

*a book by*

**Elio Petri**

*edited by*

**Jean A. Gili**

*translated by*

**Camilla Zamboni &  
Erika Marina Nadir**

**WRITINGS ON  
CINEMA & LIFE**



## ENCOMIUMS

Elio Petri was a great artist, a great director, a very great man of the cinema.

—Dante Ferretti

Through a mixture of expressionism, Brecht, and the bizarre, Petri's films brought together Marx and Gramsci, but also Freud and Reich. He dove into the world of dreams with Kafkaian lunges and into the maze that divides being and schizophrenia.

—Jean A. Gili

Elio Petri, a lucid and honest intellectual, profoundly human, a courageous and genial director, a true friend.

—Ennio Morricone

The thing that struck me about *I giorni contati*, in fact, more than one thing. First: it places itself in a strange territory, actually still unexplored in Italy, halfway between realism and existentialism. Second: it risked looking for a cinema that was different from the cinema done in Italy up to that moment. I'm sure that *I giorni contati* influenced me somehow. It influenced me the same way that all the films I loved at that time did. I *wanted* them to influence me, and I wanted to be influenced by Elio's films.

—Bernardo Bertolucci

Elio Petri is the greatest Italian director of the past, the only Italian director who made ten films that were completely different from one another.

—Franco Nero

This book is essential for appreciating Elio Petri's films, & to truly understand the importance of "Italian political cinema" in the context of the bloody and lacerating contradictions of the political struggles in Italy during the 1970s. Inspiring the reader to understand and appreciate the man beyond his work, Petri's text is written by a true author, a polemical and modern moralist who took a stand against the compromising and mediocre mechanisms of Italian culture. This is also a book about solitude and society's incomprehension of an intellectual who strove to be different, along the lines of the worldview of Pier Paolo Pasolini. This text comprises all the eloquent writings of Elio Petri, driven by intelligence, by love, and by his sarcastic view of existence. These writings are, and always will be, a seminal reference for both scholars and cinephiles.

—Alfredo Rossi

**WRITINGS ON  
CINEMA & LIFE**

*Elio Petri*

*Selected Other Works by*

Elio Petri

*Roma ore 11*

*L'assassino.* With Tonino Guerra.

*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto.* With Ugo Pirro.

*La proprietà non è più un furto.* With Ugo Pirro.

*Scritti di cinema e di vita.* Ed. by Jean A. Gili.

*Chi illumina la grande notte*

# WRITINGS ON CINEMA & LIFE

*Elio Petri*

**Edited by**

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Erika Marina Nadir*



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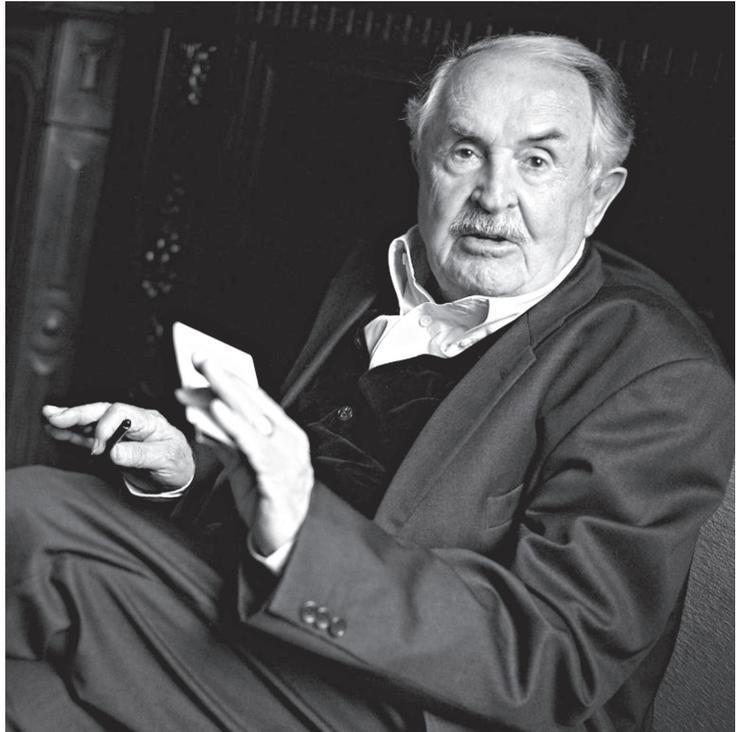
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*This book is dedicated to*

**Tonino Guerra**

poet, screenwriter, artist



16 March 1920 – 21 March 2012

<http://toninoguerra.org>

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# INTRODUCTION

*Elio Petri:*  
*Artist & Intellectual*

*F*irst of all, I would like to explain the reason for this edition of Elio Petri's writings — I want to pay homage to the memory of a man who was very important to me. Petri was the only director with whom I developed a profound — almost fraternal — friendship. He was like a big brother to me, a brother who had a lot to teach and pass down.

Elio Petri (1929–1982) is known as a film director and as an artist, but his social and political engagement in the post-war years up to the beginning of the 1980s also makes him an intellectual. He was a man who reflected on his own work and on its relationship to the socio-political context of the time. In *Elio Petri: appunti su un autore*, a documentary on the director made in 2005,<sup>1</sup> Francesco Maselli defines Petri as a unique intellectual, “a man of culture and intelligence, passionate about the figurative arts,” a man ready to question the cultural policy of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). He affirms that “[Petri] was more of an intellectual than any of us.”

Petri participated in the debates that were agitating the country, using all the tools of theater — the grotesque, the expressionist form, and indirect discourse. Reading his book *Roma ore 11* (1956), it is immediately clear that he not only collected material to shoot a film, but he also conducted a true sociological investigation of the lower social classes of Italian society in the postwar years. He adopted the same perspective in preparing the screenplay for *Giorni d'amore* (*Days of Love*, 1954).

1. Federico Bacci, Stefano Leone, and Nicola Guarneri, *Elio Petri: appunti su un autore* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2006). Throughout the text, we will use [TN] to indicate notes that were added by the translators.

In this collection, I chose to include texts published in magazines that are now difficult to find, such as *Città aperta* or *Nuova Cucina*. I believe that Elio would not have wanted these writings to be lost. I hadn't yet met him when he was writing for *Città aperta*, but when he started to write for *Nuova Cucina* he would regularly send me the magazine. He wanted to be sure that someone would appreciate and save his articles and someday collect them in a volume. He sent me a photocopy of the last installment of *Nuova Cucina* since he could not obtain the original issue for me. I myself had solicited some of the articles that appear in the section dedicated to his own films. For example, I had asked him to write for the magazine *L'Arc*, which was preparing a special issue on Leonardo Sciascia. I still have the original text, typed on yellow paper that Petri used for his correspondence and personal writings. It is a text full of deletions and afterthoughts because he truly cared about formulating a thought as precisely as possible.<sup>2</sup> The interview on *Todo modo* (1976), which was a written reply to a series of questions, is another exceptional document, full of erasures and hand-written comments added to the typed text. Petri was especially passionate about the act of writing. He would add corrections by hand with colored pens in order to clarify his thoughts or to correct some of his statements. For this reason, Petri's manuscripts are particularly moving documents.

Petri wrote numerous critical texts about films made by others as well as his own. He was also passionate about painting, as was fellow filmmaker Valerio Zurlini, and he produced valuable texts on the figurative arts. His aesthetic work was directly inspired by painting: the German Expressionists, especially Otto Dix, but also George Grosz, and then American painters such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, & Jim Dine. Dine was the model for the physical movements of the character of the painter in *Un tranquillo posto di campagna* (*A Quiet Place in the Country*, 1969). It is also important to remember the close friendship between Petri and Renzo Vespi gnani, a relationship that led the director to participate in the debate on Realism.

2. Jean A. Gili, "Elio Petri / Leonardo Sciascia," *Bianco e Nero* 1-2 (January-February 2006) 167-177.

In this collection, there are articles on Pablo Picasso & Gianfranco Bonchi. Surely other texts exist that we could not find: for example, it seems that Petri wrote a presentation for an exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Petri loved subtle, challenging analysis developed through his confrontation with other intellectuals. It was a pleasure to interview him because of his clear and precise way of speaking. He utilized concrete concepts and comments, cinematographic references, and observations derived from literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Petri was an avid reader. Largely self-taught, he formed his literary background through comprehensive reading, the same way he learned filmmaking: not by attending film school, but by watching films.

In the postwar years, he learned on the job: “At that time, cinema already interested me; I would watch even three films a day. I am part of the first truly cinematographic generation. We did not need any technical school: we already knew the grammar and syntax of cinema instinctively, because of our role as spectators.”<sup>3</sup> The same goes for Petri’s intellectual background, composed of incisive readings and a keen intelligence, ready to employ the acquired knowledge and new ideas.

Petri was also passionate about politics. After the Second World War, in 1946 — when he was seventeen years old — he joined the Italian Communist Party & was active in the party’s Youth Federation. He organized cinema clubs and wrote a few articles for the journal *Gioventù nuova*. He was profoundly affected by films such as *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1943) & *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945). He discovered Rossellini’s film in 1945 at a festival organized in Rome to highlight the revival of cultural activities in the capital. Petri participated in the screenings and in the debates of the Roman Circle of Cinema founded by Cesare Zavattini. In 1950, he was offered a position at *L’Unità* as an assistant to Tommaso Chiaretti. Unfortunately, although research was conducted in the archives of the newspaper on the advice of former employees such as Ugo Casiraghi & Franco

3. Jean A. Gili, ed., *Elio Petri* (Nice: Université de Nice, 1972) 22.

Giraldi (who succeeded Petri as Chiaretti's assistant), it was impossible to find Petri's texts (also due to the common practice at the time of signing one's article simply with "assistant").

