THE NIGHT OF POLITICS: THE INTRICATE REALISM OF *ESTERNO NOTTE*

ANTONIO RIVERA GARCÍA

Name: Antonio Rivera García
Email Address: antorive@ucm.es
Academic Centre: Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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ABSTRACT
The series *Esterno notte*, created by Marco Bellocchio, is conceived as a continuation and expansion of his film *Buongiorno, notte*. The filmmaker uses the series format to multiply points of view and offer a more complex version of the Moro case. The article demonstrates the importance for the series of the favorable portrayal of the Christian Democrat politician that Sciascia provided through a sharp analysis of the letters written during the kidnapping. The series also shows that the brigadists cultivated a kind of political religion that disregarded the principle of reality. In contrast to the firmness of the corrupt government of the Christian Democracy and the dogmatism of the terrorists, Bellocchio cultivates in the series an "aesthetics of cruelty" characterized by "betraying" the conventions of the historical genre. To this end, the series' creator proposes an intricate realism that does not hesitate to make use of fantasy and imagination to illuminate a historical event as dark as Moro's assassination; introduces metanarrative elements that promote the viewer's distanced and reflective judgment; and finally, demonstrates that the grotesque style is the most suitable to criticize the corrupt and abject political regime of his time.

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INTRODUCTION

The series *Esterno notte*, directed in 2022 by Marco Bellocchio, belongs to the historical genre, as it addresses the Moro case, the tragic event that has marked the recent history of the Italian State. Earlier, the filmmaker had dealt in *Il traditore* (2019) with another essential event of contemporary Italy: the maxi-trial against the Cosa Nostra. Andreotti is the "diabolical" figure present in both historical events.

Esterno notte could be considered an expanded version of the earlier 2003 film *Buongiorno, notte*, a film based on the book *Il prigioniero* by former brigadist Anna Laura Braghetti. It is inevitable to ask what the series, divided into six episodes, adds in comparison to the film. The director himself states that he returned to the Moro case because he wished to focus on those people who had no space in the film (Uzal and Bellocchio 2022: 32). The extended time provided by the series format has allowed it to present the Moro case through the perspective of other characters. The series constantly changes point of view, sometimes resembling films like *Rashomon* or *The Barefoot Contessa*, which show the same events from different perspectives. In reality, the greatest contribution of the series lies in the multiplication of viewpoints. The 2003 film focused on the interior of Moro's house-turned-prison. For this reason, the filmmaker privileged the point of view of the Red Brigades (BR), particularly that of Chiara. To the perspective of the terrorists and the kidnapped Moro himself, the series adds the external (*esterna*) viewpoint of other historical characters who, although outside the "prison of the people," lived through that terrible "political night (*notte*)" (Uva 2007: 75).

In each of the first five episodes, the perspective of one of the historical characters dominates: the first episode focuses on Moro's perspective; the second on that of the interior minister, Francesco Cossiga, and his party colleagues; the third on the Pope's perspective; the fourth on the terrorists', especially Adriana Faranda's; and the fifth on Nora, Moro's wife. Finally, in the last episode, all the perspectives converge, with none prevailing over the others. This multiplication of viewpoints allows for appreciating the complexity of such a decisive historical event for contemporary Italian history.

Before *Buongiorno, notte*, Bellocchio had already addressed the issue of terrorism in earlier films. Tangentially in *Sbatti il mostro in prima pagina* (1972), but especially in *Diavolo in corpo* (1986), which is considered "the first film on post-terrorism Italy" (Uva 2007: 59), and in the documentary *Sogni infranti. Ragionamenti e deliri* (1995). In the last two films, the director already criticizes the terrorists' "absolute" desires and addresses the efforts of the repentant to readapt to the reality principle.

1. FROM THE WORD TO THE IMAGE: THE DENUNCIATION OF POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL POWER IN MORO'S LETTERS

Bellocchio, both in the film and the series, places great importance on the letters Moro wrote during his kidnapping because they are the documents that best express his thoughts and feelings. The emphasis placed on the words of the President of the Christian Democracy (DC) is a sign of the influence Bellocchio received from Sciascia's book on the Moro case. It is true that the Sicilian novelist's interpretation became the main point of support for the later sympathetic versions of the fate of the DC president (O'Leary 2007: 82, 97). Bellocchio shares with the novelist the thesis that Moro is a ghost who, like Hamlet's father, has haunted and tormented Italians because of the injustice committed against him (Mancino 2014: 222). Neither Sciascia nor Bellocchio use Moro's spectral presence to develop the paranoid conspiracy theory ("diatrology"), that is, the obsessive search for the forces behind the action of the brigadists (O'Leary 2007: 84–95), which, however, we do find in other films about this historical event such as *Il caso Moro* (1986) and *Piazza delle Cinque Lune* (2003).

