Tragedia all'italiana

Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970–2010

Alan O'Leary

Cinema has played a key role in articulating the impact and legacies of the so-called *anni di piombo* in Italy, the years of intra-national political terrorism that lasted from 1969 until well into the 1980s. *Tragedia all'italiana* offers an analytical exploration of Italian cinema's representation and refraction of those years, showing how a substantial and still growing corpus of films has shaped the ways in which Italians have assimilated and remembered the events of this period.

This is the first monograph in English on terrorism and film in Italy, a topic that is attracting the interest of a wide range of scholars of film, cultural studies and critical terrorism studies. It provides novel analytical categories for an intriguing corpus of films and offers careful accounts of works and genres as diverse as *La meglio gioventú*, *Buongiorno, notte*, the *poliziottesco* (cop film) and the *commedia all'italiana*. The author argues that fiction film can provide an effective frame for the elaboration of historical experience but that the cinema is symptomatic both of its time and of the codes of the medium itself – in terms of its elisions, omissions and evasions as well as its emphases. The book is a study of a body of films that has elaborated the experience of terrorism as a fascinating and even essential part of the heritage of modern Italy.

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Cover image: Marco Tullio Giordana directing Sonia Bergamasco in
La meglio gioventù. Image courtesy of Rai Cinema and Bibi Film.

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Preface: *Tragedia all'italiana*

This study has its origins in a short Master's degree dissertation in 2002, and is a revised and expanded version of a subsequent doctoral thesis submitted in 2007 to the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages in Cambridge. That thesis was published in translation, but apart from that largely unchanged, by Angelica Editore (Tissi) as *Tragedia all'italiana: cinema e terrorismo tra Moro e Memoria* (also 2007). The current book is a substantially revised, reorganized and expanded version of that text.[1]

I assumed that the main title, *Tragedia all'italiana*, coined as it was by analogy with *commedia all'italiana*, would be self-explanatory to Italian readers and was surprised that it was the aspect of the work about which I was asked most often. One questioner put it to me that the title was striking because 'l'Italia per eccellenza è il Paese del melodramma' (Marongiu 2008). That questioner's implicitly Gramscian disparagement of Italian culture (broadly defined) and the scepticism we can infer in the words about the capacity of Italy's cultural products to elaborate the experience of political violence is shared by other critics. Demetrio Paolin's study of literature and the *anni di piombo* (2008) intimates in its very title, *Una tragedia negata*, that cultural production has been inadequate to the demands of a complex reality and has fudged the proper allocation and admission of responsibilities. As Fillipo La Porta writes in the preface to Paolin's book (2008: 9), 'il racconto degli anni di piombo non è mai riuscito ad andare oltre una superficie rassicurante e piuttosto autoconsolatoria'. For Paolin

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1   All the chapters, including the introduction, have been reworked, and the long third chapter from the Italian book has been broken into three shorter chapters which have each been expanded. This book contains new sections on the *poliziottesco* (the 1970s cop film), on several important films absent from the Italian book (including *Cadaveri eccellenti*, Francesco Rosi, 1976, and *Colpire al cuore*, Gianni Amelio, 1982) as well as on more recent releases (e.g., *La prima linea*, Renato de Maria, 2009), and it has a new conclusion.

himself the many memoirs and novels about the *anni di piombo*, be they by protagonists, fellow-travellers or observers, propose a kind of exculpatory narratorial voice: 'tutti questi "io che dice" divengono una indistinta massa, un collettivo noi, appunto, che di per sé nega il tragico, che è – in primo luogo – la storia, esemplare nella sua assolutezza, di un individuo' (149); 'facendo diventare il personaggio *luogo di una narrazione collettiva* piuttosto che un personaggio esemplare, l'immedesimazione e la catarsi sono improponibili' (150; italics in original).

The analyses of individual films in the present study do not always fail to furnish a dismissive verdict, but I feel uncomfortable with the kind of totalizing criticism provided by Paolin. Even if I share with that writer an analytical approach with origins in the Aristotelian account of mimesis as discharging a social role conceived in terms of catharsis or, in its modern formulation, 'working through', I have not felt it necessary to gauge the adequacy of the art to the representation of the reality. Instead, I have felt it enough to treat the corpus of films I study in something like symptomatic terms – as a body of texts that shield and refract as well as recall events, circumstances, perceptions and anxieties, and which remain rooted in their historical context and moment.

In any case, with the title *Tragedia all'italiana* I wish first of all to make it clear that this book is not a history book but a study of how the experience of political violence in Italy has been refracted and constructed through the prism of the cinema. The 'all'italiana' is not intended to suggest that the films considered here employ modalities that we might consider to be somehow culturally (stereo-) typical; I hope it reminds the reader, though, that the films are cultural products, and offer no simple mirror for, or window on, the nation and national experience. I want to remind ourselves that films, based though they might be on dreadful deeds or circumstances, remain artifice. The function of the critic is surely not to regret that any individual film, or even a body of texts might fail to provide some ideal purification or purgation of national emotion however such a process might be measured in a complex post-industrial society. Instead, it is to divine in the films a search for a version of a contentious and traumatic past that may be shared or imposed but that will finally prevail. If film fiction sometimes provides effective frames for understanding historical events, it

is also symptomatic both of its time and of the codes of the representation or of the medium itself – in terms of its elisions, omissions and evasions, as well as of its emphases. The task in this study is to trace the mechanism of this dialectic in individual films, and tentatively to suggest the extent to which conclusions about individual works can then be used to generalize about the contentious memory of the *anni di piombo*.

