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Sounding the Depths of History

Opera and National Identity in Italian Film

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Tuning for Pitch

Frequently the music for a historical film is an original score, composed to underpin mood or atmosphere and/or to interact with the scripted narrative, pointing it in certain directions. But, not infrequently, such music comes from a time frame that precedes the making of the film. It then brings a cultural baggage that relates to its life outside the film, as well as functioning in the directions just claimed for original music. This kind of music can be particularly important for the historical film. It has two overlapping functions: (a) one related to cultural history, oscillating between the music's own reception history and the historical time frame contemporary with the film's production; and (b) one related to its interaction with visual images during the viewer's total perception – visual and sonic – of the film.

The cultural historic function demands particular attention in the case of historical film, a genre described by Robert Burgoyne as "depend(ing) for its meaning and significance on an order of events – the historical event – that exists outside the imaginative world of the film itself" (Burgoyne 2008: 2). The historical distance between events and representation, intrinsic to the historical film, brings the potential for fresh appraisals. The gap between the composition of a piece of music that pre-exists the film and its use on that film's soundtrack at a distance corresponding to the work's reception history can in turn suggest – or even provide – historical interpretation.

The films mentioned in this chapter have a nomadic chronology due to their music. The time frame is not limited to the present context of the visuals with which the soundtrack interacts. Any or all of three time levels can be evoked: (a) the "then" of original compositions by Verdi or Puccini; (b) the narrative present of the film's plot; and (c) the reception of both past contexts (musical

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composition and film plot) by viewers contemporary with the filmmaker. In a film about the career of Mussolini, for instance, our time frame will be historically filtered by knowledge of Italy's role in two World Wars, whatever the musical expertise or sensitivity of the viewer/listener. Then there are tropes that may be configured differently across history and music history but that definitely intersect, such as the role of the chorus in Verdi operas (Gossett 1990) and the phenomenon of twentieth-century masses (Canetti 1984). A Verdi opera cited in a film of the last 50–60 years brings a different historical subject –Verdi – in interplay with the historical focus of that film.

The relationship between music and film is different from that between music and written history. Conventional written history is likely to emphasize political, military, and social history and to be self-contained in its form – that of the written word. A nineteenth-century history of Italy that eclipses or else barely mentions Verdi is conceivable. In cinema, on the other hand, the presence of music as an important part of the soundtrack is a convention observed by the majority of films, certainly by fictional feature films, and even by many documentaries. Music can function as a historical document, as a written score interpreted in performance; this process bears similarity with an archival document being "translated" (in the present) into a particular line of historical argument.

Overture

Bertolucci's *1900* opening sequence, set on Liberation Day, 1945, is followed by an intertitle transposing the scene into the past, locating it "many years earlier." A figure lurches through a dark indeterminate landscape, proclaiming that Verdi is dead. The same day – January 27, 1901, the date of Verdi's death – witnesses the birth of the two main characters in the epic that follows. The nocturnal figure wears a jester's cap and costume, which aligns him with an offstage Rigoletto; his announcement, independent as it is of the accompanying music (a dramatic section from the Prelude to *Rigoletto*), is presumably meant to evoke both Verdi the composer and Verdi the public figure[1] – the increasingly reluctant politician who came to be synonymous with Risorgimento strivings.[2] Beyond the pivotal day of January 27, 1901, the status of this historical figure can slide, posthumously, ever more easily into myth.[3]

The opening chronological marker of a historical watershed is crucial for the film's trajectory. The century of Verdi lies behind, and in some sense, yet to be established, the cycle of Italian life continues with two fictional figures who, at best, combine the great man's political involvement. But the suggestiveness of this opening gesture also allows for post-1900 Italy to be read as a continuation of sorts of Verdian opera plots, which had functioned as incendiary coded messages in an era of Austrian occupation. With the divide that Bertolucci creates between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the jester's status as fool acquires a

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Shakespearean sense; he grasps the significance of this moment, which is otherwise swallowed up by a seemingly independent narrative evolution. All this is far from a demarcation between eras such as might be found at the beginning of a written chapter, whether of fiction or of history, and it also differs from suggestive elements available to film visuals. Granted that Verdi is a special case, citing him here, in script and score, is an economical means of historically locating Bertolucci's narrative, of music operating as history in a historical film.

