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CONSCIENCE AND FRACTURES OF DIALOGUE IN *IL CONFORMISTA* BY BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI

In the life of Bernardo Bertolucci few events had consequences as profound as the family move to Rome at the beginning of the 1950s. Bernardo was little more than a child and experienced the separation from Parma as a trauma, which had consequences that would later make themselves felt in his thematic and figurative imagination. One need only consider the commitment with which Bertolucci was to reconstruct his Po Valley roots from a distance, in their double nature: one that is refined and urban, linked to the city of Parma, the true protagonist of *Prima della rivoluzione* (1964), the other rural and popular, anchored to the myths of the land and to the countryside of Emilia, transformed into the territory of the past in *Strategia del ragno* (1970), into the time and space of an epic in *Novecento* (1976), and reimagined through a memory that may be termed musical in the later *La luna* (1979). On the other hand, Rome provided the young man with an artistic apprenticeship of undoubted importance. Thanks to his father Atilio, Bernardo entered into contact with the intellectuals who habitually frequented the Bertolucci household, and he thus found himself included in one of the most culturally intense periods of Italian history. The influence of Moravia and Pasolini in particular was decisive; the latter included Bernardo in his debut film *Accattone* (1961), choosing him as assistant director, and then entrusted him with the direction of *La commare secca* (1962), an adaptation of one of his stories. Both of these were openly quoted and honoured in the screenplay of *Prima della rivoluzione*, in allusions that were then expunged from the final version of the film.[1] In contrast to his relationship with Pasolini, however, Bertolucci was to have a direct cinematographic encounter with the work of Moravia in later years: in 1970, to be precise, when *Il conformista* came out, adapted from the homonymous novel of 1951.

In Moravia's novel the adventures of Marcello Clerici, the protagonist, exemplify the collective path that led Italy to Fascism. Marcello is obsessed by his own assumed abnormality, which comes from a vague sense of guilt that he sets out to suppress by adhering to the standard morality of the time. Thus, he decides to marry and serve the cause of Fascism as a spy and hitman for the regime. In this way Marcello's life intertwines with history, in a

I am grateful to Dr Matthew Reza for translating this article into English. I would also like to thank the Czech Ministry of Education for their support in facilitating its translation (Youth and Sports, grant IGA_FF_2018_015).

[1] 'Il y a un poète qui rapproche son esthétisme du sous-prolétariat romain [. . .]. Quelle envie de Rome, à lire ses poésies. Comme dans les récits de Moravia' (Bernardo Bertolucci, *Prima della rivoluzione* [original script], *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma*, 82 (June 1968), 9). Moravia also published a flattering review of the film (*L'Espresso*, 18 April 1964).

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narrative based on recurrent temporal and causal connections. The prologue of the novel depicts Marcello as a child, his sadistic inclinations vigorously repressed, traumatized by the violence he suffers; the central part depicts the adventures of the adult protagonist: his marriage and the trip to Paris in the service of the secret police. In the epilogue, set after the liberation, Marcello is killed together with his whole family in an aerial attack while fleeing in a car. Moravia selects and constructs the narrative material in accordance with a superimposed interpretative model which at times impinges on the verisimilitude of the plot. Thus, Marcello's adventures, while they do correspond realistically to the historical events and social milieu of the period, end up being delineated according to a system of often arbitrary logical and rational relations whereby the facts are rendered subservient to the external premiss that bourgeois education generates frustration and indelibly aggressive urges which can, at most, be masked by the outward trappings of an artificial bourgeois respectability and by the false securities offered by acceptance of a system of rules, represented in the novel by the violence institutionalized by the Fascist regime. In short, everything depicted in Marcello's life appears to have been selected according to a rigid schema, aimed at giving strength to a predetermined hermeneutic model.