Like Sciascia, the filmmaker addresses in the series the theme of the language used by politicians. Moro, although, as Pasolini said, the least involved in the corruption of the government and the Christian Democracy (DC), used, like the rest of his party companions, a political language designed to say nothing, or to express an ambiguous position interpretable in various ways. This language, as incomprehensible to the public as Latin, is the one Moro himself uses at the beginning of *Esterno notte* convince the recalcitrant members of his party of the convenience of supporting the "historic compromise" (*compromesso storico*), that is, the formation of a government with the support of the communists. The character himself acknowledges to his daughter that he defended the compromise without ever pronouncing the word "communist". This "language of incommunicability" (Sciascia 2023: 18), indirect and convoluted, although it hinders understanding, prevents open conflict. Bellocchio's series, in its third episode, also attributes the use of ambiguous and incomprehensible language to the Pope, who, with his empty

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and pompous style, cannot reach the heart of the Catholic people, much less that of terrorists who are atheists.

Moro's letters constitute a radical denunciation of the *ratio status* that justifies the sacrifice of innocents in the name of the abstract principle of legality. Moro always considered, both before and during the kidnapping, that rescue and prisoner exchange were legitimate and realistic, since the "state of necessity principle" had to prevail over the abstract law (Sciascia 2023: 60). In one of his letters, Moro lucidly expressed that the blind respect for the reason of state actually implied the introduction of the death penalty into the Italian legal system (Sciascia 2023: 86).

Aldo Moro had not changed his opinion, but the party had. In his letters he expressed surprise that the DC government had fallen into the idolatrous cult of the State (Sciascia 2023: 60). The Italian State, which, as Sciascia ironically points out (2023: 62), had coexisted for more than a century with the mafia, had been corrupted and had embezzled money for decades, now rose "strong and solemn." Moro himself exposes this paradox in one of his last letters — "Such rigor in a disorderly country like Italy!" (Sciascia 2023: 134) — and the series stages this tragic irony in the desperate sequence of the kidnappee's confession.

The letters demonstrate that Moro's disillusionment with his party and the Catholic Church, as well as his feeling of abandonment, grew stronger as the days passed. The clearest expression of Moro's disillusionment is found in the letter of April 29, in which he finally acknowledges the abject, putrid nature of a power that does not govern for the common good nor to achieve the primary purpose that, for many conservative thinkers, the State must assume (Milner 2011: 29): guaranteeing the survival of the citizens. The disillusionment with power becomes transparent in this raw excerpt from the letter: "I repeat, I do not want men of power around me. I only want by my side those who truly loved me and will continue to love me and pray for me." Sciascia (2023: 108-10) thinks in this regard that Moro loved and suffered for power, but only now recognized its perverse nature, only now used the word "power" in all its harshness, and finally abandoned the euphemisms ("State authorities," "party men") that were typical of that political language that says nothing.

Bellocchio stages this disillusionment in the aforementioned confession of Moro in the final episode of the series. The kidnapped man tells the priest that he feels an uncontrollable and recurrent feeling of hatred towards his former friends, and therefore feels the urge to shout at those "Jesuitical faces." Moro believes that among them, the worst is Andreotti because he lacks mercy, while Cossiga has mitigating circumstances because he is bipolar and very unhappy. He ends up confessing that everything seems grotesque and deeply wrong (*sbagliato*): a law professor sentenced to death by a jury that does not recognize the State, and a government that, by refusing to negotiate, acknowledges the sentence of a terrorist band.

Moro's disillusionment is profound because it affects not only the men of political power but also the Pope. The series highlights the complex, contradictory position of Paul VI. On one hand, he wants to save his friend and even attempts the path of ransom with money, that is, with the "devil's excrement" whose "sacred mission purifies it." But on the other hand, he does not dare to break with the corrupt Italian political regime and ends up endorsing the government's firm stance. The Pope's statement, in which he urges the Red Brigades to release Moro "simply and unconditionally," ended up confirming and reinforcing the position of the Italian government, which was beginning to feel pressured by a public opinion favorable to negotiation. The third episode of the series stages the doubts and suffering of a Pope, magnificently portrayed by Toni Servillo, who does not know what language to use to persuade and move the terrorists. In a phone conversation with Curioni, the priest who helped him in the failed ransom attempt, he alludes to the search for a less solemn style that can reach the kidnappers' hearts, but he does not know how to do so. This shows that it is a power which, like the government, has distanced itself from the people. It lacks that "sentimental connection" with the people that, as Gramsci pointed out (2023: 739-40), is typical of intellectuals who understand and manage to communicate with the community. Bellocchio's Paul VI acknowledges that it is difficult to reconcile responsibility with mercy. With his final statement, he seems to choose the path of responsibility, but in reality, he sanctions the inflexible position of a corrupt government.

