

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Lice and the Whale: Filmmakers, Militant Cinema and the Italian Communist Party.**

On 8 September 1967, a small Unitelefilm crew was in Venice Lido hoping to catch some good shots of the final night of the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Film Festival. In all likelihood, the footage they filmed that night, less than 3 minutes, was subsequently included in one of the *attualità* that Unitelefilm used to sell in those years to Eastern European countries (see Chapter 4). The mute and unedited footage is stored in the AAMOD Archive in Rome. It shows Italian and foreign celebrities, including Alberto Sordi, Luis Bunuel and Jean Sorel, posing for the usual photocall. Fans line the streets outside the Festival's venue, in front of very large posters advertising Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex* and Damiano Damiani's *The Day of the Owl*. Luis Bunuel's *Belle de Jour* won the Golden Lion that night. Two films by politically engaged filmmakers were awarded the Special Jury Prize: *La Chinoise*, by Jean-Luc Godard, and *China is near*, by Marco Bellocchio. The former was an indictment of the capitalist system, and the latter a scathing satire of the bourgeois society. Both films included references to Maoism and China's Cultural Revolution. The political ferment that characterized that historical period would soon come out of the screen to invade the Festival's parterre. The 29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Film Festival, in 1968, saw a boycott of the festival by ANAC (Italian filmmakers association), demonstrations by students and intellectuals demanding the direction of the Festival to be entrusted to filmmakers, and even police intervention.

This was not the only time that demonstrators disrupted a cinema festival that year: fringes of Left-wing students contested Pesaro Film Festival too, as shown below. Why would left-wing demonstrators target film festivals? Because cinema was gaining new status among left-wingers: a tool to investigate the political and social mechanisms of capitalist society, and

at the same time an instrument that could effectively contribute to its destruction. Unitelefilm crew largely shared such an enthusiasm for the supposed revolutionary power of cinema, as can be seen by Unitelefilm's involvement in the *Cinema Militante* (militant cinema) movement.

*Cinema militante* was global rather than exclusively Italian, and had its roots in avant-garde filmmaking movements such as the New American Cinema Group; from the beginning of the 1960s this group had been developing ideas about the liberation of cinema from the shackles of the film industry in order to develop the social and political relevance of the medium (Lewis 1998: 283–84).

The period 1967–1970 saw a proliferation of manifestos by radical groups calling for the political renewal of Western society through the use of cinema. The French director Jean-Luc Godard was especially influential, making several politically engaged and experimental films with the Dziga Vertov Group, the Marxist film collective that he had founded (Hayward 2005: 238).

This chapter offers an analysis of some of the films that were produced within the Italian *cinema militante* movement, between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, with a particular focus on those produced by Unitelefilm. It argues that the development of militant cinema in Italy should be read in the context of the PCI's struggle to maintain political hegemony the working class, which resulted in clashes with student groups and radical left-wing intellectuals. The latter were organized in the in the Collettivi del Cinema militante (Militant cinema groups), and in the Centri Universitari Cinematografici (CUC: University Film Centres) that were set up in some universities in northern Italy. In May 1967, a group of students of the University of Turin founded the film magazine *Ombre Rosse*, which soon became the point of reference for the Cinema militante movement (Della Casa 2002: 358–59). The members of these groups opposed the politics of traditional left-wing parties, and

especially the politics of the PCI. Their inspiration came instead from the *nuova sinistra* (See Chapter 4). The connections between the *nuova sinistra* and the groups involved in the cinema militante was strengthened by the involvement of figures such as Goffredo Fofi, who was both a founder of *Ombre Rosse* and a member of the editorial board of the *Quaderni Piacentini*.

The factory constituted the battlefield in this context. The filmmakers and film critics of the *cinema militante* believed that cinema had the task of revealing the intrinsically political nature of the conflicts arising within the factories, and the duty to favor their revolutionary outcome. If it failed to reveal the ultimately political nature of trade unionism and refrained from suggesting revolutionary solutions for industrial actions, cinema betrayed its mission. It thus became merely decorative or, worse still, it ended up advocating political conservatism. This is why the filmmakers and film critics ferociously lambasted the militant films the PCI produced in those years, and particularly Ugo Gregoretti's *Apollon, una fabbrica occupata* (Apollon: an occupied factory, 1969), as I will show further ahead. As far as the PCI is concerned, its involvement in the *cinema militante* movement was consistent with PCI policy, whereby there should be an attempt to engage with, and ideally dominate, any political or cultural initiative that emerged on the left of the political spectrum.

