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Lost in Transition

In 2003, three films which were screened in Italian cinemas signalled the need to revise the nation's political memories which had, up until then, been crushed into the collective unconscious or segregated in the consciousness of certain minority groups. In their order of screening, these films are *La Meglio Gioventù (The Best of Youth)* directed by Marco Tullio Giordana, *The Dreamers*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and *Buongiorno, notte (Good morning, Night)* directed by Marco Bellocchio. They differ from each other both in the message they contain and the language they use, but they are linked, in my opinion, by the same intellectual practice and by the same intention of rewriting the last thirty five years of Italian political history: they all attempt to alter its accepted periodisation and to move the narrating subjectivity from the seat of power to the individuals and the avant-garde who were its true protagonists. These films have another common theme which can be found in their singling out of the relationship between public and private spheres as the fundamental motive behind the 'attack on above' on the traditional idea of politics attempted by the protest movement of the Sixties and Seventies. Another factor which links them is that the directors are all male and all belong to the same political generation: Giordana, born in Piacenza in 1939, Bertolucci, born in Parma in 1940 and Bellocchio, born in Rome in 1950 and all three were deeply affected both by events prior to '68 and by its aftermath. I do not intend to present a critical or canonical review of these three films but rather to use them as sources for the reconstruction of an Italian political autobiography different from the official biography written by the mass media and political scientists over the last fifteen years.

First, however, I would like to establish a premise. In these times of globalisation, the controversy over the symbolic nature of identity has become increasingly bitter regarding the material and immaterial processes which tend to homogenise and disintegrate the kernel of identity. The world over, this tension between the real and the symbolic avails itself of a rewriting of history - both recent and remote - which is useful to the current political struggle and may resort to different languages. As we know from the bloody accounts of recent years, in many parts of the world the preferred language is religion. In Italy the language of choice is political. For reasons which can probably be tracked back to remote beginnings, the land of Machiavelli, Gucciardini and Gramsci is incapable of conceiving of politics as a simple technicality. People speak of it — and is spoken by it - as a language, even if this language is limited to television small talk or to a self-referencing or captious jargon. The 'identity controversies' regarding the nation's biography and autobiography are played out in the political arena: the collective and individual 'I' depends on the

political narratives of 'the way we were'. Politics, although apparently in its death throes is still our *Heimat*, the conscious or unconscious seat of our 'Italianness'. This makes the study of how the language of cinema has intervened in such centrality of political language all the more interesting — either by restoring its sense and meaning or by decreeing its absolute senselessness.

Written for television, *The Best of Youth*¹ adheres even too rigorously to the requirements of small screen productions, managing to compress the story of thirty years' of conflict which originated within the family nucleus into a form that a prime time audience made up of that very same family unit can absorb. In Giordana's film which narrates the story of the 'abnormal' generation of '68, set within a lower middle class family, these conflicts never get to breaking point, remaining unacknowledged within a context of bitter-sweet compatibility. Although political and family sagas intertwine, it is the family and its values which triumph over the drama and tragedy of events. History penetrates the domestic walls leaving them cracked but otherwise still standing, rather as if it always comes back to an inviting maternal womb. Even the clash between State and Revolution, public order and subversion, is simultaneously expressed and contained within the family. Nicola and Matteo, the main characters, are two brothers who go their opposite ways when one joins the protest movement and the other joins the police force. However, they come face to face in crucial scenes right up until Matteo's death which signifies - in a Pasolini-like context - that in the conflict between protesters and policemen, these latter were the weakest and the most exposed.² In the two brothers' *Bildungsroman* we find - bordering between public and private - the official and unofficial history of Italy between the 1960s and the 1990s. It covers the demise of authoritarian universities and the Basaglian struggle against mental institutions³, the myth of Swedish modernity and the commitment displayed by young people during the 1966 floods in Florence, the uprisings at the University of Turin in '68, terrorism, the abduction of Aldo Moro, *Tangentopoli* and *Mani Pulite*⁴. Time passes: the best of youth reaches maturity, children grow up and mothers remain or return in the case that they have

¹ *La Meglio gioventù*, directed by Marco Tullio Giordana, screenplay by Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli, with Luigi Lo Cascio, Adriana Asti, Sonia Bergamasco, Maya Sansa and Yasmine Trinca, produced by Raicinema. The film tells the story of two brothers, Nicola and Matteo Carati, who are linked by dreams, hopes, literature and friendships until they meet Giorgia, a young female inmate of a psychiatric institution. Now their interests are no longer similar: after a holiday in Sweden, Nicola becomes a psychiatrist and joins the protest movement while Matteo abandons his studies and joins a member of the police force. Thus begin two life stories which are emblematic of two distinctive ways of living through the years that go from the Florence floods of 1967 to *Tangentopoli*, through 1968, terrorism and the murder of Aldo Moro. Emblematically, every existential and political choice of the two main characters is marked by an encounter with a woman. The female figures in the film are ambivalent and affected by change to a greater degree than the male figures. The title of the film is taken from that of the poetry collection of the same name by Pierpaolo Pasolini from which the screenplay often draws inspiration (see Note 2)

² In a well-known poem entitled *Il Pci ai giovani*, written the day after the confrontation between students and police in front of the Faculty of Architecture of Rome University in Valle Giulia in 1968, Pierpaolo Pasolini polemically declared that his sympathy lay with the policemen 'figli di poveri' (children of the poor) rather than with the students 'figli di papà' (children of the well-to-do).

³ Franco Basaglia is the psychiatrist to whom Italy is indebted for the abolition of mental institutions and Law 180 (1978) which revolutionised mental illness therapies. This law was one of the most important resulting from the cultural climate of 1968 and it is not a coincidence that, since 1980, it has been subjected a series of drastic revisions.

⁴ See Note 7.

embarked on a journey into the world to find themselves. For those who lived through these times, something rings untrue in this account - at times, painful and moving - which, in the end, is resolved in a 'happy families' solution. Whatever our perceptions, on the surface at least, things seem to have gone exactly as Giordana depicts them. In the laboratory which is Italy, everything has been experimented, all 'attacks on above' have been carried out and everything, from the political parties to the universities has been ruined or is unravelling: everything except the family - unassailable institutional bastion of an otherwise 'lost' nation.