The first, introductory, chapter of this book begins by dealing with the question of the definition of 'terrorism' before describing some of the varieties of terrorist activity In Italy since its unification and especially during the *anni di piombo*. The use of the latter term to describe the long 1970s is also discussed before I set out the approach to film, history and memory adopted in this study. The chapter continues with a thematic outline and chronological summary of the corpus of films analysed.

Chapter 2 contains a case study of the films that deal with the kidnap and murder of Aldo Moro in 1978, and confirms that the Moro kidnap was the pivotal episode of the *anni di piombo*, as well as the fact that it holds a central space in the Italian imagination. After a preamble which uses *Kleinhoff Hotel* (Carlo Lizzani, 1977) to illustrate these themes (it refers to the Moro in the dubbed English version released after the kidnap), I consider those films which present the Moro events as a 'traumatic' experience for the Italian left (*Ogro*, Gillo Pontecorvo, 1979, and *Maledetti vi amerò*, Marco Tullio Giordana, 1980); those which present it in a conspiracy mode (*Il caso Moro*, Giuseppe Ferrara, 1986, and *Piazza delle Cinque Lune*, Renzo Martinelli, 2003) or deal with its commemoration in more ironic ways (*Buongiorno, notte*, Marco Bellocchio, 2003); and the extent to which the kidnap has become a motif available for export as part of a 'tainted' national heritage, something suggested by the use made of the kidnapping in *The Year of the Gun* (John Frankenheimer, 1991), and confirmed in *Romanzo criminale* (Michele Placido, 2005), and *Il Divo* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2008). The part of Aldo Moro has become a great dramatic role for actors of a certain age, something confirmed in *Aldo Moro: il presidente* (Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, 2008), while the kidnap itself remains the event to which even the iconoclast and counter-historian must refer, something confirmed

by two other titles: *I cento passi* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000) and *Se sarà luce sarà bellissimo – Moro: un'altra storia* (Aurelio Grimaldi, 2008).

In chapter 3 I interrogate a range of attempts to portray right-wing or authoritarian terrorism and its ideologies including Francesco Rosi's *Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976) and the cycle of *poliziotteschi* (cop films) that preceded it and to which it is indebted. Both the auteurist and genre films are conspiracy texts that provide a counter-version of recent history even as they ascribe an exaggerated competence and elusiveness to those who have governed brutally or corruptly. I go on to analyse contrasting attempts from the 1990s to commemorate the victims of two massacres blamed on right-wing groups: the Brescia bombing of 1974 and the Bologna station bombing of 1980. The television film *Per non dimenticare* (Massimo Martelli, 1992) avoids conspiracy theory in order to emphasize the variety and individuality of the Bologna victims. *Le mani forti* (Franco Bernini, 1997) returns to the conspiracy mode in the attempt to commemorate the victims of the 1974 Brescia bombing. The films discussed in this chapter raise questions about the most effective means to communicate atrocity, or its memory, in a popular form; if I critique the all but ubiquitous employment of conspiracy theory I do so in the awareness that it is an economical means to communicate widespread suspicion and dissatisfaction with the official version of a contentious history.

Antonio Tricomi (2009: 22) has written that in the long 1970s 'the authority most violently called into question was precisely that of the intellectual'. *La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1981) and *Colpire al cuore* (Gianni Amelio, 1982) take the crisis of intellectual authority as their theme and make terrorism a metaphor for it. *La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* is a kind of late entry in the canon of the *commedia all'italiana*, and it pays homage to the capacity of the genre to deal with the violence of the *anni di piombo* earlier than auteurist or political cinema. I describe the history and characteristics of the *commedia all'italiana* in order to account for this capacity, and suggest that the aging of the familiar male stars of the genre, represented in Bertolucci's film by Ugo Tognazzi, implied its exhaustion of the genre as the 1970s progressed. The paradox was that this very exhaustion made it an apt vehicle to symbolize the impotence and marginalization of the intellectual in the same period. I move

on to consider *Colpire al cuore*, describing the austere formal means of the film as a refusal to compensate for intellectual loss of authority in a context where the left-wing intellectual was under very real judicial attack. I also suggest that the film encrypts anxieties about the impact of challenges to masculine authority that went beyond the crisis of the intellectual. Both *La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* and *Colpire al cuore* employ an Oedipal configuration as a metaphor for conflict and so they speak of terrorism as a crisis of patriarchal social relations.