The cinematic war between the PCI and the *nuova sinistra* was asymmetrical. The PCI could rely on its own film production company, and was able to invest considerable sums of money in film productions. The students had nothing of that sort. The publication in *Rinascita* of a call to arms by Cesare Zavattini, on 25 August 1967, presented the PCI with a suitable opportunity to show its might. Zavattini appealed for a 'guerilla war' to be waged by means of films produced at the amateur level. This was an elaboration of the previous idea inspiring the *Cinegiornale della pace* (Peace newsreel, 1963, see Chapter 3), and Zavattini named this new project *Cinegiornali liberi* (Free newsreels).

Given the newly charged political climate, there was an enthusiastic response by many left-wing filmmakers and intellectuals, including the Unitelefilm crew, to Zavattini's call. The head of UTF, Mario Benocci even joined the 'Direttivo Nazionale dei Cinegiornali Liberi'; Zavattini had established this national committee in order to coordinate the initiatives, across various cities (Masoni and Vecchi 2000: 131). Therefore, even though the *Cinema militante* movement was pervaded by the political views of the far Left, the PCI managed to play a relevant part in this brief phase of political mobilization with its very high expectations of the revolutionary power of cinema. Between 1968 and 1970, at least five *cinegiornali liberi* were produced with essential artistic and technical support from Unitelefilm, including the above-mentioned *Apollon*. These were all shot in 16mm black and white film.

The *Cinegiornali liberi* gave the UTF crew a chance to experiment more freely, from a thematic and stylistic point of view, than they could when producing propaganda films for the Italian Communist Party. This is especially evident in *Sicilia: terremoto anno uno*, a 26-minute documentary directed in 1970 by Beppe Scavuzzo and dealing with the disastrous Belice earthquake that hit western Sicily in January 1968. There is no voice-over, no music, and only ambient sound. Nonetheless, with its choice of dramatic images of destruction the film manages to communicate its political message perfectly well: the government has been manifestly disorganized in its rescue of the population of Belice. No words are needed to communicate the sense of hopeless abandonment felt by the local population. The protest by the area's people is entrusted to the graffiti on the walls of ruined houses, to brief interviews given in a pure and barely understandable Sicilian dialect, and to the striking final scene in which an old man vents his anger and frustration by gesticulating at the camera, his voice drowned out by the Beatles song 'Because' (1969). Although from a political point of view this film was perfectly in line with the PCI position, it would not have been accepted as a propaganda film by the Press and Propaganda Section because its message was complex and

therefore susceptible to differing interpretations. Much stricter control was normally exerted by the PCI over UTF propaganda films, and particularly over the text of the voice-over commentary.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the PCI, the *cinema militante* groups lacked production facilities, and their films were self-financed. Consequently, they could not always afford to shoot in 16mm and often had to resort to the amateur 8mm. The *collettivo* that was established in Turin in October 1968 was the most productive of all. It managed to shoot and edit two films: *Lotte alla Rhodiatoce* (Struggle at the Rhodiatoce, 1969, 20 minutes, 16mm) and *La fabbrica aperta* (The factory revealed, 1970, 25 minutes, 8mm). *Lotte alla Rhodiatoce* – whose political content I will discuss below – is particularly interesting, because it gave cinematic shape to a theory that was circulating within militant cinema; it postulated that militant cinema, to be truly considered such, had to express the workers' point of view. The only way to achieve this was to hand the camera over to the workers, and let them film the struggle as it unfolded. This would keep the film free from the nefarious influence of middle-class professional filmmakers. Although the idea was intriguing, the cinematic results were disappointing. As its authors frankly admitted in an article published in *Ombre Rosse*, *Lotte alla Rhodiatoce* was technically poor.<sup>2</sup> The film's message is entrusted solely to the voice-over commentary, spoken by a nonprofessional voice actor, presumably a worker of the Rhodiatoce. The commentary is not directly connected to the situations or people shown on the screen, which gives the viewer a sense of disorientation. In sum, only the most die-hard militant (or the researcher who is passionate about militant cinema) could watch all the way to the end of the film without feeling bored. This was the only time that such an experiment was attempted. As a 'comrade' of the Rhodiatoce put it: '[C]inema must be done by those who know how to do it'.<sup>3</sup>