Bertolucci knew all too well that, as a cultural icon, Verdi was not dead. Many of Bertolucci's earlier films had wrangled with his mythic presence, as had those of his compatriot Visconti. The filmic reception of Verdi, both of his music and of the myth attached to him, can furnish a road map of Italian preoccupations, particularly in the post-World War II period.[4] In two brief scenes, Marco Bellocchio's 2009 film *Vincere* shows that the innovative potential of integrating Italian opera into a historical film is far from being exhausted. The story concerns the rise of Mussolini, viewed from a very particular perspective – that of Ida Dalser. She bears his first child and claims to have formally married him, well ahead of the Blackshirts coming to power. Throughout the two hours' duration of the film, sequences alternate between historical fiction shot in far from vibrant color and black-and-white *actualités* footage. The film itself is loosely based on Alfredo Pieroni's 2006 novel *Il figlio secreto del duce* (*The Duce's Secret Son*). Striking transitions across the two realms are potentially disorienting, not least because the actor playing Mussolini is by no means a look-alike. Within the black-and-white spectrum there is a further player, namely a succession of clips from silent movies, from *Maciste* to Chaplin to Eisenstein, which rule out any simple equations (such as "black and white equals documentary"). The excerpts from silents then suture the gap between documentary footage and a "made" film, in particular one whose lighting, choreography, mise-en-scène, and atmosphere emphasize artifice.

Turning to the soundtrack of *Vincere*, what better reinforcement of this blend of fantasy and reality than Italian opera? Furthermore, Italian opera is the marker of one of the European nationalisms that culminated in World War I: "It is difficult to overestimate the influence of nationalism on the composition, production, and reception of music throughout the western world at the turn of the twentieth century" (Gienow-Hecht 2009: 155). And indeed Verdi, or rather the coded cultural message that is his music, serves the film wonderfully at a crucial early stage and is supplemented by a later reference to Puccini. World War I is signaled through the word "Sarajevo" filling the screen, accompanied by a ghostly funeral march with black and white figures, a further challenge to classifying color-free footage as straightforward documentary. The outbreak of war is heralded by the intertitle *Guerra* ("War") flashing melodramatically on to various parts of the screen, followed later by the distribution of pamphlets claiming, as in futurist aesthetics, that war is the world's only hygiene. But an extra dimension is added when *guerra* (both as a film visual and as written history) overlaps with an extract from Verdi's *Aida* on the soundtrack: "Su! del Nilo al sacro lido" (Act 1, Scene 1). In this section

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the chorus bookends the Triumphal March with an exultant outburst where the word *guerra* is repeated in the libretto. At this moment, the dramatic musical arc soars out of nowhere – but also out of the national cultural memory. It is as if the Italian plans of war in 1914 were the continuation of nineteenth-century opera by another name, above all in the sense of an emotionally captive audience being unable to distinguish between war games on stage and the "real thing" to which those emotions have led. The convergence of history, nationalism, film image, and film sound is viewed even more boldly in the following verdict: "the national operatic tradition returns as the repressed of fascism, and it makes this return through and in film" (Steinberg and Stewart-Steinberg 2007: 278). Bertolucci's *1900* makes this explicit through the placement of the "real" Verdi at the outset and the subsequent repression of his music – in a film that ranges from January 1901 until after World War II. *Vincere* combines the "real" Verdi with connotations of his postwar return through film, as a pincer movement on the seeding ground of fascism that the outbreak of World War I represents.

Historically bookending the time frame of *Vincere* were the two Italo-Ethiopian Wars. Ethiopia won the first one (1895–1896), while the second (1935–1936) resulted in the occupation of Ethiopia and its annexation to Italian East Africa. *Aida* was set in ancient Egypt; yet it was anything but ancient (or antiquarian), as Edward Said (1993: 134–157) demonstrates by contextualizing it within nineteenth-century historical and cultural discourses. The fact that Aida's father is the king of Ethiopia, among the Egyptians' prisoners, is but one overlap between the opera plot and the Italian cultural imaginary. Together with a number of other examples in Verdi's operas – and indeed in other Italian operas (the Druids' chorus from Bellini's *Norma* of 1831) – this endorsement of war by the populace is only apparently directed away from the present into a distant past. In fact, to return to the way this musical excerpt frames the Triumphal March in *Aida*, the two Ethiopian wars frame the 1914 time setting of this musical–historical allusion in *Vincere*. This combination of temporal perspectives is, again, something not available to more conventional history – at least not in such an economical form. It functions as an acoustic flash-forward, commenting on the film's narrative up to that point and extending its visuals beyond the given moment. On this interpretation, the intercut shots of an adoring crowd, seemingly interchangeable with crowds from other stages of Mussolini's ascendancy, can be located in the dictator's victory addresses in 1936.

