented through nostalgia that is designed to appeal to the spectator, following O'Leary's analysis of *La meglio gioventù*, only rather than the 1970s, the focus here is the 1980s (cf. O'Leary, 'The Persistence of *Impegno*'). This historical period is constructed through the soundtrack, including the 1980s-nostalgic soundtrack of *Fortapàsc*, which includes artists such as Vasco Rossi, Roberto De Simone, Pino Daniele and Franco Battiato, or the mise-en-scène, for instance Siani's luminous green Citroën Méhari.

the Neapolitan mafia has been nowhere near as absent on screen as other criminal organizations, such as the 'ndrangheta,<sup>59</sup> *Gomorra* quite evidently marks a shift away from the Sicilian mafia in terms of internationally distributed cinema. This shift has been observed by Dana Renga who, quoting the review of *Gomorra* in *The Times*, questions, 'as they say in the world of fashion journalism, is the Camorra the new mafia?'.<sup>60</sup> We could perhaps pick the instance of stars to illustrate a 'Gomorra-effect' in *Fortapàsc*: Neapolitan actors Gianfelice Imparato, Gigio Mora and Salvatore Cantalupo feature in both films, albeit mostly in supporting or cameo parts in Risi's film.<sup>61</sup> Their names are, however, relatively prioritized within the opening credits, which I think attests to the film's auto-definition in the wake of *Gomorra*.

These brief instances undoubtedly point to the manner in which *Fortapàsc* adopts the subject matter of Garrone's film, but articulates it according to the same codes, and invoking the same constituency, as *I cento passi* (the engaged constituency). Before returning to the importance and influence of *Gomorra* in terms of the changing approach to *impegno*, it is worth briefly contextualizing how this constituency is forged, or, in other words, how we might approach the horizon of expectation of *Fortapàsc*. Anton Giulio Mancino's review of the film marks a useful and striking introduction in this regard:

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<sup>59</sup> The camorra has featured in many B-movies (*La legge della camorra*, Demofilo Fidani, 1973; *Camorra*, Pasquale Squitieri, 1972) and Neapolitan *sceneggiate* (such as Alfonso Brescia's films, e.g. *Napoli Palermo New York: Il triangolo della camorra*, 1981; or Ettore Maria Fizzarotti's *Sgarro alla camorra*, 1972), and though less commonly depicted in mainstream cinema, has nonetheless been caught in films such as *Il camorrista* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1986), *Diario napoletano* (Francesco Rosi, 1992) or *Certi bambini* (Andrea and Antonio Frazzi, 2004). The 'ndrangheta is almost entirely absent from film, excluding a handful of documentaries such as *'Ndrangheta, une mafia d'affaires et de sang* (Corrado Durruti, 2008), and a special of *Blu notte*.

<sup>60</sup> Citation taken from Dana Renga, *Unfinished Business: Screening the Italian Mafia in the New Millennium* (forthcoming); and Cosmo Landesman, 'Gomorra,' *The Sunday Times*, 12 October 2008, <[http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/film\\_and\\_tv/film/article240834.ece](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/film_and_tv/film/article240834.ece)>, [accessed 27 May 2012].

<sup>61</sup> Common to both films are also actors Salvatore Striano and Fortunato Cerlino, and cinematographer Marco Onorato.

Un film abbastanza lineare, con una vocazione esplicitamente civile, tuttavia a un impianto più allusivo e codificato di tipo politico-indiziario, che lo rende persino più efficace e durato, dove la busta [che contiene le indagini di Siani] diventa il contenitore emblematico al cui interno si immaginano i segreti non soltanto di questo caso scottante, ma dell'intera storia italiana occultata degli ultimi sessant'anni. La busta di *Fortapàsc* rimanda a tutti gli oggetti-contenitori di verità che puntellano i misteri nazionali, dal memoriale autentico di Salvatore Giuliano alle valigie e al memoriale di Aldo Moro, dall'elenco completo degli iscritti alla loggia segreta P2 all'agenda rossa di Paolo Borsellino. E via elencando.<sup>62</sup>

It is worth picking out two aspects of this review. First, the way in which Mancino places the 'Caso Siani' into a wider chain of 'misteri italiani' naturally increases the importance of the film within events of contemporary Italian history (and a history which has been widely recounted on film).<sup>63</sup> This technique is related very precisely to the film being 'esplicitamente civile'; we might argue that this constitutes a performance of *impegno* which can be centred on the 'busta', the envelope of Siani's investigations which is taken by the mafia after his assassination. The second, related point that is worthy of note is Mancino's categorization of the 'film politico-indiziario' – which the critic has used elsewhere to define films like *Gomorra* and *Il divo*, recently, as well as a longer tradition of political/investigative cinema embodied in films such as *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (Elio Petri, 1970) or *Salvatore Giuliano*.<sup>64</sup> This allows us to clarify the film's horizon of expectation, if not its critical reception. Once again it is the *busta*, the emblem of the literal investigation that the film embodies, which is the central

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<sup>62</sup> Mancino, 'Carta canta', p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> The positioning of the film within this trend in fact quite interestingly makes recourse to a tradition of postmodern Italian culture that prioritizes true crime stories – and Carlo Lucarelli's *Blu notte* television series is exemplary here. The prevalence of 'casi' in Italy that are shrouded in mystery to the extent that they require speculative fictionalization perhaps could be placed at the root of this tendency, and this furthermore raises further interesting problems regarding the decisions to employ realist modes or historiographic metafiction in their representation. Cf. *Postmodern Impegno*, in particular Sergio Adamo, 'La giustizia del dimenticato: sulla linea giudiziaria nella letteratura italiana del Novecento', pp. 259-87, and Giuliana Pieri, 'Letteratura gialla e noir degli anni Novanta e impegno', pp. 289-304.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Mancino, 'Politico/Politico Indiziario' *Cinema e generi* (2009), 42-57; and for his own more broad contextualization of the term see Anton Giulio Mancino, *Il processo della verità: le radici del film politico-indiziario italiano* (Turin: Kaplan, 2008).

metaphor in this *indizio* ('Ci sembra questa la chiave di volta'),<sup>65</sup> thus linking quite explicitly the political message of the film to the metaphor of the journalistic investigation. Mancino's review ultimately thus represents a symbolic placement of the film within a combined genealogy of real and cinematic events. In doing so, it outlines the spectatorship, the horizon of expectation, and the modes of the film's interpretation.

With this in mind, we can further qualify the communication of *impegno* according to this metaphor of investigative journalism. Beyond the *busta*, this is made explicit through the film in a series of 'lectures' that delineate the figure of the journalist in Italy. Two come from Siani's boss, Sasà (played by Ernesto Mahieux) – and particularly significant is the discussion of the 'giornalista-impiegato' and the 'giornalista-giornalista', which echoes the qualification of men given in *Il giorno della civetta*<sup>66</sup> – and the third, the lecture on journalistic ethics that Siani himself delivers to the pupils of a local *liceo*. Journalism and the freedom of denunciation thus follow the same function that 1968 revolutionary politics played in *I cento passi*, and it is significant that in both we are presented with an alternative, guiding (to a fixed extent) father figure, in both Stefano Venuti and Sasà.

By turning now to the aesthetics and the form of Risi's film, the limitations of the model of engaged communication singularly between the film and the engaged constituency become clear. As mentioned, *Fortapàsc* widely adopts the interweaving of melodrama and realism that, as suggested in the previous chapter, is typical of the post-traumatic mafia film. The viewer is offered brutally realistic (traumatic) shots of assassinations, and once again the deaths of Ciro and Siani are pertinent here. The mafia is more generally depicted within a similar vocabulary of

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<sup>65</sup> Mancino, 'Carta canta', p. 28.

<sup>66</sup> See above, in the second section.

untouchable power and intimidation to that of Giordana's film. This power is symbolically mapped out, for instance, in Risi's use of location from the beginning of the film, as he shifts from the free, open space of Siani's naked cliff-dive to the labyrinthine alleyways of Torre Annunziata, where Siani and Rico are trapped and threatened by the camorristi.

Nevertheless, in other sequences, *Fortapàsc* transcends the realistic mode, turning to surrealistic or anti-realistic imageries, in order to re-emphasize and exaggerate the Camorra's power. Often this includes complex camerawork that recalls the 'active' shots of *Gomorra*, detailed in the previous chapter. Brief instances of this include the grotesque murder of a Camorrista who is stabbed with a sizeable swordfish, or the metaphysical disappearance of the Pretore Rosone after his final meeting with Siani.

A critical scene which illustrates this tendency is the café sequence towards the end of the film, when the atmosphere of fear and intimidation reaches a climax. Here Siani enters the recognizable setting of the Torre Annunziata café, greets the room loudly and asks for 'il solito: un cappuccino tiepido e un cornetto'. His entrance into the café is followed by a handheld camera track, and a sense of claustrophobia is constructed by the closeness of supporting characters and the humming noises of the clientele (Figures 115-16). Once the order is placed, Siani turns slightly towards the camera and suddenly is slapped from the point-of-view of the camera (Figure 117). The attack is enough to knock him to the floor, followed by the camera, thus denying the sight (though not the sound) of the other customers rapidly fleeing the scene. A pan upwards and around the café, then a further medium-long shot of Siani on the floor, testifies to the suddenly and inconceivably emptied space. Here, aesthetically, the sequence assumes the tone of *I cento passi*'s

dream sequence (which also takes place in a café), yet in applying it to Siani's *reality* it underlines the power and danger of the camorra. The way the camera denies the direct explanation of the attack evidently functions both to align the spectator's emotional response to that of Siani (whose own sight is impaired without his glasses, Figure 118), and metaphorically, to comment on the invisible omnipotence of the mafia. In this way, the scene becomes politicized in positioning the empathy of the spectator with Siani and against organized crime; yet this is done through an oneiric, *anti*-realist aesthetic.



Figures 114-119: The Oneiric Bar Sequence and Attack on Siani in *Fortapàsc* (01:24:45; 01:24:50; 01:24:55; 01:24:58; 01:25:27)

The inclusion of more complex and active camera movements, such as the ‘slap’ sequence, or the exaggerate spectacle of the Camorra in the swordfish shots, demonstrates a shift away from the straightforward combinations of melodrama and realism that was common to the cinema of the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead, what *Fortapàsc* employs (albeit to a notably lower extent) is a type of aesthetic that is closer to *Gomorra*: the swordfish sequence, for instance, brings together eerie, constructed surrealism alongside horrific brutality that mimics the opening sequence of Garrone’s film. Both sequences thus illustrate the capability of film to bring together brutal realism with the spectacular aesthetics of quality cinema.