Some groups therefore took a more realistic approach to militant cinema, and accepted help from professional filmmakers. Aldo Agosti, for example, directed the four bulletins of a *Cinegiornale studentesco* (Student newsreels), produced by the Roman student movement in 1968.<sup>4</sup> Skilfully edited by Agosti mixing footage of the demonstrations and the original audio captured in the streets and in the numerous meetings organized by the movement, the *cinegiornali* are a precious documentation of the *Contestazione*. Some words recur more often than others, in the improvised speeches that the young protesters – usually men, and only rarely women – yelled through the megaphones: *masse, lotta, violenza* and *operai* (masses, struggle, violence and factory workers). Indeed, the students hoped to mobilize the masses, beginning with factory workers, and to involve them in a struggle that was necessarily going to be characterized by violent confrontations with the police.

Other independent groups that also engaged with militant cinema in that period include the Centro Cinematografico di Documentazione Proletaria (Center for Proletarian Cinematic Documentation) of Genoa, set up by a few students politically linked to the PSIUP, and the Cinema Teatro Azione (Cinema and Theatre Action), established in the town of Suzzara (in the Lombardy region). They generally produced a small number of films, often shot in 8mm, of which only a limited number of copies were distributed. Consequently, their films did not circulate much at the time, and are now very difficult to find. However, these groups issued a considerable number of documents and articles, in which they analyzed their experience and explained their approach to militant cinema.<sup>5</sup> They argued, for example, that cinema had to be used as a tool for counter-information. This reveals the frustration of the young protesters, regarding the way they were depicted by the mainstream press and by government-controlled public broadcasting: as either thugs or dreamers. They demanded, instead, to be taken seriously, and wanted the political motivations of their protests to be known.

Alongside the student movement and informal groups at grassroots level, small political parties of the Left were also attracted to the potential of cinema, and they could count on the collaboration of internationally famous filmmakers such as Marco Bellocchio and Pier Paolo Pasolini. In order to understand how such collaborations came into being, we need to investigate the complex dynamics developing between the student movement and intellectuals in 1968. The involvement of illustrious left-wing filmmakers in the *cinema militante* was provoked by the political and existential crisis many of them were experiencing at the time. The student movement triggered this crisis when it accused professional filmmakers of being nothing more than servants of the capitalist cinema industry.

It all started during the Pesaro Film Festival, in June 1968. Born in the wake of the *centrosinistra* government, the Pesaro film festival was unanimously recognized as a left-wing happening. It was a non-competitive festival – proof of its seriousness and intellectual standing, in the eyes of left-wing film critics – and often showcased documentaries produced in Third World countries. Yet, the festival's fourth edition saw approximately two hundred students of the far Left stage a vociferous protest, the festival's venue being temporarily occupied, and the police intervening in an energetic way.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the festival, the student movement issued a document in which it highlighted the impossibility for cinema to be revolutionary, or even just progressive, within the existing cinema industry.<sup>7</sup> It also theorized the necessity for filmmakers to embrace a sort of new Zhdanovism (see chapter 1): a cinema made by middle-class professionals and intellectuals, who were to renounce – willingly and enthusiastically – their artistic freedom and subjectivity, and to place themselves at the exclusive service of the workers.

It may be difficult to believe today, but the students' criticism hit left-wing Italian filmmakers quite hard. They felt they had to do something to shake off the accusation of complicity with the capitalist system, which the students had levelled against them. This can

