BUONGIORNO, NOTTE  
Italy 2003  
Director: Marco Bellocchio  
Starring: Luigi LoCascio, Maya Sansa, Roberto Herlitzka, Pier Giorgio Bellocchio, Paolo Briguglia, Giovanni Calcagno.

The massacre of Piazza Fontana in Milan where a bomb killed 27 people and wounded 88 others marks the beginning of Italian terrorism of the 70s. Massacres (one of the most deadly, with the loss of 85 lives, was perpetrated at the Bologna train station in 1980) were plotted by extreme right terrorist groups such as Ordine Nuovo, whereas communist terrorist groups were more interested in kidnapping people in power. The Brigate Rosse, a communist extremist group, was most active from 1977 to 1979. Their agenda was to “strike a blow to the heart of the Italian government,” hence they kidnapped and/or killed people connected with the Italian Government. In 1978, after killing his bodyguards, the Brigate Rosse kidnapped Aldo Moro, president of the Christian Democrats, the largest ruling party at that time. They kept him in captivity for 55 days. During that period the terrorists issued many statements justifying this abominable act. Moro wrote 86 letters, only a few of which are publicly known. On May 9, 1978 Moretti, the leader of the terrorist group, shot the politician to death.

BUOGIORNO, NOTTE is inspired by the novel IL PRIGIONIERO, written by Laura Brighetti (one of the terrorists who took part in the incarceration of Moro). The movie, a record of those 55 days in which Moro was kept in prison, is told through Chiara’s eyes. Chiara, one of the terrorists, is the main character whose point of view shifts from reality to dream. It shifts from justifying the horror of kidnapping a man to feeling pity towards him in a painful path of working-through of bereavement.

Prisons  
The film opens in the apartment where Moro will be kept in captivity. The dark and oppressive apartment is inspected by Chiara and her pretend husband. The off-screen voice of the leasing agent allows the visual aspects to remain predominant. What the two terrorists care about is not the information they absently hear; rather, they are interested in the arrangement of the apartment. It has to become a safe hideout and prison. During the following days all the brigatisti’s efforts will be focused on building Moro’s prison. The director favors interior shots. Frames of cramped rooms and close-ups are the devices exploited to mirror not only Moro’s captivity, but also the terrorists’ frame of mind as they create a secret room hidden behind a bookshelf in which to contain and conceal him.

After the kidnapping the terrorists enter Moro’s room several times a day to question him, to prosecute him according to the laws of the “people’s court,” and finally to read him his death sentence. The opening to the room is narrow and not even a meter high. One has to kneel to be able to go through. The entrance to the room resembles that of a tomb. Moro is taken into his prison in a wooden box (the same one used to hide him during the kidnapping) which looks like a casket. Death pervades everything.

Not only are prisons material, but also mental. The terrorists are evidently trapped in the prison of their political credo. No other point of view is acceptable. Their conversations with Moro are actually monologues during which they slavishly spout their ideologies. Moro is constantly asked to confess. According to the terrorists, confessing means parroting the truths they impose. Conversely, according to Moro, confessing means intimately relating to his own spirit. He does not feel he has anything to confess. He does not understand what crimes he committed. No true communication between the two parties is ever reached, despite Moro’s effort to understand. The terrorists are resolute. No compromises are possible. He will be sentenced.

Points of view  
Keyhole shots of Moro in captivity not only enhance the claustrophobic atmosphere and the oppressive sensation of being held prisoner, but they also convey Chiara’s point of view. It is Chiara, in fact, who peeks through the peephole into Moro’s cell. She will not talk to him, but, as she confesses to her mate, she needs to know that he is there. Therefore, she often checks on him. Chiara’s voyeuristic need to watch Moro matches her habit of watching TV. No feelings are expressed through words. When she hears of the kidnapping on the news, her eyes do the talking. Her eyes cannot conceal what her words and behavior do.
Moro is portrayed lying down in bed, his hands crossed on his chest, as if in an open casket, or on his side in a fetal position. Moro is portrayed talking to the terrorists. Moro is portrayed listening to his death sentence. Chiara’s eyes secretly scrutinize; at best, given the absence of words, they communicate feelings and confused and contradictory meanings.

Mass-culture
Terrorism and Moro’s killing are not the only issues of the film. They actually become the means to convey a critical portrayal of any post-modern society as being dominated by mass-culture. TV, being omnipresent, becomes its symbol. Terrorists keep in touch with the external world via TV. TV is their eye on the world. TV programs ritually mark the beginning and the end of each day. The TV is constantly on. TV is the mirror through which they see themselves and their behavior. Finally, TV creates what they perceive as reality.