A further instance that testifies to this shift in aesthetics is the manner in which *Fortapàsc* makes cinematic citations. I mentioned above that *Gomorra*'s citation of gangster aesthetics functioned in order to bring together the pleasure of recognition of a previous film and to challenge that; though done in a less open manner, we can perceive a similar process taking place in Risi's film. This is illustrated once again in the depiction of the mafia. Superficially, at least, *Fortapàsc*'s representation of mafiosi appears closer to the traditional, suited gangster of *I cento passi* than the discomfiting casualty of *Gomorra*'s camorristi (in tanning booths, playing arcade machines). In fact, *Fortapàsc*'s depiction of the gangster, and in particular the main camorrista in the film's focus, boss Valentino Gionta, appears to share much with the glamorized image of the 1980s or 1990s gangster found in Hollywood films such as *Goodfellas* or *Casino* (Martin Scorsese, 1995). This is made particularly explicit through the extravagance of the boss, notable in particular in the party at Gionta's house for his son's communion, before the police interrupt and arrest him.<sup>67</sup> On the one hand, we might take this as an ironic citation, similar to the citations of *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), as noted by Pauline Small.<sup>68</sup> This is valid in particular since Gionta is deliberately depicted as *unusually* glamorous in his daily life, and thus the ironic citation could be taken as ultimately signalling the difference of organized crime in Italy to the Hollywood imagery. However, I would suggest that precisely in this uniqueness of Gionta does the citation require a reading that is closer to the ironic use of intertexts in *Gomorra*: just as Marco and Ciro are depicted in a recognizable recreation of *Scarface*, so too can we make the link between Gionta and Henry Hill or 'Ace' Rothstein in

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<sup>67</sup> There is, of course, much significance in the two films' shared use of the 1980s as a setting for the glamour and pomp of the gangster.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Pauline Small, '*I cento passi*: Renegotiating the Mafia Codes', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 3.1 (2005), 41-54 (p. 45).



Scorsese's films. In the same way, then, the citation also serves ironically, to draw the spectator in through the process of recognition and pleasure, but then to distance them ultimately, by challenging this very enjoyment (through the emotional severance that underplays the whole film). As such, once again the film has adopted a negotiation, or 'partnership', between different aesthetic forms in a similar way to *Gomorra*.

Though quite evidently *Fortapàsc* speaks first and foremost to an *impegnato* constituency, the cases that I have highlighted here illustrate that its political engagement is produced in a slightly more complex manner than the engaged films viewed above. This demonstrates a lasting effect of the importance of *Gomorra*'s position within the network of engaged texts. With this in mind, we might then go back to some of the similarities between Risi's and Garrone's films that I mentioned at the beginning of this section, such as the movement north of Sicily and change in focus onto the Camorra, and the use of some of *Gomorra*'s stars, which brings a set of expectations on behalf of the viewer. These two points can be furthered in relation to the second case study, which pushes further the northern trajectory and constructs itself over a key star persona.

### *Una Vita Tranquilla*

Claudio Cupellini's 2010 film *Una vita tranquilla* can be placed on the opposing end of the scale to Marco Risi's film: like *Le conseguenze dell'amore*, this is a film which very openly speaks to a quality constituency, and outright denies that it be *impegnato*. The director himself has stated in interview, 'vorrei chiarire che *Una vita tranquilla* non appartiene affatto al filone del cinema di impegno sociale o di

denuncia ma è piuttosto un film sulle dinamiche familiari'.<sup>69</sup> As with *Le conseguenze dell'amore*, though, the assumption that it is not engaged is limited, since the film bears a very interesting depiction of the mafia based in noir symbolism, that is evidently open to a political interpretation. However, in quite an apparent contradiction with Cupellini's words, the film does draw on some of the codes of the 'engaged' film, once again demonstrating that in the wake of *Gomorra* the *impegno* and quality constituencies have moved closer together. Once again, here I will illustrate first how it appeals to a quality audience, and then turn to the necessary dialectical reading.

The film's industry position shares much with Sorrentino's mafia film, in particular being the second feature-length production of Claudio Cupellini, who directed a series of shorts between 2004-06, and the light-hearted, comic vehicle for Luca Argentero, *Lezioni di cioccolato*, in 2007. This evidently placed Cupellini in a similar position – if not perhaps even more urgent, since he is completely shifting register – to that of Sorrentino, who sought to make a pronounced move into the international quality circuit. This relied on the four characteristics, once again, as identified by Wood: 'big budgets, stars, international distribution, and, visually, by spectacle'.<sup>70</sup> The experience of the first production was certainly useful for Cupellini, as the director has observed,<sup>71</sup> in order to gain the attention of major producers such as Fabrizio Mosca. The film gained international production support from RaiCinema as well as from a minor Italian production company, Acaba Produzioni; from a fairly mainstream French company, Babe Film, which often

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<sup>69</sup> Franco Montini, 'Spaghetti e pistole', *Vivilcinema*, 10.5 (2010), 18.

<sup>70</sup> Wood, p. 357.

<sup>71</sup> Montini, p. 18.

supports middlebrow or quality Italian productions;<sup>72</sup> and crucially from a German company, EOS Entertainment, which produces mostly television shows. The German co-production, which arose as a consequence of the film being shot mostly in Germany, provided *Una vita tranquilla* with a larger budget, as Cupellini has stated.<sup>73</sup> The film then gained a major international distributor, 01 Distribution, which has a history of quality Italian and international productions (for instance, distributing films by Nanni Moretti, Gianni di Gregorio, and very recently David Cronenberg's 2012 film *Cosmopolis*). The star of the film, Toni Servillo – who also played as the protagonist of Sorrentino's film, though at that point with a much more humble international status – evidently brings much to the film's position as a serious and engaged story, a point to which I will return shortly.

The film's photography functions to accentuate spectacle. Generally, it favours medium close-ups that observe the interaction of the characters, and the camera movements are slow pans or tracks that keep this centralized. The pace of the film is slow, symbolically matching the 'vita tranquilla' of the title, and yet it speeds up notably during the most dramatic sequences, such as the murders of Richter and Edoardo, prioritizing and making spectacular these events. Here the spectator is slightly disoriented as Cupellini cuts very quickly between different points of view.

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<sup>72</sup> This includes *Romanzo criminale*, *Il divo* and *Vallanzasca*, as well as a series of films which have gained international nods from festival circuits such as *La nostra vita* (Daniele Lucchetti, 2010) and *Terraferma* (Emanuele Crialese, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Nicoletta Gemmi, 'Claudio Cupellini e *La vita tranquilla* di Toni Servillo', *Primissima*, 30 October 2010, online: <[http://www.primissima.it/cinema\\_news/scheda/claudio\\_cupellini\\_e\\_la\\_vita\\_tranquilla\\_di\\_toni\\_servillo/](http://www.primissima.it/cinema_news/scheda/claudio_cupellini_e_la_vita_tranquilla_di_toni_servillo/)> [accessed 27 May 2012].



Figures 120-21: The Overhead Crane on Rosario (00:19:11; 00:19:30); Figures 122-23: The Close-up to Extreme-Long Shot Crane over Edoardo, *Una vita tranquilla* (00:50:33; 00:51:04). Both pairs of shots are single takes.

The spectacle of the film is furthermore accentuated by the inclusion of a set of ‘baroque’ cinematography, where the director uses very extravagant crane shots and pans that interrupt the narrative. Instances include the shot of Rosario hammering copper nails into a tree outside, which begins from a (vertical) high angle, then arches downwards and backwards to encompass the restaurant in the background; or the movement from a close-up of Edoardo sitting on the fountain in the town centre that rapidly shifts backwards and cranes upwards to a long-shot aerial view of the town. In both cases, the sound is slightly alienating, in the former thanks to the growing musical soundtrack, and in the latter since the sounds surrounding Edoardo (the lady walking by, the fountain) do not fade despite moving far away from him. These sequences can very evidently be taken as the effort to produce a bold aesthetics to match the director’s shift into the quality sector. We might further speculate that they seek to emulate directly Sorrentino’s *Le conseguenze*<sup>74</sup> – one thinks in particular of the important shot of Titta injecting

<sup>74</sup> Much of the critical response to the film online is critical of the film’s clear (self-)association with Sorrentino’s film, in particular given the absence of symbolism within these spectacle shots. In a

heroin in which the camera performs similar arches over the head of Servillo; this is particularly evident, frankly, from the absence of symbolic meaning of the camerawork of the ‘spectacle shots’ in a film which otherwise relies heavily on (noir) symbolism. We might thus conclude that these shots do not serve any specific purpose other than to exaggerate the spectacle of the film, and to overlap with the stylistics of an art-house film such as *Le conseguenze dell'amore*.

As mentioned, though, the quality aesthetics of Cupellini’s film are not entirely void of political significance. In fact, such noir symbolism evidently contributes much to an explicitly politicized depiction of the mafia. The film uses striking sets and staging of the actors that often function symbolically in this regard: major examples include the garden outside the restaurant and the symbolic, slow killing of the trees that accompanies the slow intervention of the mafia into Rosario’s life; the light/dark split down the centre of the screen during the sequence at the dog kennels that separates Rosario and Diego from Renate and Mathias (Figure 124); or the sequence in Rosario’s small office where Edoardo stands above him in order to symbolize his dominance (Figure 125).

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majority of reviews, in blogs and newspapers, the similarities between *Una vita tranquilla* and *Le conseguenze* is foregrounded, though not necessarily challenged (see Ilaria Urbani, ‘Una vita tranquilla lancia due nuovi talenti’, *La Repubblica*, 15 November 2010, online: <[http://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/11/15/news/una\\_vita\\_tranquilla\\_lancia\\_due\\_nuovi\\_talent-9154965/](http://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/11/15/news/una_vita_tranquilla_lancia_due_nuovi_talent-9154965/)>, [accessed 28 May 2012]; and Stefano Santoli, ‘Recensione: *Una vita tranquilla*’, *FilmScoop.it*, 15 November 2010, online: <<http://www.filmscoop.it/cgi-bin/recensioni/unavitatranquilla.asp>> [accessed 28 May 2012]). Two instances in which it is, though, is on the Italian film database site mymovies.it, on which (at the time of writing) the main, centralized review of the film criticizes the film for such similarities: ‘*Una vita tranquilla* di Claudio Cupellini soffre troppo di una somiglianza registica e di sceneggiatura con il Sorrentino di *Le conseguenze dell'amore*’ (Luca Marra, ‘*Una vita tranquilla* (2010). Tensione fotogramma per fotogramma al ritmo delle ombre dei cattivi ricordi.’, *Mymovies.it*, no date given, online <<http://www.mymovies.it/pdf/?id=60630>> [accessed 28 May 2012]). A further reviewer, writing under the handle ‘Mise en Scene 88’, writing on the *CineRepublic* blog, writes ‘Pare che il film sia una sorta di variazione sul tema di *Le conseguenze dell'amore* di Paolo Sorrentino. Ammetto di essere caduto anche io in tentazione. Non sono pochi gli elementi in comune tra i due film’, though ultimately he differentiates the two along the central themes of love and desire. Mise en Scene 88, ‘Una vita tranquilla’, *CineRepublic*, 18 November 2010, online: <<http://cinerepublic.film.tv.it/una-vita-tranquilla/832/>> [accessed 28 May 2012].



Figures 124-25: Symbolic Setting and Staging in *Una vita tranquilla* (00:38:36; 01:01:37)

The ‘film noir’, *chiaroscuro* lighting that is illustrated in the second shot is brought forward throughout the film, much of which happens at night and in darkened locations in order to exaggerate the oppressive, dangerous atmosphere that the notion and imagery of the camorra bring to the film. The wooded sequences, and those which take place in the cellar underneath the hotel and finally on the roads and countryside around Teano are key here.

