

A series of university lessons collected in book form. Not by the professor, but by his students, first and foremost Veronica Ronchi. This is how *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo – Il capitalismo secondo Pasolini* by Giulio Sapelli,

# Pasolini, or in praise of social deviance

ARTS & CRAFTS

edited by Vittorio Borelli

professor of History of Economics, came about. In this interview, Sapelli describes how his passion for the Friulian poet was born and offers a different interpretation of him, one very distant from tradition.



**W**orthy men leave a mark in the history of their times, either for their consistency or, conversely, for their contradictions. Pier Paolo Pasolini belongs to the second group. Possibly, no one has lived in the 20th century casting doubts, feelings and conflicting passions as he did. Pasolini was a refined intellectual, but not a lover of elite groups. Rather, he loved the simple people, the same people that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels labeled the sub-proletariat. He was a deeply religious man who spent his life fighting against the Roman Catholic Church, which did not understand him and excluded him. He was openly a member of the Communist Party (although a group of partisans

followers of Tito had killed his brother, a partisan with the “Partito d’Azione”). However, he was certainly not a “progressive” and was expelled from the Italian Communist Party because of his homosexuality. His communist beliefs were a result of his instincts and not an issue of political orientation or culture. Instinctively, he supported the weakest.

Pasolini, who was murdered in November 1975 at the Idroscalo di Ostia, has been much written about by artists, literary critics, journalists and psychoanalysts... but, as far as I know, this is the first time that his life and his work are being studied by a historian of Economics, Giulio Sapelli, professor at the Milan State University, president of the Fondazione Mattei and founder of the Centro per la Cultura d’Impresa. Sapelli recently published the book *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo – Il capitalismo secondo*, published by Bruno Mondadori.

\_Economic historian Giulio Sapelli (facing page) investigates the figure and the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini (below). The result is a unique portrait that describes the Pasolinian view of capitalism and much more



**Professor, what does the history of economics have to do with Pasolini? Your book is a compilation of lessons given at the University, but where do the skill and the passion come from?**

They stem from an ancient love for literature. When I was young, I dreamed of getting a Literature degree with Edoardo Sanguinetti in Turin. An unachievable dream for someone like me, the son of a printer. I had gone to a school for trades and went to night school to get a diploma. After the degree in Economics, I would have loved to get a degree in Philosophy. However, that was out of the question, for I would have had to take Latin exams, and I hadn't studied it much; so I got help from an old priest who had been one of my teachers at night school and I obtained a teaching degree as a private student. Meanwhile, I also won a contest given by the Municipality of Turin, with a structural analysis of the poems of Pascoli.

**Then, very young, you were hired by Olivetti, the company of the legendary Adriano Olivetti.**

I was 19 years old when Olivetti hired me, without a degree, and I remember that Franco Momigliano (one of Adriano Olivetti's, strongest collaborators, *editor's note*), a man of open views, told me: forget about literature and get a degree in Economics. But in Ivrea, where I had moved, I had much time on my hands, I would read avidly. I read a lot of literature, definitely much more literature than economics.

**That's how the passion for Pasolini was born...**

Yes, even though Pasolini was not one of my favorite authors. My favorite reading topics was hermetic poetry, although not in the style of Eugenio Montale. Above all, I idolized Andrea Zanzotto, whom I consider the greatest Italian poet of the 20th century. After Zanzotto, Sanguinetti is my second favorite, with his visceral passion for the



overlap between politics and literature, the destruction of language and so on. I followed Pasolini mostly for his civic and political controversies.

**The Pasolini of *Lettere luterane* and *Scritti corsari*.**

Yes, when he was writing *Vie Nuove* and *Rinascita*, long before the “Corriere della Sera”. Then I loved Pasolini for his fiction and literary criticism... although he did not do much of it; not by chance, the great critic Gianfranco Contini, who liked his first poems in Friulian dialect, guided him and helped him, mostly in fiction. As for poetry, I favored Zanzotto and Ezra Pound, authors of a completely different kind of poetry.

\_Facing page: Pasolini in the Roman working-class suburb of Quarticciolo. Below: during a protest at the Venice Biennial Film Festival in 1969

**What prompted you to offer a class?**

A polemic reaction to the Berlinguer reform (Luigi Berlinguer was the Minister of Education in the center-left governments at the beginning of the Nineties, *editor's note*), which I view as a cultural genocide. Berlinguer will be remembered as the man who killed the Italian University. Moratti is not to blame. (Letizia Moratti was the Minister during the last Berlusconi government, *editor's note*). She followed the same path and, in the end, did some good.