In chapter 5 I identify a group of erotic-political films, with their model in Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), which refract the experience of terrorism through the motif of the *amour fou*: *Kleinhoff Hotel*, *Desideria: la vita interiore* (Gianni Barcelloni, 1980), *La caduta degli angeli ribelli* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 1981), and *Diavolo in corpo* (Marco Bellocchio, 1986). In my analysis I have assumed that the sexual register is employed as an epistemological mode and was not merely exploitative or 'fashionable' but, in a complex way, 'of the moment'. I also consider an over-lapping pair of films which associate terrorism with the female either as violent protagonist or as victim. The figure of the violent woman emerges in *Segreti segreti* (Giuseppe Bertolucci, 1984) as a symptom of the ongoing national trauma of terrorism. The daughter of a murdered Carabiniere colonel in *Diavolo in corpo* is another symptom of the unfinished business of the *anni di piombo*: her barely adumbrated but strongly eroticized victimhood suggests how premature was any talk of an 'end' to the *anni di piombo*. For the true first film of 'post-terrorism', we have to look to a stereotypical television 'fiction', *Donne armate* (Sergio Corbucci, 1991). This transitional text looks back to other films discussed in the chapter but it treats the female ex-terrorist as worthy of re-integration into society and nation. As such, *Donne armate* anticipates self-consciously serious films from later in the decade, discussed in the following chapter.

The theme of chapter 6 is the attempt in a series of films made from the mid-1990s onwards to negotiate the legacies rather than the actuality of terrorism in Italy. Taking my cue from writers who have seen film as performing a function similar to that of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Italy, I discuss the extent to which it has been possible to establish a sharable memory of those years in films like *La seconda volta*

(Mimmo Calopresti, 1995), *La mia generazione* (Wilma Labate, 1996), and *La meglio gioventù* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2003). I devote a substantial part of this chapter to a discussion of the tradition of *impegno* (political or social commitment) in Italian cinema, and to the place of *La meglio gioventù* within that tradition, in order to establish the extent to which the memory of terrorism has been confronted, or the extent to which its assimilation is resisted, on behalf of a broad constituency of the left. The analysis demonstrates that terrorism continues to operate as a divisive force in Italian national life. Contentious versions of the terrorist past continue to emerge from defined political constituencies but the production of a national memory of the *anni di piombo* continues to be deferred.

In chapter 7, my conclusion, I consider four more recent films, *Arrivederci amore, ciao* (Michele Soavi 2006), the television mini-series *Attacco allo stato* (also Michele Soavi 2006), *Guido che sfidò le Brigate Rosse* (Giuseppe Ferrara, 2007), and *La prima linea* (Renato de Maria, 2009), in order to situate the place of terrorism in the contemporary Italian cultural imaginary, and in order to raise once again key questions of genre, history and memory. *La prima linea* demonstrates that there now exists a tradition of films that deal with the experience of the *anni di piombo*. It also confirms that the recent films on the theme can be placed in a category I describe as 'patrimonio all'italiana', in which the nostalgic recurrence to a violent past is inextricable from a popular elaboration of the traumatic national history of terrorism.

Acknowledgements

Almost every passing year sees the release of one or more films addressing the atrocities and traumas of the long 1970s. Critical consideration of this phenomenon was until relatively recently limited to a scattered body of film reviews and a small number of articles treating individual films (e.g., Lombardi 2000a; Orton 1999), thematic aspects (e.g., Bandirali and Terrone 2004; Cecchini 2005), or taxonomic considerations relating to the corpus as a whole (Fantoni Minella 2004). In the past few years, however, we have witnessed an eruption of interest in the theme, something evidenced by the regular presence of papers and panels on the topic of 'film and terrorism' at conferences of Italian studies, as well by the recent vintage of many of the entries in this book's bibliography.

I will not attempt to offer a survey of the scholarly and critical production here, but I should certainly mention the work of five colleagues whose work has particularly influenced the revision of this study. *Schermi di piombo: il terrorismo nel cinema italiano* (2007) by Christian Uva of Roma Tre is an invaluable work that provides an extremely comprehensive overview of the corpus in the introductory essay by Uva himself (9–94), a series of 'approfondimenti' – short essays by several authors – dealing with historiographical, genre and other questions, and interviews with writers, filmmakers and former terrorists. I have been very fortunate to be able to discuss his work with Christian himself, and been able to test my ideas at forums organized by him or in which he has participated. I have been able to work even closer with other colleagues Pierpaolo Antonello (Cambridge), Ruth Glynn (Bristol), Giancarlo Lombardi (CUNY) and Catherine O'Rawe (Bristol). With Pierpaolo I co-edited the volume *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetorical and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969–2009* (2009), and our many discussions, as well as his teaching while I was doing the PhD, have fashioned my thinking to a degree I would find impossible to quantify. With Ruth and Giancarlo (the latter

is a pioneer scholar of political violence in Italian film) I have co-edited *Terrorism Italian Style: Cinematic Representations of Political Violence in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (a volume which has been circulating in *samizdat* for some years now, but is perennially forthcoming in a book series from the London Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies). I find it hard to discern where Ruth's and Giancarlo's ideas end and my arguments begin: they are ubiquitous in this book even when they are not named explicitly. Finally, I have been a close collaborator with Catherine on the 'Thinking Italian Film' project to put the study of Italian film on a more secure theoretical and institutional footing. The example of Catherine's passionate engagement with the significance of formal aspects of film and her concern with screen performance have meant, I believe, a real increase in the sophistication of my own work. The present study benefits immeasurably from the influence of these friends and colleagues and, as attested in the references to other scholars throughout this book, from the collective critical and exegetic effort to make sense of the body of films on the *anni di piombo*.