The film’s use of Toni Servillo for the role of the protagonist functions as a particularly interesting mediation between the spectacle and engaged cinema, that can furthermore be employed to signal the wider dialectic in the film. Though the film is more than simply a star vehicle as such, the importance of Servillo (who gained critical praise for the role, and an award at the Rome Film Festival) is embodied by the prominence of his name in the film’s poster (and the DVD cover), in the second largest font after only the name of the film (see Figure 126). Evidently the persona of the star contributes to the coding of the film in a specific way, and furthermore can be used (as noted in the second chapter, in reference to Gian Maria Volontè, Alberto Sordi and Massimo Girotti) to trace the horizon of expectation of the film.<sup>75</sup> Thus by considering briefly the star persona of Servillo, we can further comment on the intentions of *Una vita tranquilla*.

<sup>75</sup> It might be noted that it is not uncommon for a mafia film to make use of a fairly limited range of actors; in part this is due to the typical need to pick out ‘regional’ actors – Sicilian for films on *cosa nostra*, Neapolitan for films on Camorra. The former would certainly include stars such as Tony

Figure 126: The Publicity Poster (and DVD Cover) for *Una vita tranquilla*

Servillo's persona owes much to his local region, as is reflected in roles like that of Titta Di Girolamo, Tony Pisapia in *L'uomo in più* or Franco in *Gomorra*. This certainly finds root in his background as a Neapolitan theatrical actor, which was his central work until the supporting role in Martone's *Morte di un matematico napoletano* in 1992 that led to his shift to the cinema.<sup>76</sup> His roles since then have nevertheless been very evidently in mainstream middlebrow or quality *cinema d'impegno*, and not singularly regional, including films such as *Luna rossa* (Antonio Capuano, 2001), *La ragazza del lago* (Andrea Molaioli, 2006), *Il divo*, *Noi credevamo* (Mario Martone, 2010) and *Gorbaciof* (Stefano Incerti, 2010).

*Il divo* and *Gomorra*, and the prize awarded to Servillo for acting in the two films at the 2008 Cannes film festival, evidently had a characterizing effect in

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Sperandeo, who has had major roles in films such as *I cento passi*, *L'uomo di vetro* (Stefano Incerti, 2005) and *La scorta* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1993), as well as minor roles of mafiosi or police officers in *La piovra* (1997-98), *La squadra* (2005-07), *Pizza Connection* (Damiano Damiani, 1980) and *I giudici* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1999), to name a few; for the latter we might think of those mentioned briefly above, Gianfelice Imparato or Salvatore Cantalupo (or indeed Toni Servillo).

<sup>76</sup> See Silvia Grande, *Toni Servillo: Il primo violino* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2010), p. 118.

making the actor mainstream and internationally recognized. Silvia Grande has observed that with *Il divo*, ‘la “maschera” dell’attore Servillo si concretizza’, using the Pirandellian notion of the ‘maschera’ to suggest the kind of typology of role to which the star persona is fundamentally associated.<sup>77</sup> We might otherwise term this, borrowing from Richard Dyer, as the ‘star image’ of Servillo, through which his typical characters and the related performance techniques are transmitted to the spectator.<sup>78</sup> While space restricts an extensive study of the social construction of the actor through the vast array of media texts on Servillo, I think that by comparing the roles in films mentioned above, culminating in *Il divo*, to the style of acting associated with Servillo’s performance, we can begin to approach Servillo’s star image from the side of semiotics. In terms of his style, as Grande writes, Servillo

conserva le caratteristiche di asciuttezza, essenzialità e precisione, utilizzando sia a teatro che al cinema, una recitazione controllata, precisa, rigorosa. È un attore calibrato, capace di raggiungere l’essenzialità dei personaggi che interpreta. Grazie alla lucidità e alla capacità critica del suo sguardo, Servillo riesce a costruire dei personaggi sempre riconoscibili e familiari per il pubblico.<sup>79</sup>

The intimacy of Servillo’s character creation, and the serious and *impegnato* style, along with the familiar placing of the actor into roles in serious and political films such as *Gomorra* and *Il divo*, I argue, construct a deliberately engaged ‘image’ for the actor. Already, then, we can suggest that the horizon of expectation which the spectator will bring to *Una vita tranquilla* in terms of its star contributes to its position as a serious and engaged film, and not solely as a quality piece.

Of course the question remains of the individual performance of Servillo within the film itself, since there is every possibility for a film to disrupt the typical notion of a star. It is in fact clear that the individual performance of Servillo in *Una*

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<sup>77</sup> Grande, p. 132.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: British Film Institute, 1998), p. 35.

<sup>79</sup> Grande, p. 34.



*vita tranquilla* and the playful manner in which it relies on Servillo's reputation is illustrative of the dialectical and self-conscious negotiation of the engaged and quality constituencies that I have noted in relation to *Gomorra* and *Fortapàsc*. This can be substantiated by considering the manner in which Servillo's physical appearance is altered. The mafiosi played by Servillo in *Gomorra* and *Le conseguenze*, the precedents to Rosario, forge an image of the man as ruthless and intelligent that is matched by a crisp look, suited and clean shaven, and he has a serious demeanour that betrays little emotion. The character of Rosario, at the beginning of the film at least, very clearly interrupts this characterization, by featuring the character in chef's whites (prominent in the film poster, Figure 126) and with a white beard. Viewing Toni Servillo smile and laugh, in particular after his absence of emotion in *Le conseguenze*, is furthermore strangely alienating. We might nevertheless suggest that this use of the actor plays into the double identity that is intrinsic to the film's plot, where the Rosario who has escaped the mafia and set up his new life, leaving behind his past identity (Antonio De Martino) is deliberately played as alternative. Then, as the film continues and the figure of De Martino catches up with him, the typical physiognomy with which we associate the characters of Servillo returns; even by the end of the film, as he has to flee once again from the identity of Rosario, the actor becomes better 'recognizable' when he shaves off his beard once again. Thus both the staging of Servillo's reputation and his physical appearance tie into the wider construction of the political message, where the omnipotent dominance of the criminal organization characterizes and conditions the man. This accentuates the ultimate futility and tragedy of his attempts to begin again.

The way in which *Una vita tranquilla* thus plays with the image and reputation of Servillo quite interesting signals a split between the past (camorrista) and the present (chef) and between Southern Italy and Germany, that ultimately comes to be presented as somewhat superficial, when the two worlds meet. Once again, then, there is the re-introduction of the question of a Northward movement in the broad focus of the mafia film, with a strongly rooted focus on the Camorra but a bold warning that organized crime can and does spread internationally. The merge between these worlds is played out in both explicitly engaged sequences, such as the Richter sub-story, introduced via newsreel, that performs realism through a reference to major contemporary mafia issues (refuse management); and in extravagant aesthetic or symbolic sequences, such as the above, or the noir impulse that runs throughout the film.<sup>80</sup> The divide and the movement between North and South in Cupellini's film can usefully be taken as allegorical of the interplay between the engaged and arthouse aspects of this film.

*Fortapàsc* and *Una vita tranquilla* are useful case studies that illustrate the complexity of the network of impulses that is taking place in *cinema d'impegno* today. Neither can be described with ease as being directly and unequivocally influenced by *Gomorra*, since they both openly communicate to specific constituencies, and illustrate clear points of influence in entirely different films. Even in the obvious connections to *Gomorra*, such as stars or the broad focus on the Camorra, the reasons for these undoubtedly transcend *impegno*, instead relating to issues of production, narrative trends and profit. Nevertheless, as I have argued in

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<sup>80</sup> Though space prevents me developing this further, it is worth offering a few brief instances: the confrontation of Rosario and Edoardo in the former's office that is lit in chiaroscuro plays with the symbolic dominance/dominant ethic; or the sequence that takes place at the dog pound which literally divides the screen according to two paths – that of Rosario's new and old families/lives – illustrate how the noir symbolism of the film paints a political message of the omnipotence and inevitability of the mafia's influence.

relation to these three films, there is a marked shift towards a dialectical negotiation of different forms of cinematic production – the engaged film and the quality film – that appears to have occurred most pointedly first in *Gomorra*. This, as I have suggested, can be read as a ‘partnership’, as a means to promote a new form of knowledge, and it undoubtedly has prompted an evolution in *both* the notion of the quality image and the notion of *impegno* today.

#### **iv. Conclusion: *Vallanzasca*, and the Issues of *Impegno* Today**

The question that still remains is that of whether *Gomorra* can thus be taken as a new ‘rule’, or an entirely new ‘game’. Of course, essentially there is too great an historical proximity to respond accurately to this question. At this stage, however, and in light of the continued reliance on the stylistics of quality filmmaking and on the invoking of an engaged constituency illustrated in *Una vita tranquilla* and *Fortapàsc*, we might be inclined to simply read the broad turn to the hybrid link of quality and *impegno* as a new ‘rule’ in the map of mainstream cinematic production. Nevertheless, it is by no means implausible that in the following years further films will emerge that draw attention to their political commitment through its mediation via spectacle, and thus signal a greater relevance of *Gomorra* and its period. A key instance which points to this is *Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male*. Placido’s film is a biopic of the infamous Milanese criminal and band leader, Renato Vallanzasca, who became infamous during the 1970s and 1980s thanks to extensive media attention in Italy and who continues to feature in the press today.<sup>81</sup> Though much like Placido’s previous film, *Romanzo criminale* (2005), the film is not explicitly a mafia film in

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<sup>81</sup> As a testament to his on-going media appeal, his emergence from prison on day-leave has been heavily documented in the press. See ‘Foto: Vallanzasca in semilibertà torna al lavoro’, anonymous article, *La Repubblica*, 12 June 2012, online: <[http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/02/06/foto/vallanzasca\\_in\\_semilibert\\_torna\\_al\\_lavoro-29414320/1/](http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/02/06/foto/vallanzasca_in_semilibert_torna_al_lavoro-29414320/1/)> [accessed 5 July 2012].

the same way as my other case studies, its treatment of organized crime both in the images of urban banditry and the connections to the Camorra and Cosa nostra through the figure of Francis Turatello<sup>82</sup> share much with the films analysed here. This is particularly the case in terms of its explicit foregrounding of the dialectic between the *impegnato* and spectacular images, though we might also make the important geographical link once again: we might speculatively place this as a further continuation of the trend to look away from Sicily and the Cosa nostra to the wider and more national/international implications of organized crime.

Though *Vallanzasca* did not have the critical or public success of *Gomorra*, nor *Romanzo criminale*, the manner in which it forges a political message is very similar, and perhaps even more original and interesting than its predecessors. This can be illustrated through two cases: the use of location and the city space, and the use of the star.

The film makes a very deliberate use of the Milanese cityscape, drawing on recognizable, central sites and unfamiliar peripheries that reflect the altering statuses of the characters. The peripheral urbanscape is set up as the location in which Vallanzasca and his friends develop as criminals, through flashback. The film then establishes a shift between this periphery (Giambellino, as the subtitle informs us) and the city centre, according to a gain in wealth. In one of the early heist scenes, the gang are first shown carrying out crime in suburban Milan. Placido designates the space carefully, first foregrounding a shot with two dominant buildings (Figure 127). The modernist, 1930s/40s architecture of the commercial building on the right, combined with more recent, 1960s/70s *palazzo* on the left designate both the peripheral location, as well as a sense of chronological progression. Though it is

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<sup>82</sup> Turatello, the rival gangster of Vallanzasca in the first half of the film, had powerful connections to the Sicilian and Campanian mafias, both of which are played upon in the film (as mentioned below), through shifting locations and regional difference.

probably intended as a generally anonymous periphery, at this point Placido has shifted from the Giambellino-Lorenteggio zone in the South-West of Milan, to the area of Via Padova in the North-East (the specific location is the crossroad between Via Privata Derna and Via Privata Giuba). Once the (slightly botched) heist has taken place, the director cuts rapidly, with no closure to the heist and with continuous sound-effects off-scene, to the city centre and an interior location inside a luxurious night club. The movement clearly illustrates continuity. Two brief shots of the Castello Sforzesco and then the Duomo, both by night, mark this transition.