The already uneasy but highly effective combination of visuals and sound is further nuanced. Mussolini has just awoken after a night of love-making with Ida. As *guerra* fills the screen, a series of strange crosscuts continues. These link him (naked) and her, in dullish color, with black-and-white shots of a huge crowd. He is viewed from behind, looking out of a window, such that he (the fictionalized rendition of a historical figure) seems to be addressing the milling populace of history, presented in *actualités* footage. The visual link thereby created is not just accompanied by an agitated, grand section of a Verdi opera; it is rendered dramatically, as if it were an opera production. Whether this film sequence can

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pass as formal history (or "History") is one thing; there is no doubt, however, about the dramatic effectiveness of the amalgam as a gloss on history. Part of that effectiveness is the *mise en abîme* aspect of citing Verdi. The film seems to be reminding contemporary Italian viewers that we once sought our own sense of national identity, not just our cosily sequestered cultural history, through the filter of Verdi's operas.

Like *Aida*, Puccini's *Tosca* lends itself to a musicological history, almost an archaeology, of many of its individual arias. One dramatic highlight is the end of Act I, which appears in *Vincere* in a sequence relating to the signing of the Lateran Treaty on February 11, 1929. This historical agreement between church and state, ending unfinished business that dated from the Italian unification, parallels the pincer movement constricting the rights and freedom of Ida Dalser, whether in an insane asylum or under the supervision of nuns. For Mussolini, the treaty solved a major domestic problem. In *Tosca*, the union between church and state is sealed by the appearance of Baron Scarpia, head of the secret police, in the church where a crowd is gathering to celebrate victory over Napoleon at Marengo (this is reversed in Act 2, which brings news of a counter-attack and of Italian defeat). Although he is finally discarded, Napoleon is a point of reference for Mussolini's fluctuating politics at various stages of *Vincere*. Napoleon was altogether a fluid catalyst of Italian identity. In the 1954 production of Spontini's opera *La Vestale*, Visconti's "intention was to remind viewers what Napoleon had meant to Italians: not a conqueror but a liberator whose accomplishments inspired the Risorgimento" (Bacon 1998: 63). Bellocchio's reference to the church scene in *Tosca* is a damning indictment of this turning point in Italian politics and in Mussolini's career, far exceeding a dramatic mirror effect across two time frames. The comparison with Scarpia, one of opera's arch-villains, removes any ambiguity from Bellocchio's narrative; Scarpia in fact proclaims that Tosca makes him forget God, which hardly augurs well for the Lateran Treaty. The operatic production of history, suggested above by the *Aida* excerpt, is reinforced here; a church leader blessing the crowd looks as if he is conducting it (see Figure 16.1), in a stirring rendition of the chorus in *Tosca*. A historical sense of *déjà vu* is achieved, whereby the original model, the plot of *Tosca*, is an operatic rendition of post-(French) revolutionary history.

More prominent than Italian opera excerpts in *Vincere* are repeated overlays of non-vocal sections from "Window of Appearances" – the name of Scene 3 in Act 1 of Philip Glass's *Akhnaten*. This sound event would seem to be anachronistic, as well as bursting the national frame of the film. But the non-progressive vortex quality of Glass's music puts a striking gloss on the spiraling attempts of Ida Dalser to claim acknowledgment. Beyond that eddy, it reveals the circularity of Italian political history (for instance the return to a fascist glorification of the Roman republic). The same spiraling quality is present with reference to another failed visionary of history: the pharaoh Akhnaten, progressively oblivious to his country falling apart. Music functioning as historical commentary evokes an underlying

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Figure 16.1 *Tosca* as the cultural memory of Italian history. *Vincere* (2009). Directed by Marco Bellocchio. Produced by Mario Gianani

mood, a level of abstraction that has long been the domain of music. But such music can also interact to great effect with whirlpools of documented information, thus coming closer to the "facts" of an era. *Vincere* combines this sense (Glass), with music functioning as cultural marker (Verdi and Puccini). Music in film can thus act also as a register of authorial commentary that differs from understatement, irony, and rhetoric, whether self-conscious or hidden, in written accounts of history.