Many individuals and organizations have facilitated the writing of this book or helped me to develop the ideas contained within it. My masters and doctoral research was aided by financial support from Wolfson College, Cambridge, the Isaac Newton Trust, the Cambridge European Trust, Trinity College, Dublin, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Among the individuals who have helped me, I would especially like to thank all of the following: Neil Archer, Ferzina Banaji, Elena Bellina, Guido Bonsaver, Alessandro Cadoni, Elena Caoduro, Francesco Capello, Lucia Cardone, Francesco Caviglia, Leonardo Cecchini, Alison Ann Cooper, Rhiannon Daniels, Luciana D'Arcangeli, Giancarlo De Cataldo, Giovanni De Luna, Emanuele D'Onofrio, Adriana Duque-Hughes, Joe Farrell, Denis Flannery, Alessandra Flore, John Foot, Loreta Gandolfi, Giulia Gentile, Patricia and Peter Glazebrook, Meg Greenberg, Aurelio Grimaldi, Max Henninger, Danielle Hipkins, Claire Honess, Gordon Johnson, Ludmilla Jordanova, Maria Chiara La Sala, Elizabeth Leake, Kate MacNaughton, Isabelle McNeill, Alex Marlow-Mann, Michele Marangi, Alessandro Marongiu, Renzo Martinelli, Sante Maurizi, Carmine Mezzacappa, Anne Murphy, Florian Mussgnug, Daragh O'Connell, my dear godson Jerry O'Leary,

Introduction: Italian Terrorisms/Italian Film

I 'Terrorism'

'Terrorism' is a vexed term, but it is a fascinating subject. Some part of the fascination resides in the troublesome definition of the term itself, and the question of who has the capacity to brand an act or an actor as 'terrorist'. This capacity is known as power, and there must be few words in any language so bound up with power (and its opposite) as 'terrorism'. It is a manifest complicity with the interests of power present in the pejorative connotations of 'terrorism' which taints any academic employment of the term, and renders elusive its objective use as a rubric of enquiry. The description 'terrorist' always implies a negative judgement of the means, and by extension the ends, of the individuals or groups so described, and so the word inevitably carries a rhetorical ballast of moral outrage.[1] But who has the right, the power, to apply such a description? The defining agency that holds this power typically exploits the term in order to demonize its antagonists, while conflating its own interests with a supposedly universal moral norm.[2]

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1   As Schmid and Jongman (1988: 3) point out, there exists a tacit understanding of terrorism as 'violence of which we do not approve'; P. Taylor suggests that the use of the term 'is a value judgement in itself' (Thackrah 2004: 70).

2   For a discussion of the importance of 'defining agencies', see Schmid and Jungman (1988: 26–7). R.F. Farnen (1990: 101) writes on the same theme: 'By defining terrorism, any administration can control and own the problem itself, particularly if the media repeat the unquestioned assertion and afford them [*sic*] legitimacy as larger-than-life social drama with a huge public audience. Although terrorism is more dramatic than everyday crime news, both serve a moral, socially solidifying, and ideological function. In addition to accepting administration labels, the media help to brand terrorism as a foreign, strange and evil occurrence – an abnormality that has no social context and that is irrational by Western standards'.

For a researcher to employ the term 'terrorism' is, therefore, to risk serving a political agenda that may be unsavoury and certainly demagogic.

In an early report on the research that informs this book, I avoided the use of the term 'terrorism' altogether, preferring as, ostensibly, more neutral the clumsy locution 'politically motivated violence' (O'Leary 2005). I hoped thereby to achieve the appropriate tenor of objectivity and detachment by evading the prejudicial connotations of 'terrorism'. I have since come to feel that such an evasion was in bad faith: whenever I have presented conference papers which featured the word 'terrorism' in the title, I have spoken to crowded halls; 'politically motivated violence' has proven to be less of a draw.[3] Terrorism (I will now dispense with the quotation marks) seems indeed to be a fascinating topic, and I am subject to this fascination just as my listeners or readers; an aspect of my purpose here is to account for such a shared fascination, and the extent to which it has also exerted itself upon four decades of Italian filmmaking.

The fascination is all the more intriguing given that terrorism does not exist. This assertion may seem grotesque given certain events of the new century, for which the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington stand as a spectacular (though unrepresentative) emblem. Nevertheless, terrorism remains a chimera; the fact that the international community has failed to agree on a definition allows a situation where certain degrees of violence, or, more usually, certain perpetrators of violence, are judged illegitimate by the defining agencies, labelled terrorist, and thereby pronounced anathema. In such a situation, instrumentalized definitions of the term have tended to proliferate. The authors of one dated but influential volume list no fewer than thirty-five 'recent governmental and academic definitions' (Schmid and Jongman 1988: 32f); we can expect the number to have multiplied in the two decades since the publication of

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3   Scholars must, in any case, be wary of the apparently neutral term 'violence'. Raymond Williams points out the tendentious nature of its application. Violence, he writes, may have a general sense as 'the use of physical force, including the distant use of weapons or bombs, but we have then to add that this seems to be specialized to "unauthorized" uses: the violence of a "terrorist" but not, except by its opponents, of an army, where "force" is preferred [...] or the similar partisan range between "putting under restraint" or "restoring order", and "police violence"' (Williams 1988: 329).

their book. In fact, there is no satisfactory definition of terrorism – none that is both precise and widely accepted.[4] Even legal definitions tend to be characterized by a deliberate vagueness, and so reveal the extent to which they are formulated as an instrument of security or military policy for the defining agency, facilitating the demonization of the *antagoniste du jour*.

