MORETTI'S CHILDREN: THE NEXT GENERATION?

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Summary: Nanni Moretti's *La stanza del figlio/The Son's Room* (2001) reveals the effects of a child's death on the protagonist Giovanni (a psychoanalyst played by Moretti) and his family. This film appears after *Aprile/April* (1998), which narrates both the birth of the director's son Pietro as well as the Italian electoral campaign in 1996 in the month of the title. The arrival of a biological son followed by the death of a fictional one in Moretti's oeuvre suggests greater implications for the parent-child relationship in Italy. This phenomenon also comments on the relationship between generations of Italian directors. An examination of Moretti's earlier autobiographical film *Caro diario/Dear Diary* (1994) gives insight into this director's relationship to other artists and also suggests implications for the future of Italian filmmaking.

In Nanni Moretti's *La stanza del figlio/The Son's Room* (2001), the death of a child allows the narrative to explore the highly personal realm of grief. The title of Moretti's film refers to a now uninhabited space that serves as a metaphor for the void in the family created by Andrea's (Giuseppe Sanfelice) accidental drowning while scuba diving. The son's death devastates his father Giovanni (Nanni Moretti), mother Paola (Laura Morante), and sister Irene (Jasmine Trinca). Moretti examines the family members' reactions to this unimaginable loss that leads ultimately to a redefinition of self. *La stanza del figlio* is part of a larger trend of recent Italian releases such as Salvatores's *Io non ho paura/I'm Not Scared* (2003), Castellitto's *Non ti muovere/Don't Move* (2004), Ozpetek's *Cuore sacro/Sacred Heart* (2005), Comencini's *La Bestia nel cuore/Don't Tell* (2005), Giordana's *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti/Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005), Rossi Stuart's *Anche libero va bene/Along the Ridge* (2006), and Ozpetek's *Un giorno perfetto/A Perfect Day* (2008) that depict misfortunes, both intentional and accidental, physical and emotional, experienced by children.¹ The proliferation of this thematic concern in the new millennium seems particularly curious in the context of Italian society, which arguably values children more than most.² This is not, of course, a new

¹ In "Suffer the Children" I argue that children in the films of the new millennium tend to die as a result of their parents' solipsistic need for personal development.

² In the chapter entitled "Families and Consumption," Ginsborg (*Italy*, 68-

phenomenon for children in Italian film have suffered in the past, most notably in the works of neorealist filmmakers. In Rossellini's *Roma città aperta/Rome Open City* (1945), Marcello witnesses his mother's execution and Edmund commits suicide after poisoning his father in *Germania Anno Zero /Germany Year Zero* (1948). De Sica allows the viewer to experience a family crisis through the eyes of a four year old in *I bambini ci guardano/The Children Are Watching Us* (1943). In that film, Pricò absorbs the emotional pain of his mother's infidelity, his parents' resulting separation, and his father's eventual suicide. Yet while children suffer as a result of the fragmentation of civil society and the subsequent upheaval caused by war and its aftermath, their pain and death more than fifty years later in Italian films such as *La stanza del figlio* demands critical attention.³

Like Andrea's family, the viewers of Moretti's film, which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2001, do not witness the actual drowning. We, like the characters, learn of it along with his loved ones. Moretti's film returns repeatedly to the visual and audio signifiers of Andrea's death in an attempt to understand the tragedy, or in Giovanni's case, to re-write the events of that morning. We see the site where Andrea and his friends launch the craft as they head out for their dive, hear the sound of nails being drilled into his coffin, and watch numerous re-enactments of father and son jogging together, Giovanni's attempt to undo the tragedy that had occurred. The father tries to come to terms with his grief in a luna park, a place designed to amuse, where the chaos and noise of the rides allows him to vent his sadness. His wife Paola cries inside their home and daughter Irene lashes out in anger on the basketball court. The family's visit with one of Andrea's female acquaintances, Arianna (Sofia Vigliar), provides them with an extra-familial perspective of their loved one that allows them to begin healing.

In *La stanza del figlio* (2001) Moretti plays the psychoanalyst Giovanni

describes Italian families as particularly durable ("long") while increasingly smaller ("thin"). The notable increase in the divorce rate (from .7 per 1000 in 2000 to .9 per 1000 in 2010) as reported by Eurostat ("Marriage and Divorce Statistics"), remains low in relation to that of other countries in the European Union.

³ Gianni Amelio's *Ladro di bambini/The Stolen Children* (1992), which reveals children as victims of adults, introduces this phenomenon in the post-neorealist Italian cinema. In this film young children fall victim to adults: a mother prostitutes her daughter and other adults, from nuns to relatives of the *carabinieri* (police officer) who escorts the children to Sicily, refuse to help them. The very institutions designed to support young people at risk, such as orphanages and the church, shun them instead.

Sermonti, not himself, nor his alter ego of earlier films, Michele Apicella. The director shares a first name (Giovanni/Nanni) but is no longer confined to the combined identity of actor/director in the two autobiographical films that preceded *La stanza del figlio*, *Aprile/April* (1998) and *Caro diario/Dear Diary* (1993). Moretti acknowledged that he was happy to have undertaken this film, with its profoundly disturbing plot, later in life:

Sono contento di aver realizzato *La stanza del figlio* oggi e non quindici anni fa. A quel tempo non avrei mai pensato di girare un film su un argomento come la morte. Avrei poi immaginato il personaggio dello psicanalista, il suo rapporto con i pazienti, i figli, in maniera assai differente, probabilmente con maggiore intolleranza e meno affetto nel rapporto frontale fra medico e malato (quoted in De Bernardinis, 17).