The extraordinary text on the adaptation of Sartre's *Le mani sporche* (1978), which was written for RAI, shows the same attention to maintaining his train of thought.<sup>4</sup> This important text should have been published long ago in a book or a magazine. Instead, it risked being completely forgotten in the RAI archives, or among the papers of the journalists who had received the article but who probably did not keep it. The cover of the printed folder is illustrated with an etching by Renzo Vespi gnani, who was the artistic advisor for Petri's adaptation; it is an unsettling engraving representing two hands, one gnarled and dark on top, the other smooth and light on the bottom. The gnarled hand — the dirty one — seems to be threatening the smooth hand — the clean one.



### *Roma ore 11*

Petri's critical activity led to his first cinematographic experience with Giuseppe De Santis, whom Petri had met through Gianni Puccini: a preliminary inquiry for De Santis' film *Roma ore 11*.

Here are the facts: on Monday, January 15, 1951, there was an accident at Via Savoia 31. A flight of stairs collapsed under the weight of about a hundred young women responding to a job call. Several girls were wounded and one of them died at the hospital a few days later.

At that time, Elio Petri was twenty-two years old, a young man with much experience as a director of cultural activities for the Italian Communist Party. As mentioned, in 1950 he was Tommaso Chiaretti's assistant at *L'Unità* (Franco Giraldi succeeded him in 1951–52).

In May 1951, four months after the accident on Via Savoia, Petri was asked to conduct an inquiry to better understand the

4. RAI, or Radio Televisione Italiana, is the major public national TV broadcasting company in Italy. It was originally composed of three television channels, named "RAI 1," "RAI 2," and "RAI 3," but now includes "RAI 4," and "RAI 5," and it is funded and owned by the Italian government.

reasons that led so many young women to respond to the job call. It was Cesare Zavattini who commissioned the inquiry to supplement the material available to the screenwriters. Petri was chosen despite his youth: De Santis said that he was “still just a boy.” Petri got to work at once and started submitting material. De Santis underlined the important role of Petri’s inquiry in the preparation of the film. For this reason, when the final screenplay was written in the following months, Petri was invited to collaborate. His name, however, was not credited in the opening titles. This collaboration was decisive for the later career of the young Petri. For a few years, he would regularly work with De Santis. The shooting of *Roma ore 11* took place in the fall of 1951: Petri was the second assistant director working with Basilio Franchina.

On February 27, 1952, the film was released in theaters and *Roma ore 11* was harshly criticized by the newspaper *Il Tempo*. Several left-wing critics also dismissed the film. In *Cinema* (March 15), Guido Aristarco spoke of “schematicism.” Moreover, the film was not a big popular hit. Despite the highly topical issues presented & the high number of famous actors employed (Lucia Bosè, Carla Del Poggio, Elena Varzi, Delia Scala, Lea Padovani, Raf Vallone, Massimo Girotti, and Paolo Stoppa), the film earned only 270 million lire. In contrast, Augusto Genina’s *Tre storie proibite* (*Three Forbidden Stories*, 1952), although mediocre, also released in the fall and concerning the same topic, earned 371 million lire. *Roma ore 11* received only one award: a Nastro d’Argento for Mario Nascimbene’s soundtrack.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, for political reasons, it was excluded from the Italian selection at the Cannes Film Festival. That year, the competing films were exceptional: Vittorio De Sica’s *Umberto D.* (1952), Alberto Lattuada’s *Il cappotto* (*The Overcoat*, 1952), Steno and Monicelli’s *Guardie e ladri* (1951), and Renato Castellani’s *Due soldi di speranza* (1952). Castellani’s film, a great success, won the Grand Prix ex aequo with Orson Welles’ *Othello* (1952).<sup>6</sup> Steno and Monicelli’s film also received an award for its screenplay by Piero Tellini. Finally, Italy received a special mention by the jury for the best selection of competing films.

5. The Nastro d’Argento (Silver Ribbon) is an Italian film award assigned annually by the association of Italian film critics (Sindacato Nazionale dei Giornalisti Cinematografici Italiani) to exceptional performances and productions. It was first distributed in 1946. It is the oldest film award in Europe and the second oldest in the world. [TN]

6. From 1939 to 1954, the highest prize at the Cannes Film Festival was the Grand Prix du Festival International du Film. The Palme d’Or (Golden Palm) was introduced in 1955 by the organizing committee. It is now the highest prize awarded at the Cannes Film Festival and is presented to the director of the best feature film of the official competition. From 1964 to 1974 it was replaced, once again, by the Grand Prix du Festival. [TN]

A few years later, Petri reworked the material collected for his earlier inquiry into a book, *Roma ore 11*.<sup>7</sup> The volume contained a preface written by Giuseppe De Santis and a letter sent from Cuba by Cesare Zavattini (this letter was omitted in Sellario's 2004 reprint). Zavattini underlined the usefulness of the inquiry as a way to investigate reality:

"Dear Petri, it is great that you, at just twenty years old, are naturally drawn to see inquiry as a basic moral need. It took me a long time, almost fifty years, to come to the same conclusion: that's because my generation was afraid to establish these ties to reality; we felt that it would have resulted in a need to change everything we knew. My generation was afraid that the wings of our fantasy would be burdened by these facts, these numbers, this taking of notes, typing, tailing, asking, and seeking answers. Instead, it is precisely these investigations that push our fantasy in different directions. They force us into different daily routines that alter the practical perspective of our daily life. It is not even called fantasy anymore, but what does it matter? It's not even called art. We shall live this other way and then we shall find the name of the things that will be born."<sup>8</sup>

7. Published in 1956 by Edizioni Avanti! in the series "Il gallo," *Omnibus* 27.

8. Cesare Zavattini, "Prefazione," in Elio Petri, *Roma ore 11* (Milan-Rome: Edizioni Avanti!, 1956) 14. [TN]

9. "Manifesto dei 101" refers to a document expressing strong dissent from the Soviets signed by 101 Italian communist intellectuals, following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in October 1956, the Budapest uprising, and its ruthless repression by the U.S.S.R. Red Army. [TN]

\*: The Italian acronym for the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano).

The volume presented some difficult issues:

- why was the book published five years after the inquiry and four years after the release of the film?
- why was it published by Edizioni Avanti! and not by a communist publishing house, such as Editori Riuniti, which in those years published Carlo Lizzani's book on Italian cinema? Was Petri's independence in the Italian Communist Party already too evident?
- in October 1956, Soviet tanks invaded Hungary. This event provoked a series of reactions in the PCI:\* a few members, Petri among them, signed a document called "Manifesto dei 101."<sup>9</sup> In 1957, Petri participated in the creation of the journal *Città aperta*. In 1958, Petri did not renew his membership in the PCI (according to Paola Petri, it was the PCI that "warmly" encouraged the dissenters to do so).
- how much of the original inquiry was modified to be published as a book?

*Roma ore 11* is a well-written book. Petri carefully juxtaposes the descriptions of the witnesses and gives them room to speak, including several answers in Roman dialect. One can imagine the interview subjects' reticence toward Petri, who, as he asserts in the book, did not introduce himself as an assistant director preparing a film, but instead as a journalist or a writer looking for material for a book. For example, an elderly father of two young girls who were interviewed told the young Petri: "At least I hope the young sir earns a million with this book that he is writing about you..." In those years, Petri was still a "young sir," and maybe he always was.

A few years later, when Giuseppe De Santis was preparing to shoot *Giorni d'amore*, he called Petri again to conduct an inquiry on the sociological and cultural context of the town of Fondi, in the Campania region. This inquiry was found among De Santis' documents and today is available in a volume dedicated to the film.<sup>10</sup> Petri's report — long and detailed, around fifty pages, enough to constitute a volume of its own — is composed of a series of descriptions of couples forced to run away in order to commit the 'irredeemable' crime of getting married without a proper and expensive ceremony. Davide and Santina, Fortunato and Ida, Francesco and Teresa, Edmondo & Elvira, Alessandro and Immacolata, Onoratino and Egidia, Giovannino and Carmina: the stories of these couples, provided by the protagonists, is the fictional material rich with authentic observations that will constitute the basis for the story of Pasquale (Marcello Mastroianni) and Angela (Marina Vlady). The film is dedicated to all those couples who had to endure those difficulties: "To all those girls and young men who must go through painful and often paradoxical events to achieve their dream of getting married."

Petri's report is an elaborate text. It provides an incredible amount of information on Italian rural society in the beginning of the 1950s, and it even offers a detailed calculation of the money necessary to wed. This was a prohibitive sum for poor people because it included a dowry, a wedding dress, a tailor,

10. Giovanni Spagnoletti, Marco Grossi, eds., *Giorni d'amore. Un film di Giuseppe De Santis tra impegno e commedia* (Turin-Fondi: Lindau-Associazione Giuseppe De Santis, 2004) 103–152.

a religious ceremony, and a nuptial banquet for at least one hundred & fifty people.

### “*Città Aperta*”

In 1957, Petri participated in the creation of a dissident communist journal, *Città aperta*. The journal emerged in the context of the occupation of Hungary by the military forces of the Warsaw Pact and of the XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which marked the beginning of de-Stalinization. It is useful to remember that after the revolt in Hungary on October 23, 1956, and the subsequent intervention of the Soviet army on October 29 of the same year, 101 Italian communist artists & intellectuals — as proof of the uneasiness of numerous members of the party — asked the central committee of the Italian Communist party to have the Communist Parties in Europe lead popular movements for renewal. They also criticized the coercive & narrow-minded methods used by Stalinism and in the relations between States and parties, and they called slanderous the definition of “counterrevolutionary putsch” given by *L’Unità* to the Hungarian revolution. Among these intellectuals were: Carlo Muscetta, Natalino Sapegno, Delio Cantimori, Mario Socrate, Renzo Vespi gnani, Dario Puccini, Vezio Crisafuli, Giorgio Candeloro, Paolo Spriano, Luciano Cafagna, Lucio Colletti, Renzo De Felice, Elio Petri, Mario Tronti, Alberto Asor Rosa, Alberto Caracciolo, & Antonio Meccanico. These are the signatures of the future collaborators of *Città aperta*.