Opera in Three Acts: Verdi

RIZZUTO: I recall the première of *Parsifal* in Palermo. Those were the years of controversy over Verdi.
ROSSINI: But Wagner . . .
RIZZUTO: Wagner . . .
ROSSINI: Too many irrational myths. Verdi was ours. His music was a weapon for our freedom.
RIZZUTO: Freedom for the nation.
ROSSINI: Freedom for everyone.

Marco Leto, *La Villeggiatura* (1973)[5]

Ten years ago I'd have scorned going to an opera. Always Verdi. Our beloved Verdi. All that we are not. Enough Verdi! I'd prefer Mozart.

Bernardo Bertolucci, *Before the Revolution* (1964)

Beyond the need to take music seriously in the historical film, the case study of Verdi in Italian film carries its own justification. We live in an age of progressive

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popularization of history in the audiovisual media, and we are starting to appreciate the implications of the "audio-" component for representing history. The status of music as a historical agent has also fluctuated. As part of the documentation of their own history, postwar Italian film directors were able to rely on the following situation: "One of the most potent vehicles for the spread of the national idea in the early 1840s was music. Opera was a passion throughout Italy, and attracted all classes [. . .] Theatres were microcosms of urban society" (Duggan 2008: 152). Opera then was not to be confined to high culture. It was central to Italian social history and national identity. When dealing with the 1840s (and indeed with the nineteenth century in Italy as a whole), the historical film would seem obliged to address opera, and, unlike historical monographs or novels, it could do that on the soundtrack.

The two quotations at the head of this section make clear that Verdi is a significant presence in postwar Italian film. They comment on Italian history, on Italian attitudes beyond music, and on a whole style of life associated with the name "Verdi." Through Verdi's music, which is present in the three films analyzed below (and in others), it is possible to construct a meaningful arc across important postwar directors. Visconti had more than an enthusiast's interest in opera; he actually directed operatic productions – some with Maria Callas in the cast. This is reflected in his opening sequence of *Senso*. One might contrast it with Werner Herzog's enlistment of colleague Werner Schroeter (whose whole output was operatic) to direct the opening sequence of his film *Fitzcarraldo*, in which part of Verdi's *Ernani* is staged. Visconti's own trajectory is worth bearing in mind in relation to the Bertolucci epigraph above. In Visconti's late film *Conversation Piece* (1974), which has a broad generational span, music from Mozart features prominently on two occasions, while Verdi is absent both from dialogues and from the soundtrack. Verdi as marker of the national, with its potential to become chauvinistic, yields to the Italianate Mozart. From this perspective, Mozart joins Visconti himself (and Thomas Mann) as a primarily European figure.

Visconti, *Senso* (1954)

Behind the opening credits for *Senso* we hear music, and not simply as a narrative mood. We also see the stage enactment of this music, in a setting that proves to be the Venetian opera house La Fenice. On-screen script explains that the year is 1866, the Veneto region is still under Austrian occupation,[6] the Italian government has made an alliance with Prussia, and the war of liberation is imminent. In the Italy of 1954, the film's historical and political constellation has a parallel plot of political struggles: "the nation which emerged from the war of liberation was not, after all, different from what it had been before. The new elite is the same as the old: the film shows implicitly the lack of ability of the Italians to change their ruling class" (Servadio 1983: 136). The link between the two centuries is Verdi, Verdi the revered figure then, and Verdi at a much advanced stage of his reception

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now. Verdi is also the direct link between the double Risorgimento – first, the one of nineteenth-century Italian unification; and, second, a self-stylization of post-World War II Italian attempts at unity, achieved through a magnified role for the Resistance. Superimposed on these time frames are "sites of memory" of Italy, the nation: over 2,000 years, now viewed as leading up to the crowning of the first king in 1861; the compressed post-1861 "coordinates of collective memory and a public account of yesterday's events" (highly relevant for *Senso*); and the intervening years of memory, those up until Visconti's film, and those between it and us (Isnenghi 2010: 29).