Figures 127-28: Peripheral and Central Milan in *Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male* (00:11:18; 00:13:14)

What is striking about this sequence, as a motif which will be then mimicked throughout the film,<sup>83</sup> is that much of the action sequences feed off the urban space. The spacing out of the street, and a natural interaction with the location, play into the gangsters' success in the act of robbery. Thus, the exterior of Milan is depicted as the location of heists, robberies and gunfights. It is in doing so, I would argue, that Placido is picking up on a tradition of urban B-movies or poliziotteschi that take place in 1970s Italian cityscapes.<sup>84</sup> Those films shot in Milan, from *Banditi a Milano* (Carlo Lizzani, 1968) to *Milano odia: La polizia non può più sparare*

<sup>83</sup> The locations of Vallanzasca's heists moreover become more centralized as the criminal gains power. The later sequence that takes place in the grandiose building of the Direzione Regionale delle Entrate per la Lombardia, on the corner of Via della Moscova and Via Daniele Manin testifies to this.

<sup>84</sup> Particularly worthy of note are those many 'city name' B-movies – *Torino nera* (Carlo Lizzani, 1972); *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia* (Sergio Martino, 1973); *Roma violenta* (Marino Girolami, 1975); *Genova a mano armata* (Mario Lanfranchi, 1976); *Napoli spara* (Mario Caiano, 1977) – that Bruschini and Tentori refer to as 'un vero e proprio filone'. See Antonio Bruschini and Antonio Tentori, *Città violente: il cinema poliziottesco italiano* (Florence: Tarab, 1998), p. 107.

(Umberto Lenzi, 1974) and *La banda Vallanzasca* (Mario Bianchi, 1977, which despite its name is only loosely connected with the bandit), are important points of influence here. What the film undoubtedly shares with these, though, is the pointedly politicized narration of cityscape and power, designating the poverty of the (quasi-‘Pasolinian’) periphery as a source of nascent crime, and the city centre as the location for corrupt, bourgeois wealth and elegance. Here we can find hints to the central political message of the film.

It is then by no means coincidental that in the luxurious nightclub to which Placido cuts, which in itself appears to be a nod to the beginning of a rise/fall narrative common to the Hollywood gangster film, Vallanzasca and his bandits first see Francis Turatello. Contrarily to Vallanzasca, Turatello is depicted as more comfortable and natural in his interaction with these surroundings, and the contrast is exaggerated in the comment of a colleague: when Turatello, with match on action on Vallanzasca, asks ‘ma chi sono questi qua?’, the colleague replies ‘vengono da fuori, dalla periferia’. The other man then states that the bandits have ‘le faccie da spacchiusi’, but ‘sono venuti nel posto sbagliato’. The use of the Sicilian term ‘spacchiuso’, and the strong, Southern accent of Turatello’s gangster stands as a crucial first instance that signals a wider network of crime that goes beyond Milan: he is evidently supposed to represent a link to a Sicilian mafia group. The employment of such a characterization supports my assertion that *Vallanzasca* is an instance of the aforementioned trend of mafia films that move North, beyond Sicily or Naples; it furthermore illustrates how the representation of crime in the film goes beyond a mere continuation of the B-movie aesthetic. In a sense, then, this geography functions ironically, as in *Una vita tranquilla*, in order to reveal and foreground the dialogue between the centre-spectacle and the periphery-political

message. The surprising, inverted link between wider organized crime bodies and the bandit's group in geographical terms only serves to re-emphasize the need to contextualize criminal power and its effects in Italy.

The complexity of the film's representation of crime can furthermore be illustrated through the use of certain actors. The protagonist, Renato Vallanzasca, is played by Kim Rossi Stuart, whose star image evidently is built upon his challenging and *impegnato* roles in middlebrow engaged films such as Renato Benedetti in *Anche libero va bene* (2006), directed by Rossi Stuart himself, or Gianni in *Le chiavi di casa* (Gianni Amelio, 2004). His characterization often combines such roles with a serious and morally engaged demeanour – considering *Romanzo criminale* in this case is quite relevant – and consequently a certain enigma surrounds his character. The mystery and inaccessibility of Rossi Stuart is brought forward in the actor's off-screen persona, through the combination of interviews, in which he typically foregrounds his committed performance, and the unavoidable celebrity-press which exaggerates his attraction and intrigue.<sup>85</sup> This is played upon in *Vallanzasca* in two ways: first, from a practical point of view, it distances the mimetic relationship between Rossi Stuart and the bandit, where the latter undoubtedly features as an important, memorable role in which the actor can illustrate his abilities. Recognizing the actor's skill in this role – and his abilities have indeed been widely acknowledged – thus re-enforces this dislocation.<sup>86</sup>

The second way in which the film plays with Rossi Stuart's star persona works in a contrary fashion, to some extent overlapping the imagery of the two men: the

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<sup>85</sup> For instances of the reviews which illustrate this persona, I refer the reader to the accompanying DVD features of both *Anche libero va bene* and *Vallanzasca: Gli angeli del male*.

<sup>86</sup> Rossi Stuart was awarded the Pegasi d'oro at the Premi Flaiano as well as the Nastro d'argento del SNGCI for Migliore Attore Protagonista for his role. Crespi's description of the actor as 'superlativo, impressionante' ("Vallanzasca", ottimo poliziesco', online) is typical of the reviews that accompanied the film's release.

celebrity actor with the celebrity criminal, whose nickname in the contemporary press was, after all, ‘Il bel René’. The extensive sequence in which Vallanzasca marries Giuliana in prison, with Turatello as his best man, immediately sets out a challenging notion of spectacle, illustrating its function in the creation and support of the criminal character. By potentially overlapping the spectacle-appeal of Vallanzasca with that of Rossi Stuart today, Placido repudiates the possibility that the glorified gangster be historical, instead enforcing a link to the present. It furthermore forges complicity on behalf of the spectator, who contributes to the very production of spectacle. Doing so thus brings together the notions of celebrity of the criminal in the 1970s, the actor today, and the film generally, bringing the issue of crime as a spectacle more widely into question.<sup>87</sup> Quite interestingly, then, the use of Rossi Stuart functions by building the spectator’s expectations into the film, and specifically into the political commentary, in the same way that the citations of Hollywood films do in both *Gomorra* and *Fortapàsc*.

The instances outlined here point to further evidence of the importance of *Gomorra*’s influence in the exciting movement in aesthetic codes of *impegno* today. Beyond these, Placido’s film serves furthermore to illustrate both the ultimate complexity of the network of impulses at play in the current climate, and moreover the issues of *impegno* that continue to affect film production and reception. Since its release, *Vallanzasca* has been marred by fairly constant polemic: Placido was

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<sup>87</sup> This of course ties into a much broader rhetoric of glorification of good and evil, heroics and violence, that the film continually plays on, by no means unproblematically. A crucial instance here is the challenging representation of the *Eccidio di Dalmine*, in which Vallanzasca’s brutal murder of two policemen, Luigi D’Andrea and Renato Barborini, is played out between the coding of a Western showdown and the melodramatic tragedy of a fallen hero, following the death of gangster Beppe. The sequence brought further polemic to the film, which was due to be screened in early 2012 on a cable-TV channel on the very anniversary of the murders of the policemen (6 February 1977). See Sara Regina, “No al film su Vallanzasca nell’anniversario dell’eccidio”. E Sky decide di rinviarlo’, *Corriere della Sera*, 6 February 2012, online: <[http://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/12\\_febbraio\\_6/vallanzasca-sky-film-dalmine-bergamo-sindaco-terzi-1903166794940.shtml](http://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/12_febbraio_6/vallanzasca-sky-film-dalmine-bergamo-sindaco-terzi-1903166794940.shtml)> [accessed 6 June 2012].



unable to gain financial support for the project from mainstream producers Rai and Medusa because of the sensitive nature of the material; instead he turned to an American production company (Fox).<sup>88</sup> The lead actor, Kim Rossi Stuart, has stated that such difficulty emerges from the film's contemporaneity, since both Vallanzasca (and presumably, moreover, the families of his victims) are still alive.<sup>89</sup> Indeed the issue of it being 'too soon' underlies much of the critique of the film, the most extreme example of which is the boycott of the film on behalf of the separatist Lega Nord party. The problems with the film – which are echoed, to a less pronounced effect, in much of the (predominantly conservative) press in Italy – take place on two levels: first, the glorification of a murderous criminal; second, the offence caused to the relatives of the victims. In the view of Lega *deputato* Davide Cavallotto, 'Utilizzare giovani e affascinanti attori allo scopo di sdoganare l'immagine di personaggi che dovrebbero cadere nell'oblio per i crimini commessi [...] è un insulto alla memoria delle vittime e una crudeltà verso i loro parenti'.<sup>90</sup> This criticism of the film quite evidently echoes very closely indeed that aimed at much organized crime cinema in Italy, as I have observed in the introduction to this thesis: specifically that the images are 'false rappresentazioni'.<sup>91</sup> In the comment provided in *Il giornale*, Maurizio Caverzan raises the very familiar issue of proximity to reality, pointing out that the film is coded through a contemporary language (literally, in some cases, by using what he suggests is anachronistic slang,

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<sup>88</sup> Giulia Pietrantoni, 'Vallanzasca a Venezia. "Gli angeli del male" pronti anche alle polemiche', *Coming Soon*, 14 July 2012, online: <[http://www.comingsoon.it/News\\_Articoli/Interviste/Page/?Key=2538](http://www.comingsoon.it/News_Articoli/Interviste/Page/?Key=2538)>, [accessed 6 June 2012].

<sup>89</sup> Claudia Morgoglione, "Non assolvo Vallanzasca ma in Parlamento c'è chi è peggio di lui", *La Repubblica*, 6 September 2010, online: <<http://www.repubblica.it/speciali/cinema/venezia/2010/09/06/news/vallanzasca-6800583/>> [accessed 6 June 2012]. I will return briefly below to the implications of this continuity on the film as post-traumatic.

<sup>90</sup> Cited in 'Lega, "Placido, boicottiamo il suo Vallanzasca"', anonymous article, *L'Unità*, 16 January 2012, online: <<http://www.unita.it/italia/lega-placido-boicottiamo-il-suo-vallanzasca-1.266366>> [accessed 6 June 2012].