Bertolucci speaks about the novel with the authorial self-assurance that characterizes all of his cinema, well aware that every adaptation is an interpretation, oriented to the construction of a new text: 'Poi lessi *Il conformista*; anzi, mi fu raccontato da una mia amica e decisi di fare il film ancora prima di leggerlo, tanto bene me l'aveva raccontato. Cominciai a scrivere la sceneggiatura, poi a un certo punto lessi anche il libro.'[2] Bertolucci's method of work, notwithstanding his extempore approach, appears to be characterized by a few fixed elements that skew his rereading of Moravia's text towards objectives that are all his own. First of all, the film adaptation constantly manipulates the structure of the novel, a structure based on a single idea and centred on logical and consequential relations, bending it into the psychoanalytic framework that conditions the whole film. Bertolucci replaces the causal relations (rise and fall, error and punishment, perversion and Fascism) with an emphasis on memory and interior revision, themes that are embodied by a disturbed subject desperately in need of forgetting even as he is open to uncritical acceptance of any compromise in order to feel that he is the same as other people. In the film, the real protagonist is therefore the conscience of Marcello (played by Jean-Louis Trintignant), with his hesitations, his suffering during periods of introspection, until the considerable change of direction that occurs in the final sequence, in which Bertolucci saves the protagonist

[2] Berndardo Bertolucci, 'Alberto Moravia: le sue parole sono come un'architettura', in *La mia magnifica ossessione: scritti, ricordi, interventi (1962–2010)*, ed. by Fabio Francione and Piero Spila (Milan: Garzanti, 2010), pp. 154–60 (p. 156).

from death, showing him alone and perplexed, perhaps finally disposed to accept the contradictions that tear his soul.

The film's focus on the dynamics of the unconscious has important consequences for the construction of the plot. The chronologically ordered structure of Moravia's novel is in fact turned on its head by the adoption of an episodic sequence, which transfers—as Morando Morandini suggests—'all'interno del protagonista gli accadimenti esterni'.[3] Thus, at the centre of the temporal structure of the film is a particular day in the life of agent Clerici, sent to Paris by OVRA (Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e la Repressione dell'Antifascismo: the regime's secret political police) with orders to eliminate his old anti-Fascist university teacher, Professor Quadri (played by Enzo Tarascio). Clerici is in a vehicle following the car of his victim, who is travelling with his wife; memories begin to surface that constitute the dominant theme of the film: a slow and progressive focus on the inner life of the protagonist, that forces the spectator to perform a complex reconstruction, without the guidance of a chronological sequence of events and uninformed about the purpose of the protagonist's journey. The spectator's sense of what is happening in the present thus takes form little by little, in tandem with the recovery of the memory of past events.

The first frames of the opening sequence of *Il conformista* contain explicit indications of the main features of Bertolucci's rereading of Moravia's novel. A close analysis brings to light, together with issues of narrative technique, some thematic and conceptual nuclei that play an important role within the economy of the film. It is precisely the importantly constructive role played by the opening sequences of the film that requires us to retrace the nature of Bertolucci's hermeneutic proposal, the fundamentals around which he builds the objectives and the overall character of his *Conformista*. While much has been written on the film using a wide range of approaches, this essay seeks to add an analytical study to an already rich field, privileging the interpretation of the visual material assembled in the opening sequence. But let us proceed in order.

We are in Paris, at night, in a hotel room. A man, Marcello, lying on the bed and leaning against the headboard, appears to be waiting for someone; he is clothed as if about to go out. Time passes, the telephone rings, and he answers it; by now it is daylight. Marcello asks his interlocutor 'se anche lei è partita', then suggests that they meet as soon as possible outside the hotel. Before leaving his room, he finishes getting dressed and picks up a gun. Then he covers a sleeping naked woman with the bedsheet: she is Giulia (played

[3] Morando Morandini, '*Il conformista*', in *In viaggio con Bernardo: il cinema di Bernardo Bertolucci*, ed. by Roberto Campari and Maurizio Schiaretti (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), pp. 64–73 (p. 70).

by Stefania Sandrelli), the petty bourgeoise who is 'piena di idee meschine, di piccole ambizioni meschine',[4] whom he has recently married.