Petri regularly wrote for *Città aperta* during the two years of the journal’s existence (his articles appear in all but one volume). The editor-in-chief was Tommaso Chiaretti and the editorial board was composed of Ugo Attardi, Luca Canali, Piero Moroni, Marcello Muccini, Elio Petri, Dario Puccini, Gianzio Sacripante, Mario Socrate, & Renzo Vespi gnani (notice the presence of the painters Attardi, Muccini, & Vespi gnani, who were also members of the ‘figurative’ painters’ circle, and of Dario Puccini).<sup>11</sup>

11. Dario Puccini (1921–1997) was a literary critic and professor of Spanish and Hispānic literature.

The journal was started under difficult conditions. Callisto Cosulich notes: "After continued denials, Mario Alicata, the cultural director of the PCI, gave permission to publish the journal on the condition that Tommaso Chiaretti — who at the time was the editor-in-chief of *L'Unità's* cinema section — would be the editor-in-chief. In the end, Chiaretti was fired, while the most involved editors, such as Petri, the painters Attardi and Vespi gnani, the writers Puccini and Socrate, and the philosopher Luca Canali, would not renew their membership in the PCI."<sup>12</sup>

*Città aperta* had many foci: literature, painting, architecture, and cinema, not to mention many interviews regarding the intellectual debate over Marxist ideology. There were many allusions to the Hungarian situation and the journal sided with those Communist intellectuals who had already left the party in protest. As an anonymous article from the first issue states: "These men were, and still are, worthy of our respect."<sup>13</sup> In another article from the first page of the first issue collectively signed *Città aperta*, alongside an engraving by Vespi gnani, who provided many illustrations for the journal, we find:

"First of all, let's introduce ourselves. We are a group of intellectuals engaged in the social, moral, and cultural renewal of our country. Motivated by socialist ideals untarnished by reformist compromises, we intend to fight against the backward mentality of Italian capitalist society, against the feudal fog of clericalism, and against the many manifestations of conformity. We intend to create a journal with a 'direction.' First of all, 'direction' is the measure and the limit of our intentions and ambitions. We do not claim to represent all of the *engagé* culture, nor a whole generation. We do not claim to bridge the gap between the old and the young. But 'direction' also means a particular way of confronting and discussing the themes and problems of our time. We believe that we belong to the movement for the moral and cultural renewal of our country. [...] We want to exert a constant and militant criticism in order to develop & defend our poetics. We support realism in the arts, in film, & in literature, but we also seek to guard

12. Callisto Cosulich, "Germi, Petri e l'impero del male," *Bianco e Nero* 1 (January–March 1998) 73. The article is a reply to Petri's article "I germi dell'odio e della speranza," previously published in *Città aperta*. [TN]

13. Citation missing in the original. [TN]

against its populist and folkloristic degeneration. We hold to the ideal of civil and technical progress found in industrial civilizations, but we renounce mechanical idolatry & all its obsessions.”<sup>14</sup>

Although *Città aperta* was originally conceived as biweekly, it came out irregularly. From May to July 1957, the journal was published every 2 weeks, then its frequency decreased to every two months, and eventually its publication ended in July 1958. There were seven issues in total, but there would have been thirty had the journal been published regularly. Petri authored nine articles in *Città aperta*. Some of them are about a director (Germi, Bardem, Kazan), but the majority are reflections on cinema and on political engagement. There is also a (possibly autobiographical) short story, “Two-Hundred Thousand Lire,” about the difficulties that a screenwriter encounters when trying to get paid by his producer. Roberto Giangrande evaluates Petri’s overall contribution to the journal in his dissertation: “This experience, born amid the strong tension between intellectuals and the Italian Communist Party, represented the explicit desire of some intellectuals to promote a free debate, although not aligned with Togliatti’s thought. Petri experienced this division in the party and remembered it as the disappearance of (youthful) illusions. This loss made him understand the necessity for a free debate that was independent from ideological schemes. The journal did not side against the party, but soon the situation became unbearable and in 1958, Petri, along with other colleagues, and due to Alicata’s opposition, did not renew his party membership.”<sup>15</sup>

In those years, and after his work on *Roma ore 11*, Petri became a screenwriter & assistant director. He was steadily working with Giuseppe De Santis. Mario Socrate, one of the editors of *Città aperta*, was also credited next to Petri’s name in the screenplays of De Santis’ *La strada lunga un anno* (*The Year Long Road*, 1958) and Carlo Lizzani’s *Il gobbo* (1960). The editor-in-chief Tommaso Chiaretti also appeared in the opening titles of Gianni Puccini’s *L’impiegato* (1960) and Leopoldo Savona’s *Le notti dei Teddy Boys* (1959). Needless to say,

14. Citation missing in the original.  
[TN]

15. Roberto Giangrande, *Il cinema politico di Elio Petri* (Rome: Università “La Sapienza,” 2002) 105.  
[TN]

Petri had developed a network in the cinema industry: Gianni Puccini, Tonino Guerra, Cesare Zavattini, and Marcello Mastroianni. Later on, Petri chose Mastroianni's younger brother, Ruggero, as the editor of all his films.

### *The Debate on Italian Cinema*

1960 was a pivotal year in Petri's career: he became a film director. After two short films, Petri shot his first feature film, *L'assassino* (*The Assassin*, 1961), in part due to the support and trust of his friend Marcello Mastroianni, who had become an international star with the success of Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960).

Alongside his predominant work as a filmmaker, Petri often contributed to the debate on the state of Italian cinema. The texts and his responses to interviews evidence his defense of a certain idea of cinema. In 1962, he responded to a questionnaire published in *Film 1962* edited by Vittorio Spinazzola, and in 1964 he commented on the development of Italian cinema in the pages of the journal *Cinema 60*.

In 1968, busy with the filming of *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (*Investigation of a Citizen above Suspicion*, 1969), Petri did not attend the International Venice Film Festival. This was the year of violent protests of Italian film directors against the Festival, spearheaded by Pier Paolo Pasolini — who was opposed to the screening of *Teorema* (1968) — and the boisterous Cesare Zavattini, who had to be physically expelled from the Palazzo del Cinema.<sup>16</sup> After stalling as much as he could, the director of the Film Festival, Luigi Chiarini, eventually capitulated and resigned. That same year, numerous Italian cinema unions gathered in Rome. The Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia was occupied, and this was reported in the press as a “political” event.<sup>17</sup> Passionate discussions were held in the Centro's lecture halls. The participants not only included directors Pier Paolo Pasolini, Bernardo Bertolucci, Marco Bellocchio, and the screenwriters Sergio Amidei and Ugo Pirro, but also Petri — who appeared speaking vibrantly in historical footage by Istituto Luce.<sup>18</sup>

16. The Palazzo del Cinema is the main screening theater of the Venice International Film Festival. [TN]

17. The Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (Italian National Film School) was established in 1935 with the aim of promoting the art and technique of cinematography and film. Citation missing in the original. [TN]

18. The Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa) is the oldest public institution in Italy dedicated to the distribution of Italian cinema for educational purposes. It was founded in Rome in 1924. [TN]

In 1971, Petri presented his film *La classe operaia va in Paradiso* (*The Working Class Goes to Heaven*, 1971) at the film festival “Il cinema libero” in Porretta Terme. After the screening, there were many young protesters who reproached Petri for adopting a reformist and passive position, and French director Jean Marie Straub went so far as to propose burning the reels of the film.<sup>19</sup> Pio Baldelli — one of the few film critics who spoke out — considered the film reactionary and fascist, a counterrevolutionary film that should have been immediately destroyed. In France, the debate continued in *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*; a militant of Lotta Continua<sup>20</sup> wrote:

“I would like to cite two concrete facts to give a global perspective on the reactionary aspect of the film. In the years 1968–69, some factory workers began militant activity in the Pirelli and Fiat factories. These movements (and it is precisely for this aspect that I criticize the film) did not develop from a single individual crisis, but rather they were produced by the contradictions intrinsic to the industry and fomented by independently organized groups. The film totally negates everything that happened in the factories and denies the potential of the working classes. In Europe, we are considered on the forefront. The film should express this, and except for the final 20 minutes, it does. I would have liked for these last 20 minutes to show the existing polemic between the workers’ movements and the unions. This is what is missing from the film, and why it is deeply reactionary. [...] This film is the product of a reformist politics &, what is worse, produces a Fascist ideology.”<sup>21</sup>

Petri complained that the film critics who attended the screening of *La classe operaia va in Paradiso* did not defend him, and abandoned him to confront an audience that had preconceived ideas and was blinded by political prejudices that characterized the extreme political left in those years.