**Spoken by a left-winger, this makes an impact. However, what did Pasolini have to do with this?**

The classes offered back then concentrated on the theory of growth, on corporations and so on. Therefore, speaking of cultural genocide called for an expert like Pasolini.

**The connection with your topics was post-war, reconstruction Italy.**

True, I never believed one could



understand economics without understanding society. I don't have a Marxist approach; I am rather a follower of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. In their thinking, society explains economics, rather than economics explaining society. It's a circle. Very often, culture creates economics. This is the issue: Pasolini, who in his own way was a great rebel, rose against modernization taking place without development, that is, without society's cultural and civic growth. This is reminiscent of Jean Jacques Rousseau's thinking. They both have a paradigm which is not that of the state of nature, which for Pasolini could have been rural civilization or popular culture. The paradigm is that presented by Rousseau in reply to the Declaration of the Academy of Dijon in 1748. It affirms that arts and sciences did not contribute at all to humanity's development, rather they corrupted it.

#### **What corruption are we speaking of?**

Differently from what my teachers believed, the liberal revolutionaries *à la* Benjamin Constant, Hobbesian democrats who viewed institutions positively, because they thought that these could restrain men, Rousseau believed that institutions had stripped men of their civil virtues. The core of this reasoning is that to achieve art and science it is necessary to go through a system of institutions based on disparity, luxury and contempt of men as beings worthy of protection.

#### **Does this paradigm incorporate some of Levy Strauss's thinking?**

Yes, also. Ultimately, Claude Levy Strauss, even though he never said it, is looking for structural and cultural archetypes, that he recreates in a world in which everything is in order: at the center, there is the world of women, with the taboo of incest, which organizes an almost perfect society where men's symbolic ascriptions find room in a harmonious universe. This is indeed Maurice Godelier's criticism of Levy Strauss. Mr. Godelier in fact states that the basic problem is not the kinship system, rather the exchange, which neither imagines nor wishes a harmonious society. In Pasolini's model, we find the archetypes of rural civilization and shattered popular cultures; it is not by chance that Neapolitan culture is the only culture

that creates a barrier against modernization. It doesn't fall into artificiality. Pasolini is frightened by the loss of face-to-face interaction, the loss of spoken words. This is where television comes in. In the book, I tried to explain that on the issue of television he was truly misunderstood: he was not against television in and of itself, but against the technological tyranny in interhuman kinship, that television brings about. A tyranny with no room for face-to-face, or learning the language. This is where, in my view, Pasolini's thinking is extraordinarily modern. These are the themes up for discussion today among cultured people. I like Pasolini because he makes us view social actions in a humble manner and helps us see them for what they really are, without being fixed in one direction.

**This is why he instinctively favored the Left and supported the humble and the weak.**



I agree. In fact, his left tendency is pre-Marxist. He favored a benevolent and utopian socialism. Not an emotional socialism, since in Pasolini there is a mix of both repulsion and attraction for the wickedness of man, as shown in his last works, such as *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or the 120 days of Sodom*). Before, however, his communism was humanist.

### **A humanistic communist... rejected by the Italian Communist Party.**

Pasolini was a middle school professor and belonged to the Italian Communist Party. At one time, he was charged with homosexuality (the formal charge, of course, was not that) and the party rejected him. Today's "living

room" communists can be offended, but they know nothing about the Italy of those years. Then, the view of the Italian Communist Party was more than justified: the Party needed legitimacy and it was not going to get it with these battles going on. Being expelled by the Party hurt Pasolini terribly. His relationship with his father, most likely a fascist, was non-existent. Therefore, he left Friuli with his mother and moved to Rome. There, he continued to write for communist newspapers, like *Vie Nuove*, to prove that human personality is not monolithic, but multi-faceted and contradictory. I think of the young people, by nature inflexible, and I am tempted to say that learning to tolerate does not qualify as reciprocity. Freedom does not come from other people. Every society has its own rules. We are complex people, where good and evil are in constant battle.