Structurally, the sequence is very simple: lasting barely three minutes, it is divided into only four shots. The first three occupy just twenty seconds in total: two of them, the first and third, which are very brief, show us an illuminated sign that flashes on and off at regular intervals; the second shows the protagonist lying on the bed in the position in which we find him at the beginning of the fourth, which is a long uninterrupted shot that shows Marcello meditating, then holding his brief telephone conversation, and finally making his cursory preparations before leaving.

I have already mentioned the stratified temporal architecture of Bertolucci's *Conformista*, whose plot, centred on retrospection, visibly alters the neat plot structure of Moravia's novel. The initial sequence therefore already contains traces of the creative plan through which the director begins to make full use of his freedom to manage the elements of time and *mise en scène* in order to define the parameters of his own project. The temporal regularity of the narrative that appears to obtain at the beginning of the film is in fact pitched into crisis by a precise element, an object of representation—namely, the illuminated sign that casts its red light around the room in which we find Marcello, until it is replaced by the grey light of the Paris dawn. The adaptation thus condenses the anxiety of a sleepless night into a few minutes, reducing the tension that oppresses the protagonist to a brief summary. The self-assurance with which Bertolucci treats the passage of time is in addition to the alteration of chronological order that, as we have seen, characterizes the whole film. The two operations in fact share a single objective: to remove the narration from the regularity of Moravia's story, with its consequential logic, and instead bring to light the dimension of psychological time. If retrospection is the movement that characterizes the whole film, the space of which is thus literally invaded by Marcello's thoughts, the temporal acceleration that characterizes the initial sequence creates an effect of alienation and

[4] With these words Marcello defines his future wife in the sequence depicting the pre-marital confession. Giulia's fleeting presence in that scene occurs in a zoom-out that widens the field of view until it includes her outline—a clear visual translation of Marcello's thoughts, which observe and describe her in brutal terms, while for her part she is denied the possibility of interrupting the pitiless depiction of her by her husband-to-be. Giulia's appearance in this scene, theatrically introduced by the priest opening the door to the confessional, gives rise to one of the most effective anti-naturalistic passages of the whole film, signalled by the paradigmatic semantic relation between the narrative situation and Marcello's reflection on his fiancée, whose appearance on screen is not entirely plausible in purely realistic terms. Giulia's image and words thus remain confined within an extra-diegetic territory, disrupting the narrative so that it functions as a comment 'apart', reflective and Brechtian, designed to highlight an important trait of bourgeois sentiment, a sort of smug knowledge of the moral misery concealed beneath the precarious cover afforded by the sanction of official institutional recognition. See the screenplay of the English version of the film at <www.scriptcity.com> (sect. 2B, shot 2).

unnaturalness that confines the experience of the protagonist to a space that is decisively dystonic, forcing it into an implausible condensation. The choice of strongly anti-naturalist lighting also has similar consequences: the red light of the sign invades the whole room, and the colour literally constructs the form of Marcello's body and constitutes the most recognizable and invasive element, which tells us of an excess, a deformation that corresponds precisely to the changed psychology of the character.

The most interesting aspect of the *mise en scène* of the sequence is, however, a different one. We have just seen how the structure of the scene is essentially very simple: yet, on this simple foundation Bertolucci constructs a fairly complex narrative that responds perfectly to his intention of presenting us with a character profoundly divided between a desire for normality and an aggressive drive. The instrument used by the director features in every film: light, or in this case, rather its absence. The illuminated sign, with its intermittent brightness, indeed effects the fracturing of the shot (this is particularly the case with the long fourth sequence), in a series of long flashes alternating with dark intervals of the same length. If the uncut shot is an indication of empathy, the empathy that governs the director's choice to depict his character in his experience of the world, diminishing the traces of the novel's written text and entrusting the role of discreet witness and participant to the viewer, we are now, by contrast, faced with a veritable attack on the principle of the uncut shot, an attack set in motion by a sign that betokens ambiguity. Recourse to a discontinuous and fragmentary composition, immediately apparent here, is in fact one of the leitmotivs in the poetics of the director, for whom the conscious fracturing of the temporal continuity of the uncut shot serves his intention of portraying the intimate and unsolved contradictions of the human spirit, its contrasting motivations and mutually irreconcilable impulses.[5]