The problem is not, ultimately, that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, as the glib cliché has it; nor is it solely that the word, terrorism, has been rendered hopelessly vague by its promiscuous use in the news media and political rhetoric. It is rather that to call somebody a terrorist suggests something like calling someone a Nationalist or a Buddhist: it implies that the creation of terror is something emotionally and irrationally desired by the perpetrators as an end in itself, as if terror were something that could be an object of faith in the same way as a nation or a godhead. Such a theology of terrorism is indeed set out in certain texts – one thinks of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) – but terrorism is neither a faith nor an ideology; it is a brutal means of communication, a tactic or strategy in the *service* of an ideology or of political, economic and military objectives.[5] And if it is conventionally considered proper to small,

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4   The cautious but unwieldy definition offered in Schmid and Jungman (1988: 28) has acquired some cachet in the social sciences (see Engene 2004, chapter 1 'Defining Terrorism'). I reproduce it here for the convenience of the reader, even if, for reasons explained in this section, I ultimately prefer to leave the question of definition unresolved: 'Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)) [*sic*], turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought'.

5   The assertion that terrorism is an ideology (or a theology) is usually made by those who wish to dismiss their enemies as irrational, and so foreclose any discussion of their motivations or grievances. Any attempt to explain the motivations or strategies of the 'terrorists' is then stigmatized as apologism (or criminal naivety).

armed groups with limited military means, it is important to remember that terrorism is also a weapon in the strategic armoury of a frustrated or ambitious state.

My intention is not, however, to correct common misconceptions about the character of terrorism, and, although I describe the various forms of terrorism in Italy, nor is it to set the record straight about terrorist violence in Italy or anywhere else. This is not a work of Italian history. I am not concerned with the study of facts or events but with the discursive construction of such events as formalized perceptions and memories articulated in the medium of film. It would therefore be inappropriate, in this introduction, to set out a definition of terrorism or terrorist in order, then, to test the extent to which the characters or incidents portrayed in an individual film correspond to the description provided. After all, it is neither my nor the scholarly community's normative understanding of terrorism (or our rejection of the term) that is at issue here, but a more diffuse or nebulous set of perceptions at work, and in flux, in the wider (Italian) culture from the period of the *anni di piombo* to the present day.

For this reason, the terms terrorism and terrorist are always employed provisionally in this study, their connotations always evolving so that the precise denotations are always deferred. It would, however, be unwieldy to signal this contingency by placing between scare quotes all uses of the terms terrorist and terrorism in this book; nonetheless, I would ask the reader to approach the terms as if they were, indeed, always quarantined within invisible quotation marks.

2   Italian Terrorisms

Terrorism has a long history in Italy: it is not controversial to describe as state terrorism many of the repressive tactics (extending to political assassination) practiced by the fascist regime; neither can the pre-dictatorship activities of fascist *squadrismo* – the systematic intimidation, humiliation and murder of opponents – escape the description. At the same time (*pace*

Croce and his view of the *ventennio* as a historically aberrant interlude), the coercive and repressive methods employed by the liberal state that preceded fascism established an authoritarian attitude in Italian political culture that has among its heirs the would-be *golpisti* and state facilitators of the right-wing terrorism of the 1960s and 1970s. Unified Italy has always had its internal opponents, and many have had recourse to methods we could describe as terrorist: pro-Bourbon brigandry in the South; anarchist bombings, assassinations (including that of Umberto I in 1900) and several attempted insurrections from the 1870s until well into the twentieth century (Rimanelli 1998).[6] The strategy of provoking vicious backlash, in the hope of fomenting popular insurrection, employed by urban resistance groups in World War II can also be described as essentially terroristic;[7] it anticipates the approach of the Brigate Rosse (BR) three decades later, the aim of which was to reveal the 'hidden fascism' of Christian Democracy by inducing it to reveal its brutally repressive face. Terrorism in Italy has also had a nationalist or regionalist character: postwar Italy saw independence movements in Sicily and Sardinia, and from the latter half of the 1950s, groups in the South Tyrol carried out terrorist attacks in the attempt to secure a regional autonomy ultimately granted in 1969 (a case of successful terrorist strategy?). Finally, we should bear in mind that some of the actions of the mafia and other organized criminal groups can be defined as terrorist (see Engene 2004: 134–41; della Porta and Rossi 1984; della Porta 1995).

   We can agree, therefore, with Walter Laqueur (1987: 9), who has written that 'there is no terrorism per se, except perhaps on an abstract level, but different terrorisms' – a statement that is true, also, to the extent that

6   It is interesting to consider Rimanelli's remarks (1998: 224) on the state reaction to anarchist bombings in the context of the attempt to identify a single 'cattivo maestro' responsible for red terrorism in the 1970s: 'the authorities reacted to Anarchist terrorism with further repressive bouts, while "criminalizing" the opposition (anarcho-syndacalists, republicans, and socialists) in an effort "to prove a single master conspiracy"' (it is unclear who Rimanelli is quoting here).