*The Dreamers*⁵ however, presents another version of the facts. In the middle class apartment in the centre of Paris, history does not enter on tip-toe nor does it come with the stealth –albeit tragic- of mental illness; it appears with all the unpredictable strength of a cobblestone hurled from the street. And the family is not strengthened but, like the university, it is overrun, defiled and distorted. It is not the children who leave home only to return at some later stage but rather, the parents who are forced to abandon their role, traumatised by their children's sexual games which completely invert Freud's main tenet. And if, within the apartment's four walls, the youthful protagonists' illicit behaviour runs the risk of becoming a deadly nightmare, that stone intervenes to restore the three dreamers to reality. Was '68 made of dreams and dreamers? 'Yes!' claims Bertolucci with an anachronistic doggedness, raising a clenched fist⁶. We must restore to the word 'dream' both its meaning of an unreal Utopia as well as its significance as an expression of the unconscious, the imaginary which *generates* reality. Contrasting the pernicious realism of 'tiny steps' politics, the film suggests that only dreams have the power to recreate reality, to rewrite it from the minutiae of the everyday. Without dreams there is no reality; without desire there is no politics; without a revolution from within, there can be no collective revolution. Moreover, if there is no intellectual extremism, if we are not willing to risk ourselves radically, there can be no shift - neither big nor tiny steps. Bertolucci's message to the anti-globalisation youth of today is that change comes about only through enormous presumption. Failing this, conformism, a colourless adaptation to the social norms always at the beck and call of the powers that be will prevail over realism. Heralded by the 'magnificent obsession' of cinema of the 1960s which had already replicated and subverted images of reality, the movement which drags youth from their homes into the streets did not overthrow power, but challenged something much broader and more radical, the very notion of politics. It questioned politics not just as

⁵*The Dreamers*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, screenplay by Gilbert Adair, based on his novel *The Holy Innocents*, with Michael Pitt, Eva Green and Louis Garrel, produced by Jeremy Thomas. The film narrates the story of two Parisian twins, Théo and Isabel and their American friend whom they meet through their shared passion for cinema in the days of the occupation of the *Cinématique di Parigi* marking the beginning of the '68 student protest in France. They then shut themselves in their parents' apartment where they normally lived and experimented living together and other forbidden things until a rock is hurled through the window, convincing them to join in the marches of the student protesters.

⁶ At the screening of his film at the Venice Film Festival in 2003, Bertolucci saluted his audience and critics with a clenched fist. In his introduction to *Sognando the Dreamers* (Dreaming the Dreamers), a book of the film's images and screenplay edited by Fabian S. Gerard, (Ubulibri), he states: "Natalia Aspesi asked me if that clenched fist was nostalgic. I said, yes. Perhaps nostalgia for an old provocation which I never acted upon. I sense a great deal of bewilderment around and I see sardonic sneers. What is happening? What is all this nonsense about the word 'nostalgia'? What is this chorus of historical-philosophical insults against the word 'Utopia'? Is it not a revisionist attempt to discredit the movement of '68 that had its very roots in Utopia?."

a rational doctrine of government and not even as a representation of the governed but rather, as a marshalling of forces, both collective and individual, of all individuals and the entire collectivity: body and mind, reason and passion, knowledge and sexuality, noble sentiments and wicked perversions; plans and dreams. The personal and political spheres united in a common revolution, twin brothers, like the characters in the film, out to discover happiness on this earth.

However, even the unconscious - especially the unconscious - reveals its ambivalence: it is a dream and it is a delirium, it is liberating imprint and paralysing removal. The season of '68 not only lasted longer in Italy than in other countries but also ended more tragically, abducted and murdered by terrorism together with Aldo Moro. So if Bertolucci's *The Dreamers* calls to mind the dawn of the movement, its outburst of energy, its dream-like potential, Marco Bellocchio's *Buongiorno, notte* re-evokes its tragic waning, its deadly implosion and its paranoid demise⁷. This time, there is no rock hurled from the street to intrude on Aldo Moro's nightmare in that outer suburban apartment, elevated by his five jailers to the status of 'People's Tribunal'. The sounds of desire have been replaced as violence subdued the creative pretexts of the movement of Seventy Seven, the road has instead been plunged into the silent tunnel of widespread and internalised fear similar, in that season of Italian terrorism, to that which we are all reliving in these times of international terrorism. Even politics has renounced its aspirations: it is no longer interested in society's demands or its transgressions but has withdrawn into the narrow confines of power. Under such conditions, the delirium of the five members of the Red Brigades can continue regardless in its paranoid attack on the 'heart of the State'. Then again, covert operations are merely the manifestation of a displacement of the mind from the outside, where it may be surprised and questioned, to the inside, where it is possible to build an artificial world which lends substance to its obsessions. It is a fine line that distinguishes a house from a 'people's prison'. Bellocchio's message is that the terrorists were not monsters, but rather ordinary left-wing militants who had crossed that fine line which marks the boundary between being in touch with reality and the delirium which re-constructs reality for its own purposes. It was a mistake to follow them into that delirium; to listen to the insanities of the kidnapers and to disregard the abducted victim's human plea for help. The political establishment should have negotiated with the Red Brigades but it did not, remaining like them locked inside its own self-referencing apartments. By negotiating it might have brought them back to reality, but it merely followed them into their escape out of reality. Once again, just a dream could have interrupted the cold, deadly drift of political reasoning. The only female member of the Red Brigades dreamt that she let the prisoner escape but, unlike the story of the three *Dreamers*, she did not act upon her dream. Moro was murdered, not symbolically as a beloved and internalised father, but in actual fact, and that is why his ghost seemingly wanders without burial and an unresolved trauma of Republican political history remains. Bringing that dream to the

⁷ *Buongiorno, notte* directed by Marco Bellocchio, screenplay based on *Il prigioniero* (The Prisoner), Paola Tavella's book-length interview with Moro's warder, Maria Laura Braghetti (Mondadori, 1978), with Roberto Herlizka, Maya Sansa and Luigi Lo Cascio, produced by Marco Bellocchio and Sergio Pelone. The film narrates the abduction of the leader of the DC, Aldo Moro on March 16th, 1978 and ends tragically with the prisoner's murder which is preceded by Chiara's dream in which, conversely, he is liberated.

screen is the step which redeems the past, rehabilitating a foregone chance; and simultaneously burying the ghost, releasing the memories, liberating the past.