I am glad that I made *The Son's Room* now rather than fifteen years ago. At that time I would not have considered making a film about death. I would have created the character of the psychoanalyst, his rapport with his patients and children, in a very different way, most likely with much less tolerance and affection in terms of the doctor/patient relationship.*

In this film, which took the director three years to complete, an older, more mature Moretti diverges from his typical solipsistic representation to focus on characters other than his own as they deal with the death of a beloved young man.⁴ In this way the film resonates with *Teorema/Theorem* (1968), by Pasolini, a director whom Moretti much admires. This earlier film depicts another, much more dramatic re-assessment of life by the entire well-to-do Milanese household after the unnamed visitor (Terence Stamp) leaves them following a short visit.

After Andrea's death in *La stanza del figlio*, Giovanni contemplates his commitment to helping others through his work as therapist. This tragedy has given him a new perspective on his patients and the various neuroses that they find so compelling. The very *mise-en-scène* of the psychiatrist's

* All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Moretti acknowledged that the maturation process had indeed changed his perspective: "Pour la première fois dans ce film, les personnages avec lesquels mon protagoniste entre en contact ne sont pas seulement les satellites de ce dernier. Ici, il y a ma femme Paola, mon fils e ma fille qui sont des personnages avec leur propre autonomie, leur propre épaisseur". ("In this film, for the first time, the characters with whom my protagonist comes into contact do not merely revolve around him. Here we have my wife Paola, my son, and my daughter, all independent characters with their own depth." (Gili, 104).

office invites the viewer to consider the psychological ramifications of loss—and here we witness Giovanni's own guilt over spending the morning of Andrea's death with his needy patient Oscar (Silvio Orlando) instead of going running with his son. His ultimate decision to take a leave from his practice reveals a new understanding of self.

In seemingly proleptic fashion, the idea for *La stanza del figlio* came to Moretti before the birth of his son Pietro, an event he recounts in his earlier film, *Aprile/April* (1998).⁵ At the time Moretti had already lost his own father; and we understand his decision to postpone work on this film while his partner Silvia was pregnant. Yet the resulting chronology of the director's oeuvre still startles as the death of a fictional son in *La stanza del figlio* follows on the heels of the birth of a biological son in *Aprile*. Moretti was surprised by the impact that the death of this character had on him personally as he told Gili in an interview: “j'étais imprégné pendant le tournage par la douleur que je voulais raconter. C'est quelque chose qui je ne m'étais jamais arrivé auparavant” (“while filming I was filled with the grief that I wished to recount. That had never happened to me before”) (104). The sadness and pain associated with making this film was unlike anything that the director had previously experienced, including the narration of his own brush with death in *Caro diario*'s last chapter, “Medici” (“Doctors”).

From Moretti's early films such as *Ecce bombo* (1978) to the more mature *Aprile* twenty years later, generational tensions between young and old, avant-garde and establishment, child and parent prevail. Whereas in *Aprile* Pietro's birth, which coincides with the victory over Berlusconi by the centrist Left coalition known as *L'Ulivo* (The Olive Tree), gives hope for a future generation of political activists who may follow in the footsteps of the *sessantottini* (68ers), the death of Andrea in Moretti's subsequent feature film suggests the destruction of that generation's vitality. This narrative reveals a crisis of representation in that the demise of the individual child portends a bleak future for the generation he exemplifies.⁶ Le Beau recognizes the ambivalent role of children in film; she notes that they represent both the hopes and fears of film viewers. These youthful characters

⁵ In an interview with Gili, Moretti explained that the passage of time and loss of others, not his own bout with cancer, led him to contemplate death in this film (100-101).

⁶ Moretti's own beliefs preclude a Christian reading of the son's immortality in this drama. In speaking of Andrea's death and funeral, the director acknowledged that he, like his character Giovanni, is an atheist who does not believe in eternal life: “Je ne crois pas à une vie après la mort.” (“I don't believe in life after death.”) (Gili, 106).

mirror the cinematic experience insofar as they embody the contradictory sentiments of excitement and terror in the depths of our psyche. Le Beau wonders: "Is it that, beyond a certain level of violence, the child is no longer a child; the future is no longer the future?" (179). This comment touches on the essential ambiguity of the demise of a figure whose very existence should signal the future which, in Moretti's case, makes us question the director's own relationship to the next generation. The child (increasingly a singleton in contemporary Italy according to demographic studies⁷) takes on greater significance as it becomes imbued with the hopes and failures of an activist generation that has lost its way and perhaps its sense of moral and political mission. An analysis of *Aprile*, the autobiographical film that precedes *La stanza del figlio*, aids our understanding of the director's personal attitude towards children and parenthood and informs our interpretation of the profoundly disturbing loss of a child.

Aprile/April (1998)

In *Aprile*, narrative tension arises between Moretti's creative forces of filmmaking and his procreative duties and responsibilities as fatherhood looms.⁸ In 1996, during the month of the film's title, Moretti experiences two felicitous events as he welcomes his son and witnesses the victory of his party in Italian national elections. Pietro's birth changes Nanni's status; he is now a father as well as a son of Agata Apicella and the late Luigi Moretti, who died in 1991. Yet the role of the Italian father, and this father in particular, is complicated in contemporary society. The crisis of the patriarchy, caused by the enormous societal changes that swept Italy in the last decades of the twentieth century, resulted in the dissolution of the father's authoritarian rule according to Ginsborg (*Italy*, 76-78). Fathers struggled to define their new role, often substituting indulgence where there was once discipline. As *Aprile* demonstrates, this crisis is reflected in Moretti's cinematic families as well.