Returning to Venice, the International Film Festival in 1969 and 1970, under the direction of Ernesto G. Laura, was more tranquil. But the protests were only temporarily stamped down: in 1972, the authors’ associations ANAC and AACI organized

19. See the booklet included with the DVD for *La classe operaia va in paradiso* (Cinema Italiano, La cineteca Repubblica-L’Espresso, 2009). Straub’s name and citation are missing from the original. [TN]

20. Lotta Continua was a far left extra-parliamentary organization in Italy, founded in autumn 1969 by a split in the student-worker movement of Turin, which had started militant activity at the universities and factories such as Fiat. [TN]

21. *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* 5 (winter 1972) 65–66. [TN]

an alternative to the official Film Festival, which had been directed by Gian Luigi Rondi since 1971.<sup>22</sup> This alternative festival was called “Giornate del cinema italiano” (Days of Italian Cinema) and it took place, not in the Lido area of Venice, but rather in the city, precisely in Piazza Santa Margherita, and in various cinema halls. The films presented included Marco Bellocchio’s *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1971), Marco Ferreri’s *La cagna* (*Liza*, 1972), Fabio Carpi’s *Corpo d’amore* (*Body of Love*, 1972), and Ettore Scola’s *Trevico-Torino* (1973). In 1973, the “Giornate del cinema italiano” achieved a more prominent role because the late adoption of the new statute of the Venice Biennale caused the Venice Film festival to be cancelled. It was reinstated in 1974, under the direction of Giacomo Gambetti. The outdoor screenings in Piazza Santa Margherita were packed every night; in fact, the theaters in the city were too small to hold all the potential attendees. Among the numerous films presented (from at least a hundred different countries) were: Vittorio De Sica’s *Una breve vacanza* (*A Brief Vacation*, 1973), Florestano Vancini’s *Il delitto Matteotti* (*The Assassination of Matteotti*, 1973), Marco Leto’s *La villeggiatura* (*Black Holiday*, 1973), the Taviani brothers’ *San Michele aveva un gallo* (*St. Michael had a Rooster*, 1972), Ugo Gregoretti’s *Omicron* (1964), Gianni Amelio’s *La città del sole* (1974), Gianfranco Mingozzi’s *La vita in gioco* (1972), a selection of “dailies” from Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Mille e una notte* (*Arabian Nights*, 1974), and Elio Petri’s *La proprietà non è più un furto* (*Property is No Longer Theft*, 1973).

Petri’s film was not well received by the press. A scathing review, published before the screening of the films by a journalist that had seen it months prior in Berlin, caused a veritable scandal. Petri commented:

“Francesco Savio was behind the original polemic at the Berlin Film Festival. After viewing *La proprietà non è più un furto* he said, ‘I hope that this is never screened in Italy.’ Do you understand? I hope that this disastrous film will never be shown to the Italian public.’ He is crazy — even though he is a good person, an enlight-

22. ANAC, or Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici (National Film Writers’ Association), brought together directors and screenwriters with the aim of promoting cinema as a means of cultural expression. It was founded in Rome in 1950 and its first president was Cesare Zavattini. AACI, or Associazione Autori Cinematografici Italiani, was a subset association of ANAC, which was created in 1968 by members who wanted to transform ANAC into a trade union to better protect the rights of its members. [TN]

ened bourgeois —, but is also monomaniacal and a snob. I, on the contrary, believe in mainstream culture. My film should be seen with people who laugh, who cry, & who will talk about the film.”<sup>23</sup>

In Venice, a spirited discussion followed the screening of the film. Andrée Tournes noticed: “During the discussions, it was always a matter of excluding, condemning, or initiating an ‘inquisition’ the way that do-gooder spoke about Tinto Brass’ film. Sectist mentality was not dead; first and foremost, free speech served to judge and to condemn.”<sup>24</sup> Petri was shocked by the aggressive reactions of the audience. He heatedly commented on and justified his aesthetic choices:

“Maybe the time has come to simply stop making movies. For someone like me, who makes mainstream films, the traditional dramatic structure is the simplest, and therefore easiest, formula. Concessions to the audience? Frankly, I don’t think I make concessions; I, myself, am part of this audience. [...] I love spectacle. I read Guy Debord & his book *La société du spectacle*. But if you attack everything that is spectacle, you ultimately destroy everything around you. Everything is spectacle: a way of displaying, a way of walking, a way of looking, and a way of dressing. Man loves spectacle, so accepting spectacle means to accept the human condition.”<sup>25</sup>

Petri expressed this aggressive point of view in an interview with journalist Lietta Tornabuoni. A few weeks later, at a conference with critics and directors, no consensus was reached over the polemic. These events would anticipate Petri’s hostile relationship with Italian critics; he felt that the ones who should have understood the sense of his work did not comprehend or defend him. A few years later, during the shooting of *Todo modo* in February 1976, Petri refused to prescreen the film for the critics:

“The critical reception of *La proprietà non è più un furto* made me angry. But in the end, I am not the only one in this situation. From time to time I read film reviews in newspapers or trade magazines and I see that critics say very stupid things. Their criticism is not constructive. They defend elitist positions engendering a discon-

23. Jean A. Gili, “Interview,” *Elio Petri et le cinéma italien* (Annecy, 1996) 15. [TN]

24. *Jeune Cinéma* 74 (November 1973) 8. [TN]

25. *Jeune Cinéma* 74 (November 1973) 22. [TN]

nection with directors. The critical reception of Pasolini's *Salò* convinced me that Italian critics had no reason to exist anymore. For instance, to give an example of the sensationalism of some critics, just a few hours after Pasolini died, they immediately ran to see *Salò*. Then, they all rushed to write. And they dissected both the film and the author. They confused Pasolini's life with his film, a truly vile act. *Salò* is a wonderful film, which nobody understood — and nobody wanted to understand. The critics clearly did not intend to accept a film so pure in its provocation, and so unprovocative in its purity. Pasolini thought he was making a provocative film, but really he made an extremely poetic film — and this film is provocative only because it is poetic. It couldn't have been understood by people with such low morality, who moralize, and who are so tightly bound to bourgeois morality.”<sup>26</sup>

In February 1975, Petri was invited to Perpignan to present a retrospective on his films by the Institut Jean Vigo — in fact, the director has often been better understood in France rather than in Italy. In the event's guestbook, he wrote two short texts for Marcel Oms, the director of the Institut, which display all of his sensibility, modesty, and attention to human relationships:

“Your Perpignan has only one big flaw: you talk too much about me, which makes me uncomfortable. And it is a little distressing to come all the way from Rome to here, to your Perpignan, only to hear you talking about me. This shows my own weakness, as well as the strong weakness (if I may say so) of the cinematic profession and its protagonists; or, more generally, the weakness of those who create ideas, and images, and idea-images. Little by little, they become door-to-door salesmen of themselves, of their ideas and images. This feeling of becoming someone who advertises himself and what he most jealously guards surely generates shame and bitterness. As much as I have done and do, even with the help of your friendship, intelligence, and warmth, I cannot avoid this feeling of exploiting you for my own goals. Will we ever be able to free cinema and human relationships from this blackmail, from this cold shadow? Thanks for who you are and what you do.”<sup>27</sup>

26. Jean A. Gili, *Elio Petri et le cinéma italien*, 13–14. [TN]

27. February 9, 1975. Citation missing in the original. [TN]

“Nothing else is left but to add my gratitude for having given me the chance to get to know Perpignan. This name comes from the deep reaches, from the penumbra of childish memories, and it is synonymous with: stages. Perpignan is an important ‘stage’ of the Tour de France, before getting to the Pyrenees. Then, it is a stage on the streets of Spain. It was a stage for the volunteers of the International Brigades. It was also the first safe stop for those who were running from Fascist terror. I have the feeling that it will be a stage for me, too. The analysis of my old films with all of you already has great value in my personal history during these last few years, and in my future. So, thanks. I hope, after this warm stay in ‘your’ Perpignan, to get better.”<sup>28</sup>

### “Nuova Cucina”

In 1980, Ugo Tognazzi reactivates the culinary magazine *Nuova Cucina*. The author asked his friend Petri (who directed him in *La proprietà non è più un furto* in 1973) to take over the column on film criticism initially titled “Cinefagia”<sup>29</sup> then “Cinema on the plate.” Petri clearly enjoyed himself — he often alludes to the ‘director’ of the magazine in these articles. He wrote the film reviews in a culinary vein. From February to July 1980, he wrote three reviews on Italian cinema — Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Ogro* (1979), Ettore Scolas’ *La terrazza* (1980), and Federico Fellini’s *La città delle donne* (*City of Women*, 1980); and three on international cinema — Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Joseph Losey’s *Don Giovanni* (1979), and Robert Benton’s *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). A light-hearted rubric next to the first review, that of *Apocalypse Now*, showed the symbols that explained the evaluations: “inedible” (upside-down plate), “indigestible” (broken plate), “insipid” (one plate), “satisfactory” (two plates), & “good” (three plates), “delicious” (three plates topped with the chef’s toque). *Apocalypse Now* was declared “inedible,” *Ogro* “satisfactory,” *Don Giovanni* “inedible,” and then the evaluations disappeared.

28. February 10, 1975. Citation missing in the original. [TN]

29. “Cinefagia” is a neologism in the original Italian, meaning “the act of eating/consuming film.” [TN]

With regard to *Don Giovanni*, the editorial board pointed out:

“This is a great cinematographic happening; it is a marriage between the lyric art of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and the skillful scenic interpretation of a director like Joseph Losey. Therefore, a close observer of cinema like Petri couldn’t help but notice it. However, in his astute analysis of the film, Petri maintains a purely gastronomic tone, in line with the original perspective that distinguishes his column on cinema and that is suited to our journal *Nuova Cucina*.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Petri, Sciascia, Sartre*

In his screenwriting, Petri at times came in contact with the work of many writers: Lucio Mastronardi for *Il maestro di Vigevano* (*The Teacher of Vigevano*, 1963), Robert Sheckley for *La decima vittima* (*The Tenth Victim*, 1965), and above all, Leonardo Sciascia for *A ciascuno il suo* (*They Still Kill the Old Way*, 1967) and *Todo modo*. Furthermore, we should not forget Jean-Paul Sartre for the adaptation of *Le mani sporche*.