be seen in the first *Cinegiornale libero di Roma*, where Cesare Zavattini discusses the *Cinegiornali liberi* project along with a number of professional film directors. The group includes Silvano Agosti, Marco Bellocchio, Liliana Cavani, Giuseppe Ferrara and Gianni Toti. The film was shot in five takes, for a total running time of 30 minutes. Zavattini is appalled because the student movement had refused to participate in the *Cinegiornali* project. It should not have come as a surprise, though; in the concluding document they had issued in Pesaro, the students had specifically targeted Zavattini's idea of a cinematic guerrilla war, branding it as little more than a toy for intellectuals. Zavattini asks the following question: is cinema finished because of the medium's rejection by the student movement? This is just one of the many questions that remain unanswered in the film. At one point, Zavattini says that the ultimate objective of the *cinegiornali liberi* project is to overturn the author-viewer relationship; the viewer should be the film's co-author, or at the very least 'accessory' to the production of the film, but never just a spectator. Marco Bellocchio seems the more ideologically aware of the filmmakers that participate in the debate. He speaks of cinema as the 'organizer of the collective revolutionary conscience', and claims that for militant film to be truly revolutionary it should be realized in such a way that each film projection has the effect of a revolutionary act. In his opinion, there is one film that possesses such a quality: Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas' *La Hora de Los Hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968). Bellocchio's reference to this film is significant; Solana's film had made quite an impression on the public in Pesaro. A crude exposé of neocolonialism in Latin America, the film was probably the only thing that everyone agreed upon during that troubled edition of the festival.<sup>8</sup> Solanas and Getino would go on writing the manifesto of the Third Cinema movement, in 1969, proposing a 'cinema of subversion' to be brandished against neocolonial oppression (Solanas and Getino 1970). According to Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi Wilson, Third Cinema proves the long-lasting and international influence of neorealism on

international cinema, since Third Cinema postulated a rediscovery / reappropriation of the documentary potential of cinema to capture truth in all its social and economic expressions (2007: 12).

As far as the left-wing Italian filmmakers were concerned, they staged their own small revolution during the 1968 Venice Film Festival (25 August – 7 September). The story is well known: the members of ANAC (National Association of Filmmakers), by then an association composed exclusively of left-wing authors (following a split within the association), decided to boycott the twenty-ninth edition of the Festival by withdrawing their films. They also tried to disrupt the projections in various ways. The then director of the Festival Luigi Chiarini wrote a book about what happened in Venice, published shortly after the events (Chiarini, 1969), where he vented his deep resentment against ANAC, in particular against Zavattini, Gregoretti and Pasolini. His anger and frustration is understandable: the protest cost him the Festival's direction. In his book, Chiarini defines the protesters as hypocritical, and their motivations as confused. He might be right. It would appear that the principal reason for which the ANAC members boycotted Venice 1968 was that French filmmakers and students had a few months before successfully disrupted the Cannes Film Festival, forcing the organizers to curtail it. Also, Italian filmmakers needed to prove themselves to the students who had ridiculed them in Pesaro. Not all the members of ANAC, however, were on the same page. Bernardo Bertolucci and Liliana Cavani eventually presented their films, while Pasolini took an ambiguous and contradictory stance. He first announced his disagreement with ANAC, before changing his mind shortly thereafter. He then retired his film – *Theorem* – from the Festival, though it was eventually screened by order of the producer. Pasolini asked journalists not to attend the press screening, but promptly justified those who had decided to stay. Finally, he tried to meet the local university students, but they soundly – and perhaps understandably – booed him (Della Casa 2002: 353).

It was not just the indecision he had shown in Venice, though, that angered the students; they had never forgiven Pasolini for the apparently anti-movement poem he had written after Valle Giulia.

It was perhaps in order to regain his status of left-wing film director that Pasolini later accepted to work with the left-wing group Lotta Continua, in the production of a *film militante*.<sup>9</sup> The film, entitled *12 dicembre* (December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1971, 100 minutes),<sup>10</sup> took two years to produce and saw the collaboration of Goffredo Fofi. It starts as an investigation into the death of Giuseppe Pinelli, a Milanese anarchist who died while being held in custody by the police under suspicion of involvement in the Piazza Fontana terrorist attack (see Chapter 5). In subsequent years, the never-clarified circumstances of Pinelli's death fuelled harsh polemics, especially by Lotta Continua (Foot 2009, 183 – 195). The first 15 minutes of the film thus represent a piece of investigative journalism, featuring interviews with Pinelli's comrades and wife. This part aimed at demonstrating that Pinelli did not commit suicide, and that his death must therefore be ascribed to the police officers of the political section within the Milanese police headquarters. Next, the film embarks on a journey through Italy, documenting social turmoil and strikes taking place around the peninsula, while also featuring interviews with former partisans. *12 dicembre* can be described as an anti-PCI film: the Communist Party is accused of having betrayed the Resistance by not promoting profound social and political changes at the end of the war, of having abandoned the southern masses, and of having suffocated the working class's revolutionary spirit.