2. Three things come to our attention when we compare these three films: an intellectual practice, a re-elaboration of the notion of politics, and a radical challenge to the accredited story of the so-called 'Italian transition'⁸. In my opinion, each supports the other, creating space in the collective imaginary for a new type of biographical and autobiographical narrative of Italian society between the 'First Republic' and its aftermath.

Here we should mention a preliminary problem. For the last few decades, the narrative function of historical texts has been the subject of much debate among historians, philosophers and literary critics both in the United States and Europe; so much so that any attempt to summarise here would be impossible.⁹ It should suffice to recall that this debate has made a significant contribution to a re-evaluation of the interconnecting notions of history, politics and subjectivity and the relationship between the discursive order prevailing in a given society, the practices which give rise to it and which sustain it and those which, wittingly or unwittingly, avail themselves of the linguistic-symbolic conflict in order to undermine it and challenge its injunctions. It is obviously not a question of denying the validity of authoritative discourse by inverting the elemental order and arrogating truth and authenticity to the narrative discourses put forward 'from the base' (there is no such thing as a 'pure' narrative, one which is completely independent of the requirements of the discursive order and of the context in which they appear). We must restore to history that conflictual plurality of facts, subjects, ends and drives which are an integral part of it and which the official political narrative tends to diminish, hierarchise, remove, mutilate and censor according to the orientation which it wishes to bestow upon the present. Neither is it merely a matter of restoring the voice of the lost and the forgotten so that they might bear witness to the victors. We must restore to the past those circumstances of which it was stripped so that the present and the future may avail themselves of those and future new circumstances. Narrative as a discursive practice and narratives in the form of plural (and often alternative) accounts of events do not confine themselves, on the whole, to finalising history; rather, they reveal its violent side and alter its concept. They do not confine themselves to making the past more complex or problematic but they do open up new possibilities for the present day and the future. Narrative practice is therefore laden with political overtones (when, as I will discuss in the case of feminism, it is not openly and manifestly political).

⁸ 'The Italian transition' is the name given in journalistic and political language to a process of political-institutional transformation which began in the early Nineties in Italy with the discovery of a system of bribes, known as *Tangentopoli*, due to a series of investigations carried out by the Deputy Public Prosecutor in Milan, known as '*Mani Pulite*'. This brought about the collapse of the parties (especially the Christian Democrats and the Socialists) that had governed for the major part of the first forty five years of the Republic. However, as the rest of my argument will demonstrate, it is a conventional name for a process whose ends and scope are, in their own way, conventional and controversial. The use of the term 'First Republic' is also conventional and controversial in the light of the political-institutional system that collapsed under *Tangentopoli*. Strictly speaking, it is an unacceptable term (I will use quotation marks) insofar as the change of the political system did not lead either to a new Constitution or a Second Republic.

⁹ Olivia Guaraldo provides an exhaustive account of this debate in a critical review, *Politica e racconto* (Rome: Meltemi, 2003).

Wittingly or unwittingly, the position assumed by these three directors is typical of this practice and is laden with political consequences. The effect of these three films - achieved through their distinctive and separate languages, incisiveness and strengths - is that they not only re-evoke memories of seasons past of Italian (and international) political history, but they force us to ask why and how these times have been progressively banished, disowned and diminished in the collective memory, erased and disgraced in the official political and media versions of the transition. As a result, they show the violence and the bias of this account of events and substitute the belief in it which begets consensus with the disbelief that threatens conflict. They throw open the possibility not only of another version of past events but also of another way to imagine future events.

Before taking a more detailed look at how and why this process evolves, it will be helpful to discuss at some length the intellectual practices which sustain it as well as the implications for the role of the intellectual in contemporary Italy.

3. The transformation undergone by the figure of the intellectual in Italy is a crucial but little recognized chapter of the more complex re-construction of Italian public life over the last decades. Briefly, this transformation depended on two separate processes, a strictly Italian political one and a socio-economic one, common to all post-Fordist and postmodern societies. On the one hand, the restructuring of the Italian political system into a bipolar form as a consequence of the upheavals in the early nineties has brought about an unprecedented bipolarisation of intellectuals¹⁰. Quintessential to the New Right that is grouped around Berlusconi, is a new class of intellectuals fostering historical revisionism (targeting the anti-fascist roots of the Italian Republic, the Constitution of 1948, the history of the left with particular reference to the Italian Communist Party - the PCI - and the decade of the protest movement between the '60s and '70s). It also attacks the hegemony of the left over Italian culture, targeting the whole of the 'First Republic' as 'old' and forcing left-wing intellectuals into the 'conservative' position of preserving a number of basic principles of democratic society and the Constitutional Pact. At the same time, left-wing intellectuals had been left in turmoil by the demise of the PCI. This came about officially as a result of programmatic changes (the so-called 'svolta della Bolognina') in 1989¹¹, but it had been materialising during the protracted crisis of the form of the party for more than a decade. It brought to an end that distinctive form of mediation among intellectuals, society and politics performed by this party. Such mediation ensured the synthesis - or at least the exchange - between different roles and specialisations and gave intellectuals a space in which to practice, not just enunciate their discourses. Briefly: in the early '90s, the organic intellectual proposed by Gramsci has moved from the left-wing to the right-wing arena.

¹⁰ At the beginning of the Nineties, following a referendum and legislative reform, the Italian electoral system, previously one of proportional representation, became a system of Majority representation. Consequently, a different association of the political forces which survived the upheaval of Tangentopoli aligned into two opposite poles, one centre-right and the other centre-left.

¹¹In November 1989, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Achille Occhetto, the then secretary of the PCI announced to the Bolognina branch in Boulogne that it was necessary to change the PCI's name, character and political aims. The so-called 'svolta della Bolognina' began a transformation process which ended with the birth of the PDS (now DS) at the Rimini conference in February 1999.