Petri wrote many texts dealing with the adaptations of Sciascia and Sartre. The question of his relationship with the Sicilian writer passed unnoticed at the time of *A ciascuno il suo*. However, *Todo modo* provoked much reaction. Initially, the film risked being prohibited from screening given that it was during a political campaign, so it was released on April 30, 1976. The Christian Democratic Party was enraged: even though he only saw a short clip of the film on television, politician Bartolo Ciccardini furiously stated:

“Petri is like Goebbels, this film is like *Süss l’ebreo*. It is an uneducated and partisan contortion, and an incitement to civil war. Let’s be clear: there may be ten thieves among us Christian Democrats, and it is ok, in the play of democracy. That is, in the alternating of the parties in power, it is licit to send the Christian Democrats to the opposition in parliament, but this hate, this mendacity, the logic of this film, is terrible. If you follow this logic, you arrive at lagars. You should realize that this film takes you to the ghetto.”<sup>31</sup>

30. Citation missing in the original. [TN]

31. *La Repubblica*, 8 May 1976. Complete citation missing in the original. [TN]

Even Sciascia enters the debate to calm the parties:

“Two years ago, in my book, I was joking (while saying very serious things). Petri doesn’t joke. And Rosi wasn’t joking either when he adapted my novel *Il contesto* into his film *Cadaveri eccellenti*. Why? This question invites many different answers. Some answers have to do with the times in which we are living. We leave them to the readers and the spectators.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1979, at the request of Jacques Bonnet, who was coordinating a special issue on Leonardo Sciascia for the magazine *L’Arc*, I asked Francesco Rosi and Elio Petri to take part in the section “Sciascia and Cinema” for which I had written an ample introduction. I asked the two directors to talk about their relationship to Sciascia’s work. Though Rosi’s text on *Cadaveri eccellenti* (*Illustrious Corpses*, 1976) is relatively short, Petri, speaking of *A ciascuno il suo* & *Todo modo*, wrote an in-depth essay ironically titled “Short Tracts.” He wrote it during a stay in Sardinia. A few days after sending me the essay consisting of many typewritten pages filled with erasures and corrections, he sent me no less than eighteen new corrections and additions, proof of the assiduous — bordering on neurotic — precision of his thoughts.

As for *Le mani sporche*, Petri was involved in the preparation of the press release from RAI. He wrote a summary to illustrate the foundation of the work, offered a long analysis of Sartre’s political thought, and also added his own thoughts on the Italian political situation. The text, with the ever-ironic title of “Short Notes, Preliminary Observations,” contains seventeen well-developed points. It is shocking to think that this fascinating document was relegated solely to promote the film on television.

### *Writings on Painting*

Painting was really important to Elio Petri. Francesco Maselli called him a “painting buff.” Petri’s long-lasting friendship with Renzo Vespi gnani proves this: Petri asked him to collaborate on

32. *Paese Sera*, 9 May 1976. Complete citation missing in the original. [TN]

the set design for *L'assassino*, and used the artist's engravings for the opening titles of *I giorni contati* (1962). He also used Vespi gnani's paintings in the opening sequence of *La proprietà non è più un furto* (the images were also used for the film poster). Finally, Petri sought Vespi gnani's advice for the visual aspects of *Le mani sporche*; the artist is credited as "artistic advisor." Vespi gnani also illustrated the screenplay of Petri's last film, *Chi illumina la grande notte*, which was never shot.<sup>33</sup> In the foreword, Vespi gnani wrote:

"Ours is not a mysterious symbiosis: we grew up together, with the same passions and the same anxieties. Together we breathed hope like oxygen in the still air of post-war Rome and stench of what was dying around and inside us, year after year. Why depict your night if it is the same as my characters'? To be sure, a painting is not a film frame; and we constantly spoke about this, laughing about cinema that looks like painting, & painting that imitates cinema. And yet, reading your screenplays, I always 'saw' them already photographed and composed, already 'painted.' I saw your colors because they were also mine. Ours."<sup>34</sup>

Petri was a refined art collector and decorated his apartment with well-chosen artwork: for example, I remember seeing Ugo Attardi's painting *Piazza Navona* in his apartment. Petri also closely followed American painters and particularly pop art, which greatly influenced him in *La decima vittima*. In this film, Petri, with the help of cinematographer Gianni Di Venanzo (who demonstrated here to be as good as he was in his black and white masterpieces), employs a groundbreaking use of color. In an essay on *La decima vittima*, Lucia Cardone stated that the protagonist's sets (as designed by Piero Poletto) show the influence of Andy Warhol, Joe Tilson, George Segal, Jasper Johns, Richard Smith, Claes Oldenburg, and Roy Lichtenstein's comics. Also, Giulio Coltellacci's costumes were inspired by Courrèges' 'space' models. Cardone continued:

33. This screenplay was published by the Biennale di Venezia in 1983.

34. Citation missing in the original. [TN]

“Petri demonstrates a deep and focused understanding of the complex panorama of American painting during those years. Due to his disparate interests, which lead him to divest himself of his ‘provinciality,’ the Roman director well understands the development of American art and is well-informed on pop and the other trends of the avant-garde, particularly with regard to visual explorations.”<sup>35</sup>

After Petri met American painter Jim Dine (who had shown his work at the Venice Biennale in 1964 with Rauschenberg, Johns, and Oldenburg), he decided to utilize him as a model for the protagonist of his film *Un tranquillo posto di campagna*. Petri went to London to meet the artist and invited him to Cinecittà to paint around fifteen large canvases, all of which would appear in the film. Jim Dine was filmed while working so that actor Franco Nero could later replicate his gestures when portraying the film’s protagonist. Petri wanted Dine to stay in Italy to advise Nero and perhaps weigh in on some visual aspects of the film. However, the painter had to return to London for other commitments.

On a related note, in *La proprietà non è più un furto*, the depiction of the butcher was directly based on Otto Dix’s engravings.

### Conclusion

I would like to conclude this introduction with a personal postscript. I will never forget the walks I took through the Roman streets with Elio on Sunday mornings in the 1970s. Before stopping for a coffee at the St. Eustachio bar in the piazza, we would navigate the tiny streets of the historic center with our dogs, Snoopy (the cocker spaniel who appears in *Un tranquillo posto di campagna*) and Magoo, a fox-terrier. These Sunday walks, full of long chats, are tied to a sad memory. On November 2, 1975, we were returning to Elio’s house. After crossing the Tiber, we met Dante Ferretti, Petri’s friend, and collaborator on *La classe operaia va in paradiso*, who a few months later created the extraordinary sets for the underground hotel of *Todo modo*.

35. Lucia Cardone, *Elio Petri, im-politico. La decima vittima* (1965) (Pisa: ETS, 2005) 49. [TN]

Together we went to the Ruschena bar, in Lungotevere dei Mellini. At one point, Ferretti walked away from the counter to make a telephone call. Ferretti rushed back to us. He was red-faced: he had just heard of Pasolini's death. We quickly parted ways; each man went home to get more information. I think that Petri and Ferretti wanted to go to the morgue to see the body of the deceased poet.

When I heard of Petri's death in November 1982, I was at the Luxembourg Cinematheque where I was presenting *Maria Zeff* (*Maria Zeff*, 1981) with Vittorio Cottafavi in a hall full of people from the Friuli region: a member of the audience had heard the news on the radio. He told me after the screening.

The memories of Petri and Pasolini will always be with me.



§ 1.6

*Italian Cinema:  
A Castrated Elephant<sup>1</sup>*



**I**n the fall of 1945, *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City) was screened for the first time at an international film festival at the Quirino Theater in Rome.<sup>2</sup> It was a critical date for those of our generation, who — sooner or later — ended up working in the film industry. Some of the best European films made between 1943 and 1945 were shown along with *Roma, città aperta*, such as *Les enfants du Paradis* (Children of Paradise, 1945), *Alessandro Nevski* (Alexander Nevsky, 1938), *Les visiteurs du soir* (The Devil's Envoys, 1942), *Arcobaleno* (Raduga, 1944), and *Enrico V* (Henry V, 1944). Seeing those works in direct contrast with one another was stunning, and *Roma, città aperta* stood out in a way that dramatically showed the two main paths that cinema throughout the world could then take — and could still take today: on the one hand, a cinema deeply engaged with reality; on the other, a profound and deeply intellectual cultural free-association. A communist critic argued that there could be a “third way” for cinema, which was not the one established by *Roma, città aperta*, but rather that of *Les enfants du Paradis* and *Enrico V*.

Now, twelve years later (after all the disappointments, the bitterness, and the defeats that still weigh on us), the new opening in cinema's goals, poetics, and formulas — even production formulas — caused by Rossellini's film appears to us in all its revolutionary power. Some people say that *Roma, città aperta* was born by accident, and there is much to be said about this

1. From *Città aperta* 4–5 (July 25, 1957)

2. Here and later in the text, we listed the international release titles of every film in parentheses. IMDb.com was used for reference. We used the original Italian titles throughout the text. [TN]

misconception. Many critics keep repeating this claim aimlessly, although it lacks foundation, even from the simple point of view of 'language' — and here, there would be even more to discuss. In any case, the film exuded the deep and unsettling energy of Italian revolution.

We will never forget the confrontation of that autumn which excited us and moved us to tears. It was also at this time that the distributors were trying to circulate, without any advertisement, a second run of *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1943), which had been banned by Fascist and Catholic censorship. They were the first to discredit our national cinema because of their ignorance and because of a *miscalculation* that would later be fatal.

Many of us watched *Ossessione* right before or after seeing *Roma, città aperta*. We realized that there were two passionate faces to Italian cinema: on the one hand, that of an investigation of social norms and of denunciation; on the other, that of a rigorous historical novel about morality and about those under-worlds vulnerable to every crisis.

Italian cinema should have started from those foundations: from *Roma, città aperta* and *Ossessione*. Instead, it followed the fate of the national society.

Italian cinema had only five years of real and rich activity. It was just enough time to gain a national audience that had been 'historically' averse to Italian production. This distaste was exacerbated by the wretched Fascist film production, a fact that is never taken into consideration when one speaks or writes about the traditional 'hostility' of Italians of all classes toward Italian films. Only five years: from 1946 to 1951, and already in the last two years, the life of Italian cinema had become difficult.

The conservative nucleus of the ruling class, which little by little was increasing its power, immediately started to tighten the financial reins. Active censorship occurred from the very beginning. *Il sole sorge ancora* (*Outcry*, 1946), which more than any other seemed to follow the direction taken by *Roma, città aperta* (and not only because it tackled the theme of the Resistance)

risked being banned — and it was only 1946. Even Rossellini's *Paisà* (*Paisan*) bore the mark of the PWB,<sup>3</sup> even though it maintained a significant humanistic quality.