⁷ Eurostat ("Fertility Statistics") reports that, as of 2010, in Italy there were 1.41 live births per woman; by contrast, in 1980 the rate was 1.64 live births per woman.

⁸ The conflict Moretti describes between creativity and procreativity evokes Sibilla Aleramo's highly autobiographical novel *Una donna/A Woman* (1906) that recounts the author's painful choice to leave a loveless marriage (and consequently her son) in the provinces in order to seek the literary life she craved in Rome. The use of the indefinite article (*una*) in the title, as well as the lack of proper nouns to identify characters in this novel, suggest a reading of Aleramo's protagonist as an Everywoman of sorts.

In a 1998 interview with Gili (87-99), Moretti explains that *Aprile*, like *Caro diario/Dear Diary* (1993) before it, was conceived in a rather haphazard fashion. Moretti took some footage of his partner Silvia's pregnant belly, then later filmed his newborn son Pietro. He merged these snippets with clips he had made of the Italian electoral campaign in the spring of 1996. This purposely hybrid movie ends with another genre in the film within, a 1950s musical about a Roman pastry chef with Leftist politics, the idea for which was introduced previously in *Caro diario* when Nanni conducted a facetious *sopralluogo* (location scouting) for his fantasy film.

Moretti refuses to acknowledge his mortality in *Aprile*. Having survived Hodgkin's lymphoma, a battle that he recounts in the final chapter of *Caro diario*, "Medici" ("Doctors"), Moretti repudiates the aging process in his subsequent film. Nanni's 44th birthday celebration turns morbid when his friend uses a yardstick to illustrate what remains of his life if he lives until 80. Confronting his relatively limited time, Moretti asserts in voiceover that he plans to live 95, not merely 80, years in an attempt to postpone middle age.⁹ Yet it is precisely the recognition of his mortality that spurs the director, at his friend's urging, to film the story of a 1950s Trotskyite pastry chef, and jettison all the rest of the clippings that he had collected as possible topics for future films. Aging can be liberating for an artist as we see in the end of the film. Yet Nanni refuses to grow up even in light of his son's birth. Even though the new father realizes that Pietro's arrival has made him think, like an adult, about someone else, he sees no reason to leave his youth behind as he announces in a direct address to the camera:

Nanni all'inizio aveva fatto fatica. Non capiva perché il figlio volesse stare con la mamma e non con il papà. Una cosa ammirevole in lui fu il processo attraverso cui decise di diventare adulto. Quel suo saper stare da parte pur essendo presente, perché le esigenze del bambino vengono prima di ogni altra cosa. E lui cominciava a imparare a separarsi da se stesso, cominciava a pensare al bambino, e finalmente affrontava la sfida di un uomo che deve diventare adulto. Ma perché deve diventare adulto? Non c'è motivo!

In the beginning Nanni had a hard time. He did not understand why his son wanted his mother and not his father. The process by which he decided to become an adult was admirable. He was able to stand apart while being present because the needs of the baby come before all others. And he began to learn how to get outside of himself, and he began to

⁹ Dante famously recognized the midpoint of life at 35 (of a projected 70 year lifespan, which he did not realize), his age in 1300 when the *Commedia* takes place.

think about the baby, and finally he faced the challenge of becoming an adult. But why must he become an adult? There's no reason!

Dan Kiley's 1983 self-help bestseller *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up* offers insight into Moretti's psychological state. Drawing upon the literary model, Kiley examines parallels between J.M. Barrie's fictional characters and real men who cannot face the responsibilities of adulthood. He views Barrie's protagonist as a sad and troubled figure caught between boyhood and manhood (23). The psychologist offers a bleak prognosis for sufferers of what he calls the Peter Pan Syndrome that includes emotional paralysis, inability to adapt to social situations, and interpersonal ineptitude. Society does not tolerate the self-centeredness of the Peter Pan, leaving him isolated and alone, according to Kiley (25). Nanni here appears to fit this description as he struggles to be a father while rejecting the necessity of becoming an adult.

As numerous critics have noted, Moretti's oeuvre focuses on the psychological aspects of human existence. From the *sedute di autocoscienza* (consciousness raising sessions) in his early film *Ecce bombo* (1978) to his reprised role as psychiatrist in his latest film, *Habemus Papam/We Have a Pope* (2011), Moretti's films depict the tools and theories associated with psychotherapy. In a very self-conscious fashion, the director even tries to write a film entitled "Freud's Mother" in *Sogni d'oro/Sweet Dreams* (1981). Viewers appreciate the hermeneutical value of psychoanalysis, to which the family is central, for such an analysis of his films. In *Aprile* Moretti begins his own nuclear family with his partner Silvia and son Pietro; his mother Agata also appears as his foil for political discussions at the beginning of the film. In their analysis of the director's oeuvre, Mazierska & Rascaroli (46-47) divide Moretti's films into three categories that describe his protagonists in relation to the family: young men who reject family ties in favor of communes or "autarchic" living in films such as *Io sono un autarchico/I Am Self-Sufficient* (1976); older characters who seek perfect families but do not establish such relationships for themselves in *La messa è finita/The Mass is Ended* (1985) and "real" characters who establish families as in *Aprile* (1998). This categorization represents the director's progression from adolescence to maturity. *La stanza del figlio* (2001), which focuses on a real family whose viability is threatened by the death of one of its members, calls into question one of the very institutions on which Moretti's opus is based.