Around the time Pasolini started his collaboration with Lotta Continua, Marco Bellocchio joined the Unione dei comunisti Italiani (UCI - Union of the Italian Communists), a small Maoist party that was, *ça va sans dire*, fiercely hostile to the PCI. Bellocchio worked on the production of two documentary films for the UCI: *Paola* (1969, 100 minutes), about an illegal occupation of council houses UCI orchestrated in the town of Paola (in the Calabria region);

and *Viva il 1° maggio rosso e proletario* (Long live the Red and Proletarian Labor day, 1969, 26 minutes), about the demonstration UCI organized in Milan to celebrate the 1969 edition of International Workers' Day. These films were made under strict political supervision of the party's propaganda officials.<sup>11</sup> Some of the claims included in the script of *Paola* would nowadays sound a bit outlandish: for example, the fact that the Italian State built highways in the South in order to spare the passing holiday-goers the distressing view of the poverty-stricken, southern villages. The film also accuses the left-wing party leaders – particularly the PCI's leaders – of being mainly responsible for the desolation of the South. Similarly, PCI leaders are vehemently criticized at the very beginning of *Viva il 1° maggio rosso e proletario*.

Another member of ANAC directed a militant film in that period: Ugo Gregoretti, a PCI sympathizer who had worked as a director for RAI and in mainstream cinema. He shot what is probably the most interesting and by far the most successful of the films produced by Unitelefilm as a result of its involvement in the *cinema militante* movement: *Apollon, una fabbrica occupata*, a 67-minute film shot in 16 mm. This chronicles the long struggle by workers at the large Apollon printing works in Rome to save their factory from closure, and culminates in its occupation, which lasted thirteen months from the summer of 1968 to the summer of 1969. Rome lacked large industrial plants; the occupation of the medium-size Apollon factory by its three hundred or so workers thus immediately became a focal point for the capital's left-wing students, intellectuals and aspiring revolutionaries. Many regarded 1968 as the dawn of revolution and were looking for their chance to experience the class struggle at first hand.

Among those to join the workers in their occupation of the factory were the members of a group of filmmakers, funded by Unitelefilm and led by Ugo Gregoretti. Rather than produce a documentary, they took the opportunity to make an experimental film that would perfectly

embody the spirit of *Cinema militante*: its style and structure were to be decided in agreement with the Apollon workers. The experiment resulted in a somewhat atypical but fascinating film, which might be described as a sort of docudrama. Its most striking feature was the fact that the workers played themselves, re-enacting the events they had lived through during the long struggle that preceded the actual occupation. Senior members of the PCI were cast in the roles of the factory owners. The shoot lasted eight days and used the factory as its location (Gregoretti 2000: 213). Despite its experimental character the film still has many features typical of UTF productions, including the voice-over commentary, read by Gian Maria Volontè: this is used to link the various scenes, and makes the authors' perspective explicit by providing a political commentary as the plot unfolds.

The Apollon workers may have just wanted to tell their story, hoping that the film would be a useful mechanism for fundraising; it was in fact subsequently used for this, and was remarkably successful.<sup>12</sup> However, the editing and the rather didactic tone of the voice-over commentary turned the film into a sort of guide for trade union organizers. The aim of *Apollon, una fabbrica occupata* seems to be the depiction of an exemplary industrial dispute that could serve as a model for class warfare. The film shows how the Apollon workers, former peasants who had not been properly unionized, slowly become politically aware during the first half of the 1960s thanks to the tireless activity of some among them: active members of the PCI like Morelli, or people from the 'socialist left' like Scucchia, 'an old anti-Fascists, one of Gramsci's comrades in prison'. The workers learn to see the injustices perpetrated by the factory boss, despite the veil of obfuscation introduced by a paternalistic management style. Morelli and Scucchia manage to set up a factory committee and organize the first strike. This is a decisive step on the road to political emancipation:

Scucchia vanquished the boom, paternalism, and the trepidation of the former peasants. The workers, such as himself, Morelli and a few others, had been dreaming for some time, and finally they came out of the sections and stopped in the yard, under the eyes of the boss.