### **In the book you explain that one of the foundations of Pasolini's thinking is the fact that the process of industrialization of Italian society took place within a very short time, much shorter than in other countries such as Germany, France and Britain.**

That's true, and I totally agree with him on this point. During the Eighties, I wrote one of my favorite books, *L'Italia inafferrabile*, published by Marsilio. In the book, I supported the thesis that Italian modernization had no development, and was characterized by the inability to bring about general integration as well as social integration. Social integration did of course take place because of rising revenues, and the consumer economy incorporated those who were not part of the community, but there was no systematic integration, which is integration obtained through institutions. The integration of the working class did not in fact take place through a new system of industrial relations, but rather through violence. The Hot Autumn of 1969 was one of "barbaric violence", mostly on the southern workers' side, the less qualified, who fought their condition by breaking everything and at times even shooting. Helped in this by the children of the rich.

### **It is the Italian way to citizenship, beauty...**

Where citizenship is achieved by destroying the productivity of work. In all

\_After his expulsion from the Italian Communist Party, Pasolini left Friuli with his mother and moved to Rome (below), where he continued to write for newspapers with a Communist leaning



other systems, the working class helps work productivity. Why do we do just the opposite? For, up to the Fifties, Italy was a commercial, agricultural system, where industry was secondary; twenty years later, it became an industrial system both in terms of GDP percentage and percentage of employed workers. We are referring to an industrial society, which, in its development, rapidly turned into a society of services, albeit not advanced services. In sum, what took a couple of centuries for France, Germany and even the United States to come about, here in Italy, it happened in just over twenty years.

**What are the outcomes of this acceleration?**

The first outcome is that it did not bring about social discipline. Industry is discipline; it teaches people to have set times, to trade off, to value productivity and more. Today, intellectuals despise Taylorism, but Taylorism was an incredible advance in human history, for it taught people rigor, precision and respect for rules. In Italy, this did not really come about. Industry was not able to develop its potential, extraordinary teaching revolution. In the end, this progressive view of industrial capitalism is one of Marxism's redeeming aspects.

**Pasolini, nevertheless, is connected to the world preceding the working class.**

He's not interested in the working class. He doesn't believe the weak are the workforce. The workforce are the ones who have been included. Further, workers are also strong: they voice movements, unions, parties and ideas. Isn't our welfare modeled on employed subordinate workers, of which the workers are an integral part? Pasolini supported the excluded, anyone who was excluded from the consumerist community. Once the peasants were gone, the sub-proletariat was the only one left.

**Pasolini spoke of two separate pre-historic cultures. The Southern pre-history, which he viewed as positive because anchored to tradition, and the Northern pre-history, featuring modernization without development.**

Ernesto De Martino wonderfully describes in his essays the Southern pre-history Pasolini speaks of. The South and its magic, the anthropologic and

ethnographic expeditions... It is a proven fact that these two had some contact, united by the common passion for post-Croce literature. That pre-history was the real one. Then there is the pre-history we are living now, caused by the too rapid economic growth, which did not allow an acceptable cultural development. Karl Gustav Jung would have said that what was lacking were the processes of identification and formation of a strong, assertive personality, capable to face modernism. The result was a multitude of individuals and not a group of people. Why do we speak of a new pre-history? Because the passage from pre-history to history means the acceptance of freedom as a need, as Spinoza said. History is understanding that there is a necessity, yet never giving up one's freedom. Only those who feel completely free inside can achieve this. It must be a moral person or, to simplify, a person who does not consider money and material things as the most important, but on the contrary places emphasis on the essence of being. This happens when the drive to positive identity of the great industrial concentration collapses, which, moreover, was of very short duration. What is left then? What is left is the family involved in economic activities, the enterprise family where the worker and the boss share the same myths.

**In an article for the "Corriere della Sera", you analyzed the split worker's vote, claiming that even in communist areas in a future not far off, the workers could vote for the extreme right.**

I think so. Tuscany and Emilia will witness the formation of neo-nazi parties that will get votes from the workers as well. This is already happening in Britain with the people belonging to the British Labor Party and to the Trade Unions who vote for the nationalists. It happens in the rich northern region of Italy where many workers today vote for the Lega, which is a right-wing party. The Left Democrats are certainly more successful among the women, who ride a bike not to pollute the environment. The pre-history of the new popular classes is nothing but a new pre-history. This is something Pasolini had envisioned and anticipated successfully.