<sup>91</sup> 'Lega, "Placido, boicottiamo"', online.

such as ‘ma ti sei bevuto il cervello?’). For Caverzan, the film’s ‘grumo irrisolto’ is, however, that ‘quando sulla strada c’è una scia di sangue, segnalarlo non è moralismo’; ‘quando [il male] è molto affascinante bisogna maneggiarlo con molta cura, soprattutto se si tratta di criminali reali e non di fantasia’.<sup>92</sup> Though the film makes a less pronounced effort to distance itself from reality than *Romanzo criminale*, for instance it includes a realist-staging post-script unlike its precedent, generally the film makes few truth claims.

This critique evidently relies on the same, ‘post-traumatic’ response to the representation of organised crime that is built upon a need to treat the subject matter seriously, and in doing so adopt plain, mimetic codes. Though such a critique is centralized in the conservative or right-wing press, reviews in left-wing newspapers, such as that of Alberto Crespi in *L’Unità*, are no less problematic. Crespi’s review, tellingly entitled “‘Vallanzasca’, ottimo poliziesco’ bears a quite interesting contradiction that nevertheless betrays an urgency to criticize the film from a moralist perspective:

Forse poteva essere interessante fare un film su Vallanzasca tutto dentro il carcere, e tutto su quelle lettere – e sul suo rapporto ambiguo con i giornalisti, che pendevano dalle sue labbra e che René era bravissimo a manipolare. Ma ovviamente le leggi dello spettacolo sono altre e Vallanzasca contiene molto altro: le rapine, le cacce all’uomo di cui il bandito fu oggetto, il rapporto con gli altri membri della banda [...]. Ne viene fuori un poliziesco molto solido e spettacolare, meno bello – forse meno ‘urgente’ – di “Romanzo criminale” ma altrettanto radicato nella memoria degli anni ’70 e di ciò che hanno significato.<sup>93</sup>

On the one hand, the review does force a link to the historical memory of the traumatic *anni di piombo*; on the other, it inserts *Vallanzasca* into a value-based hierarchy, offering the possibility of an alternative, more *impegnato* prison-film that

<sup>92</sup> Maurizio Caverzan, ‘Non è moralista ricordare la scia di sangue’, *Il Giornale*, 7 September 2010, online: <[http://www.ilgiornale.it/spettacoli/non\\_e\\_moralista\\_ricordare\\_scia\\_sangue/07-09-2010/articolo-id=471698-page=0-comments=1](http://www.ilgiornale.it/spettacoli/non_e_moralista_ricordare_scia_sangue/07-09-2010/articolo-id=471698-page=0-comments=1)> [accessed 6 June 2012].

<sup>93</sup> Alberto Crespi, “‘Vallanzasca’, ottimo poliziesco’, *L’Unità*, 7 September 2010, online: <<http://www.unita.it/culture/laquo-vallanzasca-raquo-ottimo-poliziesco-1.160548>> [accessed 6 June 2012].

is not achieved. Instead, Placido's film can be justified when termed as a 'spectacular', 'meno-urgente' B-movie, which *as a consequence* cannot be serious enough to be engaged.

These instances of reviews of *Vallanzasca* in the Italian press illustrate that its public interpretation is taking place as though it were a traditionally *impegnato* film: effectively according to dated, Marxist-humanist codes. As with the case of the 'quality' films viewed above, though, to understand this film's potential as a political text it is necessary to go beyond this 'top-down' form of interpretation, and attempt a lateral de-codification loosely based on the perception of its horizon of expectation. In other words, what is necessary in order to forge this interpretation is a dislocation of the film's aesthetics – its spectacle, or its status as 'ottimo poliziesco' – from an immediate moral or hierarchical judgment. This might be done in the manner I have illustrated here. Nevertheless, the critical response to the film illustrates, I believe, that the same rigid frameworks of reception of the mafia film in Italy persist, despite any perceived aesthetic or formal changes that are reinvigorating the politics of the contemporary film.

Via the criticism of *Vallanzasca*, we return usefully to the present conditions of reception that have led to the production of performative *impegno*. Though my direct focus has turned away from this notion in the latter half of the chapter, the theoretical context which I have provided here has intended this as latent, by bringing forward Lyotard. Using the post-hegemonic approach to *impegno* we can observe how the self-conscious and ironic accentuation of engagement that I have outlined in numerous examples here offers an alternative form that is perhaps less pointedly performed. Nevertheless, this can only be taken within a plural and rhizomatic model of *impegno*, where the legitimation through performance

continues to take place, even if in alternative fields of criticism to my own. The films, as I have suggested, never entirely bracket or dismiss the engaged constituency, but rather offer certain ‘fragments’ that appeal directly to them. As such, the performance of *impegno* will undoubtedly persist, and certainly it is present in these films: both in the constant recourse made to reality (such as in post-scripts or newsreels) and in the ironic presentation of a political reality achieved through intertextual citation. I furthermore believe there is much scope to develop an analysis of the performance of *impegno* through the use of particular stars, as my brief comments on Kim Rossi Stuart, Toni Servillo, and the actors of *Gomorra* here demonstrate.

The only manner in which this chapter can conclude, then, is to return to the very complexity and plurality of *impegno* today that I have continued to repeat and re-emphasize throughout this chapter. Though I have prioritized *Gomorra* here, I have sought to do so nevertheless taking account of it not as the beginning, peak or end of a single (grand) narrative of social engagement; instead I believe it necessary to position the film as a single node within a very wide rhizome of *impegno*. Thus, though there are influences to be traced from *I cento passi* and *Le conseguenze dell'amore* through *Gomorra* to *Fortapàsc*, *Una vita tranquilla* and *Vallanzasca*, this is by no means the whole story, and numerous other films, styles, cultural trends and financial impetuses will have had bearing on the political engagement of these cases. Despite the numerous contradictions, the influences which have converged in *Gomorra* (in particular the ironic synergy of pleasure and engagement) appear nonetheless to have caused an important and exciting shift in direction in postmodern *impegno*, though one whose long-term effects remain to be seen.

## Conclusions: A Return to *Cinema d'Impegno*?

At this stage it is possible to return to, and further contextualize, the critical appreciation of *Gomorra* (Matteo Garrone) and *Il divo* (Paolo Sorrentino) at the 2008 Cannes film festival which I addressed in my introduction. I suggested there that the success of these films was critically received as an ‘historical conjunction’, that overlapped the contemporary releases with the historical tradition of Italian *cinema d'impegno*. Taking these films as illustrative of wider tendencies within contemporary organized crime cinema in Italy, I posed the question: does this moment mark a ‘return’ to *cinema d'impegno*?

In the first half of this thesis, I argued that the ‘roots’ of *cinema d'impegno* are shaped by Marxist ideology, as theorized by Lukács, which brought about a push to represent honestly Italy’s social reality. Before the political upheavals that triggered the fragmentation of a monological agenda of *impegno*, I suggested that cinematic representations of organized crime had reached a mature form of realism that acknowledged the limitations of naturalist or mimetic approaches and had accepted dramatization; in reference to Rosi, I labelled this ‘dialectical realism’. I furthermore demonstrated that the categorical differentiation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of engaged art was, through the 1970s, disintegrating and blurring. The approach to *impegno* adopted by Garrone and Sorrentino undoubtedly has points of similarity with these models: like the films to which it garnered comparison (*Il caso Mattei*, Francesco Rosi, 1972; *La classe operaia va in paradiso*, Elio Petri, 1972), they are middle or high-brow works of art that attempt to depict a social reality in Italy. Like their predecessors, they furthermore illustrate both the limitations of an epistemological realism and the dialectic of form by building (albeit more boldly and ironically) the citation of genre stylistics into their political comment.

The films furthermore can be read in terms of their adherence to the Marxist model of the political aesthetic effect. This functions on multiple levels: in terms of form, both broadly adopt an elaborate and fragmentary narrative form that mimics the complexity of the social or political realities that they depict. For *Gomorra*, there is the sense that a ‘grand narrative’<sup>1</sup> of the Camorra cannot be represented, thus splinters of narrative that are only partially connected are the chosen form. For *Il divo*, the realist depictions of recognizable locations, such as the Palazzo Chigi, are overlapped with spectacular, oneiric sequences, such as the skateboard scene, thus forging a form that reflects the mysterious and enigmatic life of Giulio Andreotti. The use of viewer alienation in both films further illustrates how they might be placed within the cathartic process outlined by Lukács<sup>2</sup> and discussed in my first chapter; in *Gomorra*, the spectator is alienated by the rupturing of empathy, such as in the brutal murder of Maria; in *Il divo*, it is the absurd or grotesque citations that frustrate straightforward critiques of Andreotti (such as of Pinhead or Nosferatu). In these methods, then, the films appear to contribute to the broadly progressive model of art, or of *cinema d’impegno*, that I connected to Lukács and illustrated through Francesco Rosi’s films in the first chapter.

On these levels, then, the films accord with the historical approaches to *cinema d’impegno* in Italy. Nevertheless, in the thirty-six years that passed between the two Cannes Film Festivals, the very central discourses of *impegno* became increasingly questionable as Italy entered further into postmodernity. The main sources that have informed my understanding of *impegno* throughout this thesis are unanimous in their understanding of *impegno*’s fracturing and fragmentation in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> György Lukács, *Ästhetik*, 4 vols (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1972). Cf. also Bertold Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. by John Willet (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978).

context in which the ‘grand narratives’ of modernism are called into question.<sup>3</sup> The metaphors of fragmentation and post-hegemonic *impegno* emerge alongside the eschewal of ‘top-down cultural formation’,<sup>4</sup> to which the foundational models of committed cinema undoubtedly belong. The presentation of *Gomorra* and *Il divo* as marking a ‘return’ to *cinema d’impegno*, thus becomes fraught with contradictions and tensions. Those which I have remarked upon above include the dissolution of the engaged director, who both tends to reject outright the assumption that her film is engaged (such as Sorrentino), or who is overlooked thanks to the paradigm shift towards the viewer. The viewer and her interpretation, the latter of which I have phrased as the site of *impegno*, have been enormously liberated by the assumption that responses to a text are free and varied; I have attempted to channel this into certain trends and patterns where possible, using the models of the constituency and the horizon of expectation.<sup>5</sup> In relation to the examples mentioned above, the paradigm shift to the viewer problematizes the assumptions that *Gomorra* and *Il divo* can be placed with ease into the process of catharsis, since they might engender variant responses (to offer extreme examples, it would not be impossible to theorize a spectator who is drawn to the Camorra by the spectacle of violence, or who is drawn to Andreotti by the spectacle of power, and therefore overlooks the moral stances of the films). Even in attempting to theorize trends of expectation that accompany these films, however, then the equally challenging issue of the postmodern constituency presents itself in relation to the question of efficiency. As

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001); Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, eds, *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Antonello and Mussgnug, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982); Alan O’Leary, ‘Marco Tullio Giordana, or the Persistence of *Impegno*’, in *Postmodern Impegno*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug, pp. 213-32.

O’Leary has argued, the engaged constituency equates to a compatible and unchallenged political constituency who is likely to need little convincing of the film’s moral message, and to assume readily the set of legitimizing codes. The aesthetic effect and the cathartic process are consequently pushed further into crisis. Even if we recognize that in their approaches to political engagement, then, *Il divo* and *Gomorra* can be read in terms of the Italian tradition of *impegno*, this must be done nevertheless taking into account that any assumptions about a return to historical forms of cinema must take into account that the fields of reception and interpretation cannot be assumed to be coherent.