From the idealistic foundations of *Roma, città aperta* and *Osessione*, our cinema started to go backward instead of forward. During the last twelve years, its history has consisted of partial victories, some strategic and conscious retreats, others not, leading to the present bitter defeat both on an artistic & industrial level.

Every realistic film produced in the past twelve years can be considered a real victory in the daily struggle between artists and the philistine conservative authorities and producers who, for the most part, side with the government. A realistic film can also be considered the result of a generally unknown struggle, unknown even to intellectuals. Now that everyone is criticizing realism and those who represent it — often starting from a justifiably critical position that we share — it is necessary to touch upon this battle, fought film by film, from *Il sole sorge ancora* to *Caccia Tragica* (*The Tragic Hunt*, 1947), from *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, 1948) (which Visconti financed with his own money) to those films produced by official studios. These last films were more tolerated than protected and they managed to elude government censorship thanks only to the international status gained by Italian cinema and its best representatives.

People only ever talk about these twelve years with an apologetic or sensationalist tone, or to blame Communists & crypto-Communists. Nobody ever searches through ostensible reality to find the hidden truth. Even the most liberal of liberals, even the third parties that purport to be independent in their research and critical judgment, and even the fiercest men fighting for the sophistication of our country, avoid the real problem of Italian cinema. And not only in their words — like Moravia, for example, who is the author of shoddy screenplays and has made a lot of money by selling the rights for *Racconti romani* (*Roman Tales*, 1954), but did not contribute to the defense either of neorealism

3. The "Psychological Warfare Branch" (PWB) was an organization created by the Anglo-American Military Government in 1943. Its purpose was to control the Italian media, specifically press, radio, and cinema. [TN]

or of good cinema. The central issue from which everything else derives began with the elephantine bloating of industrial structures, and then continued with the castration of ideals conceived and effected by Giulio Andreotti, who surely could not ignore the fact that castration leads to sterility, to aging, and eventually to death.

It is not by chance that the core issue is mostly ignored because the majority of critics and intellectuals still demonstrate a tendency to consider cinema as an artistic or at most an industrial phenomenon. On the contrary, in reality, cinema is a huge phenomenon that is not only artistic, but also political and public. It involves vast political & economic interests to a degree that is disproportionate to what its ideal dimensions should be in a more advanced — even capitalistic — society.

Political power — at times even that belonging to progressive forces — does not like super-structural renovation of any kind that can directly or indirectly effect a change in mass values.

(Symptomatic of this is the absence in Italy of a ‘problematic’ cinema specific to the Church. In a Catholic country governed by political forces that identify themselves with Catholicism, such an absence would be inexplicable if one did not consider the government’s distrust of any form of ‘problemicity,’ even a mystical one. This is true even for ideas that have little in common with Marxism or idealism — as is the case with Fellini’s last film).<sup>4</sup>

Along with the constant and increasingly explicit strangling of national cinema carried out by the government, the most qualified artists have retreated over the past twelve years essentially for transitory reasons: fame, money, the approval of international critics, the great success of their films (and success usually leads to arrogance). All of these factors drove artists away from their natural sources of inspiration, regardless of the government’s pressure.

The theorization of ‘poetics,’ the failed attempt to raise poetics to the status of a veritable artistic conception, is the clearest symptom of this decadence: neorealism is like this, it’s made

4. Federico Fellini’s *Le notti di Cabiria* (*Nights of Cabiria*), released on May 27, 1957. [TN]

like this: non-professional actors, 'real' stories, camera out in the street, etc. Abstract theorization leads to an uncritical view of the results obtained, and this doesn't only happen in cinema. It crystallizes these results, prevents forward movement, and produces stagnation in artistic research and invention. An example of this can be found in *Il tetto* (*The Roof*, 1956), a film that, as soon as it came out already looked eight years old because while it perfectly followed the classical models and theoretical 'canons' of Zavattini's neorealism, it no longer corresponded to our need to confront the new reality of the country, nor to our most recent cultural experiences.

Reality usually moves faster than theories rooted in current events — such as those created by neorealist artists — or rooted in social norms, and theory becomes official only if it has the force and depth of historical perspective. In this regard, *Il tetto* clarified many of the issues. If neorealism is not understood as an overarching need for research and investigation, but rather as an outright poetic tendency, it no longer appeals to us. This is not because, as some have argued, we only care for the usual 'quality leap' (from 'neo' to 'realism,' from impression to reflection, from 'fragment' to 'novel'); that is only one aspect of the neorealist impasse, included in the wider issues of theme, of the ideal attitude of neorealism, or of the choice of 'content.' This troubled Italy, born from post-war compromises, cannot be represented with the implicitly Christian innocence of neorealism; there is a need for stories and images that are more relevant to the moral lacerations inflicted on the mind by the return of capitalism. We need to face up to modern myths and incoherencies, corruption, great examples of worthless heroism, and fluctuations in morality; we must *be able* — and know how — to represent all of that.

If one considers the history of our cinema over the past twelve years, it is clear that the Italian progressive forces that identify themselves with Marxist principles have had a hegemonic influence on said cinema, which was purely cultural. The battle for new content was at the core of the Marxist critique; this was the

correct center, the only axis around which cinema could renew itself.

Little by little, however, the goal (or as people too often say: the buzz word) of 'new content' became crystallized and restricted to themes that came from a partial vision of national reality. 'New content' became a blueprint, even for the most qualified Marxist artists and critics, and thus turned neorealism into a formula for all of us, including the youngest of our generation. To take inspiration from reality meant to see in that reality only those events most overtly connected with class struggle and only the facts that directly originated from great political and union battles. Class struggle in the form of politics and trade unions did not seem to continuously produce conscious and subconscious qualitative changes in men's consciences, and these changes did not generate new facts, characters, and feelings, or problems of life, morality, and relations among men. We Marxist artists and critics saw only the *strike* and never *after the strike*.

All this was worsened by the local battle against so-called 'cosmopolitanism,' which prevented us from fully understanding the value of many foreign experiences and made us embark on pointless 're-discoveries' in a passive acceptance of the Italian tradition. The 'struggle' against 'naturalism' exacerbated this pettiness, led to 'optimistic' and 'collectivist' visions of life, and did not allow us to overcome the 'philosophical' distress of the realistic experience, which would have opened up said experience to the problems of modern humanity as a whole.

This overly mechanical tie to the most evident aspects of class struggle was clearly exposed by a widespread tendency among communist painters and filmmakers to focus their investigations on the South of Italy with distinct folkloristic accents. This was due to the misunderstanding of the concept of a national-popular art, which in Gramsci's conception had little to do with folkloristic attitudes. Gramsci spoke of an art that could express national unity, and this, in his opinion, was the core of the working classes cultural politics.

With Gramsci we can say: “The lives of peasants occupy a significant place in literature, but here, too, not as hard work and fatigue” — and this last sentence doesn’t fit with our argument — “but rather, farmers as ‘folklore,’ as picturesque representatives of curious and bizarre customs and feelings.”

Thus, many communist artists, even though they dealt with farmers’ lives “as hard work and fatigue,” bore the mark of those communist artists whom Gramsci mentioned.

Nobody really cared about correcting this attitude. Due to ideological conflicts aimed at making artists aware of the cultural problems of national unity and of the working class, nobody tried to compare the communist artists’ work with the new themes originating in the life of the working class, in the fact that the working class was part of the government, in the profound crisis of morality and mores that the fall of Fascism, the Liberation, the Resistance, and the revolution caused in every stratum of the Italian people and in the core of Italian *humanity*.

The goal of the cultural direction through which the Italian progressive forces exert their hegemony on cinema is correct — and we need to start from there again, from ‘new content.’ Instead, however, the form this direction took was schematic and restricted.

Turning again to Gramsci we recognize that: “We surely cannot impose the task of addressing this or that aspect of life on one or more generations of writers, but the fact that one or more generations of writers share certain intellectual and moral interests is, in itself, significant, and it indicates that some specific cultural direction is predominant among intellectuals.”

The dominant direction among communist artists cannot be imposed: yet a group that intends to revolutionize society, to build a new society and a new civilization, *must* wage a battle of principles, through dialectics, that develops into a ‘cultural direction.’

In our opinion, at several important moments, a true ‘cultural direction’ was missing, or it manifested itself too many

times through purely opportunistic motivations. While a certain theoretical, schematic, and abstract rigor was visible, there was no concrete development of a battle for the principles of an engaged and realistic cinema and art. There was, to use a language typical of party members, “opportunism in the practice.”

There is no doubt, for example, that the majority of deficiencies in the cultural direction of the Communist Party were the product of merely political and often stifling motivations.

Sometimes it was even the fear of antagonizing the most iconic men in Italian cinema, who were becoming very popular in Italy and the whole world. The cultural direction of the communist party ‘played nice’; it did not go beyond friendly and diplomatic — at times even personal — relationships with the artists and failed to promote a national and unitary art that could express, with its works, broader needs and more audacious & revolutionary research.

One of the principal leaders of the communist party told a communist director who was almost exiled for his very socially engaged film (probably the best of his still short career) that more was “not allowed” and that it would have been better for him and for the working class to deal with topics less controversial than unemployment. It was the end of 1953, right before one of the biggest defeats of Italian conservatives. Why did that politician not secure his and the party’s endorsement so that in cinema, political conditions favorable to progress, not regression, could have been created?

To fail to understand that defending freedom of expression — for all intellectuals — means to defend the constitutional principles of democracy, is a symptom of grave blindness. This compromised the fate of Italian cinema, and it is one of the faults that Italian progressives must bear on their shoulders.