It is then understandable the deep disappointment Moro felt in his letters regarding the blatant contradiction of the Pope, who distanced himself with his statement from the merciful praxis of the Church: "the Holy See," Moro wrote, "renounces its humanitarian tradition and condemns me [...]. It is something horrible, unworthy of the Holy See" that prefers the "state murder" over the practice of exile or prisoner exchange conducted in many countries (Sciascia 2023: 135). The tragic aspect of the case is that the mercy he unsuccessfully sought from the State and the Vatican was instead found in his executioners. Sciascia (2023: 93) poignantly notes that "the highest point, the most Christianly elevated point,

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reached by Moro's tragedy" is found in the letter from April 29, in which the kidnapped man recognizes that the person who delivered the letter from his family "had piously cut out the news of my condemnation," that is, the refusal of the Christian Democratic party to the prisoner Exchange.

Regarding the opinion that Moro had gone mad during the kidnapping, Bellocchio's series also agrees with Sciascia in that he was no different than before, even continuing to use that new language that seemed to say nothing. It is false that he was forced to become the spokesperson of the terrorist group. For Sciascia (2023: 177), the reason there was no happy ending is precisely due to the refusal of the political and journalistic power to identify the Moro of the kidnapping letters with the previous politician. However, in those letters, the kidnapped man demonstrates that he still retained his independence. He requested the same as in the past: to put the principle of life before the abstract principle of the reason of state. According to Sciascia (2023: 19), he wrote the letters freely because the prison ethics of the Red Brigades allowed it, as they knew Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and did not want the "people's prison" to resemble the prisons of the SIM (Imperialist State of the Multinationals). The truth is that the power preferred that he was not found, since Moro's absence facilitated the approval of Andreotti's fourth government.

The series, from the second episode onward, shows in numerous sequences the betrayal of the party. It is especially the woman, Eleonora, who in two magnificent sequences complains that they want to portray her husband as crazy. First before the Pope, in the third episode. Paul VI explains to her, however, that "firmness" is only the official position, and that the literal words about Moro's madness do not express the deep views of the public powers and the press. The Pope maintains that it is a stance of prudence, diplomacy, which allows acting in secret. The second sequence takes place in the final episode and concerns the conversation she has with Zaccagnini, who reiterates that the State must remain firm and not accept the terrorists' blackmail, since negotiating means acknowledging the State's weakness. Bellocchio's Nora insists, however, that her husband's letters reflect his true thoughts, those of a Christian who always wished to negotiate.

2. *BRIGATE ROSSE*, OR THE SECOND REALITY OF THE "POLITICAL RELIGIONS"

Bellocchio also shares Sciascia's thesis (2023: 64, 82) that Moro was condemned directly by the Red Brigades and indirectly by the State itself, that is, by "two halves of the same Stalinism": the violent and cruel one of the terrorist group "which kills the SIM's servants without trying them and tries their leaders"; and the "covert and subtle Stalinism" of the State which places abstract principles above the lives of its citizens. Both the State and the Red Brigades believed, to put it in the terms of the Spanish philosopher José Luis Villacañas, in the "absolute object" of the strong State, regardless of whether it was a liberal or communist State.

Sciascia not only compares the Red Brigades with the Cosa Nostra and highlights the need to understand the armed group in the Italian context, but also, as Bellocchio constantly does, wonders if the terrorists are mad. It is true that Sciascia (2023: 129) initially doubts the thesis of madness ("when madness follows a method, one should not trust it"). The function of the Red Brigades was to prevent the "historic compromise," that is, the right-wing government relying on the support of socialists and communists, but their armed actions achieved the opposite effect. The same radical left, represented by the newspaper *Lotta Continua*, warned the brigadists—through a public appeal of intellectuals left of the PCI published on April 19, 1978—of the mistake they would make if they did not release Moro. In the end, they executed him, which marked the beginning of their decline. For this reason, Sciascia (2023: 132) ends up wondering whether the destiny of the terrorist group will not be madness, "an aestheticism in which dying for the revolution has become dying with the revolution." An aestheticism or romanticism that the series *Esterno notte* identifies with the character of Valerio Morucci.

In Bellocchio's two works, the brigadists suffer, if not madness, something very similar, which we could describe with the term "second reality." This is a concept that Voegelin (2023: 259-79) uses to explain those political ideologies that distance themselves from the truth of facts and that, in certain critical situations, can become very persuasive. The Austrian philosopher mainly takes this concept from Heimito von Doderer (2009: 1266-7), from his novel *Die Dämonen. Nach der Chronik des Sektionsrates Geyrenhoff* where one of his characters, the young René, explains that "the dominant feature of our time" is "a second reality, which rises alongside the first, that of facts, resting on ideology." In his opinion, "it is a very modern situation, the clash of a first and a second reality, for which there is neither a bridge nor a common language, although concrete words may be so".