7   See Rimanelli (1998: 225). Ginsborg (1990: 64) refers to a section of the partisan movement as the 'urban terrorists of the GAP'.

terrorism is in the eye of the powerful beholder. Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that we can identify two main types of terrorism according to how the targets of violence are chosen:

> The first is random or arbitrary targeting, by aiming terrorist actions at whoever is present when the attack is launched. The typical example is the bomb in a crowded city centre, an airport or railway station. In such cases, terrorists are seeking to take advantage of the effect created by the infliction of death and injury upon a random selection of people. [...] Secondly, targets of violence may be selected for their symbolic or representative value. [...] It is important to stress that the targets of violence selected in this way have only a peripheral role in the struggle against the terrorists. They represent the enemy because of their political or social status, because of their positions in politics, business or the state apparatus, or membership in a social or cultural group. Victims are not chosen so selectively that those actually hit by violence could not have been substituted with other members of the same category of people. (Engene 2004: 13; see also Schmid and Jongman 1988: 7–10)

These two types of target selection correspond to the main forms of terrorist violence practiced by right and left during the *anni di piombo*. The second corresponds to the *modus operandi* of militant left-wing groups like Prima Linea and the BR, groups for the most part guilty of targeted assassinations, kneecappings, robbery and kidnapping, actions carried out in an attempt to foment revolution and hasten the advent of a communist state. The first type, on the other hand, corresponds to the large-scale, indiscriminate bombing, or *stragismo*, of the far right. *Stragismo* was linked to the *strategia della tensione*, which, narrowly defined, was implemented between 1969 and 1974 as part of a campaign to establish a 'presidential' or quasi-authoritarian type of political system in Italy (the intention was to throw the state into a law-and-order crisis that would make a take-over by the military or the far right seem desirable). *Stragismo* refers to the more autonomous use of indiscriminate massacre by neo-fascist groups which enjoyed the protection of the intelligence services, and which continued well beyond 1974, reaching its horrific apotheosis with the Bologna bombing.[8]

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8   We should bear in mind that the division of terrorist strategy described here is
      extremely schematic: during the *anni di piombo*, the right also used small scale violence

It is perhaps not yet common knowledge that *anni di piombo*, the phrase used to refer to the period of terrorism in Italy, derives from the Italian title given to a German film: Margarethe Von Trotta's *Die bleierne Zeit* – literally 'the leaden time' – shown at the Venice film festival in 1981.[9] Von Trotta's film tells the story of two German sisters (based on Christiane and Gudrun Ensslin) who become politicized when confronted with the horror of images of the Nazi concentration camps, taken from the documentary *Nuit e brouillard* (Alain Resnais, 1955), and of the carnage in Vietnam: Marianne opts for the armed struggle and clandestinity; Julianne for legal protest and radical journalism. Marianne is eventually caught and apparently commits suicide in prison while awaiting trial. The remainder of the film tells of Julianne's struggle to prove that her sister's death was a state execution, and of her obligation to explain her sister's choices to Marianne's deserted son, the representative of another generation.[10]

Von Trotta has called *Die bleierne Zeit* 'a labour of mourning' (Di Caprio 1984: 56), and the interpolation of clips from *Nuit e brouillard* signals that *Die bleierne Zeit* itself is intended to aid the transmission of historical memory (Resnais' film comes to occupy the full frame at certain moments, and so becomes identical to *Die bleierne Zeit* itself). In Italy *Die bleierne Zeit* fulfills this function of transmission in an exceptional way, and

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and targeted assassination, while the left sometimes used arson and bomb attacks against property (Rimanelli 1998: 236–52).

9　Released in English-speaking Europe as *The German Sisters*, and in North America as *Marianne and Julianne*. *Die bleierne Zeit* was shown twice in Venice, on Thursday 10 September 1981 (Marinucci 1981: 4), the penultimate day of that year's festival, and received a tumultuous and grateful reception from European and especially Italian critics (American critics were less impressed). It went on to receive that year's top festival prize, the Golden Lion (awarded by a jury headed by Italo Calvino), and several other lesser prizes; it was immediately picked up for Italian distribution. The phrase 'anni di piombo' begins to appear in the Italian press soon after this festival triumph (see examples cited in Saulini 1987: 76).

10　The film alludes to the apparently coordinated suicides of several members of the Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction) in Stammheim prison in October 1977. Although many have been suspicious of the authorities' version of these events, historians now agree that the deaths were indeed suicides and not covert state executions.

comes to be part of the apparatus through which we understand the long 1970s in Italy. The film becomes a means of characterization of memory inasmuch as its Italian title, *Anni di piombo*, passes into journalistic, popular and scholarly discourse as the label given to this ill-defined period of roughly a decade. The title, in its Italian translation, becomes a 'luogo comune' or even 'luogo di memoria' (*lieu de mémoire*) in the figurative sense familiar from the work of Pierre Nora (1996) and Mario Isnenghi (1997); in other words, it becomes a location where the collective memories of the nation are stored, and where variant historical interpretations are crystallized into a shared interpretation of history. Ultimately, the phrase is transposed again across language (from Italian to English), and the 'shared' version of history represented by the phrase may be said to have a tendentious or even coercive aspect to it.