**Going back to the communist Pasolini, how did he interact with the intellectuals of his time?**

He didn't. He lived his life separate from the intelligentsia, whether communist or in the tradition of the "Partito d'Azione". He was a friend of Moravia, and had a wonderful relationship with Contini, Arcangeli and Longhi, but didn't associate with the communist intellectuals, who, for the most part, followers of Andrei Zhdanov, (member of the Soviet politburo during the Stalin regime, *editor's note*), therefore servants. His relationship with Moravia, as well as with Enzo Siciliano was personal; it had no political implications. He had friends in the university world of Bologna, such as the Roversis, the Scalias and so on. However, overall, this does not form a lobby. What I like about Pasolini is the fact that he did not

\_Pasolini lived outside the circles of both the Communist and the corporate intelligentsia. While he did not mix with the Communist intellectuals, he was on good terms with the Bologna university crowd

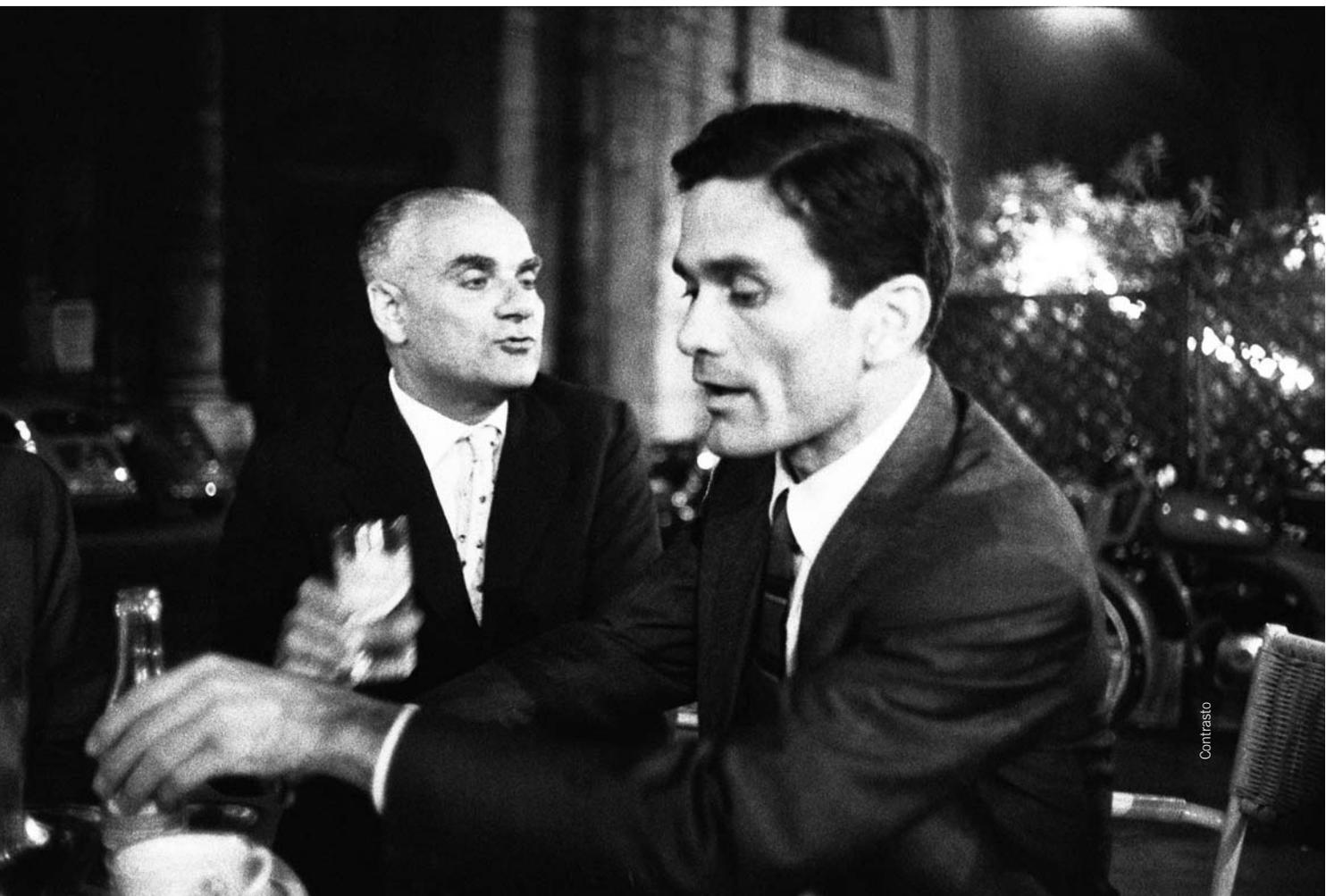
get involved. He stayed on the outside as a stray dog. He was a true populist. For populist, I mean a true and noble expression of independence from money. A model that was always my inspiration.