The character of *Buongiorno, notte* who identifies with Bellocchio, Enzo Passoscuro, explicitly says that the terrorists "are crazy, stupid fools." They are even worse than the

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Christian Democratic politicians because "they want to imitate them." The director has highlighted in his film and series the mirror relationship that exists between the Red Brigades and the State (O'Leary 2007: 98): not only do the former imitate the latter by establishing the people's prison, the trial, and the death sentence, but they also share the thesis that "a priori abstraction" — the general principle — is more important than the life of the individual citizen. In a way, the brigadist agrees with what another character in the mentioned novel by Doderer (2009: 621-5) says: "what makes someone a revolutionary is generalization," since the subject who embraces revolutionary ideology moves away from "evidence, immediacy, concreteness, the most urgent certainties, the natural relationship with friends and enemies."

In *Sogni infranti*, the former brigadist Massimo Gidoni maintains that they were not mad, but believed in an ideology that made them "walk a meter above the ground" (Jimeno 2022: 345), disconnected from material reality. This ideology gave them the desire for an absolute object. The refusal of the world to realize their desire triggered the death drive, the destruction of that very world. In sum, the brigadists suffered from a pseudo-religious dogmatism that prevented them from recognizing any humanitarian limit. They had a theological, apocalyptic conception of political conflict. That is why they were convinced they were waging an absolute war that had to end with the total destruction of the adversary. Carl Schmitt warned against this revolutionary thinking in his writings, but in order to legitimize the political theology of the States, which, although of a different sign, was another absolutism that, like the Italian government, put the good of the State above that of its citizens (Villacañas 2008: 236-41). In *Buongiorno, notte*, the most dogmatic character and furthest from the Freudian reality principle, Mariano—who is nothing but the mask of Mario Moretti—confesses to Chiara that the absolute object of the revolution justifies everything, "even killing your own mother."

Both the film and the series contrast two types of brigadists. The first type is adopted by the female terrorists, Chiara and Adriana, who free themselves from the "second reality" as soon as they recognize the error of executing Moro. Certainly, this is something that did not happen during the kidnapping, but Bellocchio intends with this invention to make present the repentance that would come later (O'Leary 2007: 96).

The series develops better than the film the change of opinion of the brigadist. There are three decisive moments. The first takes place in the bar sequence, where Adriana watches moved on TV the burial of the five bodyguards. The second moment is the conversation with her lover, the terrorist Morucci, which leads her to reconsider whether it was worth giving up family life with her daughter, since the Red Brigades are immersed in a spiral of madness that could lead the group to self-immolation. Adriana reproaches her lover for daring to kill five fathers without truly believing in the triumph of the revolution. It is obvious that Adriana assumes only such a triumph justifies the crimes. Badiou (2016: 84-6) has precisely argued about the erroneous historical relationship that the left, to which the Red Brigades also belong, established between revolution and destruction. The French philosopher has recognized in recent years that the argument used by the red terrorism is false: "since history must give birth to an emancipated world, it is possible without any qualms to accept and even organize maximum destruction." Badiou thinks, on the contrary, that all this must be corrected with a new conception of revolution "that does not pretend History to be its servant." He also considers false the thesis that inspires the terrorist action of the Red Brigades: "negation entails affirmation" and destruction "gives birth to construction." Finally, decisive in Adriana's change of opinion is the sequence of the dialogue with a non-governmental intermediary, who makes it clear that Moro's death will have the opposite effect to that desired by the brigadists. This character, invented by Bellocchio, defends the opinion that Moro is more frightening alive than dead, and that the true revolutionary act consists in freeing him.

In contrast to the evolution of the characters Chiara and Adriana, the main men in the group remain trapped in the second reality. The Moretti of the series and the Mariano of the film are the best expressions of the Red Brigades' uncompromising Stalinism, since they believe, as we have indicated, that the revolution justifies everything. In another sequence from the last episode of the series, the terrorists debate outdoors, in a square in Rome, whether they should carry out the death sentence. Mario Moretti is inflexible and points out that the idea of freeing him is one belonging to an intellectual, a poet, which would never occur to the worker exploited on a factory assembly line. Moretti imagines an idealized proletariat that does not ask such questions: it knows it is at war and has no mercy.

Valerio Morucci, on the other hand, embodies a subjectivity different from that of Moretti. The series presents him as a kind of romantic Che Guevara, who, although willing to sacrifice his life for the proletarian cause, no longer believes that the guerrilla group can win the war to realize the communist ideal. Instead, it is enough to provoke as much

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disorder as possible and kill as many fascists as possible. He resembles the protagonists of *The Wild Bunch* (1969), the Sam Peckinpah film that, in one of the series' episodes, Morucci watches at the cinema, although a police raid prevents him from seeing the ending. Morucci's position reveals a decadent romanticism incompatible with true revolutionary subjectivity (Uzal and Bellocchio 2023: 33).