The problems of Italian cinema have become particularly acute today, especially in the tragic situation of the national film industry. The reasons for the crisis are the much-discussed changes in collective habits caused by technological progress, by the spread

of television, by the extraordinary increase of private transportation. But such a phenomenon, in a field of cultural activities, cannot be dependent only on quantitative causes. Today the film audience, with all its conscious or unconscious contradictions — depending on the social stratum — assigns to cinema a function that goes beyond mere entertainment. Television has become the new ‘nickelodeon.’ In the historical perspective of show business, cinema assumes a new role in which its noble character as modern art is exalted. The success of films like *La strada* (*The Road*, 1954), inasmuch as one can discuss all the other causes, affirms this conviction. Film artists cannot be idle with respect to the new possibilities opening up for cinema as a creative instrument. In order to be loyal to their means of expression, they will have to be more courageous and more consistent than before.

We cannot wait for a new revolution — as strong as the one that produced the neorealist films — to appear and show the new directions.

To start again from *Roma, città aperta* and *Ossessione* is impossible. After all, despite the abuses, the oppression, and everything else, Italian cinema has gained new protagonists and experiences, as well as precise attitudes and personalities. We must start from these results and from the most recent experiences in world cinema (from Japanese films to *Limelight* [1952], from *Il ritorno di Vassili Bortnikov* [*The Return of Vassili Bortnikov*, 1953] to *On the Waterfront* [1954]).<sup>5</sup>

The essential condition for a strong and coherent investigation is for artists to have the greatest freedom possible. This is the reason that we still talk about ‘unity,’ despite the risk of looking like old-fashioned ‘tacticians.’ 

5. In the Italian version, *On the Waterfront* was listed as *Fronte del porto*, but we decided to use the original English title. [TN]

# **2.**

## **THE DEBATE ABOUT ITALIAN CINEMA (1962-1982)**

## § 2.1

*Questionnaire: The Directors  
of the 1960s<sup>1</sup>*

*We dedicated the* following questionnaire to ‘new’ Italian and foreign filmmakers. Many of those we have addressed so far directed only one or two films. All of them, regardless of their age, have revealed themselves to the general public in the past few months. We didn’t receive all the answers we expected: however, we feel that those that we have collected can offer an important overview of the intentions and the goals of the filmmakers who will shape the cinema of the 1960s.

### *Elio Petri’s Answers*

*In what ways do you feel different from the film directors of the previous generation?*

I won’t deny that I still look up to some of these directors: the impact of the revolution they brought about in Italian and international cinema is still difficult to evaluate today. *Ossessione* might recall *Toni* (1935), but it is through *Ossessione* that many understood how to proceed in filmmaking. Ten years after their first release, *Roma, città aperta* and *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946) directly influenced the French *Nouvelle Vague*. If in Italy we cannot talk of a current *Nouvelle Vague*, it is because we already had one with those directors of the past, and that was more than a *Nouvelle Vague*. It was not only a linguistic or a cerebral revolt but

1. First published in Vittorio Spinazzola (ed.), *Film 1962* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962). The other interviewed directors were Giuseppe Bennati, Peter Brook, Henri Colpi, Damiano Damiani, Vittorio De Seta, Nicolò Ferrari, Edgar Morin, Ermanno Olmi, Gillo Pontecorvo, Lionel Rogosin, Franco Rossi, & Jiří Weiss.

also a rebellion against Fascism, and against the provincialism of Italian culture and the very structure of Italian society. Many of these directors still now have interesting ideas and world-views. If we think of the artists from the postwar years until now who contributed to the formation of the Italians' self-awareness, these are the filmmakers that would first come to mind, followed by a few writers and painters. Other filmmakers couldn't or didn't want to adapt to the 'restoration': their work would have been very different if their freedom of expression hadn't been constantly impeded by political power. In this light, we should reconsider the filmographies of many directors. What are the differences between them and us? At a fundamental level, it is a matter of talent: I feel ten times less talented. Then there are differences of interests, but then we should also talk about our different backgrounds and the different periods in which we took our first fundamental steps. After the cinema revolution came a restoration, and the atmosphere during a counter-reformation is always suffocating and obstructionist. Therefore, the themes that come to our attention today are all 'internal': the protagonist of *Ladri di biciclette* (*The Bicycle Thief*, 1948), today, must face not only the society in which he lives, but also his own conscience.

*Besides the specifically cinematographic, what cultural and intellectual traditions do you intend to connect with in your work?*

For those, like me, who want to tell stories about individuals and about the mental encumbrances they find within themselves without ever losing sight of social and historical phenomena and their social class direction (as an external imposition but not a deterministic one), Sartre's is a necessary lesson. Sartre's continuous effort to bring Existentialism back to earth and his attention (I would say tension) toward Marxist research, and his open-mindedness (which allows him to find the new and lively aspects in techniques shunned by others, for example, his interest in psychoanalysis), all of this is very important material to study.

With regard to cinema, I believe that the neorealist tradition is still very valuable as a window into people, sentiments, and reality. The neorealists must be absorbed for the spirit that animated neorealism & not for the problems it exposed.

*What elements of filmic storytelling attract your interest?*

For me, the basic magic of filmic storytelling resides in its essentially objective nature. The psychology and physical appearance of actors, the concreteness of objects and sets, the materiality of light, the power of a realistic atmosphere, the theme and the screenplay: each of these elements has an autonomous objective presence and when they combine, under the energetic direction of a filmmaker, they produce a human event, unique in its appearance and even in its substance. It is great fun to unleash these elements, and it is very difficult to master them. The struggle is consciously inserting one's own subjective view within these objective elements.

*Which aspects of the society in which you live and of the contemporary world in general directly or indirectly capture your attention?*

Some powerful forces tend to alienate man from himself, to extinguish every thought in him, and to roil his conscience. Life can oppress us under the weight of a pile of social relationships and can reduce itself to the monotony of mere survival and to the obsessive ticking of fixed hours that rotate around our physiological centers. There exists an apparently contradictory link between the uncertainty in which we live today (which in theory should push us toward a continuous renewal) and the stagnation of consciences, that is, the fear of thinking and living: many things stem from the unraveling of this knot. All that is human is also fascinating, but nothing is more valuable to us than our conscience and our integrity. The worst act of arrogance that cinema could do is to penetrate men's consciences and to invent a

'special' camera. Images have the great advantage of being more objective than words. The foundation of modern art is all in the will to stubbornly keep or give man back to himself, even in his suffering, and in the desire to be an alert witness to events, a witness not in the service of alienating forces. To have an idea, then, is different from fully representing it: here begins my personal situation.

*Besides official censorship, what kind of prejudices, misunderstandings, & obstacles did you encounter while developing your work?*

A fundamental incomprehension is that still today many people mistake cinema for simple distraction, and this opinion is shared even by people of the so-called educated classes. (I am not saying that some films, or many films, shouldn't be commercial. As a spectator, I would be sad if adventure films or Totò films didn't exist, but I wouldn't want every film reduced to that level.) Audiences can be an obstacle in developing a cinema focused on ideas or at least on issues. Since cinema is fundamentally a spectacle (and nobody, not even the most Calvinist of us, can deny that), its natural destination is the audience. If this relationship is not understood dialectically, then cinema, instead of exercising an active cultural function, places itself behind the last row of the audience. Among the duties of our cinema are to goad, animate, and provoke the critical spirit of the viewers, and to expose the problems of our times. This often sets cinema to go against the tide and to isolate itself from the audience, as has already happened (with Stroheim, Visconti, and Antonioni). Producers don't like this, although it is a fact that films that go against the tide eventually penetrate the viewers' consciences until the films become profitable (and I would cite the same names here). These films, in short, constitute a sort of investment that only few people dare to make. As we know, cinema is an industry (this also can't be denied), even at the level of thirty million films.<sup>2</sup> As such, it follows market regulations, so that production 'flirts'

2. Petri here means thirty million lire, the old Italian currency. It corresponds to roughly \$20,000 USD.

with the audience's apathy and predilection for distraction (market regulations explain the massive presence of comedy and of erotic, even soft-porn films in Italy). Producers easily give in to the possibility of exerting some influence on the audience so that they can direct their taste.

So, a serious impediment in the development of a film is its expected cost, but this can be resolved by being alert. Political censorship, on the contrary, is an almost insurmountable obstacle, since it reaches deep into the subconscious of the cinema community. An extreme example of the combination of uncertainty, stagnation, and fear comes from the events of our political life: I would gladly make a portrait-film of a young political man (such as Mario Alicata, or Giulio Andreotti, or both in the same film), in which the names and the positions of political life are true, but is there a producer available to face such a challenge in Italy? Politics, which takes up such a great part of the life of Italians, even in the consciences of those who think they can avoid its decisions, has no right to appear in our cinema (the only example remains Francesco Rosi's great *Salvatore Giuliano*, but that should be discussed separately). Cinema's contribution to the development of a real democracy in our country was only minimally influenced by politics, and it could have been much greater. But some of 'them' didn't want that. Very few people, in our country, truly love democracy. 🚫

§ 2.6

*You Reproach Us, but You  
Never Took Our Side*

Interview by Umberto Rossi<sup>1</sup>

*With the help of the Theater of Genoa, you made your debut as a stage director with The American Clock by Arthur Miller. Why this choice after so many years dedicated exclusively to film?*

**I**n my most recent films, beginning with *La proprietà non è più un furto* (*Property is no Longer Theft*, 1973), there is a certain theatrical thrust: for example, the critics criticized my use of monologues in *La proprietà non è più un furto*. But even now I still defend that choice, even though it is a theatrical conceit. In the same vein, *Todo Modo* represents a kind of political and theatrical ‘mystery.’ The film faithfully respects what is at the basis of a theatrical performance: a certain concept of space and time, a certain use of actors. I also believe we’re at a time in the development of creative work when a director’s experience is going to be circular and interdisciplinary in the broadest sense. Take Luca Ronconi’s case for example. He works in theater and television and, sooner or later, will make a film as well. I really think it’s worthwhile to mix diverse experiences and that a film director should share what he knows with theater actors and teach them ‘immediacy,’ making a return to building a performance ‘with their craft’ rather than reverting to intellectually-contrived formulas.