How are we to read the death of Andrea in *La stanza del figlio* that follows the child's birth in *Aprile*? This chronology reveals Moretti's own anxiety about parenthood, and by extension, that of many members of his

generation. Andrea's death effectively renders his sister Irene an only child, an increasingly common figure in contemporary Italian society. The decision by Moretti's generation to limit their families to one offspring results, according to Ginsborg (*Italy*, 68-74), from a variety of economic forces and disincentives such as the pressure for both parents to work outside the home, the partial emancipation of women, increased age at marriage, societal pressure to have legitimate children, and the changing nature of children's role in the family. It is precisely the prevalence of families with one child that Nanni, who will also become the father of a singleton, satirizes in his portrayal of anxious parents on the island of Salina in the second chapter of *Caro diario*.¹⁰ Moretti described the cultural process that led to this phenomenon:

Des hommes et des femmes ont résisté pendant de nombreuses années à l'idée d'avoir un enfant, ils ont même théorisé le fait de ne pas vouloir d'enfants. Pour nos parents, c'était une chose normale d'avoir des enfants, un, deux, trois, quatre... contrairement à ma génération pour laquelle c'est une sorte d'événement exceptionnel. Ces parents n'ont donc souvent qu'un seul enfant et ils adoptent une attitude très protectrice à son égard. (Gili 85)

Men and women resisted for many years the idea of having children; they even theorized about not wanting children. For our parents, it was normal to have one, two, three, four children.... But for my generation it was an unusual event. Those parents had only one child, and they were very protective of him or her.

In addition to revealing Nanni's attitudes on parenthood, *Caro diario* also addresses the broader, metaphorical relationship of "fathers" and "sons" in Italian cinema. As the following analysis demonstrates, through references both obvious and oblique, the highly autobiographical feature-

¹⁰ Sutton reads the missing child or *bambino negato* as the desired second child that never materializes in contemporary Italian families. He defines the *bambino negato* as "the 'missing' or 'denied' child, a term that refers not only to the decline in the birth rate but which also takes note of the apparent statistical preference amongst Italians of all classes and ages for families with two children, despite in actuality producing only one" (354). Recent demographic data from Eurostat ("Marriage and Divorce Statistics") reveal a decline in marriage rates and an increase in the number of divorces in Italy, and indeed throughout the European Union, that have resulted in an increase in the number of children born outside of marriage.

length film that precedes *Aprile* provides the viewer with another way to read the dynamic of the eclipsed lifespan of the child in Moretti's oeuvre.

Caro diario/Dear Diary (1993)

The autobiographical elements of *Caro diario* are indisputable: Moretti plays himself instead of his cinematic alter ego Michele Apicella (his mother's maiden name), he writes in his own hand, wears his own clothes, rides his own blue Vespa (the symbol of his film company that was recently retired because of environmental controls as Nobili points out), and includes real footage of his last chemotherapy session for Hodgkin's disease. In this way, *Caro diario* lays the foundation for *Aprile* and gives us insight into Moretti's development as a director.

In the first chapter of *Caro diario*, "In Vespa" ("On My Vespa"), Moretti establishes a critical distance between himself and others of his politically active generation.¹¹ Seated alone in a deserted Roman movie theater in the summer, he takes issue with the contention made by a group of his contemporaries onscreen that they have compromised the politics of their youth. One of the actors (Sebastiano Nardone) expresses the collective malaise when he bemoans their degradation: "La nostra generazione, che cosa siamo diventati? Siamo diventati pubblicitari, architetti, agenti di borsa, deputati, assessori, giornalisti. Siamo tanto cambiati, tutti peggiorati, oggi siamo tutti complici." ("Our generation, what have we become? We have become publicists, architects, stockbrokers, politicians, council members, journalists. We have all changed, we have all gotten worse, we are all complicit.") To this self-indictment, Moretti responds: "Voi gridavate cose orrende, violentissime e voi siete imbruttiti. Io gridavo cose giuste e ora sono uno splendido quarantenne!" ("You yelled awful, violent things, and you have grown ugly. I yelled the right things and now I am a splendid forty year old!"). In the fictional film within *Caro diario*, well-dressed, middle-aged characters discuss the inefficacy of the headache pills Optalidon. This medicine, once powerful but now ineffective, is emblematic of the 1968 generation's rhetoric, a

¹¹ Marcus reads this film as a decisive break from the director's past films in which he, in the role of Michele Apicella or one of his stand-ins such as the priest Don Giulio in *La messa è finita/The Mass is Ended* (1985), represented the hopes and desires of his generation. She notes that with *Caro diario*, Moretti "signals a will to speak for no one but himself, to forge a film language of authenticity and personal renewal, in marked contrast to the style of this film-within-a-film, which participates fully in the banality and the pretentiousness of its characters' communal breast-beating" (239).

voice for change that seems empty twenty-five years later. Against this pessimistic backdrop, Moretti, casually dressed in a T-shirt and pants, declares his vitality. As one who has expressed his political sentiment in public (most notably when he railed against the weaknesses of the Italian Left in Rome's Piazza Navona in February 2002 and then again later that year in Piazza San Giovanni when he delivered a longer discourse on the grave dangers facing Italian democracy under Berlusconi) and has reinvested his profits from successful films to support other Italian directors, Moretti highlights the difference between himself and others who, in their own words, were responsible for the failures of their generation.

Born in 1953, Moretti came of age in the 1960s, when the student movement challenged Italy's institutions and authority in general. As the above-mentioned scene reveals, this generation has undergone a transformation, which is essentially negative. Once activists, Moretti's on-screen contemporaries now find themselves firmly entrenched in the bourgeoisie. But an examination of Moretti's second film *Ecce bombo* (1978), a quirky and profitable investigation of the lives of students in the tumultuous 1970s, reveals that, in effect, little has changed for members of his generation. During consciousness-raising sessions held in Mirko's (Fabio Traversa) apartment, the group of aimless buddies project inertia in contrast to Michele's (Moretti) younger sister Valentina (Lorenza Ralli) and her energetic friends who plan to do something: they will protest by occupying their high school. The young men barely move. It is no wonder that Mazierska and Rascaroli refer to Michele and his lot as "losers" (26).