Bellocchio is not original when he presents the Moro case as an expression of the Freudian theme—Oedipal-totemic—of the "death of the father." His generation used to see terrorism as a movement that promoted liberation from the "paternal authority" of the bourgeois State (Uva 2007: 27). The psychoanalytic interpretation of the death of the father is, moreover, very present in a filmmaker like Bellocchio, who has given great importance to psychoanalysis and has even collaborated with the father of collective analisis (*analisi collettiva*), Massimo Fagioli, in some of his scripts.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Bellocchio gives great importance to the family. The filmmaker, who dedicates the film about Moro to the memory of his father and who, since his first work, *I pugni in tasca* (1965), has continuously addressed the most pathological aspects of the family and paternal authority, seems to agree with Sciascia (2023: 53-4) when he points out that in Italy everything is explained by the family. Moro appears in the film and series as the quintessential paternal figure. His sacrifice is even equated with the sacrifice of Christ, the Father of the Christians. The same terrorist in *Buongiorno, notte*, Chiara, finds herself torn between identifying Moro with her deceased father and the need that young terrorists have to kill the father and take his place in a utopian socialist state.

One of the most recurrent themes in Bellocchio's cinematography has been the criticism of the power of parents, but also of the children who want to impose themselves as parents (Pellanda and Rimini 2020: 177). Despite the younger Bellocchio's disagreement with Pasolini, the mature director of *Esterno notte* is not far from Pasolini's interpretation, who saw in the uprisings of '68 a family conflict within the bourgeoisie. Pasolini (2018: 193, 208) was convinced that the youth insurrection was not just another episode of class struggle but a "civil war" between rebellious children and their bourgeois parents, or, to be more precise, between the "young and good bourgeoisie" and the "old and evil bourgeoisie," which could only end with yet another reform of capitalist society.

Buongiorno, notte, an "interior" film, revolves around the house converted into the "people's prison." From the beginning, the apartment appears to be a family home and the terrorist group an inverted representation of the Holy Family. Bellocchio does not hesitate to be redundant when he shows on Chiara's nightstand Marx and Engels' *The Holy Family* (Uva 2007: 75). Beyond the fact that the Red Brigades are a kind of sectarian and "holy family," the Marxist literary classic invites us to consider that the brigadists identify with those idealists, Bruno Bauer and the Young Hegelians, who were criticized in the book for having distanced themselves from reality, for living in a "second reality." *Esterno notte* presents the group again as a political family that replaces the biological one. Adriana, the member of the group who receives the greatest importance in the series, is a mother who renounces her motherhood, the raising of her daughter, for the revolution, and who has even had an abortion because armed struggle is incompatible with family life. It is a renunciation that she lives with displeasure, which Bellocchio shows especially in the sequences where Adriana cannot pick up her daughter from school. The girl thus becomes another victim of the armed struggle.

3. ART OF TREASON, INTRICATE REALISM, AND AESTHETICS OF CRUELTY

The women from the film and series, Chiara and Adriana, ultimately betray the absolute cause of the terrorist group, just as Tommaso Buscetta does in that other magnificent historical film by Bellocchio, *Il traditore*. The Italian director has commented in an interview that "some betrayals are just" when they represent an "identity affirmation" against collective devices that, like the sectarian family of the Red Brigades and the family of Cosa Nostra, restrict freedom (Pellanda and Rimini 2020: 175-6). Bellocchio himself acknowledges that, in his case, he betrayed the Marxist-Leninist ideology in his youth, so present in the early part of his filmography, and later the collective psychoanalysis of Massimo Fagioli. In all the mentioned cases, one betrays in order to remain autonomous, free. According to the concept provided by Artaud (2004: 566), we could say that betrayal is an act of "cruelty," of acquiring the painful awareness that one is not free when subject to the sovereignty of an absolute object. The aesthetics of betrayal would be another name for the aesthetics of cruelty, which seeks to end all political and aesthetic theology, that is, all sovereign principle.

Bellocchio's art could be framed within a cruel aesthetics of betrayal that breaks with established rules and cinematic conventions. There are three aspects of this style or aesthet-

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ics that are highly relevant in *Esterno notte*, and which appear, albeit with less purity, in other works by the filmmaker: cultivation of an intricate, profound realism that draws both on documentary material and more freely imaginative productions; use of metanarrative or metalinguistic elements to make the viewer distance themselves from the story being told and develop a critical judgment; and the use of a grotesque style in sequences where he critiques the corrupt and abject political power of his time.

3.1. Deep and intricate realism

With the series *Esterno notte*, Bellocchio provides a valuable example of intricate, deep, and complex realism because he constantly blurs the boundaries between different types of realities and images. He not only seamlessly mixes historical facts with imagined or dreamed ones, but also integrates fictional images created by the filmmaker with documentary footage of the actual historical figures. Intricate realism also allows the public history to blend with private history, as the collective community of the State becomes incomprehensible if the private and family life of the historical characters is not shown (Lasagna 2024). Moreover, only in this way can we understand the tragedy that arises from placing the public and abstract principles of the State above the singular and incomparable life of a human being.