As the years pass, the Apollon workers join the vanguard of Rome's union circles. The factory is sold to another entrepreneur, Borgognoni, who starts to sabotage production on a systematic basis. The factory committee hires a private investigator to lay bare the owner's intentions, and they find out that he is secretly planning to shut down the plant in order to build residential accommodation on the Apollon land. A battle of nerves begins between Borgognoni and the Apollon factory committee; the owner delays the payment of wages, while Morelli and Scucchia urge the workers not to react to management provocation in order to avoid police intervention. Borgognoni eventually discloses his intentions, but the workers, who already know of his plans, rapidly occupy the factory in order to stop the machinery being dismantled. The heat is now on; the Apollon workers are determined to resist 'one more minute of the boss'. Over the months that follow, the occupiers benefit from the solidarity and practical support given by the workers of Rome, as well as from further afield, thanks to the organizational effectiveness of the PCI, which has moved quickly to support their struggle. Many artists, intellectuals and students also align themselves with the occupiers. The factory courtyard serves as a venue for debates, meetings, theatrical performances, and even for the celebration of mass. Within its portrayal of the occupation, the film includes a rare visual record of the use of *Cinema militante*: we see a group of students, on behalf of the occupiers, showing a film about the May 1968 protests in France. One of them can be heard declaiming the Italian dubbing of the French film.

*Apollon, una fabbrica occupata* was the most widely distributed of all the *Cinema militante* films, thanks in particular to its promotion by the PCI and the Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI), a Communist partner organization. Forty-one copies were printed and it was shown more than a thousand times, with an estimated total Italian audience of 240,000. It was also shown in West Germany, Switzerland and the United States, and was sold to the public broadcasting services of Sweden and Finland (Rosati 1973: 9). *Apollon* had thus been a sound investment for Unitelefilm: it cost three million lire to make, and grossed twelve million.<sup>13</sup>

However, the film had many negative reviews. While the film critic Adriano Aprà lambasted *Apollon* from a cinematographic point of view, questioning the decision to re-enact the Apollon story, severe criticism of a political nature came from parts of the *Cinema militante* movement.<sup>14</sup> Goffredo Fofi, for example, did not mince his words in an article published in *Ombre Rosse*, metaphorically entitled ‘The lice and the whale’ (the lice being the workers of the Apollon, while the whale was the PCI). For Fofi, the film was ‘an ugly shot in the back of the working class’, which seemed to attenuate Italy’s social and political tensions rather than advancing the class struggle. According to Fofi, this was consistent with the traditions of the PCI, which he described as an ‘obstructer of the class struggle’.<sup>15</sup> In particular, he argued that the film misrepresented reality in its omission of many of the tensions and clashes that had arisen among the Apollon workers themselves during the long struggle. Those who had wanted to step up the level of confrontation both inside and outside the factory, a tactic suggested by the student movement, had been deliberately ignored in the film, or dismissed as ‘provocateurs paid by the boss’. From this perspective, *Apollon* was in fact a reactionary film that depicted an oversimplified dialectical exchange, ‘tolerated and allowed by the PCI apparatus’, between the students and the workers.

Today's viewer might be struck by the forthright comments within the voice-over for *Apollon*, and might understandably see Fofi's analysis in *Ombre Rosse* as motivated by pure political partisanship. However, there was arguably some truth to his remarks. The commentary itself, albeit obliquely, hints at the complex relationship that had developed between students, workers and the PCI during the *Apollon* occupation:

Workers and students march together through the streets, debating the modes of struggle but certainly not the watchwords that are always and can only be the same: no to the class state, no to the bourgeois state, no to the bosses' state.

Reading between the lines, we can see this statement as revealing that a minority of the workers, urged on by the student movement, had sought to turn the occupation into an open rebellion against the political system. Most, however, had followed the PCI in seeing the occupation as purely a union dispute. In many respects, *Apollon una fabbrica occupata* endorses the *politica unitaria* of the PCI: the factory workers succeed in foiling the plans of the class enemy by means of an alliance with a wide range of political and social forces, under the leadership of the Italian Communist Party. Ultimately, the film reflects how the PCI generally succeeded in maintaining hegemony over the workers' movement and how, in partnership with the trade unions, it managed to keep that period's substantial current of industrial action within legal boundaries.