Known by the year that proved most pivotal to the movement, 1968, the *sessantottini* (68ers) demanded change to the status quo in Italian society. These students, along with the disgruntled factory workers whose protests combined with theirs to great effect, reacted to the failure of the so-called economic miracle of the 1950s to improve the lives of Italian citizens (Ginsborg, *History*, 298-322). Unhappy with the dysfunctional and overcrowded university system, young people demonstrated throughout Italy and across Europe. During this period they revolted against much more than their poorly organized academic institutions. In Italy, students contested the authority of professors, parents, and government leaders. They hoped to transform established institutions into more humane and therefore more egalitarian systems, and to free their society from the grips of consumerism and capitalism. Ginsborg (*History*, 301) describes the sweeping objectives of this movement, which benefited from the contribution of both Catholic and Marxist ideologies, as "an ethical revolt, a notable attempt to turn the tide against the predominant values of the

time. The students, and soon the whole population, had to be prevented from 'interiorizing' the values of a capitalist society."

In this first chapter Moretti also distances himself from other Italian directors, who according to him, do not believe in their characters. The subtext for this distinction revolves around the tension between politically engaged cinema and commercially successful films such as Lina Wertmüller's 1974 comedy, *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'agosto/Swept Away* (1974). Moretti also separates himself from the masses (Wertmüller's intended audience) by declaring that he gets along with a select few ("*una minoranza*") rather than with the majority ("*la maggioranza*") as he tells a disaffected, wealthy young man in a fancy red sports car. As the young *menefreghista* drives off without responding to Moretti's political and artistic musings, the director is left to ponder his relevance. This scene, of course, illustrates precisely Moretti's point: the young man, representative of the mass audiences of contemporary consumerist Italy (the very phenomenon against which the 68ers fought), has no interest in the political, ethical, or intellectual debates surrounding filmmaking.

As a cinematic journal, *Caro diario* represents the intersection of the essentially private sphere of the diary with the public world of film just as *Aprile* connects the personal (the birth of a child) with the political (national elections).¹² Moretti explains the evolution of *Caro diario* into a tripartite story from a pastiche of existing footage and ideas for storylines:

... in *Caro diario* I wanted to tell a story with great narrative freedom. I began to make *Caro diario* without really realizing it. I had a different script ready and was planning to make another film. I was alone during the summer and came up with the idea of making a short film about my travels around Rome on my Vespa. I filmed for two weekends and then looked at the unedited footage. When I saw it, I said to myself that I'd like to preserve this freedom, this irresponsibility I had when I thought I was making a short film that very few people would see. It wasn't a film that had the burden of being anticipated by the public and the critics. I had already decided to tell the story of my disease and had the idea of *Islands* in my head, so I began to prepare these three stories. (Porton, 12)

The first chapter, "*In Vespa*" ("On My Vespa"), follows Moretti as he joyfully cruises through Roman neighborhoods while the third chapter, "*Medici*"

¹² Wagstaff, in his review of *Aprile*, notes the same dichotomy between public and private spheres. He extends the metaphor to include the public, "adult" documentary of the political state and the private, "infantile" fantasy of a musical about a Roman pastry chef.

("Doctors"), chronicles his journey through the maze of the Italian medical bureaucracy in search of a diagnosis of his ailment. In between these two chapters, he tells the story of Italian intellectuals' changing attitudes toward television, albeit in a compressed timeframe, in "*Isole*" ("Islands"). From the authentic and intimate (the director's last chemotherapy session for Hodgkin's disease) to the mundane and farcical (a discussion in English with Jennifer Beals about his sanity and her shoes), Moretti reveals his obsessions, fears, and prejudices while commenting on filmmaking.

In *Caro diario's* first chapter ("*In Vespa*") Moretti, in addition to watching the above-mentioned fictional film in the cinematic wasteland of Roman summer, professes his desire to dance like Jennifer Beals, criticizes an American journalist (played by his friend, director Carlo Mazzacurati) whose positive reviews propelled *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (McNaughton, 1986) to the heights of film festivals in Chicago and Telluride, while also launching a withering critique of Lina Wertmüller without mentioning her name.¹³ The director's passion for meandering through the streets of Rome on his Vespa can be interpreted as a metaphoric search for his own identity in the history of film. Moretti both recognizes his indebtedness to Italian cinematographers who have come before him and demonstrates his distance from them in *Caro diario*. In this way, Moretti's film constructs a compendium of film history that identifies his potential "fathers" (Pasolini, Rossellini, Lattuada, Leone and others) while rejecting the one potential "mother" (Wertmüller). As he searches the cinematic past, Nanni acknowledges the styles and themes of his forefathers only to ultimately reject them all.