The Italian director dives into the realm of imagination and dreams because he seeks alternative scenarios that help explain historical reality and illuminate what appearances conceal. Galli (2005: 11, Uva 2007: 77) argues that "if revolution is imagination in power, a revolutionary director must stage alternative scripts (scenarios) to historical reality." This explains why the film and series ultimately show the scandalous image of Moro's liberation and survival. Bellocchio himself acknowledges that he aims to achieve the greatest historical fidelity with this peculiar "aesthetics of betrayal," which consists of representing the greatest historical falsehood: Moro's liberation (Mancino 2014: 257, Uva 2007: 74, Aprà 2005: 220). This image constitutes "a kind of blasphemy" for those who have blind faith or trust in a political ideology or even historical science itself. Bellocchio comments that he places consecutively the imaginary sequence of the liberation and the one showing the historical truth of the execution (Mancino 2014: 257-9), one after the other, with the purpose that the viewer becomes aware that Moro's death was not inevitable, and that he was assassinated because the two mentioned Stalinisms wanted it that way.

Bellocchio's style, the constant mixing of real and dreamed or imagined images, serves to express the existential crisis of his characters, the painful contradictions they endure. The discomfort of the historical characters in the series (terrorists, politicians, the Pope, Moro's family) translates into the production of images that do not correspond to historical facts but are real because they help clarify the motivations and actions of the protagonists of the tragedy. The terrorist from *Buongiorno, notte*, Chiara, lucidly acknowledges in a conversation with the brigadist Ernesto that the boundary between reality and dream disappears for individuals undergoing extreme tension. If she often looks at the kidnapped man, it is to make sure "that he is there, that it is not all a dream." Ernesto asks Chiara if she would like everything to be a dream, and she replies that the worst thing is the uncertainty: "I don't know. One thing or the other."

The 2003 film, before reaching the tragic end, shows Chiara's daydreams in which she imagines or dreams that Aldo Moro furtively walks through the apartment and curiously looks at the books on the shelves (Jimeno 2022: 330-1). In the final sequences, what Chiara's fantasy has created is represented. The terrorist imagines—and the filmmaker shows it without those images having a different status than the images corresponding to historical facts—that she pours a drug into the brigadists' food so that Moro can escape. After this sequence, the historical outcome is shown along with documentary footage of the funeral mass, presided over by the Pope, and with Moro's absent corpse due to the explicit wish of the family, who no longer wanted any connection with power. Nevertheless, the film ends with a sequence that exists only in the imagination of the character and the filmmaker: Moro walking freely through the streets of Rome. O'Leary (2007: 86) believes that the imagined ending suggests, as we have already pointed out, the "continued spectral presence of Moro over the consciousness of the Italians," the explicit manifestation of national guilt (Amabile 2023: 25).

The daydreams or imagined scenes are more varied in the series *Esterno notte*, since the points of view multiply. Daydreams or fantasy products are shown that are either diegetically elaborated by different historical characters or directly invented by the director, such as the sequence that opens the series and repeats in the last episode. Thus, Cossiga, tormented by the kidnapping of the president of his party, imagines Moro appearing to him in the second episode. The Pope, in the third episode, feels exhausted and sick and refuses to participate in the Good Friday Stations of the Cross, but at the same time imagines Moro carrying the cross

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while being watched by the political class that sentenced him to death. Nora, Moro's wife, who shortly before the kidnapping confessed her marital crisis to a priest, dreams in episode 5 that Aldo returns to the bedroom and shares the marital bed again. But the terrorist's dream in episode 4 has special intensity. In a sequence with muted colors, almost appearing black and white, Adriana Faranda watches from the riverbank as the waters carry away the bodies of Moro and his escorts. Freudian psychoanalysis helps us interpret the image of a corpse dragged by the river, which in classical mythology was the place where the dead traveled to the Underworld. These striking shots, arising from the unconscious of the brigadist, express the guilt felt by the individual who tries to destroy the law and attack paternal authority.

The most important imagined scene is the one at the beginning, which we see again in the final episode. Before showing the historical truth, Bellocchio imagines a false happy ending: Moro is found alive in the trunk of the car left on Via Caetani, between the headquarters of the DC and the PCI. Then, the director shows Andreotti, Zaccagnini, and Cossiga walking through the hospital corridors where the freed president has been taken. Once in the room, Moro communicates to them what his last letters suggest: his complete break with the party. After this sequence, we return to reality and the shots showing Moro's execution take place, followed by the terrorist's call to the family to communicate the death, and the discovery of the deceased president in the trunk of a car.

The final shots of *Esterno notte* are filled with images intended to be documentary: the State funeral (a mix of documentary and fiction images), Pertini's speech in Parliament, the death of Paul VI, the arrest of Adriana Faranda, the election of Cossiga as President of the Republic, and images of Andreotti, the most corrupt of all politicians. These documentary or archival images complement the fictional images and make the body of the series an intricate one.