Senso begins with a lyrical aria toward the end of Act 3 of *Il Trovatore*, "L'onda dei suoni mistici" ("The wave of holy sounds," whose text continues "let it descend, pure, into our hearts"). The lovers Leonora and Manrico are about to take their marriage vows. But the act finishes on a different note altogether, as a comrade of Manrico reports that his supposed mother, Azucena, is to be burnt at the stake. Leonora faints, but Manrico rushes to help her intoning the rousing cabaletta "Di quella pira" ("[The horrid flames] of that pyre"), as his troops rally round him.

Simply at the dramatic level, there is a strong transition from lyrical music, which functions as a kind of bridge passage, to impassioned music (*stretta* – gathering in pace, and thereby in its visceral quality). With the opening sequence filling the screen, the artificial world of opera had prevailed. But the camerawork during "Di quella pira" fluctuates in angle, distance, and direction, alternating between shots of the performance and shots of the audience being addressed. Without English subtitles to render the historical background, this aria would be the first music to "emerge" from the opening credits' occupation of screen space, dramatically aiding the singer's (and the camera's) movements. The audience is addressed not just in vocal and aesthetic terms; the address ("All'armi"/"To arms," from Ruiz and the assembled soldiers) is at least construed as a political call to defiance. Audience members standing up in the gods (top level in the theater) are shown from behind as leaflets are distributed into their receptive hands, and when the fiery aria ends these leaflets are hurled down to ground floor level, where the Austrian occupiers sit. The act of defiance is accompanied by rallying calls, by bouquets with the colors of the Italian flag, and ultimately by a commotion. Allied to the musical and political popularity of Verdi, the emotive power of music catalyzes reactions that encapsulate a historical climate, rather than reflecting an actual demonstration at La Fenice. The weighting of this music makes it a legitimate object of historical scrutiny in a film whose staging and subsequent plot capture the melodramatic core of *Il Trovatore*.

In the rowdy intermission between Acts 3 and 4, offstage intrigue generates rival factions, all underpinned by contemporary reality. A number of programmatic statements set up the contrary positions that Countess Livia Serpieri will come to bridge. The Austrian officer Franz Mahler asserts that Italians throw confetti to the sound of mandolins, which prompts her impetuous cousin Ussoni to challenge him to a duel. Livia intercedes, telling him that Austrians are music-lovers, whereas

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Italians go to the theater for other reasons. The wife of an Austrian dignitary informs Livia that *Der Freischütz* is to be performed the following Wednesday. Mention of this cornerstone of German Romantic nationalism is highly ironic in this context, given that Prussia will soon be Italy's ally in ousting Austria from the Veneto. A twin-pronged historical reference is established of the "now" (or at least of the immediate future) of the film's setting, and of Germany and Italy as future Axis powers. But differences are also implied, even ahead of adding Austria to either side of the equation. Act 4, Scene 1 of *Il Trovatore* gets under way. It is viewed largely in the background, beyond the figures in the opera box, as Leonora begs for mercy for the imprisoned Manrico. The parallel between on and off stage – Livia's intercession for Ussoni – becomes ever closer. But, after these intense 15 minutes or so at the start of the film, the music of Verdi recedes altogether. Ussoni is ultimately banished from Venice for a year, whereupon Livia is pursued across a canal bridge by Mahler, and music of a quite different register signals another facet of the narrative world.

The new music, announced in the opening credits, is a montage of excerpts from the Symphony No. 7 of the Austrian composer Anton Bruckner. The rest of the film is periodically saturated by this music, which in all respects is counterpoised to Italian opera. In keeping with the change of genre – from Italian opera to the Austro-German symphonic tradition – Bruckner's is unseen music, non-theatrical, or at least not staged, though from its first entry it is perfectly synchronized with the shimmering reflections of the Venetian canal and bridge. It is as if this music were coming from a pit, matching Wagner's aesthetics for Bayreuth; and, as in Wagner's operas – the converse of Verdi's – it is as if the orchestra were more important than the voice. The Austrian symphony, with its invisible performance source, has usurped the live, on-stage Italian opera – assuredly a symbol of the Austrian occupation of the country and one that is repeatedly suggested in the course of the film, whereas in a conventional written account of history such repetitions would seem obtuse or unsubtle. (Not all Bruckner entries are subtle either, or convincingly edited.) Of course, the shift from Verdi to Bruckner also signals Livia's own changed allegiance, not without inner struggle, to the point where she even delivers the funds of the Garibaldi cause to her lover, in order to enable him to buy his medical release from service.[7] So Bruckner's symphony plays an important role at both national and personal level. While as abstract music it has no "meaning," its narrative function demands explanation in order to counter-balance the on-stage/off-stage overlaps between the plots of *Il Trovatore* and *Senso*.

