

**A Cinematic Anti-Monument against Mafia Violence:
P. Diliberto's *La mafia uccide solo d'estate***

Abstract: This article explores how contemporary cinema can serve as artistic means to reflect upon, and ultimately counteract, the Mafia's cultural production of violence. It analyzes Pierfrancesco Diliberto's *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* (2013) as a movie that, by thematizing the Mafia in a personal and biological manner, serves as a striking example of an anti-monument. Drawing on concepts from monument theory and documentary theory, the article shows how the movie's anti-monumental form allows the spectators' active sensitization to and purging of Mafia culture through the sacrificial blood of its victims. From such a perspective, *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* proves to be an essential movie to consider in the context of both the present negotiation of Italian identity linked to its most recent violent history, and the contemporary directions of Italian auteur cinema.

Keywords: Mafia, Violence, Anti-Monument, Documentary, History.

Introduction

1969. A couple is making love under the sheets. The movie cuts to a computer-generated image showing a group of spermatozoa racing through the fallopian tube. Their trip is juxtaposed to one of a car full of armed men speeding through a tunnel. A voice-over comments on the caustic parallelism with the following words: "E così mentre gli spermatozoi di mio padre correvano verso la meta, gli uomini di Totò Riina uscivano dall'ultima galleria per arrivare a Palermo." The tragedy announced unfolds. The men reach *viale Lazio*, enter the apartment immediately below the couple's love nest in search of their enemies, and kill them in a bloody shootout. The movie cuts again to the spermatozoa, which, scared by the noise, flee in fear away from the ovum. Behind them, a slower, clumsier spermatozoon, unaware of all that has occurred, finally reaches his goal and fecundates the egg. The movie's protagonist Arturo recognizes himself in that union, and utters: "Se Totò Riina non avesse organizzato la cosiddetta strage di viale Lazio, io non sarei mai stato concepito."

Such is the powerful narrative incipit of *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* (*The Mafia Kills Only in Summer*), Pierfrancesco Diliberto's debut movie of 2013.¹

¹ Pierfrancesco Diliberto, also known as Pif, has worked as a freelance video-journalist for the Italian investigative TV show *Le Iene*, and has since conducted his own TV show titled *Il testimone* for MTV, where he follows the life of famous personalities in a documentaristic fashion. His previous cinematic experience is the crucial collaboration as assistant director for Marco Tullio Giordana's *I cento passi*, which revolves around the historical figure of Peppino Impastato and his struggles against the Mafia. *La mafia Annali d'italianistica* 35 (2017). *Violence Resistance Tolerance Sacrifice*

The movie offers right from the beginning a discourse that satirically explores the relationship between the Mafia and its effects on the citizens' political, experiential and, indeed, biological "being-in-the-world." It systematically investigates the possibility of both societal and individual defenses in relation to the Mafia phenomenon and the violence it produces. In spite of its being substantially a historical fiction — or a docudrama, since all of the historical facts shown in the movie are accurate — the movie presents not only a novel, biological reading of the Mafia *problématique*, but moreover serves as an anti-monument that provokes an ethical reaction to national historical memory and stimulates the viewers' emancipatory potential for the present.

In order to demonstrate the above thesis, I will organize the analysis in four sections. After introducing the reader to the movie's peculiar satirical tone and autobiographical component, my analysis shows how a biological analogy is foundational to its thematization of the Mafia phenomenon. I then discuss the movie's documentaristic dimension and the palingenetic value it attributes to the blood of those who sacrificed themselves in the fight against the Mafia. In the last part, I trace how monuments and memorial plaques of anti-Mafia heroes act as open sources of such palingenetic value, and argue that by performatively and interactively prompting its viewers to take a first-person stance against Mafia culture, the movie in its totality should be read as an anti-monument.

1. *An Idiosyncratic and Innovative Approach to the Mafia*

The movie tells the life story of Arturo, a boy particularly sensitive to the presence of the Mafia, in Palermo from 1969 to 1992, the year in which both Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino were killed. The protagonist's love story with a girl named Flora is the main narrative thread employed to foreground the pervasive climate of violence, danger, and death that constantly defines and shapes both Arturo's life and that of the Palermitan people. The various stages of Arturo's courtship of Flora, spanning from elementary school to adulthood, serve to highlight different dramatic moments of Palermitan Mafia history. Throughout the movie, many different historical personalities cross paths with the lives of the two protagonists, such as Boris Giuliano, General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, and Totò Riina. The continuous interweaving of Arturo's life with the Mafia reveals the movie's central core of reflection, namely the societal effects of what Jane and Peter Schneider fittingly define as Mafia's "cultural

uccide, written in collaboration with Michele Astori and Marco Mantani, has been received extremely well by the Italian audience, grossing over four million euros from movie-theater distribution alone and receiving many important prizes such as two *David di Donatello*, two *Nastri d'Argento*, and one Golden Globe. The film inspired the production of a very successful TV series of the same name that aired in 2016, directed by Luca Ribuoli, but again written by Diliberto and Michele Astori (and Stefano Bises). An ideal prequel to *La mafia uccide* for tone and content is Diliberto's *In guerra per amore* (2016).

production of violence” (81).