Unlike what happens with the imagined or dreamed scenes, which are more complex in the series, the variety of archival footage shown is greater in *Buongiorno, notte*, where we have different types of archives. On one hand, images extracted from historical documentary archives are shown, both Soviet, belonging to the Stalinist period, and from 1970s Italy, particularly from the days of the kidnapping. On the other hand, film footage is edited into the movie from the cinematic archive itself, with the purpose of illuminating the present of historical fiction with the past of cinema. Corresponding to Chiara's second dream, we see images related to the hopes raised by the Soviet revolution that belong to Dziga Vertov's film *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) (Jimeno 2022: 314). Later, Bellocchio compares Moro's letters with the book *Letters of Condemned to Death from the European resistance*, and to make this explicit, he inserts images from Roberto Rossellini's Paisà (1946), which show Nazis murdering and throwing prisoners into the sea from a ship (Jimeno 2022: 328-9). *Esterno notte* only shows from the cinematic archive a part of the ending of *The Wild Bunch*, the film with which the most romantic and decadent terrorism is identified.

3.2. Metalinguistic elements of a modern work

Metalinguistic or metanarrative elements are often indicators of artistic modernity because they make the form of the work of art visible. They primarily produce an effect of distancing and estrangement that allows the viewer to become aware of the medium of artistic expression and, at the same time, help them adopt a reflective and critical position. In the two audiovisual works dedicated to the Moro case, Bellocchio shows some of the means of representation with which he intends to approach historical truth (O'Leary 2007: 100), that is, he makes the complex, intricate body of the audiovisual work perceptible to the viewer. In the film and the series, the mentioned inclusion of archival footage interrupts the homogeneous flow of the audiovisual work and demonstrates that memory is a mixture of real and imagined recollections.

Enzo Passoscuro's screenplay also performs a metanarrative function in the 2003 film. The screenwriter character is a veiled, dark personification of Bellocchio himself, to the extent that some ill-intentioned critics have commented that this intradiegetic emissary of the author is nothing more than Bellocchio's own narcissistic self-projection (O'Leary 2007: 101). The fact is that the memoirs inspiring the film, those of the terrorist Braghetti, mention that among Moro's belongings there was a film script. It is inevitable to think that the film's sequences are already contained in Enzo Passoscuro's script (Mancino 2014: 181), whose title, *Buongiorno, notte* (taken from a verse by Emily Dickinson, which says "Good morning – midnight"), is identical to that of the movie we are watching.

The metanarrative device of the screenplay seems to respond to the reflection with which Sciascia (2023: 25) begins his book on Moro: the case appears to be taken from a novel because it demonstrates a perfection and logical coherence that is more characteristic of the literary realm than of reality. Bellocchio takes Sciascia's reflection seriously when he points

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out in the film that Moro's tragedy was imagined beforehand by the screenwriter Enzo Passoscuro. Thus, we enter the field of hyperreality, a world in which literary signs precede historical reality. The very language employed by the powers responsible for the tragedy, which says nothing because it has distanced itself from otherness or from the real reference that exists outside the signs, belongs to the order of the simulacrum (Baudrillard 1978). Political power becomes a simulacrum when it no longer represents a real citizenry, a community that exists beforehand, and when, as happens with right- and left-wing populism (Villacañas 2015), its main function is not to give expression to the will of the people but to construct that very Will.

The character's screenplay contains only the imaginary part of Bellocchio's film, that is, Chiara's dreams, and not the part that recounts the historical facts. That is why Chiara tells Enzo that his "script is false from beginning to end, absurd, implausible. Imagination has never saved anyone. Reality is very different." Enzo—and it must not be forgotten that he speaks on behalf of the director—replies that "imagination is real. It is real to imagine [Bellocchio has only anticipated in time the terrorist's remorse] that among the kidnappers there is a woman who wants to save the prisoner but does not want to betray her comrades," and that "she feels horror at the murder because she no longer believes in it. She is even furious with herself for having been so blind, so stupid." Bellocchio's mentioned intricate realism implies affirming that "imagination is real," that without it historical facts remain silent, just like the documentary images themselves, which are the result of the encounter between reality and the technical apparatus. Imagination, or the act of fantasizing with alternative scenarios, leads us to relate, to combine some images with others, in order to judge historical events.

The metanarrative function, which in *Buongiorno, notte* is performed by Passoscuro's screenplay, is exercised in *Esterno notte* by the filming—at the end of episode 5 and the beginning of episode 6—of a movie that narrates Moro's kidnapping and even, before it happens, his execution. The filming images become a mirror that reveals the fictional dimension of the series we are watching. All of this is compatible with an intricate realism that, on one hand, uses images from the external world and images from the subject's inner world. On the other hand, it invites the viewer to be aware of the difference between real images and the simulacrum of the filming; in other words, it invites them to be able to separate images with an external referent from those that say nothing because they become the zero degree of otherness, as they no longer express something prior and external to the sign. The story of the nun who confuses the filming with reality, and who awakens unfounded hopes in Moro's family, is nothing more than a mise en abîme of the same situation of the viewer who trusts in linguistic and visual simulacra. The "distrust of images" is one of the main lessons we can draw from Bellocchio's series.