The film produced by the *Collettivo cinema militante* of Turin, *Lotte alla Rhodiatoce* (Struggle at the Rhodiatoce), can be regarded as the anti-*Apollon*. Its political message is indeed the opposite of Gregoretti's film; the struggle at the Rhodiatoce is presented as having been conducted independently from, and indeed against, the unions and the PCI. Since the trade unions' activists were passive and prone to a compromise with the factory's owner, the

4200 workers had to take things into their hands: ‘It was no longer about the unions leading the workers’, the voice-over commentary says, ‘but about the workers imposing their will on the unions’. The workers could, however, count on the solidarity of the student movement: ‘workers and students, same struggle, same enemy’, reads a handwritten board hung up on the factory gates. Thanks to the students – the voice-over goes on to explain – the workers had become aware of the political significance of their struggle. As a consequence, the workers’ initial demands have lost most of their relevance in the course of the struggle: the *lotta* is important in its own right, as a moment of the class struggle shaking the country, and as a step towards the revolution.

In the film’s last scene, we see a group of workers paying homage to a monument that commemorates a partisan group, the *Volante Cucciolo*. This scene is highly significant, as it is meant to suggest a political continuity between the anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi Resistance fighters of World War II and the workers’ / student movement. As we have seen above, radical left-wing groups accused the PCI of having betrayed the *Resistenza* by allowing the capitalist structure of Italian economy to survive virtually unreformed after the war. They were thus claiming political ownership of the Resistance’s moral legacy. This would grant their political struggle historical justification and meaning. Another political group would do exactly the same, only a few years later, this time with the aim of justifying its terrorist attacks: the Red Brigades (see Chapter 8).

With respect to political violence and the rise of left-wing terrorism in Italy, we should point out that the films of the *cinema militante* offer valuable documentation of the progressive acceptance of violence by the radical Left. We have mentioned – in both the previous and present chapter – that the student movement openly contemplated the possibility, or even theorized the necessity, of moments of violent confrontation with the police. In this respect, a film like *12 dicembre* takes a step forward. This can be seen in the

part devoted to the Reggio revolt (July 1970 – February 1971), when the post-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) managed to harness a burst of outrage from the citizens of Reggio Calabria against the government's decision to make Catanzaro – and not Reggio – the regional capital of Calabria (Crainz 2005: 470 – 79). However, *12 dicembre* does not seem to mind the right-wing character of the revolt very much. The fact that the people of Reggio started a revolt against the government is seen as a positive development, and as a potential prelude to what is hoped might happen across the country. Rebellion and violence are thus valued per se, and presented as a legitimate form of political struggle. Again, when asked what he would say ‘if you were to meet Agnelli [the FIAT car company owner] face to face’, a young factory worker replies: ‘Nothing, I would just shoot him’. As pointed out by Giovanni De Luna, such a nonchalant endorsement of violence was the inevitable consequence of the radical Left’s rhetoric (De Luna 2009, 70 – 80). By characterizing the Italian Republic as the continuation of the Fascist regime, the radical Left implicitly justified its violent subversion. This is not to say that there is a direct political correlation between the *nuova sinistra* and the left-wing terrorism of the mid-1970s. Rather, the years of the *Contestazione* produced a political milieu that made it possible for political terrorism to arise. However, terrorism was by no means the *Contestazione*’s inevitable outcome.

At the turn of the 1970s, the season of militant cinemas died out. *Ombre Rosse* ceased its publication at the end of 1969, depriving the movement of an important platform for theoretical and cultural discussion. However, the demise of *cinema militante* was mostly due to the fact that film production was expensive and required much work. Making the films available to a large audience also proved to be quite an expensive and laborious undertaking. Once the initial enthusiasm had passed, many found it more convenient to direct their efforts towards different forms of communication and propaganda. Zavattini’s *cinegiornali liberi* also did not progress much further. Unitelefilm, by contrast, was able to capitalize on the

notoriety it had acquired during the years of the *cinema militante*, and managed to establish collaborations with well-known filmmakers for quite some time thereafter. This was a propitious moment for this kind of experiment, as several Italian directors seemed eager to prove their revolutionary credentials by working in independent left-wing productions for little or no remuneration (Miccichè 1995: 348 – 349). Thus, in 1971, Bernardo Bertolucci directed a film for Unitelefilm, *La salute è malata* (The health service is unwell, 33 minutes), which addressed the problems of the Italian healthcare system.