It is important here to note that Diliberto’s personal life experience as a Palermitan directly informs *La mafia uccide*, a fact that establishes a close correlation between the body of Arturo and the one of Diliberto himself, the voice-over narrator, protagonist, writer, and director of the cinematic project.² Like Diliberto, who was born in 1972, Arturo’s life in Palermo spans the oppressively violent years of the aftermath of the first (1962) and the second (1981) Mafia wars, the Maxi Trial (1986) and the dramatic Mafia murders of 1992. The choice of structuring the movie as a drama interspersed with frequent comic sketches further underlines this link by recalling the author’s own humorous televisual works that made him famous in Italy as Pif.

Arturo’s fictional story thus possesses an important autobiographical dimension that needs to be highlighted in order to understand *La mafia uccide* from both a formal and a reader-response perspective. The movie’s opening, shot in the typical hand-held camera style that characterizes Diliberto’s work as Pif, does not merely serve to introduce the audience to the protagonist’s love for Flora, but most importantly to establish a visual and aural connection between the narrator and Pif *qua* main character. Viewers are therefore led to believe that Diliberto is telling a hyperbolic version of his *own* life when in the next scene he starts recounting the aforementioned story of his character’s conception. This at once fictional and yet personal re-writing of Diliberto’s past interestingly makes the movie come into close proximity with the autofictional genre.³ The absolute identification between Pif and the protagonist is only disrupted eight minutes into the movie, when his father refers to his character as “Arturo”, thus making viewers realize that they are not watching a filmic autobiography proper. The strong association between Diliberto and Arturo however remains, suggesting viewers to experience the movie’s fictional content as an honest and intimate first-person account of Mafia agency.

In addition to this autobiographical element, Diliberto bravely chooses to employ a satirical narrative tone — here intended as a mode of social criticism that employs irony to achieve an ethical “ameliorative aim” (Hutcheon 43) — in order to approach Mafia culture and violence. The grotesque tinge that consequently characterizes the film finds in Sorrentino’s *Il divo* (2008), with which it shares the editor Cristiano Travaglioli, an important reference point — especially in its treatment of Giulio Andreotti, as will be discussed below.

However, the only real precursor to the movie’s satirical view of the Mafia

² Diliberto refers to the autobiographical dimension of his movie in different interviews. See for example Marilena Vinci’s or Lilly Gruber’s interview from 2013.

³ Doubrovsky originally coined the term *autofiction* for his novel *Fils* in 1977. It names a kind of autobiographical narration that Philippe Vilain subsequently defined as “fiction homonymique ou anominale qu’un individu fait de sa vie ou d’une partie de celle-ci” (74). Insofar as Arturo does not share Diliberto’s first name, *La mafia uccide* cannot in its totality be read in strictly autofictional terms.

phenomenon is Roberta Torre's *Tano da morire* of 1997, an idiosyncratic choral musical that purposefully overcomes the reluctance of past filmmakers to make people laugh about Mafia stories.⁴ *La mafia uccide*'s comic tone is achieved by recounting historical events through the eyes of its main character Arturo. The director retrieves and updates the Italian Neorealist focus on children as protagonists of the cinematic historical drama, while at the same time responding to the contemporary global cinema trend that features very young protagonists witnessing key historical events.⁵

Far from downplaying the devastating effects of the Mafia presence, the comic depiction of historical figures reveals the film's central anti-Mafia activism. By showing renowned people and events directly interacting with the author of the story himself, Diliberto elicits from spectators an emotively charged response to, and reappraisal of, recent historical facts. Tying the portrayal of controversial characters — such as Cosa Nostra boss Totò Riina — to Diliberto's own personal life experience in Palermo allows spectators to gain a deeper, more dramatic and nuanced understanding of the film's satirical tone. The satirical representation of historical events and people acquires a tragic connotation when it is centered on a person whose body is inscribed by that very story and not simply told by an external, potentially stereotyping and superficial, authorial instance.

With Diliberto's film we thus move from stories that reflect on the ambiguity of the sociocultural role of the Mafia in the Italian social fabric to a protagonist, Arturo, who clearly bears on his very body the signs of that evil he later seeks to efface. If, as Siebert puts it, the "mafia disputes the state's legitimate monopoly of violence" and "the very definition of the mafia, in the final analysis, is anchored in the usurpation of a 'right' over the life and death of individuals" (20), Diliberto writes his story to explore not only Mafia's thanatopolitics, but also its violent control of and interference with the living, even the neutral and innocent.