Moretti's cruise through Roman neighborhoods immediately calls to mind the neorealist sensibility that privileges on-location shooting, natural lighting, and extremely long takes, among other elements. But in a reversal of the genre that promulgates genuine, realistic presentation, Nanni

¹³ This was not Moretti's first invective against Wertmüller: in *Io sono un autarchico/I Am Self Sufficient* (1976), Michele Apicella (Moretti) foams at the mouth when his friend announces that she has been offered a film professorship at the University of California, Berkeley. Wertmüller responded to these attacks by calling Moretti "abominevole" ("abominable") in her 2012 autobiography, *Tutto a posto e niente in ordine*. She blamed his rude behavior at a film festival in Berlin, not his cinematic depiction of her: "Moretti mi vide, guardò la mia mano offerta con amicizia, voltò la schiena e se ne andò." ("Moretti looked at me, saw my outstretched hand, turned his back to me and left.") (195). Wertmüller went on to call the director a *stronzo* (jerk) and accuse him of being shamefully envious of her, but she did compliment him, however, on his latest film, *Habemus Papam* (2011).

champions artifice, not authenticity, as he tells the owner of a penthouse that he is scouting locations for an absurd musical about a Trotskyite confectioner. This chapter ends with a lengthy wordless visual homage to Pier Paolo Pasolini, as Moretti circles the field in Ostia where the director was murdered in 1975.¹⁴

The director focuses the second, and perhaps most self-reflexive, episode (“*Isole*”/“Islands”) on his search for an ideal place to write the film that will become *Caro diario*. Nanni’s physical movement from one island to the next in the Aeolian chain evokes Dante’s metaphysical search of the Italian peninsula for the appropriate dialect that will become the Italian language in *De vulgari eloquentia*/On *Eloquence in the Vernacular*. Just as Dante surveyed the regional dialects for the ideal vulgate, so Moretti visits five Aeolian Islands that represent different approaches to filmmaking in my reading. Dante, of course, failed to find the one dialect that succeeded in being simultaneously illustrious (*illustre*), cardinal (*cardinale*), noble (*aulico*) and courtly (*curiale*), just as Moretti fails in his quest to find one cinematic school to which he can adhere. As he tells the viewer in voiceover, he is happy only while at sea.

Moretti’s maritime journey also resonates with Homer’s *Odyssey*, and by extension Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the subject of his friend Gerardo’s (Renato Carpentieri) lengthy study, in that both recount the travails of men trying to return home. The director faces fewer physical challenges than Odysseus; his obstacles are psychological rather than physical. On the islands he must confront his predecessors (or “fathers”) whose artistic patrimony he acknowledges on his way to define this film, and by extension, himself as director. The first stop on this artistic odyssey is Lipari, Gerardo’s home, where the traffic and noise inhibit Moretti’s ability to concentrate. On a television set in a bar, Silvana Mangano in *Anna* (Lattuada, 1951) inspires the director to dance thus recalling Jennifer Beals, the American ballerina of *Flashdance* with whom he is obsessed in the film’s first episode. The pair flees the chaos of Lipari and heads to Salina.

Children appear most prominently on this island, where Nanni meets friends and their families and sees firsthand the consequences for Italy of the preponderance of families with only one child. Moretti critiques the Italian phenomenon of the *figlio unico* in a hilarious parody of the mores of contemporary society. The director’s treatment of this phenomenon res-

¹⁴ As Marcus (241) has pointed out, Moretti visits the sight of a splatter victim—Pasolini—after his imagined visit to a critic who praised *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*.

onates with *commedia all'italiana*, a satirical comedy of manners focused mainly on the habits of the middle class. As Mazierska and Rascaroli observe (87), the director openly derided two icons of this genre, Nino Manfredi and Alberto Sordi, in *Ecce bombo* (1978). Moretti indicates his ironic and self-deprecatory sensibility as a distinguishing factor between himself and the directors of this form of comedy, which was immensely popular in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s:

Just as my style is different than the one you find in an older tradition of Italian comedy, so is my relationship with the public. The most important difference is this—I make fun of my own milieu because I think that, when you make fun of yourself, you have more of a right to make fun of others. Instead, the older Italian comedy reached its most well-known and best results when it dealt with subject matter the scriptwriters and directors weren't personally familiar with. They didn't show us their own world, but talked about the lumpenproletariat or workers who tried to become bourgeois or emulate aristocrats. I'm not talking about merit, I'm talking about method. My films are more personal, both in style and content. (Porton, 14-15)

The children on Salina have taken control of their parents, and by extension, the entire island. In Moretti's whimsical representation, adults cannot communicate because their (only) children control the telephone lines. Clearly Moretti, who has yet to become a father at this point, places the blame squarely on his over-protective and over-involved contemporaries. Thus Moretti's exaggerated portrayal of Italian parents' penchant for indulging their children, while simultaneously burdening them with their own fears, makes us laugh on account of its verisimilitude.¹⁵ Moretti, uncomfortable with both this society and the film genre it represents (*commedia all'italiana*), moves on to the island of Stromboli.

Stromboli is a veritable cinematic palimpsest. Here Nanni and Gerardo meet the mayor (Antonio Neiwiller) who envisions the island as a newly constructed stage set with the help of two Italian artists, composer Ennio Morricone and cinematographer Vittorio Storaro. His announcement for the future recalls a post-war sensibility, expressed in cinematic terms, in the following exhortation: "Ricostruire da zero Stromboli! Ricostruire da zero l'Italia! Un nuovo modo di vivere, con una nuova luce, nuovi abiti, nuovi suoni, un nuovo modo di parlare, nuovi colori, nuovi sapori...tutto nuovo!" ("Rebuild Stromboli from zero! Rebuild Italy from

¹⁵ As Mazierska and Rascaroli point out, this phenomenon is presaged by a similar discussion about singletons in *La messa è finita* (72-73).

zero! A new way of life, a new light, new clothes, new sounds, a new way of speaking, new colors, new tastes... all new!"). As he bids the two visitors adieu, he hums "scion scion," the melodic lyric from Sergio Leone's *Giù la testa/Duck, You Sucker* (1971), a nod to that director's mastery of the spaghetti western, a genre that combines distinctly Italian elements in the quintessentially American medium of the Western.