What survived the end of militant cinema was the sense of guilt many Italian left-wing intellectuals felt for the contribution they were making to the country's cultural industry: in other words, to the perpetuation of the capitalist system. Their ideological anguish can be best seen in one of the feature films that were produced in this period, Francesco Maselli's *Lettera aperta a un giornale della sera* (Open Letter to an Evening Newspaper, 1970). The film's plot revolves around a group of middle-aged left-wing intellectuals, members of the PCI, who spend their evenings theorizing revolutionary acts (like a direct participation in the Vietnam War) they are evidently unable and unwilling to carry out. They are wealthy, privileged, and socially integrated. Far away from their stylish living rooms, the police chase and brutally torture those who pose a real threat to the capitalist system: the students. Maselli himself was a member of the PCI, and the film's cast included some of his colleagues and comrades. Open Letter to an Evening Newspaper is thus the merciless self-indictment of an entire generation of intellectuals. Italian left-wing intellectuals would only get rid of their sense of guilt and related ideological concerns in the 1980s, following the *riflusso* (see Chapter 10). As a result, though, they would no longer be the same. Having lost the role of vanguard of Italian progressive thinking, which the PCI had given them after the war, they lost any real purpose as a group, ending up on the Roman terraces, with not much more left to do but to contemplate *The Great Beauty*.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See the statement by Paola Scarnati, who worked at UTF from 1965 to 1979, in Medici, Morbidelli and Taviani (2001: 190–91).
- <sup>2</sup> Number 8, December 1969, 65 – 69.
- <sup>3</sup> Ivi, 65.
- <sup>4</sup> See the screenplay of the *Cinegiornale* number 1 (53 minutes) in Rosati (1973, 20 – 25). Silvano Agosti was going to film protest movements in Rome for the following ten years. Part of the footage he filmed is now visible in the documentary film *Ora e sempre riprendiamoci la vita* (Now and always let's take back our life), released in 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> See these collected in Rosati (1973).
- <sup>6</sup> See Mino Argentieri's recollections of the events occurred in Pesaro in Medici, Morbidelli and Taviani (2001, 64 – 87). Argentieri was at the time responsible of the *Commissione Cinema* of the Italian Communist Party and one of the organizers of Pesaro Film festival.
- <sup>7</sup> See 'Cultura al servizio delle Rivoluzioni', in *Ombre Rosse*, number 5, August 1968, 3 – 9.
- <sup>8</sup> On the political and cultural impact of *The Hour of the Furnaces* in Italy see Mestman (2017).
- <sup>9</sup> On Lotta Continua see Cazzullo (1998).
- <sup>10</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini's first hand account of his experience with Lotta Continua is in Faldini and Fofi (1981, 33 – 34).
- <sup>11</sup> Marco Bellocchio and others speak of these films in Faldini and Fofi (1981, 26 – 28).

- <sup>12</sup> According to Ugo Gregoretti, *Apollon, una fabbrica occupata* made sixty million lire from the donations made at thousands of showings in the venues of the PCI's alternative distribution network (Sircana 2010: 85).
- <sup>13</sup> IG, APCI, MF 161, pp. 615–38, Istituti e organismi vari, Unitelefilm, serie 1971.
- <sup>14</sup> Adriano Aprà's review, in *Cinema e Film*, 9, 1969, is quoted by Bertozzi (2008: 195).
- <sup>15</sup> See Goffredo Fofi, 'I pidocchi e la balena', *Ombre Rosse*, 8, December 1969: 70–71. For reviews from the perspective of the PCI, see 'Gli operai dell'Apollon salgono sullo schermo', *Rinascita*, 14 February 1969: 22; 'L'Apollon protagonista in un film', *L'Unità*, 30 January 1969: 3.

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