According to Dana Renga, newer Italian Mafia movies — and the realist, classic mode of storytelling they employ — tend to "focus on stories that are both pleasurable and familiar" and ultimately suggest "that the country is populated with heroes ready to combat evil at all costs." These films, by putting forth "a fantasy of a nation united against Mafia villainy," end up avoiding dealing with the Mafia as national trauma, and thus postponing the due

⁴ For a discussion of the relationship between comedy and Mafia movies, see Millicent Marcus's "Postmodern Pastiche, the Sceneggiata, and the View of the Mafia from Below in Roberta Torre's *To Die For Tano*" (2002).

⁵ Films that are part of this trend are, for example, A. Wood's *Machuca* (Chile, 2004), C. Hamburger's *The Year My Parents Went on Vacation* (Brazil, 2006), E. Kusturica's *When Father Was Away for Business* (Yugoslavia, 1985), W. Allen's *Radio Days* (USA, 1987) and G. Salvatores's *Io non ho paura* (Italy, 2003). I am grateful to Fabrizio Cilento for drawing my attention to this cinematic trend.

mourning process (14). Diliberto departs from such a filmic tradition by basing his story on a character whose body suffers the effects of the Mafia and whose life span coincides with a national rise of awareness concerning the Mafia's violent agency on the collectivity. Arturo is at once a conflation of the figures of director, writer, spectator, and the epitome of national conscience. As such, the continuous interplay of private story and public history — coupled with an engaged narration that manages to conflate tragedy and comedy, fiction and reality — is able to transcend traditional narrations and present spectators with Palermitan Mafia history and the trauma it produces, while impeding any sort of “avoidance” or “compulsion to repeat” (Renga 9).

2. *A Biological Reading of the Mafia*

As described at the outset, the very life of the main character Arturo not only is parodically determined by the Mafia, but somehow originated in a bloody event perpetrated by it. In this way, Arturo receives a special “imprinting” that comically makes him utter “Mafia” as his first word, and enables him to recognize Mafiosi at a glance, as if the child could see through their mere appearances and reach their ontological status of criminals. This satirical “superpower” clearly parodies that of superheroes, who conventionally acquire special abilities in traumatic circumstances similar to the events of *viale Lazio* shown here.

However, Diliberto's biological reading of the Mafia is all but a merely superficial comic device. The author suggests that the Mafia phenomenon has never been a reality existing in simple opposition to State forces. On the contrary, as demonstrated by Mafia scholar Francesco Benigno, among others, even its very formation in Risorgimental times occurred not *against* the newly founded Italian state, but rather *within* it and *alongside* it (370). Diliberto therefore creates a character who reflects this historic intertwining by bodily experiencing the lacerating consequences of his ambiguous citizenship. As Arturo/Diliberto says in the movie's opening: “Siamo a Palermo, e qui la Mafia ha sempre influenzato la vita di tutti, e in particolar modo la mia”, where the key word *influenzato* (influenced, from the latin *in-fluere*, to flow into), hides also a secondary darker meaning related to the semantic field of contagion and disease.

It soon becomes clear that the boy's sensitivity to the Mafia comes at a time when he lacks the cultural instruments that would allow him to understand the implications of his abilities. As a being biologically determined by the Mafia, Arturo cannot yet comprehend that what brought about his birth in the past is also what pathologically endangers and limits in the present his existence and that of his community.

The relation of Arturo to the ambiguous figure of Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti further elucidates this biological discourse. Diliberto openly associates Andreotti with the very essence of the Mafia phenomenon. In an interview conducted by Lilli Gruber on Italian national television, Diliberto reminded the

audience that even if the legal sentence that saw Andreotti tried for Mafia collusion was terminated for lack of evidence, it nevertheless proved that many personal encounters took place between Andreotti and various Mafia members. The director then explicitly added: “Non ci sono dubbi ormai [...] o si tifa per Andreotti, o si tifa per Falcone; delle due l’una, non possiamo tifare per tutti e due.” For the director, the “grey area” defined by Jane and Peter Schneider as characterizing the Mafia *intreccio* between Italian politicians and *mafiosi* is, in the case of Andreotti, certainly less obscure than what it appears to be at first sight (34).

Diliberto is certainly not alone in taking this position. In his book on the history of Cosa Nostra in Sicily between the Fascist era and 1995, Alexander Stille devotes important pages to Andreotti’s history, and explains why definitive proof of his participation in the Mafia’s decision-making process cannot be obtained. However, Stille, like Diliberto, concludes that the political leader had indeed a “political and moral responsibility for the well-documented collusion with the mafia of the leaders of his faction in Sicily,” and that Andreotti was “perhaps the most important player in a political class that accepted a culture of illegality and knowingly used the mafia’s strength in southern Italy for its own political advantage” (401).