In the afore-mentioned socio-economic context, the figure of the end-of-century Italian intellectual is characterised, on the one hand, by a tendency towards a higher degree of specialisation and scholarship in his/her work and, on the other hand, by increased mass media attention. It is a fact that this simultaneous two-fold tendency has placed him/her in crisis everywhere¹². Once a channel between the elite and the masses, the intellectual of today finds him/herself divided between an elite specialised academic career and a lesser role in the mass media. In other words, the intellectual is either an academic, an expert, a 'qualified' someone to whom politicians turn to as an occasional consultant, or s/he is a columnist for the mass media. In the first case, s/he has a public voice only sporadically, if at all; in the second case, s/he has a vast audience which guarantees his/her popularity but is not necessarily receptive to his/her message. In both cases, what is missing is the context of practice and the political feed-back that were intrinsic to the Gramscian organic intellectual.

The final element and, in my opinion, the most important in the transformation of the intellectual figure, lies in the fact that what Marx referred to as a 'general intellect' has become a reality in late capitalist societies.¹³ Although typical of all modern democracies, this transformation has had particularly important consequences in Italy. As the more sophisticated analyses of modern capitalism have revealed, post-Fordist societies - in which production is primarily dependent on knowledge and on interactive and communicative relationships - the intellectual figure has been shattered, disseminated and generalized. In the knowledge economy, where material and immaterial production - ranging from culture to microchips - as well as capital flows and share market speculation originate, there are no longer merely '*hands at work*' but '*minds at work*' as well. The opinion of the traditional public intellectual regarding this or that policy is less crucial than the accepting or challenging the values by this mass of intellectual workers who constitute the mind-body core of production. In my opinion, it is precisely this mind-body alignment that has provided the basis for the transition of the Italian cultural hegemony from the Left to the Right. We should not forget that Silvio Berlusconi is, first and foremost, a television magnate not a politician. His television companies were the first - during the Eighties - to identify this trend and to offer intellectuals working in the mass media and in the 'industry of the imaginary' a space in which to find employment and voice. Berlusconi understood in good time that which the Left failed to grasp, i.e. that the cultural, communications and information industries would play host to a decisive game in post-Ford, postmodern Italy. He played the game, utilising his own capital, his own tactics and his own content and he won, while the Left refused to play at all or played a defensive game, merely 'imitating' the form and the content of Berlusconi's television.

In a context like the one I have briefly described, the act of the three directors whom I am discussing becomes even more interesting because it is not inspired by traditional intellectual figures. Furthermore, it does not merely respond to the rewriting of the country's history in terms of content, reasoning and pedagogy but launches a counter-offensive in the same sphere of the imaginary in which Berlusconi's attack took place. It is easy to recognise here a very simple trend - the umpteenth example of in the Americanisation of the Italian public sphere. Hollywood

¹² See Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2001)

¹³ See Christian Marazzi, *Il posto dei calzini: La svolta linguistica nell'economia e i suoi effetti nella politica* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 1994)

has long accustomed us to search the big screen for the elaboration of American history and collective memory that we will never find in official political language. Even if this were the case, it is still a significant example of a loss of meaningfulness of that traditional, rational language used in the public sphere and especially of a weakening of political language's ability to decipher and give voice to the political crisis.

It is not a coincidence that we are indebted to another director, Nanni Moretti, for his 'j'accuse' against the self-referencing typical of 'professional' politics which he made on February 3rd, 2002. It helped to re-open a channel of communication (and confrontation) between the centre-left leadership and its disillusioned electorate as well as breathing new life into a discussion on the relationship between politicians and intellectuals which had been totally discarded¹⁴. However, while Moretti's attack on the political language gave way when directly confronted, the choices made by Giordana, Bertolucci and Bellocchio are anchored in cinematographic language. By avoiding a direct confrontation with political language they demonstrate more effectively its loss of meaningfulness and sense; by avoiding direct confrontation with the political bureaucracy they show, at a distance, its loss of charisma and position. The three directors do not question the relationship between politicians and intellectuals, but rather resort to a given function of the intellectual. They do not protest over the out-dated procedures of modern politics, but rather raise awareness of different practices which have been ignored or have been twisted by the ascendant version of events.

4. We can now take a closer look at the messages of these three films, dividing them into two main categories. One covers the notions of politics and history behind them, the other covers the relationship between present and past as well as the function of memory in Italy's autobiography:

It should be noted that in all three films, History with a capital 'H' is never given any conclusive or factual role.. Rather, it appears in the guise of a quotation or a context and always filtered through the characters' subjectivity. It is their stories which determine History and not vice versa, not only as regards the plot but

¹⁴ On February 3rd 2002, in Piazza Navona in Rome, at the end of a colourless demonstration by the leaders of the centre-left (who were pushed into opposition in June 2001, after five years in government, by Berlusconi's second victory and still shell-shocked by the electoral defeat), Nanni Moretti, much loved by left-wing audiences for his openly left-wing films (*Palombella rossa*, *Caro Diario*, *Aprile*) leapt onto the stage, took the microphone and uttered the still-famous phrase, "With these leaders we will never win". Immediately dismissed as the 'ravings of an artist', Moretti's gesture forced the secretary of the DS, Piero Fassino to face the widespread disillusionment that Moretti represented. On February 22nd, he organised a conference on the relations between the party and intellectuals. Subsequently, Nanni Moretti became one of the leaders of the so-called 'Giortondi' (ring-a-ring-a-roses), a movement with the twin aims of defending lawfulness and the Constitution from Berlusconi's attacks and of encouraging the centre-left to listen to ordinary people. Made up essentially of the so-called 'thinking middle class', the movement's leaders, apart from Moretti, are all well-known personalities, the historian Paul Ginsborg, the town planner Francesco Pardi and the philosopher and director of the journal *Micromega*, Paolo Flores d'Arcais. We should underline the fact however, that we owe the initial surge of the movement to their habit of playing 'girotondo' around the Law Courts and Rai and their recourse to email or organise demonstrations. This was the work of a handful of women who, as soon as the media spotlight fell upon the movement, were relegated to the shadows. While I am writing this, in January 2004, negotiations are taking place between 'girotondo', the core groups of the larger party caucuses and the acronyms that constitute the centre-left in the lists for the European elections to be held next June.