Throughout this thesis, I have made passing reference to the postmodern network of influences and impulses at play in the construction of the two *filoni* which are my focus – images of organized crime, and *impegno* – using the notion of the rhizome. Though this captures successfully the unpredictability and complexity of commitment today, it serves furthermore to problematize deeply the notion of a ‘return’ to *cinema d’impegno*. I recapitulate here some of the ‘characteristics’ of the rhizome given by Deleuze and Guattari which illustrate this issue:

- Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from a tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. [...]
- A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. [...] Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. [...] The rhizome is antigenealogy. [...]
- A rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. It is a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 7-13. I have bulleted the points for emphasis.



Taken as metaphorical of the arena of *impegno* today, these definitions signpost the flexibility of the term's usage: it is applicable to anything, it rejects linearity, it can be generative, though not in a progressive manner. Yet precisely in its 'antigenealogy', the model of the rhizome fundamentally brings into question the historical conjunction of *Il divo* and *Gomorra* with *Il caso Mattei* and *La classe operaia*. The recent films are symptoms of the historical shift into postmodernity and for this reason cannot be articulated as a hereditary continuation of Rosi and Petri's work, at best they can be read in terms of individual lines of influence within a much broader network. Here emerges the very tension between past and present in the construction of commitment that my thesis has sought to address. This tension, which has presented itself extensively in recent scholarship that engages with the films,<sup>7</sup> could quite easily lead us to re-read straightforwardly these films as *original*, simply employing the depoliticized approaches of postmodern pastiche and free interpretation. Nevertheless, as I have sought to illustrate in the montage of my chapters here, while all contemporary mafia film could be read as postmodern with this qualification, no film can be entirely dislocated from its past: both thanks to the enormously repetitive narratives (more on this below), and the rigid frameworks of criticism that are employed in its public reception in Italy.

In order to attempt a new contextualization of this tension, I have attempted to define the category of 'performative *impegno*'. Combining the notions of realism, genre and the horizon of expectation with the outline of knowledge in

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Millicent Marcus 'The Ironist and the Auteur: Post-Realism in Paolo Sorrentino's *Il divo*', *The Italianist*, 30.2 (2010), 245–57; and responses Pierpaolo Antonello, 'The Ambiguity of Realism and its Posts: A Response to Millicent Marcus', 258–62; Alex Marlow-Mann, 'Beyond (Post-) Realism: A Response to Millicent Marcus', 263–68. See also: Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe, 'Against Realism: On a "Certain Tendency" in Italian Film Criticism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16.1 (2011): 107–28; Pierpaolo Antonello, 'Di crisi in meglio. Realismo, impegno postmoderno e cinema politico nell'Italia degli anni zero: da Nanni Moretti a Paolo Sorrentino', *Italian Studies*, 67.2 (2012), 169–87.

postmodernity offered by Lyotard,<sup>8</sup> I suggested that these films could be read as generally conscious reproductions of key, foundational paradigms of *impegno* that seek to produce a certain legitimacy in their political stance. These are ‘performative’ modes of expression. What is implicit in this is the alignment of the film’s overt coding, and the spectator’s framework for decoding; it occurs when the input and output become similar. In the analysed cases, this has included the performance of realism, in the third chapter, whereby the viewer willingly decodes the presentation of a social reality within the film in a ‘dominant’ fashion; and, related to this, a broader performance of social engagement that emerges, for instance, in the use of citation (observed in the fourth chapter). The performance of *impegno*, I have argued, takes place both textually and paratextually.

Phrasing the alignment of foundational and postmodern forms of *impegno* thus allows us to conceive of the tension between the present and the past in a more productive, and slightly less contradictory manner. Nevertheless, the fourth chapter of my thesis has emphatically sought to illustrate that the performance of *impegno* constitutes just a single aspect in a much broader network of influences: the rhizome of contemporary commitment. Enacting this conceptualization allows us not only to conceive of this form of ‘legitimized’ engagement as a ‘line’ of the rhizome, which is ‘signified’ or ‘attributed’, afforded a particular meaning thanks to the historical foundations of *impegno*; but it furthermore exists along a line within the network that is *also* greatly influenced by, and exerts influence upon, many different sources. The question that I pose in the previous chapter, of whether *Gomorra* can be taken as a ‘game changer’ or simply a ‘rule changer’, is made complex by the rhizome metaphor: perhaps we might view this instance as marking

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lyotard.

the ‘break’ or ‘shattering’ of this line of the rhizome, but one which never the less ‘starts up again’ according to ‘one of its old lines’. As such, the film combines old political modes with a new aesthetic code, new stars, and a new geographical emphasis that can be linked to diverse films. *Vallanzasca: Gli angeli del male* (Michele Placido, 2011) demonstrates the new aesthetic code that foregrounds and challenges diverse forms of pleasure and spectacle and associates this with organized crime powerfully; *Fortàpasc* (Marco Risi, 2009) illustrates the thematic influence of the Camorra and traces the emergence of *Gomorra*’s stars; and yet Risi’s and Placido’s films together share very little.

This points towards a future direction of research to which this thesis could lead: the applicability of the notion of performativity in the study of commitment more broadly within Italian cinema studies. I have argued throughout – and remain convinced – that the performance of *impegno* in organized crime film emerges very specifically at the meeting point of a number of singular impulses: from the history of representation, to the specific continuity of the trauma of Italy’s mafias. Nevertheless, the process of performative realism, and perhaps of performative engagement, too, could be mapped over different trauma in Italy, such as the *anni di piombo* or the assassination of Aldo Moro, and the results would undoubtedly be interesting. It would be further useful to investigate how the discourses surrounding the mafia imagery and its close links to Italian society would be enhanced through their comparison to further national cases of organized crime, from the USA to Russia, Japan or China.

The question of the reasons or motivations for this return to lines of foundational *impegno*, or perhaps the question of *why* it needs to bear the

legitimation with which performance endows it, was the focus of my third chapter. Phrasing the mafia in Italy as trauma, and then tracing a theoretical map of the direct consequences of this – that is, the fork in realism that is observed by Rothberg – serves this function. Thus, though the performance of *impegno* is something which ultimately must be intertwined into discourses on postmodernity, this should not overlook a direct influence of the traumatic event. In fact, the moments at which the most significant alterations of paradigm in, specifically, the representation of the mafia occur alongside major traumatic events in Italy. The instance which I outlined in the third chapter is the assassinations of Judges Falcone and Borsellino, the effects of which remain visible in the cinema still today, two decades after the events themselves. These effects of this include a pointed return to a *serious* moral engagement with organized crime, which in itself might be taken as a key rupture point that brought about the turn to performative *impegno*. I illustrated this in the third chapter through two sections, on the performance of realism and on the compulsion to repeat. If we take *Gomorra*, too, as signifying the shift in paradigm which I have signalled in the fourth chapter, then this too appears compatible with a certain notion of trauma: the realization of the gravity of the Camorra's activity (as symbolized in the figure of Roberto Saviano).

In fact, this final traumatic moment points to one further issue which has remained latent throughout this thesis, which is that of the significance of the regional mafia on a national or international scale. As I have mentioned, *Gomorra* is certainly not the first film to narrate the Camorra; this tradition goes as far back as the silent period, with *La Camorra napoletana* (1906) and *La Camorra* (1907), but also includes numerous *sceneggiate* in the 1970s as well as more recent films. The cinematic response to the Neapolitan mafia was thus already present in Italy.

What *Gomorra* does mark, however, is the shift of this self-awareness onto a much more international scene: this is due both to the explicit internationalism within both the book and film versions of the text, as well as the international success of both. The traumatic moment of realization of the gravity of the Camorra can furthermore be traced to the ‘internationalized’ aesthetic within it (such as its genre citations), and the instance of *denuncia* at the film’s ‘post-script’ that clearly seeks to transcend the boundaries of Italy:

In Europa la camorra ha ucciso più di ogni altra organizzazione terroristica o criminale: 4.000 di morti negli ultimi trent'anni. Uno ogni tre giorni.

Scampia è la piazza di spaccio di droga a cielo aperto più grande del mondo. Per un solo clan il fatturato è di circa 500 mila euro al giorno.

Se i rifiuti tossici gestiti dai clan fossero accorpati diventerebbero una montagna di 14.600 metri. L'Everest è 8.850 metri. L'aumento di cancro nei territori contaminati è del 20%.

I proventi della attività illegali vengono investiti in attività legali. La camorra ha investito nelle azioni per la ricostruzione delle Torri gemelle a New York.<sup>9</sup>

In the manner in which the trauma of the assassinations of Falcone and Borsellino triggered a series of new tendencies within the mafia movies released in their aftermath, so, too, can we view the effects of this international focus in *Gomorra* as a trauma which triggers new formal trends and motifs. As observed in the final chapter, this can be directly related to the geographical shift *away* from Sicily in the mafia film, to Naples (*Gomorra, Fortapàsc*), to Milan (*Vallanzasca*) and beyond Italy (*Una vita tranquilla*, Claudio Cupellini, 2010).

### **i. The Sense of an Ending**

As a useful illustration of the cyclical nature of these traumas, we might recall here that intrinsic to both cases of the 1992 trauma and that of the Camorra’s damage in *Gomorra* is a return to the combination of brutal, unflinching realism and a

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<sup>9</sup> The reference to the World Trade Center is quite interesting inasmuch as it relates the ‘shock’ of the Camorra’s power to the ‘flashbulb’ trauma of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

powerfully enunciated humanistic critique which, together, recall Karl Schoonover's notion of neorealism's 'brutal humanism'. Schoonover places emphasis on the human body, and the damage or destruction that is exacted upon it in the neorealist film, as the site of the moralist message within the film. Significantly, this message develops into a denunciation of the (traumatic) atrocities brought about during the Second World War. Observing this becomes the political activity which is inherent to neorealism, and which I view as the first important instance of *cinema d'impegno*, Schoonover states (and here I reproduce the citation made in the introduction, in light of its importance):

It is interesting to consider how urgently neorealist films attempt to thematize ethical viewing as a form of action. Their spectacular display of suffering is remarkable precisely for how it compensates for the isolation and inactivity of those lucky people [i.e. the non-suffering audience]. In fact, these films seek to turn watching from a passive form of consumption into an activity replete with palpable geopolitical consequence. Through the staging of bodily violence for virtual witnessing, these films offer up the activity of looking as an exercise of political will.<sup>10</sup>

The spectacle of suffering that Schoonover observes is brought forward, and indeed accentuated in the post-traumatic organized crime film of the 1990s and 2000s: suffice it to recall the foresight of assassination and the exposition of grief stages in the 'compulsion to repeat' traced in my third chapter; or the staging of murders in *Gomorra*, where the opening sequence as well as the death of Maria are most relevant. We might take this as a 'return' of sorts, albeit within a wider rhizome of representation, to the *impegno* of the immediate post-war that is carried out in order to 'perform' (intending both with legitimacy and efficiently) *impegno* in the contemporary period.

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision. The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. xvii. For his definition of 'brutal humanism', cf. p. xix.