The phrase *anni di piombo* is problematic in that the transition from the German adjective 'bleierne', intended to connote the 'leaden' weight of history, to the Italian noun 'piombo', with its clear metaphorical allusion to bullets, implicitly excludes the bombings characteristic of right-wing terrorism.[11] This effect has been further exaggerated when the phrase is rendered in English. In Paul Ginsborg's *History of Contemporary Italy* (1993: 379), it becomes, in a chapter sub-heading, not 'years of lead', but, precisely, the 'years of the bullet', and all potential ambiguity about the figurative character of the 'lead' is jettisoned.[12] The period dealt with in the section headed by the phrase 'years of the bullet' in Ginsborg's book begins in 1976 and ends in 1979, and as such differs from the now standard Italian usage which understands 'anni di piombo' to refer to the whole of

11   As Orioles (2002: 32) comments, the Italian and German titles differ: 'non tanto per la scelta di *anni* in luogo di *Zeit*, quanto per l'enfasi posta sull'accezione materiale di piombo, con trasparente riferimento all'uso delle armi da fuoco'.

12   It has been pointed out to me that the phrase 'years of lead' remains more common in English than 'years of the bullet', but the latter is, nonetheless, occasionally found, for example in Mary P. Wood's *Italian Cinema* (2005: 47) in the context of a discussion of Italian film comedy.

the 1970s.[13] Inasmuch as it excludes the Piazza Fontana and Brescia bombings, and even the Bologna station massacre, the frame placed around this period by Ginsborg has the effect of concentrating the account of extra-parliamentary aspiration and politically motivated violence exclusively on the activities of a criminalized left.

On the other hand, the more conventional location of the 'origin' of the 'years of lead' in the right-wing bombing of the Banca Agricultura di Milano in Piazza Fontana, an act that left sixteen dead, has the advantage of suggesting that terrorist action was not exclusive to the left, and of drawing attention to the Strategy of Tension. However, even this broader timeframe may be too circumscribed. As Paul Furlong (1981: 62) remarks:

> The social and political origins of Italian terrorism can be found in the contradictory influences that produced the Italian constitution and that resulted in the radical expectations engendered by the resistance movement; in the tempering of the populist democratic elements in the Constituent Assembly; and in the delays and lapses that accompanied the implementation of the constitution.

Furlong situates these 'social and political origins' internally to Italy itself; but one could argue that the disappointment of the hopes inspired by the Resistance, the curtailing of popular democracy and the infinitely delayed implementation of the constitution also had external causes. According to this argument, terrorism in Italy was a Cold War phenomenon: it had its origins in Yalta and the postwar standoff between the Soviet and American empires.[14] If the tradition of political violence was deep-rooted and various

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13   '*Anni di piombo*: nel linguaggio giornalistico, il decennio successivo al 1970, caratterizzato soprattutto in Italia e in Germania da azioni terroristiche' (*Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*).

14   Rimanelli (1998: 225), in an article originally published towards the end of the Cold War, describes Italy as 'a geostrategically vital NATO country in the turbulent Mediterranean basin, at the centre of East-West and North-South tensions, as well as home to both the Catholic Church and the largest communist party (PCI) in the West. This unique combination of weaknesses [political and economic fragility, a weak sense of state] and international relevance, as well as Italy's traditionally strong politicization, provided fertile ground for different kinds of terrorist movements'. However, it is not simply that Italy's 'geostrategical' importance provided the 'ground'

in the unified Italy, the terrorism of the long 1970s can also be contextual-
ized as a local-national conflict that formed part of the 'global civil war'
spoken of by Giorgio Agamben (2005: 2, following Hannah Arendt and
Carl Schmitt), and anticipated in the vision of perpetual global war (with
the constant shifting of allies and enemies with which we have become
familiar) described in Orwell's *1984* (1949). A warning, however: while this
is a persuasive way to approach the question of terrorism in Italy in the long
1970s, it can lead to interpretative enormities. Placing Italy's intra-national
problems (justly) in an international perspective can quickly become a
way to disavow internal responsibility for the violence; it encourages a
conspiratorial vision of history where everything that happens in Italy is
ultimately willed by CIA or KGB, depending on one's political complexion
and preferred wellspring of paranoia.

3   Cinema between History and Memory

My approaches to the study of film in this book are eclectic. I have sought
in the course of my research to allow the methodologies employed to be
suggested by the films being studied, and the ad hoc procedures adopted are
elaborated in the appropriate chapters and sections. However, I set out in
this section the basic assumptions underpinning my writing, with particular
reference to the role or place of film in historical understanding.

This study begins with terrorism – as we have seen, a term that
eludes precise definition – and attempts to trace its representation and
refraction in four decades of Italian cinema. Two objections immediately
present themselves to a such a project: the first objection, spoken from the

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for terrorist activity, it is rather that the Italian mini-civil war of the *anni di piombo*
was a 'hot' inflection of the global 'cold' civil war being waged by the two imperial
blocks. (See, however, Panvini (2007: 103–4) for a critique of the use of the term
'civil war' to describe Italian terrorism and the conflict with the state.)

perspective of the student of cinema, is that to treat film in this way is to risk ignoring its formal characteristics in the accumulation of 'significant' content; the second is the historian's objection that cinema can only be a debased form of historiography which simplifies events and turns them into entertainment.