particularly as regards its symbolisation or, in other words, the way in which it is imprinted on the individual and collective memory. More important than the facts themselves is the manner in which they are selected and perceived by the subjectivity - which means that the narrative is more important than history. However, the priority given to the subjective eye is never allowed to overstep the mark (not even in Giordana's film that tends to restrict history's wide horizons to the narrow perimeter of the family) of that decadent and narcissistic intimacy which has not been absent from other Italian films in the most recent generations. Far from diminishing it, the subjective point of view is useful in emphasising the importance of history and the impact it has on individual lives: history and life are bound together by a virtual loop. Thus, in all three films, 'Politics' represents that process of putting into the loop personal with public, subjectivity with the real, the intimate with the external, emotions with intentions, transformation of self with the transformation of the world.

Once again, 'politics' is not the realm of reason, nor of order, nor of purposeful actions. Reason and the unconscious, intention and desire, the will to impose order and the energy that creates disorder all traverse both the personal and public spheres. It is this mixture that makes politics unpredictable, and it is its varying dosages which often, in just as unpredictable a manner, give rise to 'good' or 'bad' outcomes. The trajectory of the cobblestone which lands in the Paris apartment in *The Dreamers* is also unpredictable: it thrusts the lives of the three young people towards the public good in the very same moment that they could have been burdened with a sense of sin and death. Here politics plays on dreams and on vital energies; it wins and a period of a seminal conflict begins. But just as unpredictable is the fate which awaits Aldo Moro: here the alliance with the female terrorist's dream in which she frees him does not bring about the desired results and politics intervenes in the guise of reasons of State and the revolution: it loses and a gray period of order is restored. The First Republic died at Aldo Moro's funeral and Italian politics began its decline.

Here there is an arc where the two categories which we established, and which link the three films, come together, in other words, a junction between the function of memory and the periodisation of the Italian transition, which completes the deconstruction and reconstruction of the Italian autobiography of the late 1990s. Indeed, if the first category demolishes the restrictive and stifling idea of politics which characterised the Nineties, the second category dismantles the framework of chronological falsehoods which sustained that idea. I would like now to consider the main meeting points.

5. As I have already mentioned, in the early 1990s the Italian political system was hit by a wave of judicial inquiries that highlighted the corruption of those parties which had governed, amid ups and downs and by excluding the PCI from its alliances, for more than forty years. We know that corruption is a constant in contemporary political systems and that this leads to an increasing number of conflicts between executive power and the legal controls exercised by the judiciary. Nonetheless, the revelations of '*Tangentopoli*' - as the corruption scandal became known - and the operations of '*Mani Pulite*' - as the investigations into corruption became known - assumed particularly strong tones in Italy. This intersected with other socio-political, national and international issues pushing for change. Among these issues we can identify: the crisis of political representation and the rise of a new type of mass media representation; the crisis of some basics of the Constitutional Pact, such as the

solidarity between rich and poor areas of the nation, expressed symbolically by the birth of the secessionist Northern League; the collapse of the international bipolar system in 1989 and the subsequent transformation of the PCI into the Democratic Party of the Left: the decline of the Fordist socio-industrial model and the rise of the post-Ford model embodied by *Fininvest*, the television company belonging to Silvio Berlusconi. These were complex and diverse processes that had, for a long time, probed the collective consciousness and unconscious and they warranted a thorough investigation into Republican history, - especially in the decade between '68 and '78, and how to resolve its political and institutional crises. This investigation never eventuated and the hasty version of the facts which was cobbled up in its place must bear some of the blame for the unfavourable outcome of the transition.

Earlier, I mentioned the dominant history's habitual tendency to diminish the complexities of real history according to the direction that a particular reading of the past intends to give to the present. A very good example of this is to be found in the way the mass media - both in print and television - has conditioned the Italian transition. In fact, it has carried out a joint, three-way campaign, targeting the time span of the transition, the plurality of the subjects involved and the notion of politics at stake. Furthermore, by re-reading the past in such a manner, it has made a substantial contribution towards diminishing the scope of the subjectivity and meaning of politics, both now and in the future. This campaign established that everything began with *Tangentopoli*. In this manner, it reduced the complexities of the ongoing investigation to a mere clash between 'the old' - in other words, the entire history of the First Republic - and 'the new' - a similarly poorly defined 'new beginning' that was supposed to offer a rebirth. It restricted its diagnosis solely to the institutional system, providing no insight into the social dynamics which went hand-in-hand with the political ones. It established that the cause of the political crisis was to be found in the lack of decision from an inept government, thereby encouraging an understanding of politics as merely an administrative tool of power. All the questions, subjects, opinions, excesses and perversities of politics that did not fit this concept were categorised as ungovernable 'disorder' -. The *damnatio memoriae* of that 'dark decade' from 1968 onwards which, in Italy as in all western countries, questioned the traditional definition of politics was the result.

Conversely, since the early Nineties and right up until the present day, historical revisionists - both right and moderate left wing - have been boldly insisting on rewriting the history of the Republic's founding struggle. This struggle between Fascism and anti-Fascism has been turned into a story of 'national reconciliation' with the dual purpose of lifting the blame from Fascism and placing it on Communism and of turning what was apparently a divisive and partisan national identity into a 'single' one that all 'Italians' can embrace.