It is in this perspective that one should read Arturo’s fascination for Andreotti and the latter’s role in elucidating the biological interference of the Mafia with the protagonist. Young Arturo is so “influenced” by the prime minister’s persona that, fascinated by his actions and thoughts, he chooses to disguise himself as the prime minister on the occasion of a carnival party. His willingness to transform himself into Andreotti symbolizes how the Mafia in the film comes to appropriate biological and cultural spaces *internal* to the individual. This invasion, which should be read as a parodic extremization of Foucault’s analysis of modern biopolitical regimes and their direct control over the body, makes the Mafia the opposite of a peripheral menace that one can clearly define and eventually counteract with conventional measures (210). Just as the so-called *intreccio* reveals the presence of the Mafia at the core of the Italian political system, in Diliberto’s movie *Cosa Nostra* is shown as a cancerous presence located at the very heart of the social body, a presence that disrupts the inside/outside divide that normally characterizes individuals’ private spheres in modern society.

In the movie, the Mafia’s influence — in its double meaning earlier discussed — saturates Palermo, and produces a cultural and material contagion that, through systematically enacted violence, slowly threatens to control and dominate the entire society. When, as shown in the story, something as simple and quotidian as iris cakes become inedible because of the possible presence of bullets within them, or when two car bombings produce dire consequences in the private homes of the film’s protagonists — among them Flora’s home which is inadvertently devastated despite not being targeted — it becomes clear how in

Diliberto's view the Mafia transcends the internal/external relationship by transgressing all boundaries between public and private spaces. One is constantly exposed to the danger of traumatic harm, just as Arturo is when he sits on top of the Fiat car that will explode only a few hours later killing judge Chinnici and his men.

Strikingly, the film then juxtaposes the Mafia's omnipresence with the norm of silence or false unawareness by playing with clichés and norms that structure Palermitan society. In step with Palermo's masculinist culture, for example, members of the community blame men's frequent and mysterious deaths in the city on women: "A Palermo ammazzano più le femmine che l'infarto" — an exclamation reminiscent of the famous line uttered by Franco Citti's character in Coppola's *The Godfather II*: "[...] in Sicily women are just as dangerous as shotguns." Keyed as choral bearers of popular beliefs, these characters reveal the ignorance, sexism, and *omertà* at play in the face of Mafia violence.

The moment of self-recognition in which the protagonist is finally able to start untangling himself from the Mafia's cultural production of violence and *omertà* occurs only at the funeral function in honor of his friend General Dalla Chiesa. On that occasion, the absence of Arturo's hero Andreotti from the church reveals to the young boy a sign of bad faith that will give credence to the teachings of his anti-Mafia journalist friend Francesco. Rocco Chinnici's death will later confirm this realization. And it is precisely when Palermitans, too, "'scoprirono' che esisteva la mafia," as the narrator says, that the movie can symbolically transition from Arturo's childhood to adulthood showing a montage of the *Maxi processo* (1986-87).

This montage subtly functions as a metonymy of Arturo's growth. His becoming a man is only hinted at through images that display the rising awareness of both Palermitan residents and Italians in general in the face of groundbreaking confessions by Mafia members arrested and interviewed during these years. No other visual device is used to signal the passage of time, and it is indeed with a shock that, after the montage, viewers recognize the adult character lying on the bed as Arturo, who has now become a young man (interpreted by Diliberto himself). The parallel underlines that Arturo — and with him the Italian people he symbolically represents — can only truly reach maturity through the knowledge of what determined his birth. His development becomes complete once we see him step out of his childhood bed, leave the house, and turn into an active member of civil society.

The character of Flora, Arturo's future wife, undergoes an analogous development. In line with the Italian tradition of *donna angelicata* that dates back to Italian medieval poetry of *dolce stil novo*, Diliberto constructs her as the absolute and, at least at first, unattainable object of desire. Arturo falls in love with Flora in elementary school, and her ambiguous reactions to his courtship constitute the driving force of the movie's narration, just like the character of Beatrice serves to structure Dante's love story in his *Vita nova*.

However, in stark parodic contrast to the Italian poetic tradition, Flora does not possess — at least until the very end of the movie — any salvific potential at all. It is precisely Flora's various refusals that will later put the protagonist in direct contact with the aforementioned Palermitan historical characters, and, during adulthood, oblige Arturo to work for Salvo Lima, a politician whom he knew to be directly related to Cosa Nostra. Flora is so implicated in the Mafia culture that she works for Lima without ever doubting his political sincerity to the point of arguing with Arturo when he suggests otherwise. Lima's violent death, however, will eventually make her call into question the man's true political identity.

Flora is at first characterized by the paradoxical ambiguity of being the only figure able to complement the life's aspirations of the protagonist, while also being part of the culture Arturo has grown up fearing and learning to refuse. In the scene in which Arturo finally reveals his love for her on a sofa, and which ends in the above-mentioned argument about Lima, the red rose Arturo holds visually separates the couple in their respective fields of thought. As the shot suggests, their union is impossible at this point, before Lima's death, for Arturo has started his emancipatory struggle against the Mafia construct, while Flora is still implicated in it.