The solution adopted by Bertolucci in the initial section of *Il conformista* suggests a comparison with a short piece written by Pasolini, 'Osservazioni sul piano-sequenza', published in 1967, only a few years before the film came out. In his essay Pasolini had contrasted the uncut shot with an approach to editing based on premisses that are not so much technical as philosophical. The uncut shot came to be identified by Pasolini with a form of knowledge lacking in self-awareness, consisting of an unmediated perception of the surrounding world; editing, by contrast, is an intentional and rational approach to explaning the world: a hermeneutic process, an attempt to encapsulate the

[5] See Pierre Pitiot, 'Il cinema è una ragione di vita', in *Intervista a Bernardo Bertolucci*, ed. by Jean-Claude Mirabella and Pierre Pitiot (Rome: Gremese 1999), pp. 41–56 (p. 48). On the possibilities for editing film see Bernardo Bertolucci, 'Franco (Kim) Arcalli: il piacere dell'imprevisto', and 'Anghelopulos: l'ideologia del piano sequenza', both in *La mia magnifica ossessione*, ed. by Francione and Spila, pp. 175–77 and 198–200. See also, on the tendency to deconstruct the uncut shot, Vito Zagarrio, 'Respiro, suspense e storia: appunti sulla regia di Bertolucci', in *Bernardo Bertolucci: il cinema e i film*, ed. by Adriano Aprà (Venice: Marsilio, 2011), pp. 128–142 (p. 137).

fleeting meaning of the human experience.[6] Thus, in the opening shots of the film Bertolucci constructs a spurious narrative, centred on the contradictory co-presence of two opposing forms of representation. Already compressed and deformed by temporal acceleration, the continuum that should offer us a portrait in full relief is fractured into a series of brief isolated shots, in effect rendering the duality at the heart of the protagonist's nature, which is divided between the object of desire—the fulfilment afforded by normality—and the existential setback of an eternal and stifling present, signalled by the hermeneutic force that weighs down upon his search for a position in the world and upon his craving, which can never be satisfied, to understand his own lived experience. The cinematographic form here adopts a hybrid approach that reproduces the split between the desire to achieve social inclusion and despair that is the product of internal upheaval: the uncut shot portrays a character whose integrity and contentment are negated by the discontinuity of the lighting, showing us, in isolated segments, a man in the throes of a cognitive crisis, divided between opposing drives and in open conflict with himself.[7]

Waiting for the telephone call, Marcello is illuminated as many as eight times by the light of the sign; his body language is minimal, but sufficient to express anxiety and preoccupation: we see him become anxious about the telephone (in the second flash of the light), while he nervously watches the ceiling and the clock (the third), giving vent to a long and tense sigh (the fourth), immobile (the fifth), in the position of a dead body, with his arms crossed over his chest (the eighth). But above all it is the first, sixth, and seventh flashes of light that portray Marcello in a clearly allegorical reflection of his status, while he covers his eyes to protect himself from the light or, more probably, in an attempt to free himself from the condition and knowledge that have been forced upon him.

In *Il conformista*, as has been underlined many times, the theme of blindness is of great importance.[8] Marcello's best friend is Italo (played by José Quaglio), a blind radio journalist who works for Italy's state radio, EIAR, and

[6] See Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Osservazioni sul piano-sequenza', in *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 2000), pp. 237–41.