The most salient cinematic reference on this island is Rossellini's 1950 eponymous film. According to the mayor, "*la presenza minacciosa del vulcano*" ("the menacing presence of the volcano") defines the island's inhabitants and explains their lack of hospitality towards Nanni and Gerardo. This remark is, of course, cinematic allusion: in Rossellini's film Karin (Ingrid Bergman), a Lithuanian refugee married to Antonio (Mario Vitale), a fisherman from Stromboli, received the same sort of reception from the island's inhabitants as the two contemporary visitors. This hostility also mirrors America's response to the scandal created by Bergman's decision to leave her husband and children for Rossellini, who was already estranged from his wife due to his affair with Anna Magnani.¹⁶ Nanni and Gerardo's encounter with American tourists on the volcanic crater, an iconic image for Rossellini's film, reveals the connections between American and Italian culture as well as those between cinema and television. Gerardo's desire to learn what happens next on the sensational soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* (or simply *Beautiful* in Italian) underscores the cultural hegemony of Americans who are "ahead" of the Italians in terms of episodes. The news that there is no hope for Thorne, because his wife is having an affair with her tennis instructor, slyly alludes to the marital situation of Petter Lindstrom whose spouse, Ingrid Bergman, had left him for Rossellini.

Moretti's experience with the American tourists on Stromboli underscores the ascendancy of television that threatened the viability of Italian cinema in the 1980s and 1990s. Just like Rossellini, who turned to television in the 1960s after more than twenty years in cinema, Gerardo repudiates the critical theories of Hans Magnus Enzensberger to embrace that medium in the form of soap operas such as "*The Bold and the Beautiful*" or mystery shows like "*Chi l'ha visto?*"¹⁷ From the mid 1960s to mid 1970s,

¹⁶ Gallagher (321) notes that moral outrage was particularly strong in the United States where Colorado Senator Edwin C. Johnson requested that Ingrid Bergman be banned from making films in the United States in protest against her "moral turpitude." Additionally, industry representatives telegraphed Bergman to warn the star that the stories about the affair threatened to ruin her acting career.

¹⁷ In 1945, Alessandrini directed a melodramatic film by the same name about a vagabond named Emilio.

Rossellini produced ambitious historical investigations such as *L'età del ferro/The Iron Age* (1964), and biographies such as *Socrate/Socrates* (1970) and *Cartesio/Cartesius* (1974). This historical footnote informs our understanding of Gerardo's metamorphosis from TV-hater to devoted defender of that medium as it parallels Rossellini's own realization of the importance of television as a vehicle for reaching the largest possible audience. Moretti explained Gerardo's accelerated transformation:

Dans le récit, j'ai fait faire à Gerardo en quelques jours le parcours beaucoup de intellectuels font en quelques années. Entre les années soixante-dix et les années quatre-vingt, il y a eu beaucoup de personnes – intellectuels ou pas—qui sont passés d'un refus total de la télévision à une totale acceptation. (Gili, 85)

In the script I made Gerardo go through in a few days what many intellectuals experienced over the course of several years. Between the 1970s and the 1980s, many people, some intellectuals and some not, went from a total refusal of television to a total acceptance of it.

Rossellini first rejected cinema as a mode of communication before proceeding to indict all forms of mass media, including television, in a period of approximately 10 years. In 1962, more than a decade after *Stromboli's* release, Rossellini announced the death of cinema:

Credo che il cinema abbia fallito la sua missione di essere l'arte del nostro secolo. Ha fatto dei tentativi, persino dei tentativi eroici, ma ha fallito. Non solo ma, tra le arti, è forse la più grande responsabile di questa immensa opera di condizionamento, d'abbruttimento che si è compiuta. (quoted in Trasatti, 7)

I think that cinema has failed in its mission to be the art form of our century. It made several attempts, even heroic ones, but it failed. Not only that, but it is perhaps the most responsible of all the arts for the immense body of bias and degradation that has ever been made.

The story behind Rossellini's switch to another medium was complicated, and involved financial woes, both personal and professional, as well as artistic disappointments that Trasatti describes in detail in his study, *Rossellini e la televisione*. As the world around him changed, Rossellini searched for a new form of expression as Gallagher (549) explains: "neo-realism had been a 'window' into reality in the 1940s, in the 1960s it had become a wall. In Rossellini's pursuit of truth in contemporary subjects, he had run into a dead end, an unbreachable wall, which was his inability because of censorship and his own prudence to follow the questions of

contemporary life beyond the portals to a 'forbidden knowledge,' beyond boundaries that prevented realities from being shown..." Rossellini contended that television appeared to be the appropriate medium:

Ma c'è di più, c'è che il cinema se vuole avere una funzione sociale deve essere didattico, deve insegnare qualcosa alla gente, deve raccontare l'uomo agli altri uomini. In altre parole, il pubblico non deve aver soltanto qualche ora di svago, ma deve anche partecipare ad eventi storici e umani attraverso una forma di spettacolo diretto, immediato, condotto in maniera nuova ed agevole. E questo compito non lo sta forse svolgendo la televisione? (quoted in Trasatti, 202)

But there's more. If cinema wants to have a societal function, then it must be didactic, it must teach people something, it must tell men about other men. In other words, the audience must not have only an hour of diversion but it must participate in historical and humane events in the form of a direct, immediate spectacle, conducted in a new and pleasing manner. And is not television doing exactly that?