It is similarly not by chance that Arturo and Flora will meet and finally kiss for the first time during the demonstrations following Borsellino's death. Only by accepting complete rejection of Mafia culture as the crucial turning point of their love story can one fully justify the otherwise seemingly unmotivated and abrupt kiss the couple share. The two casually meet standing in the crowd that, — raging against the state and the Mafia alike after the brutal and outrageous murders — is trying to reach Palermo's cathedral in protest. Their reunion is accompanied by the crowd's shouted slogan: "Fuori la mafia dallo stato!" which explicitly voices the movie's central theme of emancipation from an internal threat.

Arturo's personal fulfillment with Flora is granted only after his having engaged in social activism. Specularly, it is precisely at the moment in which Flora untangles herself from Mafia culture by truly recognizing its pervasiveness and deadly consequences, that she is also able to understand true love. No words are needed between the two lovers: The achievement of political awareness corresponds to the recovery of biological agency.

The couple can thus kiss in a temporally suspended state of bliss. While dramatic extra-diegetic music cathartically peaks, the voice of the other protesters is suddenly silenced, and the two lovers are framed by quick shots that keep their kiss at the center of the action. These rapid cuts taken from different angles end up drawing a circle around the lovers and ultimately shatter the continuity of space/time around them, making the exceptionality and the urgency of the public demonstration powerfully coincide with the sublime fulfillment of private personal desire.

3. *The Value of Referential Blood*

Beyond the fate of its main characters, the truly compelling quality of *La mafia uccide* resides in its aspiration to allow viewers to undertake a similar process of emancipation. To prepare the ground for such transformation, the director cuts through the fictional ontology of the cinematic image by inserting historical footage in the movie's montage. These images reveal the documentaristic second nature of the movie, a form of filmmaking that in recent years has evolved to include works that depart from traditional ideas of the genre, as testified by Ary Folman's 2008 animation movie *Waltz With Bashir*.⁶

Documentary filmmaking, for Bill Nichols, is characterized by a "self-chosen mandate to represent the historical world rather than to imaginatively invent alternative ones"; this willingness transcends the traditional documentary formula of structuring either a non-narrative investigation, or a narrative mimetic recounting of historical facts (*Introduction to Documentary* 19). The documentary as a genre is thus being conceived more and more as a way to approach the filmic medium, rather than as a form that can be achieved when a given set of fixed conventional requirements is respected. *La mafia uccide* displays what Nichols terms "the informing logic" typical of documentary filmmaking essence, the presence of an argument about the historical world for which a solution is ultimately sought (21).

The movie's documentary nature is especially apparent when historical footage of the times is used and Arturo/Diliberto's voice-over mediates the images by adding and contextualizing information. He thereby provides a direct interpretation of historical reality that represents the informative documentary component just described.

Such an interplay between fiction and historical reality also serves to shape the film's own desired readership mode. The movie creates in its spectators a set of expectations and assumptions about its use of history that makes them overcome the traditional "suspension of disbelief" that characterizes cinematic audiences. It makes them reach, instead, a more critically conscious approach to its textual strategies and the interaction between the informative and the ludic aspects of the narrative.⁷ If for Dirk Eitzen the primary distinction of any documentary text is that it prompts the audience to ask itself if the text is lying, Diliberto exploits this impulse to make viewers rethink recent historical events

⁶ *Waltz with Bashir* is an animated documentary based on a soldier's experience of the 1982 Lebanon war that does not rely on real film footage up until the very last scene of the movie.

⁷ As Nichols writes: "We may define documentary not in institutional (discursive) nor textual terms but in relation to its viewers. Taking a text in isolation, there is nothing that absolutely or infallibly distinguishes documentary from fiction [...]. The distinguishing mark of documentary may be less intrinsic to the text than a function of the assumptions and expectations brought to the process of the viewing act" (*Representing Reality* 24).

and re-read them in light of their emotive filmic participation (92).

Part of this strategy resides also in the juxtaposition of real footage in key diegetic moments to shots that mimic the televisual aesthetics of the time, as for example in the aforementioned scene of Dalla Chiesa's funeral, when Arturo realizes that Andreotti has decided not to participate in the public mourning of the anti-Mafia hero. The short inserts, characterized by identical televisual grain and colors of the true footage, serve to situate the protagonists directly in the past reality as if they were an integral part of the historical events narrated on screen. These inserts allow for the "multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, film-makers/apparatus and spectators" that Bruzzi considers as the distinctive trait of recent documentary practices and their renewed anti-Bazinian approach to filmic "transparency" (10).