As Schoonover does with the neorealist body, we might ultimately conclude that the enormously present corpse has become a synecdoche and focal point for engagement for the Italian organized crime film. Since the body of *Salvatore Giuliano* (Francesco Rosi, 1962), which, as Schoonover observes, already adopts the ‘brutal humanism’ of the neorealism film for a period beyond it, there has been an enormously present trend to observe the life and eventual death of a main character at the hands of the mafia. As I have mentioned in the introduction, this motif is strikingly common to the recent mafia film: in addition to *Gomorra* and *Fortapàsc*, the or a central character(s) are murdered by the mafia in *Giovanni Falcone* (Giuseppe Ferrara, 1993), *La scorta* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1993) *Il giudice ragazzino* (Alessandro di Robilant, 1994) *Un eroe borghese* Michele Placido, 1995), *I cento passi* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000), *Placido Rizzotto* (Pasquale Scimeca, 2000), *Luna rossa* (Antonio Capuano, 2001), *Segreti di Stato* (Paolo Benvenuti, 2003), *Romanzo criminale* (Michele Placido, 2005), *Le conseguenze dell'amore* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2005), *L'uomo di vetro* (Stefano Incerti, 2007) *La siciliana ribelle* (Marco Amenta, 2009). With quite similar symbolism, characters become jailed, exiled, or socially outcast because of direct involvement with the mafia in *Testimonio a rischio* (Pasquale Pozzessere, 1997), *Angela* (Roberta Torre, 2001), *Fine pena mai* (Davide Borletti and Lorenzo Conte, 2007) and *Una vita tranquilla*. In the same way that the bodies of neorealism are configured, these films serve to invoke the trauma of the mafia, but they also *involve* the non-suffering spectators through a process of pity that becomes, essentially, politicized. The body serves to signal the trauma of the mafia, and in doing so it focalizes the *impegno* of the film; it furthermore fits into each of the frameworks outlined above of alienation (shock, interrupted empathy) and thus catharsis (I am shocked by the

grief, therefore I act). The aesthetic question of realism that has been central throughout this thesis can furthermore be re-read in light of the representation of these bodies: as I mentioned in chapter three, and above, they are often placed at the meeting point of the biographical story with the cinematic dramatization, and they directly involve a process of ‘dialectical realism’ in combining brutal realism with melodrama and emotional involvement.

Though, as mentioned in the introduction, to phrase the organized crime film in Italy as a genre *per se* is a risky move, should such a genre exist then the death of the protagonist as a signal of the omnipotence of the mafia (and the failure of equal society) would undoubtedly feature within its repeated iconography. Indeed with the frequency of this motif in mind, we can certainly maintain that it features within the horizon of expectation of the spectator. In fact if this is true, there are a number of very interesting consequences that are worth unpacking.

First, we can conceptualize this expectation within a theory of time inside the film. To do so, we can borrow from Frank Kermode, and his theory of the ‘sense of an ending’. Focussing on apocalyptic texts – and perhaps, in light of this expectation, these mafia films are not so distant from the same theme – Kermode outlines the significance of the meaning of the text which is altered by the very presence of the *ending*. Playing with the progressive conception of time emblemized by ‘tick and tock’ that is intrinsic to any fiction that has ending, Kermode writes,

a systematic submission of [these fictive patterns] is almost another way of describing what we call ‘form.’ ‘An inter-connexion of parts all mutually implied’; a duration (rather than a space) organizing the moment in terms of the end, giving meaning to the interval between tick and tock because we humanly do not want it to be an indeterminate interval between the tick of birth and the tock of death.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 57-58.



The interval between the beginning and end thus gains its significance in relation to its ephemerality, and its beginning and end ('tick' and 'tock'). Kermode defines this in-between period as the 'middest', and takes it for granted that 'Men in the midst make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle'.<sup>12</sup> In watching the mafia film, and in expecting the ending of death or murder, the spectator then becomes a witness to the development of a life with its own philosophy of time, within its own 'middest' – and here we might return to the instance of Peppino Impastato and his own *impegno* against the mafia. Impastato's life is bracketed within its own philosophy of time, its tick and tock, that generally gains significance in himself, subjectively, within his own midst. And yet, the viewer, within the horizon of expectation of this film, becomes aware of a further philosophy of time, which is the running of the film. The sense of the ending of the film, which we come to expect, then overlaps with the sense of an ending projected by Peppino, which is not foreseen. Thus, as these two are juxtaposed with the film's conclusion, the viewer is forced to recognize the tragedy of the mafia's intervention that *interrupts* the life of protagonist. The general significance of the 'middest' is thus brought into question tragically by the (unattained) *alternative* and (attained) predictable endings.

In both the juxtapositions of lives and expectations, and the focal point of brutal realism, this highly repetitive motif/expectation constitutes a focused instance of denunciation and political engagement. This occurs in despite of its quite evident 'formal alienation', borrowing the theory of Eco (mentioned in my

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<sup>12</sup> Kermode, p. 17.

first chapter).<sup>13</sup> Building on my argument in the fourth chapter, and specifically my identification of the legitimizing ‘performances’ of *impegno*, it becomes clear that the repeated depiction of the corpse constitutes a further performance. Articulated thus, we can conceptualize of a process of political engagement that is encoded by artist, and decoded dominantly by the spectator: in other words, in continuing to draw a political reaction from the death sequences of these films, the spectator is essentially legitimating a repetitive process of *impegno*. The repetition of emotion, specifically shock and grief, hence become a legitimating act.

Are these the only emotions that the spectator experiences when experiencing the traumatic events of the mafia? Throughout my discussion, a further issue has remained latent, which is that of the viewer’s pleasure. Though the questions raised in relation to pleasure transcend both the limits and the scope of this thesis, I would offer two brief scenarios that are important to understand in the contemporary mosaic of *impegno* here: first, the role of pleasure within the political act itself; second, the challenging of pleasure as an engaged act. In relation to the first of these, I argued at the conclusion of the third chapter that it is possible to conceive of a certain ‘buonismo’ that emerges in the participation in the *impegno* of a film such as *Gomorra*. In the scenario of performed *impegno*, this is the recognition of a political message with which a member of a particular constituency agrees, the response to it as such a constituency would dictate, and thus the participatory role within its legitimation. We might speculatively suggest that the pleasure of participation is what leads the spectator to dominantly decode, without question, a particular message. This assumption can be maintained in relation to the corpse at the end of the organized crime film: if the viewer responds to the performance of

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<sup>13</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà’, *Menabò*, 5 (1962), 198-237.

the 'ending' in the manner which is anticipated of them (shock, grief, perhaps a denunciation) then, as I have suggested, she is both participating in the action and assisting in its legitimization.

The second form of pleasure is something raised at various points during the fourth chapter, in relation to the important post-*Gomorra* films released in recent years. Referring to the space that recent crime fiction authors have made for the simultaneous creation and challenging of the reader's pleasure, Burns concludes that 'an *impegno* of the twenty-first century might be conceived of as – still – a close and intense engagement of the reader by the author, aimed at calling into question the reader's motivations, assumptions, and at making him/her engage face-to-face with what brings him/her pleasure'.<sup>14</sup> In both *Gomorra* and *Vallanzasca*, I have outlined precisely this ironic challenging of viewer-response: in both cases it is a pleasure of recognition in relation to the inter- and extra-textual citations (such as the B-movie or Hollywood film, or the celebrity appeal of the star/gangster) that then becomes intertwined into the process of engagement. This, I have argued, lies at the root of the evolved paradigm of *impegno* that I have attempted to define and defend in the chapter, suggesting that the dialectic of spectacular and engaged modes constitutes an important step forward.

The same question must once again be asked: if it is performed, does this imply that the repetition of the image of the corpse is essentially undermining to the film's political message? Of course, firstly it is worth re-stating that there are bound to be a series of factors in any single viewing of these films which could alter the viewer's response (the dominant decoding is not definite). However, my impression is that though performed repetitively, and though expected and thus removed from

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<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Burns, 'Re-thinking *Impegno* (again): Reading, Ethics and Pleasure', in *Postmodern Impegno*, ed. by Antonello and Mussgnug, pp. 61-80 (p. 79).

any shock or alienation, the films do continue to enact the same political action that is intrinsic to the witnessing of brutal humanism outlined by Schoonover. This occurs, ultimately, because of the ironic interplay of ‘middests’ that more actively involve the viewer: not only is she forced to acknowledge the tragedy of the life cut short in each viewing of an organized crime film, but she is furthermore asked to recognize the *transcendence* of the ‘interval between tick and tock’ and the final indeterminacy and ineffability of the mafia. Though performative, then, each new mafia film that brings forward the motif of the premature ending to a life ultimately sets itself into the broad chain of *impegno* begun by the first, testifying to the overbearing omnipotence of the mafia and the failure of the state to counter this force.

The visual motif of the premature dead body in the mafia film therefore stands for that stubborn and immovable need to re-emphasize the growing danger of the mafia as a concrete social reality: the lasting *impegno* of the neorealist theorists. For this reason, the mafia film continues to endure in that clash between the aesthetic codes of the past and the present, and continues to offer a unique, intellectually productive notion of realism within the fragmentations and contradictions of postmodernity.

As this thesis has sought to illustrate, it is the (traumatic) insistence of the social and political problem of the mafia which makes the urgency of discourses of *impegno* in mafia film such a fertile field of enquiry within the broader discussion of cinematic engagements with society.

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*The Black Hand.* Dir. Wallace McCutchen. American Mutoscope & Biograph, 1906

*Blu notte* [TV series].<sup>1</sup> Dir. Alessandro Patrignanelli, with Carlo Lucarelli. Rai, 1998-2012

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<sup>1</sup> I use the title *Blu notte* to refer to all series of the show presented by Lucarelli, however the title has changed at various points: the first series, 1998, was entitled *Mistero in blu*, the second and third *Blu notte*, the fourth through tenth were entitled *Blu notte: Misteri italiani*, and since 2010 the official title is *Lucarelli racconta*.

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*Il capo dei capi* [TV series]. Dir. Enzo Monteleone and Alexis Cahill. Taodue Film, 2007

*Casino*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Universal Pictures, Syalis DA, Légende Entreprises, De Fina-Cappa, 1995

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*Fortapåsc*. Dir. Marco Risi. BiBi Film, Gruppo Minerva International, Rai Cinema, 2009

*Genova a mano armata*. Dir. Mario Lanfranchi. InterVision, 1976

*Germania anno zero*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Produzione Salvo D'Angelo, Tevere Film, 1948

*Il giorno della civetta*. Dir. Damiano Damiani. Corona Cinematografica, Euro International Film (EIA), Panda Societa per L'Industria Cinematografica, 1968

*Giovanni Falcone*. Dir. Giuseppe Ferrara. Clemi Cinematografica, 1993

*Giovanni Falcone: l'uomo che sfidò Cosa Nostra* [TV film]. Dir. Andrea and Antonio Frazzi. Cinergy Pictures, Palomar-Endemol, Rai Fiction, 2006

*Il giudice ragazzino*. Dir. Alessandro di Robilant. Rai Due, RCS Films & TV, 1994

*The Godfather*. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures, Afran Productions, 1972

*Gomorra*. Dir. Matteo Garrone. Fandango, Rai Cinema, 01 Distribuzione, 2008

*Gomorra* [TV series]. Dir. Paolo Sorrentino. Cattleya, Fandango, 2013 (forthcoming transmission)

*Goodfellas*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Warner Bros. Pictures, Warner Bros, 1990

*Gorbaciof*. Dir. Stefano Incerti. Devon Cinematografica, Surf Film, The Bottom Line, Immagine e Cinema, Teatri Uniti, Rai Cinema, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC), 2010

*Hellraiser*. Dir. Clive Barker. Cinemarque Entertainment BV, Film Futures, Rivdel Films; New World Pictures, 1987

*Hiroshima mon amour*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos Films, Como Films, Daiei Studios, Pathé Entertainment, 1959.