About 70 minutes into the film a supporter informs Livia that "Garibaldi is at Salò." But musically the Italian cause is swamped, either absent (as here, where church bells alone are audible on the soundtrack), or else displaced (as in Livia's affections) by Bruckner. At the mention of Salò, a 1954 Italian viewer would think not of Garibaldi, but of the Salò Republic, Mussolini's puppet state propped up by the Nazis, and of Bruckner as a hapless conscript in the Valhalla pantheon of Hitler, a further Austro-German mix. The absence of Italian music even holds for dramatic

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situations in *Senso* where the melodrama of Italian opera would seem obligatory. When Livia is convinced that Franz has summoned her, the door opens to reveal Ussoni and his fellow conspirators – by this stage an untimely reminder of Livia's earlier allegiance. This situation is not underscored by Verdi or by the soaring strings of Hollywood melodrama, but by the strings soaring to different effect in Bruckner's symphony. When the initial Italian victory is reversed into the defeat at Custoza, Franz foresees the end of "their" (not just the Austrians') old world, and this prophecy is underscored by the strains of Bruckner's second movement. To shift focus once more to the setting of the film's production, this is all too suggestive, historically, to be a case of music used as (romantic/Romantic) "mood." Music functions here as historical allegory, as a separate discourse of history.

On the other hand, the Italian viewer of 1954 may not have been aware of the German reception of Italian opera. Musicologist Gundula Kreuzer has reported that "in 1939 Verdi again outranked Wagner as the most frequently performed opera composer, a position he held [. . .] until the late 1940s." To counter-balance stereotypes that make Wagner difficult to disentangle from Nazism, Kreuzer reminds us:

> By 1933, Verdi's position in the repertory and in public musical awareness was such that it could not be ignored [. . .] Verdi, like Bruckner, lent himself to stylization as an exemplary *völkisch* artist and ardent nationalist. [. . .] ideological appropriations of Verdi and his works were reinforced and further politicized with the establishment of strategic bonds between Germany and Italy, the Germans' "viva Verdi" now turning into a cultural support for the Axis alliance. (Kreuzer 2003: 296)

Kreuzer's conclusion sheds further light on the quotation from the script of *La Villeggiatura* at the start of this section: "the fact that Verdi, unlike Wagner, survived the Nazi period with undiminished popularity seem[s] to suggest that Verdi reception during the Third Reich should no longer be separated from historical continuities at either end" (305). Cultural history of this kind, far from being confined to the discipline of musicology in its implications, does not sit comfortably with more conventional takes on Nazi ideology. Kreuzer's formulations are arresting in relation to the Third Reich. They further imply the importance for history, not just for musicology, of exploring Verdi continuities at either end of the fascist dictatorship in Italy. This chapter's exploration of continuity at the latter end, as documented by film narratives and soundtracks, is an attempt to approach a sub-genre of the historical film: the film of cultural history – the cultural historical film.

Bertolucci, *Before the Revolution* (1964)

In an elaborate lead-up to the film's story, the title is explained by an intertitle quoting Talleyrand, a skilled survivor of the periods before, during, and after the French Revolution: "Those who have not lived the years before the revolution

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cannot know the sweetness of life." The "after" phase matches the time frame of the novel on which this film is loosely based: the period of the post-Napoleonic machinations in Stendhal's 1839 *La Chartreuse de Parme*. The film also prophetically anticipates 1968, the watershed year for Europe. Without of course knowing what was to come, Bertolucci clearly understands his film as an exploration of *mentalités* – often languid, ideologically contradictory, and solipsistic. But the 1960s that emerge here do not swing, and the film's tone barely captures a bitter-sweetness, let alone Talleyrand's "sweetness of life."