Diliberto thus not only plays with the audience's understanding of facts versus fiction, but also with their perception of present and past experiences. These juxtapositions in fact create a short circuit in which the past becomes present once again by re-activating the historical moment through the presence of the main characters. Thus Arturo's story — for instance, when he is walking among the funeral crowd in San Domenico's church — merges with national historical trauma. This conflation of space/time ultimately serves to place the Italian viewers at the very center of the fiction. Through the catalytic body of Arturo, the director creates the fictitious presence of a past historical moment, prompting viewers to form an ethical judgment on both the community's past and the present political situation it contributed to creating.

This temporal short circuit further aims at meaningfully thematizing violence within the movie. For David Riches, violence is better understood and studied through different contexts by uncovering "the dynamics" at play in the triangulation between the perpetrator, the victim, and the witness, all possessing a respective interpretation of the violent act (8). Through the aforementioned stylistic choices, the director is able to conflate the figures of the victim (Arturo) and the witness (the viewer) in order to elicit an informed and emotive response to the horror depicted on screen. Furthermore, the author forces viewers to take a stance, since witnesses too, precisely because of their inaction, at times risk participating in the perpetrators' misdeeds.

At a deeper level, what further anchors the urgency and the referentiality of Diliberto's cinematic project are those filmic shots in which the consequences of Mafia violence are displayed in their most explicit and repulsive forms. Such is the case, for example, when Pio La Torre, Rocco Chinnici, and their bodyguards are shown dead in their bloody materiality. The director notably does not re-create these images on set, but rather uses real shots of the corpses — pure "emanation of the referent," as Barthes would put it, and thus direct indexical traces of Mafia violence (80) — for their documentary value.

By making viewers face these gruesome images, Diliberto seems to suggest that beyond the interpretation of a violent event or historical period remains

always the horror of a disfigured, dismembered, or violated body. For the director, then, the possibility of understanding and counteracting the cancerous force that causes blood to be shed lies precisely in reconsidering the blood itself as possessing palingenetic potential.

Blood, as evidence of violence and death, functions here as a symbolic trigger for resistance. Given the important performative dimension of political self-sacrifice, the image of the injured or dying human body has to be understood as connected with the community and aimed at mobilizing a public reaction in the direction of a sociopolitical renewal. Karin Fierke, in her essay titled *Political Self-Sacrifice*, finds that wounded bodies sacrificed for a common cause allow the community to experience potential for resistance. For her, “the dying body at one and the same time becomes the embodiment of the death of community and the condition for its restoration — that is, the act that destroys life in order to create new life” (85).⁸ One should read in the same vein the paradoxical existence of Arturo himself, a man who, in spite of his origin due to an internalization of the negative, is able to represent the condition of restoration of Palermitan society.

As discussed above, if the first part of the film metaphorically biologizes the Mafia’s necrotic relation to life in order to satirically expose the cultural domination that it achieves over individuals, the second part reveals the blood of anti-Mafia heroes as a vital force for the achievement of individual and communal resistance and counter-struggle.

4. *Diegetic Monuments and the Film as Anti-Monument*

Monuments enter at this point in our analysis, just as they reveal their crucial importance at the end of the movie itself. The movie’s biological (fictional) and the documentaristic (factual) discourses culminate in its treatment of monuments to anti-Mafia heroes. The final sequence consists of a montage in which Arturo and his wife Flora take their son, at different stages of his infancy, to the memorial plaques of anti-Mafia heroes such as Paolo Borsellino, Giovanni Falcone, Boris Giuliano, Rocco Chinnici and others, because, as the voice-over specifies, “Quando sono diventato padre ho capito che i genitori hanno due compiti fondamentali: il primo è quello di difendere il proprio figlio dalla malvagità del mondo; il secondo è quello di aiutarlo a riconoscerla.”

The sequence aesthetically reiterates the interesting friction already established within the movie between fiction and reality, since the realistic shots

⁸ Particular case studies taken into consideration by Fierke are the death of Jerzy Popiełuszko in 1984, the self-immolation of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in the early 60s, and the conception of sacrifice in the contemporary Middle East. Given the pervasiveness of the Mafia influence and the clearly understood dangers of fighting it, undoubtedly the death of any activist who fought actively against the Mafia — and died because of it — has to be included in the same category of self-sacrifice.

taken by Arturo's shaky hand-held camera are contrasted by dramatic background music. This tension is also built on a tight juxtaposition between the personal and the collective spheres, allowing us to expand the list of intermedial styles employed in the movie — the televisual, the monumental, the documentarist and the journalistic — to include also the home movie genre.⁹ Each different shot of the final montage underlines the cultural and political growth of Arturo's son, whom he wants to raise as a citizen aware and capable of recognizing evil. Following the definition of art historian Joech Spielmann, we can define monuments as

works of art reminding us of people or events. Erected in a public space [...] and designed to endure. A monument fulfills a function of identification, legitimization, representation, anticipation, interpretation and information [...]. Discussion, development and reception are an integral part of the monument itself. In order to be and remain a monument, it must be subjected to ritual reception.