The pair head next to Panarea, a fashionable island that evokes the jet set scene of Italy. With its overt materialism and emphasis on appearances, this island recalls the economic boom of postwar Italy and the concomitant rise in consumerism. In the 1960s, Italy's Cinecittà became known as "Hollywood on Tiber" on account of its international appeal to directors and stars alike; Federico Fellini was one of the studios' greatest fans. When Nanni and Gerardo disembark on the island, they encounter a consultant specializing in parties in bad taste who invites them to a party to celebrate her divorce. This event recalls Nadia's (Nadia Gray) annulment party (divorce was not legal in Italy until 1971) with which Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) concludes. Ironically, not all critics or censors understood Fellini's examination of nocturnal carousing by the Roman demi-monde, reported by Marcello (Marcello Mastroianni) and his sidekick photographer Paparazzo (Walter Santesso), as the antithesis of "sweet." Panarea's circus-like atmosphere sends Nanni and Gerardo back to the hovercraft that deposited them on the island thus ending the shortest (approximately one and a half minutes in length) of their Aeolian visits.

The final stop on this artistic odyssey, Alicudi, is the most isolated of the islands—"la più isola di tutte." Alicudi offers a stark contrast to Panarea and initially appears to be the most conducive to the Nanni's and Gerardo's writing. A haven from the interruptions of the modern world, this island has no electricity and no television. Its inhabitants reject fame. Their convictions and principles suggest a geographic equivalent of *cinema d'impeg-*

no or committed cinema. Monastic types like Lucio (Moni Ovadia), Nanni and Gerardo's host, revel in moral superiority by rejecting modern conveniences and public praise. Lucio, for example, describes inhabitants of other islands in the Aeolian chain as "*compromessi*" ("compromised") in comparison to Alicudi's residents. This island's extreme isolation sends Gerardo running and screaming for the ferry, and home to his newfound love, television. With its suggestion of politically engaged filmmaking, this island also brings us back to the beginning of the episode that follows Moretti's homage to Pier Paolo Pasolini at the end of the preceding chapter, "*In Vespa*."¹⁸

Hope for the Future?

Children, both biological and metaphorical, serve as a hermeneutical tool for understanding the works of Nanni Moretti. An analysis of the most autobiographical of his works, *Aprile* (1998) and *Caro diario* (1993) offers insight into the director's professional perspectives on filmmaking. These two films also emphasize the importance of political activism. The death of the child in *Stanza del figlio*, a film without political overtones, suggests that there will be no more young people to do and say the right things in life and in art.¹⁹ That film appears to confirm the discouragement projected by the Moretti's onscreen contemporaries in *Caro diario*'s first chapter. Yet the future of Italian cinema, and the Italian society that it depicts, lies with the younger generation, those "sons" of the fathers such as Moretti, who have continued the tradition of *cinema d'impegno* in order to make politically inspired films that attract funding, win awards, and produce revenues, while remaining true to the values they seek to project.

Despite the fact that Moretti rejects his cinematic fathers in *Caro diario*, wrestles with parenthood in *Aprile*, and eliminates his fictional son in *La stanza del figlio*, he has fathered a younger generation of Italian film-

¹⁸ Pasolini's relationship to Italian student demonstrators was complicated. His poem, "*Il PCI ai giovani*," ("*The Communist Party to the Young*"), published on June 16, 1968 in *Espresso* (Vol. XIV, no. 4) condemned the violent student protests at the architecture faculty of the University of Rome in Valle Giulia. Pasolini, who viewed this bloody encounter as class warfare, supported the police who were, in his words "sons of the poor" ("*figli di poveri*") and not "rich" ("*ricchi*") like the students.

¹⁹ Palestini explains that once again, "Il cinema è in crisi" ("Cinema is in crisis"), due to the preference for blockbuster, not art house, films as well as on account of the increase in piracy.

makers. As Gieri (232) points out, at the time of *Caro diario*'s release, the younger generation of Italian filmmakers (Pappi Corsicato, Giulio Base, Francesco Martinuzzi, Vito Zagarrio and Silvio Soldini) recognized Moretti, who employed alternative modes of film production and distribution while maintaining an ethical message, for contributing to the success of Italian cinema. Having rejected his own possible cinematic fathers, Moretti has laid the foundation for future families of independent Italian filmmakers: along with Angelo Barbagallo, he founded the production company Sacher Films in 1987 (which ceased acquiring and distributing films as of June 2013 but continues to produce Moretti's work); established the Nuovo Sacher Theater, an art house cinema in Rome's Trastevere neighborhood in 1991; launched a film festival for short subjects, Sacher Film Festival, in 1996, and, with others, founded a distribution company, Tandem, in 1997.

Twenty years after the debut of *Caro diario* (and the laudatory comments from younger filmmakers at the Toronto film festival), the film critic D'Agostini paid tribute to the director for giving rise to yet another generation of directors like Matteo Garrone (*Gomorra/Gomorra*, 2008; *Reality* 2012) and Paolo Sorrentino (*Conseguenze d'amore/The Consequences of Love*, 2004; *Il divo*, 2008; *This Must Be the Place*, 2011; *La grande bellezza/The Great Beauty*, 2013), on the occasion of Moretti's 60th birthday on August 19, 2013. As he enters his seventh decade, Nanni Moretti clearly is no longer a "splendido quarantenne." Yet the 2012 President of the Jury at Cannes has become a "father" again to a new generation of Italian directors. Whereas the *sessantottini* may have failed to change their world when they became businessmen and publicists, Moretti has changed the world as a film director by drawing attention to the importance of independent film making, authorial imprints, and the insistence on political and social exigencies found in the values, cinematic and otherwise, that exemplified the 1960s.

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