1. Originally published in *Cinema* 60, 144 (March–April 1982). Next to Petri’s text, the editor-in-chief Mino Argentero added his own comment, to which Petri replied with the following article collected here, “Our Cinema Leaves the Left Indifferent.”

*And what about television?*

Television is a medium that allows broadcasting an event live to millions of people. Unfortunately, that capability is only marginally employed, since many prefer to build an 'event' from the most routine and proven methods. Television shouldn't be an excuse to make pseudo-films, nor pseudo-comedies, nor pseudo-sport events. That's why I find theater more interesting than television. I even think that working in theater these days requires lots of ideas, many more than those expected of a film director.

*Was your experience televising Sartre's Dirty Hands also "pseudo"?*

Not at all. If you consider it closely, you will find that I didn't try to make pseudo-film or pseudo-theater but something truly and intrinsically televisual. To do that, I took screen size into account for every scene and worked intensely with opening shots and precision handling of the video camera. You asked me why I chose Miller. I chose the play because it's a contemporary work. I am not drawn to classics already incised in cultural history and the annals of the stage. *The American Clock* is a play we should have written in Italy, a work of great newsworthiness. Staging it was like making a film.

*Let's turn to your own newsworthiness in film, and Todo Modo in particular. At the film release, there was much controversy. You were accused of ridiculing the Christian Democratic government by portraying it as a self-devouring monster. After all these years and the wave of terrorism and the assassination of Aldo Moro, do you still find that portrayal valid?*

More than ever. I think the film resists a political stance as much as it does an aesthetic one. Of course, I am referring to a long period of time. We can all see today that Forlani appears more and more like Facta, the minister whose laziness cleared the way for Mussolini's rise to power. Let's hope that comparison doesn't end

up having the same drastic consequences, but so far everything points to the worst. What's more, isn't it true that the Christian Democrats are self-destructive? Look at Andreotti, who is the party's most distinguished & intelligent figure, yet still someone you would be embarrassed to present to the public. Nonetheless, I'll say it again: he is the only Christian Democrat of international stature. I would also say that he is the only real challenger to the Left, precisely because of his lucid cynicism. We're living through a real tragedy for which *Todo Modo* was a precise metaphor. Before leaving the public hearing room of the parliamentary commission investigating Aldo Moro's death, Sereno Freato said: "Please note that we didn't kill Mino Pecorelli!" Don't you think that this way of "throwing their hands up" is even more absurd than my portrayal of the Christian Democrats? In short, the atmosphere they have created in the country is one of vendetta, so I still believe that *Todo Modo* was based on an accurate political model. Even in the D'Urso affair, if the country's leaders — Pertini aside — had shown a greater sense of State, the captive would have behaved differently toward his kidnappers.

*Aren't you too pessimistic?*

Too pessimistic? At a time when the commander of the Carabinieri has more political sense than the Prime Minister!

*In the years immediately following the Second World War, things weren't easier than now, yet Italian film followed reality closely, it interpreted it, it unflinchingly took on the most troubling social problems. That's not the case today. You need only consider the rise of internal terrorism, and the scant attention Italian film has paid to it, to realize how much has changed.*

There has undoubtedly been a decline in the political conscience of filmmakers, but there has also been a rise in the complexity of the political situation. In the postwar years, class struggle had clear connotations. Then came this very peculiar anthropological

change that Pier Paolo Pasolini was the first to expose. The contradictions became greater and more complicated — everything became more difficult and less clear. Add to that the passing of several great filmmakers, such as De Sica, Visconti, and Pasolini himself, and the explosion of numerous “contradictions within the people.” The directors who were most preoccupied with, and dedicated to, political film found themselves attacked more aggressively by the critics, censored by political parties, and generally regarded with suspicion, from organizations such as Lotta Continua to the conservative press. We continued to make films without anyone’s help simply because we believed in them. There was no sense of internal adjustment on our part: we were attacked from all sides. There were filmmakers of my generation who, before the audience of Porretta Terme Film Festival in 1971, demanded to have the prints of *La classe operaia va in Paradiso* set on fire. Do you understand? They wanted to burn it! And you were there, so you might remember that no one came forward to call that man crazy. How can you lament the mediocre political sensibilities of contemporary Italian filmmakers when you never fought for, never defended, those who tried to keep talking about politics despite a thousand obstacles? If the Left blocks all forms of political inquiry and experimentation or better yet, if it is bothered by any independent voice within the worker’s movement, how can you then bemoan the ‘depoliticization’ of filmmakers? I joined the youth movement of the Italian Communist Party at an early age, at 15 (in 1944). Two years later, I joined the party and I stayed until the events in Hungary. I left the Italian Communist Party in 1956 after founding a journal called *Città aperta*. I have maintained ties with the Italian Communist Party ever since, with issues of Marxism and Leninism, but I have always remained independent in my thinking and autonomous in my judgment and actions.

*Did your stay in Genoa — home to Guido Rossa, the man who fought terrorism — provide any inspiration for your future work?*

Several great Italian films were born on the wave of a great popular movement: the case of the Resistance and neorealism is one example. Similarly, a few of the political films that I and certain other directors shot between 1972 and 1974 came out of the great students' and workers' movements of that time. Then Italian society began to disintegrate and film, being a creative and communicative entity closely tied to social reality, suffered the consequences. Today, any rebuilding would require a pluralist effort rich in dialectical tension & hegemonic tendencies (an old communist vice) and show respect for different people and differing opinions. What is needed is a process of cultural and critical growth, a process that even the Italian Communist Party up until now hasn't sought with the required conviction. I want to share an anecdote I find meaningful: When I was Giuseppe De Santis' assistant, I went with him to visit Mario Alicata in Naples, where we met Giorgio Amendola. Amendola was already one of the most prestigious figures on the Italian political scene, and chided De Santis rather harshly, saying: "Why don't you make a lovely corsair film?" Poor Peppe didn't even have the heart to tell him that he couldn't make it because for three years he had tried unsuccessfully to put together a film about land occupation. If someone said the same thing to me today, I would reply: "I am not making it because you and I together haven't reached the point where directors can make films they care about rather than ones imposed on them by those pulling the economic and political strings." In short, I am not against 'social engagement' and political opinions, I am against censorship...

*Concerning censorship, what do you think of the so-called 'young critic' who is prone to pay John Wayne the most swooning praise while tossing out anything that has the least whiff of an openly political work?*

My generation really liked American cinema, but not those films where military propaganda takes priority. The John Wayne I liked, and still like, is the one you see in John Ford's films, not the gallant knight of the worst military aggressions. Also, as for militarism, it should be understood that for Ford, militarism was only a small component of a discourse that transcended it to arrive at an 'Americanism' that was one of the characteristics of the 'first generation' of American film. Even if today's nationalism is linked to that early moment — and these are but weak and circuitous links — Ford's Americanism is the mortar bonding together men of diverse cultural experiences and histories to serve a single goal.

*And the inspiration from Genoa?*

While working for a few months in Genoa, I had the chance, among other things, to consider a possible project on the drama of Guido Rossa. More accurately, the 'case' of Rossa & Berardi, two victims of opposite ways of conceiving the struggle and political militantness. Such an undertaking doesn't just spring from a director's head: it needs the approval and verification of the whole city and of the political and social forces at work there. It must confront the men and women who live there. If I were one of the promoters of this initiative, I would fight for it as a quest for the 'true facts' that lie behind these two tragedies, facts we only know today in incomplete and biased accounts gleaned from the press. The first objective, in my mind, would be to understand the chain of events so as to present them without prejudice, neither toward Rossa nor Bernardi. 



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 Italian writer/director Elio Petri (1929–1982) is of the cinematic era of Bertolucci, Bellocchio, and Pasolini, and although he is recognized by film scholars as one of the major figures of Italian cinema, his work remains largely unknown and unavailable outside of Italy. Hardly a marginal figure, Petri began as an assistant to Giuseppe De Santis and his future collaborators would include many of the most renowned film artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Marcello Mastroianni, Gian Maria Volonté, Dante Ferretti, Ennio Morricone, Ugo Pirro, and Tonino Guerra.

Due to Petri's belief that culture is inextricable from political struggle, he was a central figure in the fervent debates of his time on both Italian cinema and culture that arose from the aftermath of World War II to the 1980s. However, while generally characterized as a political filmmaker, this view is limited and reductive, for Petri's films are polemical interrogations of social, religious, and political phenomena as well as acute analyses of moral, psychological, and existential crises. His cinema is also informed by a rich and profound understanding of and engagement with literature, philosophy, and art, evident for instance in his adaptations of Sci-

ascia's novels, Miller's *The American Clock*, and Sartre's *Dirty Hands*, as well as in his use of Pop and Abstract Art in *The Tenth Victim*, *A Quiet Day in the Country*, and other films.

Available for the first time in English, *Writings on Cinema and Life* is a collection of texts Petri originally published mainly in French and Italian journals. Also included are several art reviews, as well as Petri's essay on Sartre's *Dirty Hands*. Petri's affinity for subtle analysis is evident in his clear & precise writing style, which utilizes concrete concepts and observations, cinematographic references, and ideas drawn from literature, philosophy, & psychoanalysis. There is as well an acute and scathing sense of humor that permeates many of the texts.

Petri was the recipient of the Palme d'Or, an Academy Award, and the Edgar Allan Poe Award as well as others, and in 2005 he was the subject of the documentary *Elio Petri: appunti su un autore*. This collection of Petri's writings is an important contribution to the history of cinema and offers further insight into the work, thought, and beliefs of one of cinema's most ambitious & innovative practitioners. 

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Petri was so alive, and inside the cinema, *inside* the images, so inside the strength of a vision. He should not be forgotten.  
—Tonino Guerra