Truth, however has won out in this revisionist attempt to alter the official account of Italian political history, by modifying the transition to suit its own ends. The 'new beginnings', which many had hoped for, have undergone a substantial turnaround and have become a monolithic restoration. The question of legality did not prevent more than 50% of Italians from electing a prime minister who is the embodiment of illegality (but capable of presenting himself as 'homo novus', alternative leader-entrepreneur to the much-despised professional politicians). The desire for a more representative democracy had succumbed to the mirage of direct elections of the 'leaders' (from mayor to prime minister) and of the majority system which restricts

rather than widens the democratic base. After the failed attempt at a 'reasonable' and bipartisan reform of the Constitution, the constitutional crisis began to drift towards an accelerated 'de-constitutionalisation'.¹⁵ In the meantime, skirting the truth and misconstruing the facts, the revisionists' narrative has had a profound effect on the nation's autobiography. 'The Italian people' felt that, for more than a decade, they had been made to look like a people who had lived under a corrupt regime for more than forty years. Represented as having been held hostage to international bipolarism and especially to the Soviet Union, they felt themselves to be the victims of an ideological struggle which needed 'polishing up' into some new-found notion of 'patriotic unity', possibly ratified by a military commitment. The funeral service for those Italian soldiers who died in Nassiriya last November was the defining moment of this project of sublimation of the ideological into the national identity.

However, like all the re-invented identities which crowd the world stage currently, this too was a cover-up for everything that the ascendant version of events was unable to explain. In actual fact, this version explains very little. It fails to explain how and why, in thirty years, Italy has gone from being the most advanced political laboratory concerning 'progressive democracy' to being the one most advanced showing the crisis of democracy. It also fails to explain something more insidious and ill-defined: that disillusioned and slightly melancholic attitude taken by those who, thirty years ago, had imagined another future for themselves and for Italy. In order to explain these and many other things, we must repudiate the notion which places the beginning of the transition in the early Nineties and in the political system. We must dispel the fable, very fashionable ten years ago, that the wish for change which occurred in the Nineties had its roots in our wish to free ourselves from the Eighties (the legacy that Berlusconi has inherited) and not, as has become clearer with the passing of time, from any wish to bury the Seventies. We must put back into the loop the personal and the political, our intimate selves and the public good, passions and reason, dreams and intentions. We must follow the course that may turn dreams into nightmares, we must judge both the terrorists who, by shooting on the State, dealt the dreamers the fatal blow, as well as the State which, by refusing to negotiate with the terrorists, dealt itself the fatal blow.

It should also be said that, having shattered our links with dreams, having attempted to deny politics its imaginative and symbolic dimension, as the party which arose from the ashes of the PCI has consistently done since 1989, we have allowed the likes of Berlusconi and his television companies unlimited access to the colonisation of the imaginary. By permitting a frenzied wish to control the Dreamers to hold sway, by ignoring their pleas for liberty, we have only opened the doors to the liberalistic and liberty-destroying forces of the House of Freedom. The overturning of the 'Italian laboratory' cannot be explained by the short-wave of a decade but must be traced back to the long-wave of a thirty-year time span that began with a revolution in

¹⁵ I cannot go into the political merit of these processes here. Refer to my 'Il ritorno della sovranità assoluta' ('The coming back of absolute Sovereignty) in Alberto Burgio (ed), *La forza e il diritto* (Strength and Law), Rome: Deriveapprodi, 2003).

subjectivity which the Left proved incapable of understanding and finished with the counter-revolution of a populist leader who measures everything against his own ego..

6. While I write these last pages, Silvio Berlusconi is appearing on television for the first time since he underwent plastic surgery on his face¹⁶. Looking at his pop image, a perfect example of a nation that has made a religion out of its 'look', I am reminded of the face of Aldo Moro, both the real one and that one represented by Robert Herlitzka in Bellocchio's film, that tragic, lined mask and then his dead body, squeezed into the trunk of that red Renault in Via Caetani. And still I see the drawn faces, stiffened not by surgical lifts but by the sight of that dead body, doubled over, the petrified faces of Pietro Ingrao and Enrico Berlinguer and all the political leaders of the First Republic, captured at his funeral service and broadcast by a television which was still in black and white. Assembling those images at the conclusion of his film, Marco Bellocchio has succeeded in restoring to the people something which very few of us had dared to write in the twenty years since Moro's death: the 'First Republic' did not have to wait for *Tangentopoli* to crumble; it died that day in that church. It died together with the 'double body' of the king¹⁷ which the terrorists had played with, by killing the secular body and putting the sacred one in the trunk like a useless suitcase: political authority began its demise in that trunk. The public, especially the young, came out moved and bewildered by that film. It is almost as if they had been confronted with something they knew nothing about or very little about, like archaeology, and certainly not real Italian memories. According to the director, his intention in selecting Herlitzka for the role, was to emphasise the paternal figure of Moro - the very last father, I would say, of the 'First Republic'. What has happened to all the fathers since then? And what has happened to patriarchy?

The fact that the breakdown in paternal authority was an important ingredient in the volatile mixture which characterised the Italian transition did not escape the notice of a few perspicacious observers in the early Nineties¹⁸. However, they failed to complete their analysis, thereby ignoring the role played by feminism, in changing that mixture. Italy in the Nineties requires this overlapping analysis, no less than Germany in the Thirties as viewed by Horkheimer and Virginia Woolf¹⁹. The crisis in Italian politics is indeed related to a much broader patriarchal crisis due to both the decline in masculine political authority and to the rise, in an unusual form, of a female political authority. This is the last piece that I want to add to the puzzle.

In 1994, the perspicacious observers whom I mentioned earlier, linked the breakdown of paternal authority, to the deterioration of domestic politics, the disorientation of the managerial class and the Republican crisis - likened to a ship gone adrift, no longer able to refer to the founding fathers' compass. It was not a difficult conclusion, given the emergence of Berlusconi as a 'homo novus' - more managerial and paternalistic than paternal - who managed to embody the shift to an

¹⁶ On January, 24th 2004, Forza Italia, the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi in 1994, celebrated its tenth anniversary with a well-organised television ceremony. For the occasion, after being out of circulation for more than a month, the Premier returned to the public arena exhibiting a new face, recently enhanced by plastic surgery.

¹⁷ The obvious reference is E. Kantorowitz's famous study *I due corpi del re*, (The Two Bodies of the King), Turin: Einaudi, 1989

¹⁸ Eugenio Scalfari, Umberto Eco, 'E' una destra senza legge" (It is a Right without Law), 21a *Repubblica*, 2nd march, 1994

¹⁹ See my 'Dai padri alle madri' (From Fathers to Mothers) in Aa.Vv. *Il futuro del Novecento* (Rome: manifestolibri, 2000).