**How much did his homosexual status influence his lack of connection to the official culture?**

I'm not able to analyze this topic in depth. Pier Francesco Galli, Italy's last great psychoanalyst might be able to. I could be wrong, but I think that his homosexuality always freed him and sheltered him from this bastardized modernization. He had to get rid of his sexual energy in a world of outcasts. This was a great intellectual strength. His sexuality, for his times, was a great force for oppositionality.

**Opposition also against the Church.**

I've always been very passionate about this aspect because, in the end, I am a Catholic heretic, a Catholic communist and not a follower of Franco Rodano (the Catholic communist leader, who, after the war,



maintained relations with the Church, *editor's note*). In short, the Christian communists of Northern Italy. Pasolini declared himself an atheist, but his atheism must be understood and made sense of. In his anti-bourgeois critique – this reminds me of a wonderful book by Emile Poulat, a great historian of the French church, *Eglise contre bourgeoisie*, where the Church was seen as an element of protest against social order – Pasolini sees the Church as a guardian of tradition, in a positive sense. At the same time, he sees the Church as offsetting modernism. Everyone remembers the beautiful essay on Pope Paul VI and his feathered head-dress. It's an important essay, because in the end the Church renounces its identity. Pope Montini, always a man of doubt, is not convinced of all this. Pasolini was more a follower of Léfrevre than Montini.

#### **What about you?**

I feel closer to Pope Montini, but on certain topics, like the Church being too modernized, I am closer to Monsignor Léfrevre. I am referring to the lack of liturgy like there used to be in the past, the fact that the Church has become protestant... I believe Protestantism is the worst thing that could happen to a society. In my *Diario Americano*, which is about to be published by Boringhieri, I tell the story of how in New York the Catholic priests would keep the churches open all day and all night to provide refuge to the poor and the homeless.

#### **Going back to Pasolini's devoutness...**

Pasolini liked the Catholic Church because it was the Church of the humble. And because, like Gabriel Le Bras, he believed there were two kinds of priests: the institutional ones, the cardinals and the aspiring cardinals, who perhaps no longer believe in God, and the devotional ones, whose habit is somewhat dirty, who believe in God and preach the word of God. A timely topic. Today, Italian-style "neo-cons" think of themselves as Catholics non-believers, but do not get the truth of the matter, which is not Christian civilization... I would not take Senator Marcello Pera seriously, who does not have any cultural base, but I would take into consideration Giuliano Ferrara, who has a good base and who knows German – this is a qualifying reason in itself. Pasolini approached the Church, not in the same

fashion a right-wing supporter would think today, not because he believed there were Christian values, but because he understood that the essence of Catholicism was the non-assertion of the principle of reciprocity. Thinking that a Muslim cannot build his mosque in a prevalently Catholic country simply because in Muslim countries churches cannot be built is un-Christian. In reality, the "neo-con" thinking is the essence of not being Catholic.

#### **This is also what Enzo Bianchi, founder of the Comunità di Bose believes.**

Then I am in good company. I read his books... In Catholicism, there are two utopias: one is the resurrection of the flesh, not as a symbolic fact, but as a reality. The other is forgiveness. If you don't forgive, you are not Catholic. Briefly, Pasolini sees the Church acting as an agent of reparative justice. Amid cultural genocide, a saving presence attracted him intensely.

#### **Pasolini and the events of May 1968. Pasolini the communist-reactionary, who after the Valle Giulia clashes, in Rome, sides with the police force, offspring of poor people, against bourgeois students.**