3.3. The use of the grotesque style to represent the abjection of power

The series *Esterno notte* demonstrates that the grotesque is one of the most suitable styles to represent a corrupt, putrid, abject power. In particular, the series uses this style to address both the power of the DC and the pathetic and outdated power of the Vatican, everything that Pasolini included under the name *Palazzo.* It is not surprising, therefore, that due to this use of the grotesque style, Bellocchio seems a worthy heir to the author of *Salò* (1975) and *Petrolio.*

The series' director himself associates the use of "sarcasm" and "ridicule," characteristic of the grotesque style, with an anarchist critique of power (Uzal and Bellocchio 2022: 32) that seems to coincide with that of Valle-Inclán, the Spanish writer who called his grotesque tragedies "esperpentos." Cruel anarchism is not characterized by showing violent images or torn bodies, but by showing caricatured and sarcastic images of power.

Wolfgang Kayser (2010: 309) relates the grotesque to mental alienation, particularly to the intense experience of being moved by strange forces. When this happens, we resemble puppets or marionettes moved by strings, by powers we cannot control or understand, and the world becomes *unheimliche* —unsettling, eerie, sinister. For this reason, the grotesque produces disorientation and strangeness. The world also becomes absurd when we lack values to overcome crisis situations, when the institutions born to save us from existential—natural or cultural—risk become our main enemies. This inversion is demonic and fatal. It is none other than this inversion that Bellocchio expresses in his series, that of an Italy where political powers are in the hands of a corrupt elite. The world ceases to be grotesque, ceases to be perceived as absurd and meaningless, when institutions, starting with traditional powers, once again provide sufficient tools, techniques, and symbols to fight the evils that threaten human beings. The definition Kayser provides (2010: 315) of the grotesque as "the attempt to conjure and exorcise the demonic forces of our world" can be perfectly applied to Bellocchio's series.

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There is a certain "aesthetic violence" and cruelty in Bellocchio's grotesque style. We speak of "cruelty" in the sense given by Artaud, that is, in the sense already mentioned that the characters completely lack freedom. Cruel is the distanced, unconsoled contemplation of the state of degradation in which the multitude of a country lives. The grotesque style, like the metanarrative elements of the series, has a distancing effect. It implies, as Valle-Inclán said about *esperpento*, a superior (zenithal) gaze over characters who seem reduced to masks, to marionettes, without any freedom (Dougherty 1983: 176-177). The grotesque arises from the contrast between the suffering of the characters and the distanced, impassive vision of the viewer. *Esterno notte* attains in some episodes, especially the second and the third, the condition of a "grotesque tragedy." It is true that some characters, such as the trio of DC politicians Andreotti, Cossiga, and Zaccagnini, are clearly grotesque, while others, like Aldo Moro and Adriana Faranda, are more tragic, but equally overcome by disturbing and dark circumstances.

As a conclusion, we can say that the mixture of the tragic and the grotesque to express the political and cultural crisis has been cultivated by the most insightful and committed art. This is one of the artistic forms that has best represented the cultural crisis in a time of profound corruption of institutions, such as Italy in the 1970s. A good example of a work contemporary to the events that makes use of grotesque tragedy is *Todo modo* (1976), the adaptation that Elio Petri made of Sciascia's famous novel dedicated to the DC.

The tragedy of Moro, the betrayal by his party and the Vatican, was a civil trauma that influenced the downfall of the regime itself, which was sustained by the hegemony of the DC. However, the regime change was not the result of the revolution longed for by the left, but rather a "passive revolution" that, as happened in Spain (Villacañas 2022), gave way to neoliberal and populist policies. Bellocchio's series helps us understand the profound truth of the Italian passive revolution. To achieve this, the filmmaker complements the work on historical memory with the creative work that involves a deep use of fantasy and imagination. In sum, *Esterno notte* stands out among other historical series for its intelligent use of the most intricate and grotesque realism, which is not incompatible with the compassion that, like any true artist of memory, it shows toward its characters.

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Buongiorno, notte (2003)
Diavolo in corpo (1986)
I pugni in tasca (1965)
Il caso Moro (1986)
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Paisà (1946)
Piazza delle Cinque Lune (2003)
Rashomon (1950)
Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma (1975)
Sbatti il mostro in prima pagina (1972)
Sogni infranti. Ragionamenti e deliri (1995)
The Barefoot Contessa (1954)
The Wild Bunch
Three Songs of Lenin (1934)
Todo modo (1976)

TV shows

Esterno notte (2022)

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