Italy deprived of its lineage. However, Bellocchio's camera provides more information, not merely by identifying the death of Moro with the death of the Republic's last father but, in particular, because he points to the symbolic aspect of the father's death and he links it to the symbolic procedure of a grieving process that was not elaborated. Italy has been fatherless since Moro's assassination, not because the fathers of the Republic have all died - a natural if painful occurrence in every generation and period - but because their deaths have not been worked through. Removed in death, their spirits still hang over the collective unconscious and nobody can take their place. The tragic death of Moro, assassinated by terrorists but left to be murdered - according to Bellocchio (and this is also my interpretation) - by the 'hard line'²⁰ adopted by the State, is subjected to this removal process in a distinctive manner. Beneath floods of words and conjecture regarding his abduction, the weakness of the political authority which the Red Brigade had exposed lies unmentioned, covered over by the hypocrisy of the State's 'firmness'. In other words, both at the time and in the intervening twenty five years, no expression has been given to the crisis of political authority which Moro's abduction had so tragically revealed long before the farcical arrival on the scene of *Tangentopoli*, the transition of the Nineties and Berlusconi. And Moro's murder is not the only example of that failure to grieve for the death of the father. Even the demise of the PCI, swamped by a flood of words which extolled what was to come and gave scant consideration to what was ending, was characterised by something similar in 1989. When Pci changed its name and identity, its activists were prevented from ascertaining and evaluating the political and existential breakdown of a community and its symbolic order.

The failure to grieve for the death of father figures has continued, in some ways, to influence Italian political events. In my opinion, this is partly responsible not only for the wholesale confusion among the political classes but also for that particularly quarrelsome and fratricidal form that politics has assumed, not so much between the centre-right and centre-left alliances as deep within the central-left coalition, heir to the political parties which founded the Republic, and within the main left-wing party, heir to the PCI. Almost as if, from a Freudian perspective, sons could not agree on a division of their father's estate because they had failed to grieve symbolically for his death. Almost as if that unsettled period of the Italian transition could only reinforce that old cliché of a people inclined to fratricide as Umberto Saba maintained in 1946²¹.

²⁰ The 'hard line' of 'firmness' refers to the decision of the Italian State and notably of the Christian Democrats and the PCI not to negotiate with the Red Brigades for the liberation of Moro.

²¹ 'Vi siete mai chiesti perché l'Italia non ha avuto, in tutta la sua storia - da Roma a oggi - una sola vera rivoluzione? La risposta - chiave che apre molte porte - è forse la storia d'Italia in poche righe. Gli italiani non sono parricidi: sono fraticidi. Romolo e Remo, Ferruccio e Maramaldo, Mussolini e i socialisti, Badoglio e Graziani. (...) gli italiani sono l'unico popolo (credo) che abbiano, alla base della loro storia (o della loro leggenda) un fratricidio. Ed è solo col patricidio (uccisione del vecchio) che si inizia una rivoluzione, (...) gli italiani vogliono darsi al padre, ed avere da lui, in cambio, il permesso di uccidere gli altri fratelli.' (Umberto Saba, *Scorciatoie e raccontini*, 1946).

(have you ever asked yourselves why Italy has not had, in its entire history - from Rome until now - just one real revolution? The response - a key that opens many doors - is perhaps the history of Italy in a few lines. Italians are not patricidal, they are fratricidal: Romulus and Remus, Ferruccio and Maramaldo, Mussolini and the socialists, Badoglio and Graziani (...). I believe that Italians are a people that have fratricide at the foundation of their history (or of their legends). And it is only with patricide (the murder of the old) that one commences a revolution. (...) Italians want to give themselves to the father and to have his permission to murder other brothers.)

8. However, the scene is further complicated by an element which I have intentionally kept for last as I believe it to be the pivotal one. The *paternal* order of the First Republic was indeed a patriarchal one and the demise of paternal authority is interwoven, in Italian politics, with the end of patriarchy and with an extraordinary feminine and feminist growth. This fact profoundly alters the terms of the problem as we have studied them up until now and as they would have normally been studied. Even in the field of relations between the sexes, we come up against a mainstream narrative which is considerably misleading when compared with reality. It repeats the same old story: 1970s: feminism was a great social revolution but it failed to make a breach in the world of politics which is still entirely a male bastion, impenetrable then and now to women, as is evidenced by the insignificant percentages of women in parliament and in top party or government jobs²². The story however has had its time: it believes that the effects of a feminist revolution on politics can be measured on that very same scale of power and that very same notion of politics that feminism has challenged so dramatically. This thesis needs to be overturned: Italian feminism has been and continues to be, not only a social, but an intrinsically political movement. Not because it asserted women's right to enter politics, but because it demolished the traditional idea, scope and ways of politics. Moreover, its *criticism* of traditional politics cuts across the *crisis* of politics, thereby showing an alternative that did not mean adding women to an existing scenario but rather, creating a new scenario.

For obvious reasons, I will be unable to go into any detail regarding Italian feminism's deconstruction of the established concepts of contemporary politics: suffice to say that they have hurled the gendered subject composed of body and language, of reason and passion against the abstract notion of a rational and neutral individual on which these concepts were based. This challenge has been carried through by protesting and rewriting, from here onwards and consequently, the notions of identity and difference, universality and equality, political rationality and intent, public and private, representation and State²³. I would like to point out however that the progress made by Italian feminism on this front has taken place in the middle of a context - the thirty five years from 1968 to the present day which we are examining through our three films - strongly marked by the crisis in modern politics. The ongoing struggle with this crisis has and still does characterise the feminist course. The feminist movement was born from its very kernel, it reveals its deepest motives, interprets it and, I maintain, stamps it with its own shadow. I beg to differ from current views that either disregard the effect of the feminist revolution on Italian politics or point out the divergences between the outcomes of various events and feminist intentions. I am convinced that feminism has had a remarkable influence on the changes that have taken place in Italian society and politics even if - and this is the essence of the problem - its role has been often ignored or misconstrued. I am furthermore convinced that by following in these footsteps, changes in Italian society and politics will take a different direction, will reveal further contradictions and will take on a new transparency. We are speaking here about another, different account of the Italian transition which, in part lends weight to the account of our three films and in part corrects, makes it more complex and gives it a new position.