The setting is the city of Parma in April 1962, just before Easter. The festival is divested of any sense of resurrection; the anti-hero Fabrizio and his aunt Gina, by this stage lovers, somehow sleep through the clamor of church bells and fail to join the rest of the family at mass. The motif of sleep also appears in a different guise. The soundtrack of the opening sequence portrays Parma, whether in aerial shots or at ground level, as sonically dormant. Up until the jarring entry of a harpsichord, the sole sound source is the voice-over of Fabrizio's musings, while the ambient sound seemingly required by the visuals – a crowded square in front of the railway station – is absent. In his self-absorption, Fabrizio remains hermetically sealed off from his environment. When Fabrizio enters the church, his voice-over introduces his eternal fiancée: "Clelia is the town, that part of the town I have rejected. Clelia is that sweetness of life that I don't want to accept. I wanted to see her for the last time." The "sweetness of life" links to the Talleyrand quotation. Seeing "her for the last time" could well link to the music that, in instrumentally estranged form, accompanies shots of gargoyles, and then of Clelia and her mother moving along the aisle of the church.[8] For this is a harpsichord rendition of the opening bars of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene from Verdi's *Macbeth*, Act 4.

The soundtrack at the end of the film bookends these opening harpsichord entries. Fabrizio marries Clelia, to the devastation of Gina, and, as the wedding group emerges from the church, it is accompanied by the *Macbeth* sleepwalking music. The final shots of the film are then complemented by a jangling harpsichord riff (which has reappeared episodically throughout the film), now backed by strings. In this musical *mise en abîme*, what is the status of the Parma region's most famous son, Verdi, when subjected to Brechtian alienation?

Ahead of any more direct parallels between Bertolucci's film and *Macbeth*, the motif of sleepwalking instantly seems to qualify Fabrizio's anti-clerical and anti-bourgeois stance. The rest of the film confirms this, depicting Fabrizio's unconvincing flirtation with the proletariat and his ultimate return to the fold of bourgeois mediocrity. The arrangement of Verdi's theme further foretells this. The reduction of a full string orchestra to a single, desiccated sound source corresponds to the richness of Fabrizio's imagined sexual and political revolutionary spirit vis-à-vis the actuality of Clelia, of the stasis of Parma, and of the sweetness of life that predictably becomes cloying. The original musical scores of Verdi, with their galvanizing of national pride and identity, form a still greater contrast to the postwar reception of Verdi (even the "arrangement" of his music into

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something less complex) by a sated provincial bourgeoisie. The key example of this dissonance comes in a long sequence toward the end of the film, with a performance of Verdi's *Macbeth*.

The soundtrack has other musical episodes in between Verdi estranged and Verdi undiluted. Felliniesque clown music accompanies Gina's modeling of various pairs of spectacles, while sometimes a pop melody is heard, feigning carefree harmony when Fabrizio and Gina dance. In Part 2 of the film, which is named after Fabrizio's mentor Cesare,[9] talk of politics and the philosophy of history is undermined in its thrust by a reference to Oscar Wilde, plus a radio transmission of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloë* with sumptuous waves of sound.[10] A bedroom scene is briefly accompanied by strains of Bach, but the record is quickly removed from the player and replaced by cool jazz. Fabrizio's own tenuous convictions shift dramatically in the wake of a scene shot among the placards of a political parade in a park. Seemingly he is headed for a political solidarity of sorts; the words "Workers of the world, unite," are accompanied by a workers' anthem in the background, bringing a rare moment of self-knowledge for Fabrizio ("I thought . . . for my sort it's always before the revolution").

But the unkindest editing cut of all transports us to a different mass phenomenon, bridging Fabrizio's abandoned communist ideals and his self-immolation on the altar of bourgeois marriage. A sartorially splendid audience scurries to its seats for a performance of *Macbeth*, inaugurating a new opera season at the Teatro Regio on December 26, 1962. Bertolucci dissects the bourgeoisie in diabolical fashion, the off-screen witches' chorus being matched to the blue-rinse crowd moving through the foyer. Throughout the ten minutes or so of music the camera keeps linking sections of the audience, the true object of (self-)celebration, and avoids the performance. Gina down below looks up to Fabrizio and Clelia in their box, before Gina and Fabrizio flee to the foyer as the music, still muted, continues. The Bertolucci epigraph given at the head of this section is the core of their conversation. Gina's attack on Verdi is clearly not directed at his music. It is pitched at his commodification by audiences such as this one and at its self-deluding claims to kinship with the spirit of the original Verdi – a barb to which Fabrizio's sell-out exposes him. For Gina, Verdi is "all that we are not," meaning that the real Verdi has been completely effaced by the Verdi legend, without his current adherents knowing the difference. This scathing broadside reflects the gulf between Fabrizio and Gina, and its musical allegory is played out one last time as the wedding party leaves the church.