[7] Franco Prono notes: 'Jean-Louis Trintignant è organicamente in sintonia con la struttura drammaturgica dell'opera: egli calibra con sapienza e apparente spontaneità una recitazione che dà sfogo a sentimenti e stati d'animo contrastanti e contraddittori, caratteristici di un'indole insicura, vile e dolorosamente terremotata. Scatti isterici improvvisi, inquieti e penosi silenzi, sguardi allucinati e pieni di angosciante consapevolezza, profonda e introversa tristezza, accenti grotteschi ed esasperati, tic studiati e clowneschi, gesti stravaganti, frenetici e spavaldi mascheramenti, disarmanti abbandoni non privi di dolcezza costituiscono il ricco repertorio con cui l'attore francese [. . .] dà vita a un personaggio che non risulta certo "simpatico", ma dotato di verosimiglianza e credibilità' (*Bernardo Bertolucci: 'Il conformista'* (Turin: Lindau, 1998), p. 55).

[8] See Prono, pp. 86–91, and T. Jefferson Kline, *I film di Bernardo Bertolucci: cinema e psicanalisi* (Rome: Gremese, 1994), p. 87.

is a convinced and enthusiastic Fascist. Significantly, the character is absent from Moravia's novel, and was invented for Bertolucci's film. The phenomenology of vision is in fact an enduring and ubiquitous theme throughout Bertolucci's cinema. Italo's adherence to Fascism goes hand in hand with his blindness: his loyalty represents a sort of ideological proxy engendered in the subject confronted by an authoritarian and simplifying power, for which he has had to suppress the operation of reason in evolving his political stance. The punishment for accepting this hardly honourable exchange is the loss of understanding, an inability to draw distinctions that reduces the individual to the status of a robot: Italo's blindness is the perfect allegory for such a condition. His unswerving confidence in the regime's support is made clear in the film when he broadcasts his speech 'Mistica di un'alleanza'—a veritable expression of faith in Fascism, with its many religious and redemptive overtones—but is also implicit at the end, when he finds himself terrified, forced to walk across the chaos of liberated Rome, publicly accused by his friend Marcello of having unthinkingly aligned himself with the dictatorship. Blindness thus implies simplification, a reduction of experience. This is clear too in the sequence depicting a ball organized by Italo and his blind friends.[9] The ball is cheerful, almost frivolous, as intended by the participants, but in reality it is dangerously close to a conflicted and tragic outcome; even its conclusion, when Italo declares that he never makes a mistake while the camera shows him wearing odd shoes, alludes to the false consolatory character of the knowledge by proxy implied in the blindness of the character, whose name, by contrast, explicitly connotes the political confusion of the Italian people.

Marcello has much to ponder regarding his situation. And not so much because he is blind like all the others, dazzled by the seduction of authority and power and therefore incapable of making distinctions and judgements: if it were so, his would be a normal existence, lacking the nagging doubt of conscience. Marcello, rather, possesses one of the most important attributes of Bertolucci's protagonists: the knowledge of his inadequacy and failure. Similarly, the young Fabrizio (played by Francesco Barilli), protagonist of *Prima della rivoluzione*, falls back into the ranks of his hated, vacuous bourgeoisie, painfully aware of his unsuccessful attempt to escape; likewise, in *Strategia del ragno* Athos Magnani (played by Giulio Brogi) acquires a problematic understanding of the precariousness of memory in the labyrinthine and motionless space of Tara, his father's city. In the same way, in *Il conformista* Marcello's difference, shown by his full understanding of his own existential misery, is highlighted by the uncritical intellectual simplicity of many

[9] This scene was in fact cut in the version distributed in theatres. It was reinserted in the restored edition.

other characters. His parents are united in their drift towards indifference: his father is mad, confined to an asylum, and his mother uses drugs, having apparently lost all contact with reality. Giulia seems to have embraced the myth of a superficial bourgeois respectability, and Manganiello (played by Gastone Moschin), the agent who accompanies the protagonist on the Paris mission, is entirely committed to serving the authority that gives him orders, incapable of dissent even when close to someone trying to free himself from that authority: he is a grotesque character, made up of superficial cheerfulness, brutality without remorse, and aggression devoid of a sense of guilt. A certain deficit of awareness is present among the anti-Fascists too. Professor Quadri and his wife Anna (played by Dominique Sanda), despite the lucidity of their analysis and the open-mindedness of their position—they show little respect for the rules, both in politics and in love—appear incapable of understanding the dangers that threaten them. The professor, in particular, theorizes on the one-sidedness of consciousness by using Plato's myth of the cave, alluding to the depth of indifference and passivity, in itself apolitical, on which every dictatorship bases its power;[10] such hermeneutic skill, however, does not save him from underestimating the risks of a solitary journey, during which he will be assassinated, together with his wife, by Fascist hitmen. Italo's literal blindness, in short, is replicated in its links to the experiences of various other characters.