The terrorists’ attitude towards TV is non-critical. They passively view anything from the news on which the funerals of Moro’s bodyguard are displayed to programs with dancing show-girls. TV becomes an anesthetic, helping them carry out their deeds without pain. The terrorists already live in an alienated condition in which reality is a construct of their ideals or a construct of what TV shows. There is no relationship with the external world. Reality is literally filtered through the images they view on TV, which also becomes their conscious. Since they are isolated from everybody and everything, TV often gives them feedback to relate to. As an omni-pervasive leitmotif, TV becomes the symbol of any non-critical society, one that risks losing touch with reality.

Psycho-apathy.
According to 19th Century and early 20th Century psychology theories, psycho-apathy defines a state in which a subject could not perceive any feelings or emotions. According to the portrait of the terrorists in the film they could be defined as psycho-apathetic. They are viewed as completely alienated from reality. They manifest their dissociated personality when they show no feelings toward Moro, who is a human being, but worry about a bird which is about to get eaten by a cat. Once again TV becomes a symbol of their apathy. On TV images of tragic events are followed by cheerful dancers and happy music. Everything is on the same level: tragedy and comedy are on a continuum without boundaries. Similarly, the terrorists know no boundaries: they can kill a man whose only sin is to belong to the Christian Democrat party. This idea is also supported by the comment made by the conscientious objector, Enzo: “I think terrorists are dissociated. I heard of a terrorist who before and after a killing reads Tex Willer and masturbates while watching porno movies.” One of the terrorists states he does not dream anymore: by not dreaming his emotions can be nullified.

Totalitarian society
Documentaries of totalitarian societies are interspersed throughout the film. Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia are recurring images. They show parades exalting the cult of the body, the murdering of people opposed to the regimes, and desolate landscapes symbolizing the terrible conditions under which the people lived. These documentaries seem to serve as a critical comment on any society that imposes ideals by means of violence and any fascist society that does not respect individual freedom. The Brigate Rosse’s agenda is totalitarian as well, since, from their perspective, proletarian justice must triumph by any means, including violence. In a politically divided Italy (such as it was in the 70s), contrasts between left and right were evident and often ended in harsh fights between the two parties. One of the sequences of the film shows a dialogue between the conscientious objector, Chiara’s colleague at the ministry where she works to cover up her identity, and a person in a cafeteria. They state their contrasting political views: the conscientious objector, by having chosen not to do his obligatory military service, is a pacifist and therefore belongs to a leftist political culture. The person with whom he is engaged in conversation, by raising his arm in the fascist salute, is clearly a rightwing sympathizer. The latter’s comment about the Brigatisti

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1 “…The modern concept of ‘psychopathy’ was put forward by Hervey Cleckley (1903-1984) in his classic work The Mask of Sanity (1941). According to Cleckley’s criteria a psychopath is an intelligent person characterized by poverty of emotions, who has no sense of shame, is superficially charming, is manipulative, who shows irresponsible behaviour, and is inadequately motivated.” Ian Pitchford PhD Cbiol MIBiol, “The Origin Of Violence: Is Psychopathy an Adaptation?”, The Human Nature Review, 2001 Volume 1: 28-36 (5 November)
identifies any terrorist as a supporter of a totalitarian society, whether he or she is fascist or communist. Addressing the conscientious objector, he states, “Sei peggio di un brigate, perché loro rischiano la vita” (You are worse than a terrorist, because they risk their lives). Violence equals courage according to the fascist sympathizer. Conversely, violence equals loss of freedom according to the conscientious objector, who seems to translate Bellocchio’s views, expressed visually through clips from films and documentaries about totalitarian regimes. “I terroristi sono alienati. Pretendono di cambiare il mondo a colpo di pistola” (The terrorists are alienated. They expect to change the world with weapons). Thus, terrorism and fascism are the same thing, because of their use of violence, their lack of respect for the individual, and their credos imposed by means of fear and violence. In this manner the kernels of persuasion and consequently of fascism are also in a passive, non-critical relationship with the mass media, which is also exemplified by the terrorists’ attitude towards TV. TV has the power of persuading, the power of anesthetizing, and the power of putting tragedy and comedy on the same plane. The director is not only thinking of society in the 70s, but he is also thinking of the society we live in, where TV is becoming more real than reality itself and where what is covered by TV becomes real. Similarly, what is not covered by TV does not exist for some people. Persuasion is also present in the slogan Chiara and the other terrorists recite as a mantra “la classe operaia deve dirigere tutto.” They repeat it until they fall into a trance. They need to find the strength to overcome the disappointment resulting from their viewing on TV the leftist trade unionist speaking out against the terrorists. Worse yet, they cannot stand the disapproval of the people taking part in the rally organized by the trade union to protest terrorist acts.