*Gli imponenti funerali del poliziotto americano Joe Petrosino*. Dir. unknown. Sicula Film, 1909

*In nome della legge*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Lux Film, 1949

*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*. Dir. Elio Petri. Vera Films S.p.a., 1970

*Io sono un autarchico*. Dir. Nanni Moretti. Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 1976

*Johnny Stecchino*. Dir. Roberto Benigni. Cecchi Gori Group Tiger Cinematografica, Penta Film, Silvio Berlusconi Communications, 1991

*Ladri di biciclette*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Produzioni De Sica, Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche (ENIC), 1948

*La legge della camorra*. Dir. Demofilo Fidani. Tarquinia Internazionale Cinematografica, 1973

*Lezioni di cioccolato*. Dir. Claudio Cupellini. Cattleya, FaroFilm, 2007

*Little Caesar*. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. First National Pictures, 1931

*Luce verticale. Rosario Livatino: il martirio*. Dir. Salvatore Presti. Regione Sicila, Associazione. 'Sicilia Fantastica', 2007

*Lucky Luciano*. Dir. Francesco Rosi. Harbor Productions, Les Films de la Boétie, Vides Cinematografica, 1973

*Luna rossa*. Dir. Antonio Caprano. Poetiche Cinematografiche, Telepiù, 2001

*Il lungo silenzio*. Dir. Margarethe von Trotta. Bioskop Film, Evento Spettacolo, K.G. Productions, Union P. N., 1993

*I mafiosi*. Dir. Roberto Mauri. European Cinema Pictures, 1959

*Mafioso*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Compagnia Cinematografica Antonio Cervi, Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1962

*I magliari*. Dir. Francesco Rosi. Titanus, Société Générale de Cinématographie (S.G.C.), Vides Cinematografica, 1959

*Manhattan*. Dir. Woody Allen. Jack Rollins & Charles H. Joffe Productions, 1979

*Le mani sulla città*. Dir. Francesco Rosi. Galatea Film, Société Cinématographique Lyre, 1963

*La meglio gioventù* [TV series]. Dir. Marco Tullio Giordana. BiBi Film, Rai Cinemafiction, 2003

*Mi manda Picone*. Dir. Nanni Loy. A.M.A. Film, Rai Due, 1984

*Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare*. Dir. Umberto Lenzi. Dania Film, 1974

*Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*. Dir. Sergio Martino. Champion, Compagnia Cinematografica Champion, Dania Film, 1973

*Mio fratello è figlio unico*. Dir. Daniele Luchetti. Cattleya, Babe Film, Film Commission Torino-Piemonte, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC), 2007

*La moglie più bella*. Dir. Damiano Damiani. Explorer Film '58, Produzioni Atlas Consorziate (P.A.C.), 1970

*Morte di un matematico napoletano*. Dir. Mario Martone. AnGio Film,



- Radiotelevisione Italiana, Teatri Uniti, 1992
- Napoli Palermo New York: il triangolo della camorra.* Dir. Alfonso Brescia. Panda Societa per L'Industria Cinematografica, 1981
- Napoli spara.* Dir. Mario Caiano. Capitolina Produzioni Cinematografiche, 1977
- 'Ndrangheta, une mafia d'affaires et de sang* [TV film]. Dir. Corrado Durruti. Arte France, 2008
- Noi credevamo.* Dir. Mario Martone. Palomar, Les Films d'Ici, Rai Cinema, Rai Fiction, Arte France Cinéma, 2010
- I nuovi mostri.* Dir. Dino Risi, Mario Monicelli & Ettore Scola. Dean Film, 1977
- L'onorata società.* Dir. Riccardo Pazzaglia. Emme Film, Serena, 1961
- I padroni della città.* Dir. Ferdinando Di Leo. Cineproduzioni Daunia 70, Divina-Film, Seven Star Film, 1976
- Paisà.* Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Organizzazione Film Internazionali, Foreign Film Productions, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1946
- Palermo Milano solo andata.* Dir. Claudio Fragasso. Globe Films, Production Group S.r.l., 1995
- Paolo Borsellino* [TV series]. Dir. Gianluca Maria Tavarelli. Taodue Film, 2004
- Paolo Borsellino.* Dir. Pasquale Scimeca. [no production company], 1995
- Il pentito.* Dir. Pasquale Squitieri. C. G. Silver Film, 1985
- La piovra* [TV series]. Dir. Damiano Damiani, Florestano Vancini, Luigi Perelli, Giacomo Battiato. Radiotelevisione Italiana, Taurus Film, Channel 4 Television Corporation, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), A2, Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF), Televisión Española (TVE), TF1, Janus Film, Beta Film, Sveriges Television (SVT) et al., 1984-2001
- Pizza Connection.* Dir. Damiano Damiani. Alexandra Film, C.G. Silver Film, 1985

*Placido Rizzotto*. Dir. Pasquale Scimeca. Arbash, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC), Rai Cinemafiction, 2000

*Il portiere di notte*. Dir. Liliana Cavani. Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico, Lotar Film Productions, 1974

*Il prefetto di ferro*. Dir. Pasquale Squitieri. Rizzoli Film, 1977

*La prima linea*. Dir. Renato De Maria. Lucky Red, Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF), Les Films du Fleuve, 2009

*The Public Enemy*. Dir. William A. Wellman. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1931

*I pugni in tasca*. Dir. Marco Bellocchio. Doria Cinematografica, 1965

*Radiofreccia*. Dir. Luciano Ligabue. Fandango, Medusa Produzione, 1998

*La ragazza del lago*. Dir. Andrea Molatoli. Indigo Film, Medusa Film, Sky, Friuli Venezia Giulia Film Commission, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC), Programme MEDIA de la Communauté Européenne, 2007

*Reservoir Dogs*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Live Entertainment, Dog Eat Dog Productions Inc., 1992

*Riso amaro*. Dir. Giuseppe De Santis. Lux Film, 1949

*Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Titanus, Les Films Marceau, 1960

*Roma violenta*. Dir. Marino Girolami. Flaminia Produzioni Cinematografiche, 1975

*Romanzo Criminale*. Dir. Michele Placido. Cattleya, Babe Film, Warner Bros., Aquarius Films, 2005

*Salvatore Giuliano*. Dir. Francesco Rosi. Galatea Film, Lux Film, Vides Cinematografica, Cristaldifilm, 1962

*Il sasso in bocca*. Dir. Giuseppe Ferrara. Cine 2000, Pino Film S.r.l., 1969

*Scarface*. Dir. Howard Hawks. The Caddo Company, 1932

*Scarface*. Dir. Brian De Palma. Universal Pictures, 1983

*Sciusia*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Società Cooperativa Alfa Cinematografica, 1946

*La scorta*. Dir. Ricky Tognazzi. Claudio Bonivento Productions, 1993

*Segreti di Stato*. Dir. Paolo Benvenuti. Fandango, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC), 2003

*Senso*. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Lux Film, 1954

*Senza pietà*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Lux Film, 1948

*La sfida*. Dir. Francesco Rosi. Cinecittà, Lux Film, Suevia Films - Cesáreo González, Vides Cinematografica, 1958

*Sgarro alla camorra*. Dir. Ettore Maria Fizzarotti. Partenopea Film, 1972

*The Sicilian*. Dir. Christopher Lambert. Gladden Entertainment, 1987

*La siciliana ribelle*. Dir. Marco Amenta. R&C Produzioni, EuroFilm, Roissy Films, Rai Cinema, 2008

*Det sjunde inseglet* [*The Seventh Seal*]. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. Svensk Filmindustri (SF), 1957

*The Sopranos* [TV series]. Dir. David Chase. Brillstein Entertainment Partners, Home Box Office (HBO), 1999-2007

*I sovversivi*. Dir. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. Ager Cinematografica, Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, 1967

*La squadra* [TV series]. Dir. Donatella Maiorca, Giovanni Lacche, Cristiano Celeste et al. Pearson Television International, 1999-2007

*Tano da morire*. Dir. Roberta Torre. A.S.P., Dania Film, Lucky Red, Rai Tre Radiotelevisione Italiana, Tele+, VIP National Audiovisual, 1997

*Teorema*. Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini. Aetos Produzioni Cinematografiche, Euro International Film, 1968

*Terra di nessuno.* Dir. Mario Baffico. Roma Film, 1939

*La terra trema: episodio del mare.* Dir. Luchino Visconti. Universal Film, 1948

*Testimone a rischio.* Dir. Pasquale Pozzessere. Istituto Luce, Mediaset, Taodue Film, 1997

*Tony Arzenta.* Dir. Duccio Tessari. Adel Productions, Lira Films, Mondial Televisione Film, 1973

*Torino nera.* Dir. Carlo Lizzani. Produzione De Lauretiis Intermaco S.p.A., 1972

*Totò che visse due volte.* Dir. Daniele Ciprì and Franco Maresco. Istituto Luce, Lucky Red, Tea Nova, 1998

*Tre fratelli.* Dir. Francesco Rosi. Iterfilm, Gaumont, 1981

*Ulisse.* Dir. Mario Camerini. Lux Film, 1954

*Umberto D.* Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Rizzoli Film, Produzione Films De Sica, Amato Film, 1952

*Underworld.* Josef von Sternberg. Paramount Pictures, 1927

*Un uomo da bruciare.* Dir. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. Ager Cinematografica, Sancro Film, Alfa Cinematografica, Moira Film, 1962

*Uomini contro.* Dir. Francesco Rosi. Prima Cinematografica, Dubrava Film, 1970

*L'uomo di vetro.* Dir. Stefano Incerti. Rai Cinema, Red Film, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC), Programme MEDIA de la Communauté Européenne, 2007

*Un uomo in ginocchio.* Dir. Damiano Damiani. Rizzoli Film, 1980

*L'uomo in più.* Dir. Paolo Sorrentino. Indigo Film, Keyfilms Roma, 2001

*Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male.* Dir. Michele Placido. Cosmo Production, Fox International Production Italy, Babe Film, Canal+, CinéCinéma, Mandragora Movies, 2010

*Il vangelo secondo Matteo*. Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964

*Vieni via con me* [TV series]. Dir. Duccio Forzano, with Fabio Fazio, Roberto Saviano, Pietro Galeotti, Marco Posani, Francesco Piccolo, Michele Serra. Rai, 2010

*Una vita tranquilla*. Dir. Claudio Cupellini. Acaba Produzioni, Babe Film, EOS Entertainment, Rai Cinema, CinéCinéma, Deutsche Filmförderfonds (DFFF), 2010

*The Wire* [TV series]. Dir. David Simon, Joe Chappelle, Ernest R. Dickerson, Clark Johnson, Ed Bianchi et al. Blown Deadline Productions, Home Box Office (HBO), 2002-2008

*Lo zio di Brooklyn*. Dir. Daniele Ciprì and Franco Maresco. Digital Film, 1995