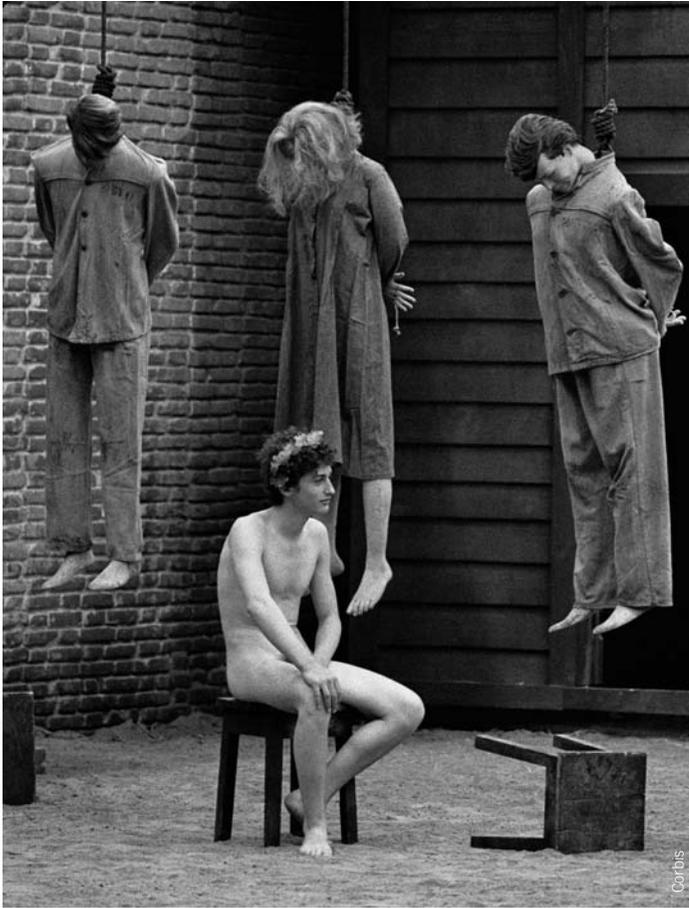
There isn't much to say. I've always felt in agreement with him. There are essentially three dramatic events of the history of Italy that mark the beginning of the decline: the escape of the King from Pescara; then, by-passing the events of 1968, the nomination of Giorgio Benvenuto as General Secretary of the Ministry of Finance...

#### **What do you mean?**

I'm not expressing my reservation on Deputy Benvenuto, who works and conducts his profession very honestly. I am referring to the method, to the idea of assigning a trade unionist to a job like that. It is symptomatic of the State level of destruction we are at today.

#### **And the third dramatic event?**

The nuclear referendum. The events of 1968 and the nuclear referendum show that Italy is beyond salvation. A ruling group under the pretense of modernization, the Craxis, the Martellis and their friends thought that, with general consent, the people could be called to decide on the



\_A scene from the last film that Pasolini wrote and directed: *Salò or The 120 days of Sodom*. Pasolini was murdered before he could finish editing the film

nuclear situation. It is difficult to reach a universal consensus on general themes, where there are methods of concrete evaluation for everybody, never mind technical issues like the nuclear situation.

#### **And the events of 1968?**

It's the rebellion of the middle class. In a "left-wing" international context, the young people do a right wing thing, like their fathers during the Twenties. The ingredients are the same: violence, some great myths like Stalin and Mao, the logic of everything against everybody... This was the beginning of a fascist-like movement. That hid itself within left-wing ideologies, but which were fascist in behavior. It was like an ideological landscape to hide the actions, a blast of Gentilian reality (from the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, *editor's note*) that captured the sons of the rich: all this mixed with the sufferings of the working class. The sufferings of the workers were completely real: if you lived in Turin during the Sixties, let's say two kilometers away from Mirafiori,

occasionally the earth would shake as in an earthquake: tum, tum, tum... it was the presses. The workers in effect, lived in conditions of semi-slavery, with the exception of public business.

#### **But you were leftist in those years.**

I was the Vice Secretary of the Young Communist Federation, then the director of the Gramsci institute, since I had firm Amendolian tendencies, rightist in effect. I was a neo-populist already, then. I left the Italian Communist Party in 1980 after Enrico Berlinguer's speech in front of the Mirafiori gates. If the secretary of my party in 1980 told the workers to take possession of their plant... there was no room for me in that party. I see the events of 1968 like Pasolini did. Against the students, not against the workers. I remember demonstrations along Corso Traiano where the wives of the workers would throw flowerpots on the heads of the police officers from the fifteenth floor. I didn't approve, but I understood the suffering from which that violence came.

#### **And the young people of today, what do they make of all this?**

Some understand perfectly. I had the privilege to teach Economics abroad. When I came back to Italy, I found a job at the Milan State University only thanks to the help of Vittorio Spinazzola who offered me a position as teacher of History of Economics and Geography in a Literature department. I won the contest and I left Paris, and came to teach in a university where the History of Economics is an elective. So a preliminary choice is possible, deciding whether to follow my classes or not. Let me add that I always wanted to teach with a seminar-based approach and that usually the schedule of my classes is between 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., to help out working people. In short, I always had a good relationship with my pupils. I usually start with 150 students and reach a plateau of 70-80. Many leave because my lectures scare them. However, the ones that remain are the true thinkers, not just people looking at slides. It is a known fact that today we make an excessive use of slides. Exactly the opposite happened with Pasolini: the number of students increased instead of decreasing, and then stabilizing. Luckily, social deviance continues to attract more than social normality.