The power of imagination
Chiara is asked to listen to Moro reading his letter addressed to the Pope. She cries. She starts having doubts about what the Brigate Rosse are doing and asks in vain for her fellow terrorists to change their plans and not to kill their prisoner.

Earlier, Enzo, the conscientious objector, had told Chiara he had written a script about a female terrorist who kidnaps a politician and eventually starts not believing in what her companions believe in and helps the politician escape. The script’s main character is Chiara’s doppelganger. Chiara is upset by the script and her disturbing double, because they make her think and make her feel. Thus, they break the spell of her anesthetized self. Not only do Moro’s letter and the script provoke some sort of emotional and intellectual reaction in Chiara, so do the letters of the partisans condemned to death. Her father, a partisan as well, used to read them to her when she was a child. There seems to be a common theme emphasizing the episodes where Chiara undergoes a change, even though she will not be able to transform her thoughts and feeling into action and imitate the main character of the script. The letters and the script become a source of feelings and reasoning. The letters and the script seem to be in contrast with the mass culture proposed by TV. As long as Chiara watches TV she is anesthetized; when she listens to the reading of the letters and the script, she starts having doubts about what she is doing. Her father becomes alive in her memories not by formally commemorating him at the cemetery, but by remembering the letters he used to read her. The letters and the movie script stand for literature and art; it is not a coincidence that the title BUONGIORNO, NOTTE was inspired by one of Emily Dickinson’s poems Good Morning, Midnight. It is the kind of literature and art which is seemingly advocated by Parini and Humanistic ideals: art has a civil and educational role for man². Director Bellocchio, who seems to mirror the author of the script BUONGIORNO, NOTTE, asserts the fundamental role of art and the artist as a means to create a better society.

Power and art
The film takes a final stance by having the author of the script BUONGIORNO, NOTTE arrested. He is the peace lover, he is against terrorism, and he is a person who has ideas. He is arrested, probably indicted of

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² “…In seno alle odi, dunque,[Parini] il moralista e l’umanista, l’uomo pubblico e il letterato, hanno cercato di realizzare un accordo, di equilibrare tra loro le particolari esigenze dell’uno e dell’altro: il sincero zelo didattico del riformatore moderno e l’amore per la parola…. del classicista educato sui latini…”
[“…In the Odes Parini, as a moralist and a humanist, a public man and a learned man, attempted to find the perfect balance between the former’s and the latter’s needs: the sincere didactic zeal of the modern reformer is united with the love for language of the classicist who was brought up studying the Latin classics…”]
Lanfranco Caretti, Antichi e Moderni, Torino, Einaudi, 1976, pp.208-12
being a terrorist himself, just because he does not conform, he is unconventional, and he likes to write about prohibited subjects.

One of the last sequences shows politicians and people in power during a séance for Moro where an irreverent spirit makes fun of them. Whether this is considered a game or they really believe it, this scene is disturbing. It strongly contrasts with the imminent tragedy.

Moro reveals love, pity, and understanding in his letters; so does the artist in his script and so do the partisans, condemned to die, in their letters. As the film ends, in series of images that at first are confusing, Moro is killed by the brigatisti, while the artist sets him free through Chiara’s dream inspired by BUONGIORNO, NOTTE. As final images the director chooses to frame the terrorists in a claustrophobic close-up, while Moro, the protagonist of the dream, is shot walking along empty streets. Thanks to the paradox of art the captors are imprisoned while their victim is free.

Emily Dickinson - Good Morning -- Midnight
Good Morning -- Midnight --
I'm coming Home --
Day -- got tired of Me --
How could I -- of Him?

Sunshine was a sweet place --
I liked to stay --
But Morn -- didn't want me -- now --
So -- Goodnight -- Day!

I can look -- can't I --
When the East is Red?
The Hills -- have a way -- then --
That puts the Heart -- abroad --

You -- are not so fair -- Midnight --
I chose -- Day --
But -- please take a little Girl --
He turned away!