Marcello is different from the rest. The propensity to self-reflection never abandons him: his history, as we have seen, is delineated through painful re-collection of traumas, frustrations, forced and necessary choices. To annihilate this facet of his character is both desirable and impossible, and the tragedy of his existence is encapsulated in this impossibility. To close his eyes, to deny what he sees, is the perfect gestural reflex of the desire to forget that which torments him. Marcello would like not to see, yet is forced to see, to recognize himself: he is denied the possibility of suspending self-judgement. He fulfils the allegorical condition of modernity in an exemplary way, as someone who would like to live coherently when coherence is denied to him, as he is denied the closure that would result from acceptance of his loss. All that remains is a never-ending and contradictory interrogation of his own identity and of his own past.

To conclude this analysis, nothing could be more fitting than the elegant quotation inserted into the first scene. I have mentioned the illuminated sign, whose red light invades the room and falls on the protagonist, revealing his disturbed personality. It is the neon light advertising a cinema whose name

[10] On the nature and possible Moravian origins of the episode, which is not present in the novel, see Pau Gilabert Barberà, '*The Conformist* by Bernardo Bertolucci: Alberto Moravia+Plato against Fascism' <http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/17982/8/El%20conformista%20angl%C3%A8s%2017982.pdf> [accessed 4 January 2018].

coincides with a multi-authored propaganda film of 1936, *La Vie est à nous*, written and planned by Jean Renoir to support the French Communist Party in the political elections that took place in the spring of that year. This is an example of a kind of intertextual quotation typical of the new cinema of the 1960s, in which a cross-reference constitutes both an act of homage to an admired author and also a Brechtian gesture of subjectivity, in which naturalness of representation is obfuscated by an authorial voice that captures the attention of the audience and disturbs any impulse to identify straightforwardly with the narrated event.[11] As has been duly noted by Francesco Casetti, the homage to Renoir is to be read in parallel with the repeated references to Jean-Luc Godard, to whom Professor Quadri, Marcello's intellectual anti-Fascist former professor, constitutes a cryptic counter-figure. A very indirect allusion, as Bertolucci himself remarked, lies in the fact that, in the film, both the professor's address and his telephone number—17, rue St-Jacques, MED 1537—are the same as Godard's real personal details, thus creating a deliberate link between the two.[12] Furthermore, we may note a clearer internal reference beyond this extra-filmic detail, in the sequence in which Marcello, speaking on the telephone, reminds Quadri of one of his old phrases—'per me il tempo della riflessione è finito, ora comincia quello dell'azione'—with which the professor had once announced to his students his intention to move towards political militancy: the reference inverts a joke by Bruno (played by Michel Subor), the protagonist of Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1963), by then old and ready to revisit his past. On the complex relation with Godard, however, Bertolucci himself has always been explicit: '*Il conformista* è la storia di me e Godard. [. . .] Io sono Marcello e faccio film fascisti e voglio uccidere Godard che è un rivoluzionario, che fa film rivoluzionari e che fu il mio maestro.'[13] The homage to Renoir, therefore, takes on a programmatic value, against Godard and in support of a cinema that is always committed,

[11] Bertolucci had this to say with reference to Renoir: 'I miei film sono figli della nostra cultura, dei nostri tempi. In questo penso a Renoir, che è forse l'autore da me più amato. Lui è figlio della pittura di Auguste Renoir, suo padre, delle poesie di Baudelaire, ed è straordinario che tutto questo nei suoi film non risulti mai in modo diretto. A livello filmico ci sono invece le emozioni, la sua visione del mondo, il suo rapporto dialettico con la realtà. Ecco, nei miei film avviene un po' questo' (Clare Peploe, 'Entr'acte: passo a due su *Novecento*. I contadini, il sogno, il socialismo', in *La mia magnifica ossessione*, ed. by Francione and Spila, pp. 66–95 (pp. 75–76)).