(cit. in Carrier 35)

It is not by chance that Diliberto stresses the importance of the ritualistic return to and explanation of the monumental plaques. Arturo exposes his son to their presence not merely by describing the circumstances of the murders the plaques commemorate, but also their lasting contributions. He emphasizes how the lives of these men have impacted his own past as well as Italian laws — such as Pio La Torre's law of *reato di associazione mafiosa* introduced in 1982 — and thus how their actions have strengthened society's and the state's defenses. These public artifacts thus allow for a repolarization of the public space, making permanent the memory of an event that is believed to be foundational for the social identity of that community.

In this sense, *La mafia uccide* has to be seen as part of the epitaphic tradition of Mafia movies discussed by Millicent Marcus. For Marcus, movies like *Il giudice ragazzino*, *Placido Rizzotto*, and *I cento passi* can be seen as “cinematic tomb inscriptions designed to transmit the legacy of moral engagement and social justice for which their protagonists died” (*In Memoriam* 292). The engaged and memorialistic intent is intrinsic to each of these movies as all conclude their narration with textual intertitles. The writings serve as epitaphic remembrances honoring the death of the protagonist and also as devices that directly imbue in audiences the ineluctable sense of death and the consequential outrage deriving from the irrecoverable loss of such unique lives.

Aware of this heritage, Diliberto, who worked as assistant director on the set of *I cento passi*, chooses to place right before the final credits an epitaphic collage of newspaper cut-outs of articles about the sacrifices of anti-Mafia

⁹ The journalistic genre is most notably present during Arturo's TV reportages and right before the movie's closing credits, as will be discussed below.

heroes. He also displays his version of a celebratory plaque at the very beginning of the movie, dedicating it “Ai ragazzi della sezione catturandi della squadra mobile di Palermo; Al Quarto Savona 15; A tutti gli agenti di scorta che sono caduti nell’adempimento del proprio dovere.” Furthermore, the movie opens with Flora passing in front of the plaque of Chinnici and ends contemplating it again: a circular self-reflexive stance that reveals the function of the movie to be that of a cinematic monument. In fact, just as Peter Homans writes, “cultural forms other than the traditional monument — such as film — can serve as ‘functional equivalent’ of a monument” (24), the very nature of the cinematic image should be seen here as acquiring a monumental dimension.

A closer analysis further reveals that the didactic approach to monuments that Diliberto’s *alter ego* Arturo performs for his son is specular to the one that he has been deploying throughout the movie with viewers. The final sequence thus reveals itself to be the *mise en abyme* of the whole *La mafia uccide qua* film. Just like one of the monumental plaques shown in the finale, the movie too suggests its own emancipatory potential for the audience. For Diliberto, through the monumental concretization of past bloodshed, perennial therapeutic sources open up in the wounded space of the city, and thus allow for a conscious civil re-appropriation of public space against indifference, forgetfulness, and ignorance. It is as if Diliberto, with his close-ups of monuments’ surfaces, were directly replying to Robert Musil’s statement of 1927, according to which the most important characteristic of monuments is that they “are so conspicuously inconspicuous. There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument” (61). Monuments thus become protagonists once again against the indifference and the decay with which they are associated in modern times.¹⁰

However, by self-reflexively revealing its own artifice, *La mafia uccide* can be more fruitfully read as part of the discursive field of anti-monuments rather than traditional monuments. In other words, the movie transcends its own epitaphic and thus monumental potential, and becomes an anti-monument in its own right.¹¹

In deconstructing conventional memorialistic forms of expression, the film belongs to a tradition that started in the early twentieth century, when artists, according to Bryan-Wilson, began to reflect on how not to “ossify the past [nor] glorify destruction with elegant bronzes,” but rather achieve a “self-reflective

¹⁰ Both the threat of decay and indifference towards monuments are here directly highlighted by the director through the close-up shot of the sign that says: “Non depositare rifiuti sotto la lapide del Generale Dalla Chiesa.”

¹¹ Throughout the essay, the anti-monumental category is used in contrast to the counter-monumental one. In spite of the apparent interchangeability of the two in critical discourse, Q. Stevens, K. Frank and R. Fazakerley propose to refer to counter-monuments only to designate “dialogic monument[s] that critique the purpose and the design of a specific, existing monument, in an explicit, contrary and proximate pairing” (259).

decentering” by re-conceptualizing the very mode of monumental expression (194). Especially after the horrors of World War II and Nazi fascism, the form through which traditional monuments symbolically favored social remembrance and conveyed their pedagogical function had to be rethought. In the West, according to Carrier, 1945 marked a “watershed in the history of monuments in terms of both style and utility” (19). “Multiple and *open*” forms of remembrance were favored over the traditional and therefore “‘enduring,’ ‘objective,’ ‘desirable’ and ‘pro-’” kind of monument (214, 7).