I use the model of 'social text' to avoid the problems indicated by the first objection, and to answer the sceptical appraisal of film in the second. The 'social text' model takes account of the mutually determining aspects of events, discourses and representations; I borrow it from several sources, but it is partially set out in an article by Beverly Allen on the novel during the *anni di piombo*:

> social texts and linguistic texts always co-implicate one another, albeit in messy, noncongruent, and ambiguous ways. Here, of course, the social text is clandestine political violence on the Italian peninsula during the 'years of lead', and the linguistic texts are novels in Italian that represent that violence [...] [By] articulating the mutual and overlapping social and literary texts of that violence, I want to draw attention to the osmosis that exists between them [...]. (Allen 1997: 54)

Allen does not further define 'social text', a phrase that is ambiguous because it has been used in at least two ways in the study of literature and its relationship to the 'world'.[15] The more restricted use is that of a scholar like Jerome McGann who uses it to point to the fact that any text (be it novel, poem or, we may note, especially film) is better thought of, not as the offspring of individual creativity or genius according to the Romantic or auteurist model, but as the output of a nexus of social relations and productive functions. (As such his 'social' includes Allen's 'linguistic' text but

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15   It is also the name of an influential journal of critical theory published at Duke University since 1979, though the editors of *Social Text* seem to make no reference to their use of the term, even in the earliest editions. It seems likely that the term was common in academic discourse of the period, used especially by scholars of literature who were reacting to formalist methodologies from various historicist perspectives. One of these was the Marxist approach of Fredric Jameson, a founding editor of the journal *Social Text*, upon whose work Beverly Allen explicitly relies for her methodology in the cited article (Allen 1997).

is not reducible to it.) Seen thus, the text can in no way be treated as a hermetic artefact available to formal exegesis alone; instead, McGann (1988: 21) writes 'that to pursue the meaning of a text entails the pursuit of the text's entire socio-historical field, that the range of such a field will stretch across large reaches of time and space, and the field cannot be properly approached – cannot even be *seen* – if one's vision is hemmed in within the linguistic confines that have so dominated twentieth-century hermeneutics'. If we take the cinema as an example: most films are the work of one or more screenwriters, one or more directors, producers, actors, etc., but they are also the product of discourses that envelop them, namely, the dictates of genre, the expectations of the audience, previewing, reviewing, exhibition, the distribution system (and therefore the medium through or *as* which they are transmitted), the title and language changes that occur across linguistic borders, and so on; all of which determine not only how a film is perceived but also how it is generated.

I also take social text to have a broader meaning than that found in McGann. The key to this extended sense is the idea of the mutual permeability of events and representations referred to above by Allen. According to this understanding, events have a discursive as well as a phenomenal status, and enter into a field we may describe as representational. No event exists as a 'fact' outside a system of textual models; that is, no event can be independent of the context of its interpretation. Film exists along a continuum with events that allows it no autonomy and allows events no independence from their representation. The relationship, though at times opaque, is one of symbiosis: events influence film form just as interpretation is present at the very moment of the event. So it is that a film like *La seconda volta* (Mimmo Calopresti, 1995) embodies in its unresolved structure and truncated narrative the political and ethical impasse of the *indulto* debate – the debate in the wider society about the fate of those imprisoned for 'terrorist' offences. (The film stages the 'second' and subsequent meeting of an imprisoned terrorist and the victim she failed to assassinate.) Film reacts to, and impresses in its turn upon the social and political world and the interpretation of events. The films studied in this book should be understood as entering into a social text comprising a range of discourses, events and their representations; according to the context,

nature and scale of reception; and within the wider cultural context of mass media, historiography, memoir and fiction. Methodologically, this implies that the choice of film as a single topic of research is to some extent an arbitrary one, but it is a necessary choice that allows a manageable corpus of material to be studied.[16]

A society's understanding of its past and present is constructed through a negotiation (however unequal) between different interests and discourses; as Pierre Sorlin (1980: 17) puts it, in an important book on historical film: 'Most societies [...] create their history as they evolve. And in these societies certain groups, social classes, political parties and socio-professional communities define their own version of the past.' The auteur or committed filmmaker who confronts a theme like terrorism is among those who engage in this creation of history, but so too is the commercial producer whose attitude to historical circumstances might be more exploitative. To both, the professional historian may object that film is too crude a medium and too contingent upon its industrial constrictions to be taken seriously as historiography. But to apply the criteria of a primarily written and document-based historiography to a visual and commercial medium like cinema is to misunderstand what it is that cinema (and television film) is equipped to achieve. Attempts to critique historical films from the perspective of institutional history tend to fixate upon issues of accuracy which are most often beside the point, in that a positivistic factual accuracy is both beyond the means of the commercial film and rarely part of the intentions of the filmmakers. One might think of the criticisms of the Moro film *Buongiorno, notte* for the film's portrayal of the protagonist as a 'terrorista pentita ante-litteram', when in reality the model for the character, Anna Laura Braghetti, went on to assassinate Vittorio Bachelet, a university professor and vice-president of the Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura, two years after the Moro events (Bandirali and Terrone, 2004: 4; Pirani

16 I include television films in this study because the crossover between the media is so prevalent, in that films made for the cinema will be shown on television or released in formats for the home screen, while certain television films receive, in turn, a cinema release – the best known example among those studied here being *La meglio gioventù*.