[12] See. Kline, p. 84.

[13] Quoted in Stefano Socci, *Bernardo Bertolucci* (Milan: Il Castoro, 1995), p. 8. The words of the director would open a further controversial question about the allegorical and autobiographical dimensions of the character, through which Bertolucci intends to embody the contradictions and ambiguity of his own intellectual and artistic position, divided between commitment to and fascination with the tradition, the desire for autonomy, and compromise. Moreover, according to Christian Uva, in *Il conformista* 'la storia appare più che altro il tramite attraverso il quale far passare un discorso fondamentalmente autoanalitico' ('Storia', in *Lessico del cinema italiano: forme di rappresentazione e forme di vita*, ed. by Roberto De Gaetano, 3 vols (Milan and Udine: Mimesis, 2014–16), III, 163–237 (p. 200)).

but more discursive and less experimental: a choice in line with the change that *Il conformista*, a work of culture and at the same time accommodated to the exigencies of the market, marks in Bertolucci's career.[14]

Besides all this, however, in my opinion there is much more. *La Vie est à nous* is a militant Brechtian film, a hymn to the France of the people and to the solidarity of French workers. The episodes of which it is composed, halfway between documentary and fiction, focus on the power of class consciousness, the strong sense of unity that gives value to the shared action of people and the programmes of the Communist Party. Nothing could be further from the condition of the conformist Marcello Clerici, and not only because of the strictly poetical divide that separates his position as a zealous Fascist from the commitment of the Communists represented by Renoir. It is the solitude of the character that marks the film's distance from the spirit of *La Vie est à nous*: the representation of his individual and miserable drama that traps him in a hotel room, confined within his bourgeois clothing, his horror of the explicit nudity of the woman sleeping next to him, first covered by a hat—a veritable 'attributo epico' that accompanies Marcello in his continuous and precarious disguise—and then by the sheet. The very presence of the female body, the whiteness of which appears almost corpse-like, and the need to conceal its presence say a great deal about the solitude of the protagonist. Marcello is indeed scared by every emotion and confuses indifference with tranquillity—just so long as he can conform. To achieve this he restrains his own passions and banishes from his gaze and his surroundings all those things that, in other people, can evoke those very passions: it is thus with calm composure that he participates in the murder of Quadri, gets rid of his mother's lover, brings his sick father to trial, and abandons Italo in his moment of danger. Even with Giulia, Marcello covers and averts his gaze from everything to which he cannot relate, leaving him inevitably alone. The conceptual principle that gives a sense to the reference to *La vie est à nous* is thus that of a counterpoint, of a relation by opposition: on the one hand, in the quoted film there is the life that belongs to a united humanity and which is projected into the future; on the other, in front of our eyes, a man who is unable to live—able to do everything, even save his own life, yet incapable of freeing himself from his obsessions, with no hope in the future and excluded from personal relationships. Even the red light that illuminates him—red being the colour of blood, of political passion, of eros—constitutes a chromatic counterpoint to the neutral colours of his clothes, as does the unnatural and disturbing whiteness of Giulia's body. The presence of this light—or, better,

[14] 'Sì a Renoir e no a Godard, dunque. O meglio: sì al cinema politico anche quando questo passi per le strutture solite e no al cinema politico quando questo voglia dire marginalità' (Francesco Casetti, *Bernardo Bertolucci* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1975), p. 77).

its obsessive intrusiveness—is precisely the visual representation of the trait that renders Marcello a perfect Bertoluccian hero, divided between aspiration to change and knowledge of his distance from the vital consummation of a harmony now lost.

Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci Alessandro Marini