The trajectory of questioning the very nature of a monument eventually led to the birth of anti-monuments, which for Young refuted “the heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons of the Nineteenth Century celebrating national ideals and triumphs” in favor of “antiheroic, often ironic and self-effacing conceptual installations marking the national ambivalence and uncertainty of late Twentieth-century postmodernism” (93). As Lipstadt writes: “If a [traditional] monument is dignifying of death in war, the anti-monument exposes the horrors of war” (65). Anti-monuments thus push for their own symbolic, and at times even material, deconstruction, since, as Young suggests, they conceptually “stand against [themselves]” (66).

A major example of an anti-monument is the one conceived by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalav-Gerz’s in 1986 and placed in Hamburg, simply titled *Monument Against Fascism*. It consisted of a twelve-meter tall stele covered in lead, which was gradually lowered into the ground until its complete disappearance in 1993. The monument notably allowed, and actually encouraged, people to inscribe on its surface their names or other messages, thus participating in a ritual appropriation of the monument itself as locus of active reflection on collective history. In this way, public space is at least partially recuperated by the community — a strategy that radically opposes the traditional monument’s monolithic imposition of a unidirectional ideological message. Precisely because of its visible final absence, the progressive disappearance of the monument, or its self-effacement, further prompts a remembrance of the cause it stood for. The artifact ultimately asks people to “stand up against injustice,” as the inscription read, instead of remaining passively sheltered behind a traditional monument’s symbolic message.¹²

We should read in this vein the ironic title of the movie: “La mafia uccide solo d’estate.” The seemingly reassuring words that the father uses with his son to make him sleep peacefully at night are in fact the expression of a culture of

¹² The full inscription reads: “We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names here next to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12-metre tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end it is only we ourselves who can stand up against injustice” (Young 130).

conscious denial. In this sense the movie seems to challenge itself, since what it shows clearly serves to contradict the claim contained in its own title, standing for the ignorance that produces it. Anti-monuments represent subversive stances that always speak “against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate — and finally, against the authoritarian propensity in monumental spaces that reduces viewers to passive spectators” (Young 96).

La mafia uccide, unlike traditional anti-Mafia films, similarly demands the active participation of its spectators in understanding its performative and satirical treatment of history. The movie progressively displays its own deconstruction, increasingly substituting satirical depictions with historical facts. Furthermore, instead of constructing a hagiographic narrative only focused on the sacrifice of exceptional individuals, Diliberto seeks to oppose the Mafia by having spectators become experientially aware of the cultural spaces it occupies within society. Ultimately, and just like the self-effacing stele, the cinematic project wishes both to achieve the complete communal emancipation from Mafia culture and violence, and also prompt citizens’ first-person social activism.¹³ After the death of the anti-Mafia heroes shown in the movie, it is indeed only “we ourselves who can stand up against injustice.”

Conclusion

La mafia uccide performs a rewriting of history that requires full participation from the audience. Its satirical tone, which at first glance risks downplaying the viewers’ filmic engagement with history, in reality allows a much broader audience to partake in a common catharsis. Unlike a traditional monument to Mafia victims, the movie succeeds in becoming a didactic tool that, rather than merely glorifying the actions and sacrifices of the dead, acts on the sensitivities of the living.

Here Diliberto shows that even the fetus deterministically born as a Mafia product from a slow and unaware spermatozoon, possesses the strength to go against the very circumstances that allowed it to come to life. His cinematic project stands as an anti-monument that, by foregrounding a biological declination of the Mafia issue, permits the viewers to have a novel understanding of the cultural dimension of the phenomenon.

But the triangulation established between Arturo, the viewer, and Diliberto creates a productive tension only insofar as it ultimately encounters the blood and the sacrificial bodies of those who died to protect the Italian state from the destructive presence of Cosa Nostra. The movie thus meaningfully reflects upon

¹³ Similarly, Bufalino, one of the most important modern Sicilian writers and close friend of anti-Mafia writer Leonardo Sciascia, at the end of his introduction to the collection of essays on Sicily titled *Il fiere ibileo*, dedicates his work to a time in which “nella terra che amo, guarita, parleranno di mafia solo i sociologi dell’antico e le tesi di laurea” (8).

Riches's aforementioned triadic structure of violence: not only are viewers urged to identify with the victims to avoid their own indirect participation in the deeds of the perpetrators, but one of the victims, Arturo, is depicted as an aware and informed witness of the violence perpetrated against him and his whole community. Thus viewers and victims are ultimately impelled to become forces of resistance against Mafia culture and the violence it causes.

Just as the fictional Arturo does with his journalistic profession and with his commitment to educating his son, Diliberto calls upon our conscience by shaping an anti-monument to the dead that communicates with the living: a biological, "therapeutical" device of emancipation from violence that can help us learn from the past in order to act decisively towards a different future. For the story of the Mafia — sadly — does not end in 1992.

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