²² The percentage has never yet reached ten percent.

²³ The bibliography on the subject is immense. Refer to my 'Il desiderio di politica', the Introduction to Lia Cigarini, *La politica del desiderio* (Milan: Pratiche, 1995); 'L'eccedenza della libertà' in Ida Dominijanni (ed), *Motivi della libertà* (Milan: Franco angeli, 2001); Maria Luisa Boccia, *La differenza politica* (Il Saggiatore 2002); and Diotima, *Oltre l'uguaglianza* (Naples: Liguori, 1995)

We are, in fact, particularly indebted to feminism for that redefinition of politics that all three films lay claim to just as it is also due to feminism, in large part, that there is a self-conscious narrative practice that claims its own intrinsic political character, and an intellectual practice that links thought to experience and the symbolic to the real²⁴. This practice also creates a public space through a network of relationships (including that one between the author and his/her readers) which also does not depend on social hierarchy and traditional political mediation²⁵. In all cases, it is not a matter of planting little flags as evidence of victory. Rather, we need to reformulate a correct lineage which has been corrected by the political crisis and by political criticism. We need to understand why it has been, and never could have been otherwise, a female-centred lineage, and draw the conclusions regarding the linked destinies of politics and the relations between the sexes.

The 'putting back into the loop' of the personal and the political, desires and intentions, the transformation of self and that of the world, of the unconscious with the rational as the three films reclaim, would have been impossible in the period around '68 (and would also have been an untellable tale today) if the subject of sexual difference had not irrupted into the public sphere. The collapse of the regime of dualities - between public and private, between ordered rationality and disordered irrationality - on which the long story of modern politics is founded, came about due to this irruption of women into the public sphere. The fact that it happened to coincide with the period of '68 does not justify the current reading which interprets feminism as an 'off-shoot' of '68, along the lines of the story of Eve being created from one of Adam's ribs. An accurate reconstruction of facts and documents reveals, more importantly, that the surge of feminism in Italy, as in the U.S., began before 1968. Furthermore, it is the very presence of the female subject and its criticism that goes to the very heart of the statute of modern politics that made the period of '68 so radical and not vice versa. In fact, the groundswell of '68 returns ten years later and falls into those contradictions typical of male political history, primarily the use of violence. While the feminist groundswell has more distant origins - as manifested by its echoes in twentieth century feminist (but also not feminist) thought in Virginia Woolf or Hannah Arendt -, and it does not stop but rather grows stronger when, thanks to the 'big chill' of the 1980s, the mood of '68 is dampened and politics returns to the stifling confines of governability. Neither does it stop when the great crisis of the 1990s makes itself felt.

The point however is this, that the two paths are only apparently parallel. In actual fact, since the 1970s, quite a strong thread links that swift narrowing of the traditional political horizon with the widening of the horizon of difference; the withdrawal of institutional politics into an all-male fratricidal enclave with the exponential growth of relations between women; the male regret for the lost paternal authority with the theoretical and practical female research on maternal authority²⁶. That thread is the

²⁴ See Diotima, *La sapienza di partire da sé* (Naples: Liguori, 1996). See also Olivia Guaraldo, *Politica e racconto*, on the relation between an author and her public that is ignored by social hierarchies and traditional political mediations.

²⁵ See Susanna Scarparo, "Feminist Intellectuals as Public Figures in Contemporary Italy" *Australian Feminist Studies* 19.44 (2004): 201-12.

²⁶ The category of 'maternal authority' is one of the most crucial and innovative ideas developed by the of Italian Sexual Difference feminist theory. It is not a question of equal and symmetrical authority although it is diverse and asymmetrical in terms of paternal authority. It refers to a symbolic order based on relations and trust rather than upon a hierarchy. Moreover, it serves to restore a public function to the mother beyond that of care that 'maternal' traditionally signifies. The mother, gives life

growth of female freedom which proceeds at the same pace as the decline of patriarchy and with the temporary subrogation of a fraternity that is both self-referencing and misogynist. It is, in fact, not only the death of the father that the generation of males who grew up within or alongside to the movement of '68 is incapable of working through; it is also the public maternal authority and a sentiment of acknowledgement and reconciliation towards the tear inflicted by women on the rigid plot of politics²⁷.

Not even our three films are capable of explaining and elaborating on this sentiment; even here, proving to be extremely indicative of a 'spirit of the times' which they help us to decipher. It is not an accident that the most complex characters, in all three films, are female; they drive the plot, they embody the stimulus for change and they liberate the ambivalence of the unconscious. But it is also no accident that this construction of the female characters stops short of the threshold of political acknowledgement. Again it is on the threshold which separates intimacy and History, passion and reason that the female, replete with her seductive powers and sway, is given her rightful place more so that in the sovereign place of a politics rewritten by intimacy and desire. Yet again, in Giordana's film which, unlike the others, has a chronological and pedagogical deliberateness, feminism - the single unnamed movement of those twenty years - is completely dismissed, while all the male filial gratitude is lavished on the mother, not as a measure of the world but as a guarantee for a return to the origins which she represents.

In this manner, the female political revolution is (not) enshrined in the Italian public memory; like a wellspring of change that has watered the earth and of which the earth bears an infinite number of traces, never returned in their entirety to its profile, often deforming or diminishing it or allowing it to evaporate. It is both a lot and a little, depending on how we women manage to make sense from this representation. But until the collective memory succeeds in drawing a more precised profile and in recognising its political expression, the narrative of the (un)making of the Italian identity will be full of defects, like a painting not shown in its best light.

and nourishment but also language to the world. Cf. Diotima, *Oltre l'uguaglianza. Le radici dell'autorità*, Liguori, 1995

²⁷ c.f. my '*L'eccedenza della liberta' femminile*'. See also 'Nella piega del presente', in Diotima, *Approfittare dell'assenza*, (Naples: Liguori, 2002)