Macbeth was Verdi's tenth opera; it was premiered to Italian audiences before 1848, the year of Europe-wide revolutions that brought disillusionment for liberal supporters. Purely in chronological terms, this particular musical choice emerges as the musical companion to Fabrizio's musings on his own half-baked existence. And beyond this opera, at the broader level of mythical nation-building, "the biographical Verdi was a now inaccessible example of national integrity and of active involvement *in* the revolution, not a perpetually coquettish flirting with the

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prospect of the revolution, *before* the revolution, whose implications are to be held at bay'' (Hillman 2002: 224).

Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, *The Night of San Lorenzo* (1982)

The plot of this film draws on personal recollections of the filmmakers as well as on events of the latter stages of World War II in Italy. The ''night'' of the title falls on August 10, and the year referred to is 1944. Italy is no longer an Axis power, Germany is a strong presence on the peninsula – but now as the enemy, with a strong sense of betrayal – the Americans are working their way up from the south, and the north and center of Italy are hopelessly divided between remaining fascists and partisans. Those in the foreground of this film are tossed between the two feuding fronts in their basic quest to survive. The event that solidifies these fronts, the blowing up of a church filled with parishioners, is prepared for in most of the first half of the film.

Ahead of it, confusion reigns, confusion that becomes wholly localized in the later wheatfields sequence, a microcosm of the Italian civil war. In an early sequence, a priest tells his flock – gathered to formalize the wedding of the heavily pregnant Belindia and her swain – that it is their duty to survive the imminent *dies irae* (''day of wrath'' of the eponymous hymn, whose first stanza is most familiar from the Requiem Mass). He mentions that both Americans and Germans are nearby – the first of many references to the external sources of Italian hopes and fears. They remain completely off-stage presences, and indeed, throughout the film, they instantly fade away again on the rare occasions when they materialize. The film will show a confrontation between Italian and Italian, and of both with their God. The link between all three is Verdi's *Requiem* of 1874, one of the most notable settings of this centerpiece of the Catholic liturgy. In a later scene, the villagers, gathered in a forest, resolve to change their names. One opts for the unlikely name of Requiem, matched by images of him singing the Verdi. The film can in fact be viewed as enacting a requiem for a divided Italy, from a 1980s perspective.

The invisible world that is evoked in a religious context transmits to the film's style, in its avoidance of documentary realism. The teller of the tale proves in the final frames to be a child who has witnessed the events, now an adult. The child's view of religious art in the early sequence filters its more drastic elements via a kind of magic realism.[11] Playing on the desires of his villagers, a landowner cranks up a recording of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, the sonic indicator that the American liberators are nigh (and evoking ''their'' Civil War of an earlier century). Sound conjures the phantom Americans to the point where it transforms the landscape – ''I can see them,'' claims a boy, astride a man's shoulders.

It is tempting to understand this scene as self-reflexive: does/can Verdi exercise a comparable power on the soundtrack of Italian films, including that of the two Taviani brothers? The acoustic mirage created by the landowner is matched

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repeatedly in the visuals, without such sequences being signaled as illusory. The peasant girl Mara breaks rank and heads toward the Sicilian-born US soldiers she has heard of. One shows her a snowdome encasing a likeness of the Statue of Liberty, but the reality is that she's been shot inadvertently by the Germans. The segueing of "reality" with fantasy is furthered by the frequent use of wipes as an editing device, which creates both greater continuity across sequences and a slightly antiquated feel (in terms of film history). Establishing the latter is important, not least to prepare the viewer for the centurions of the wheatfields sequence.

The first use of Verdi's *Requiem* on the soundtrack, the "Hostias et preces tibi" section of the Offertorio, accompanies the breaking of bread for consecration at the doomed mass. It returns when the priest tries to help survivors of the detonation; but, for Belindia, this comes too late. However, an actual funeral procession of sorts comes in a different context, with strong narrative links to the cathedral scene. Shot from a distance – the point of view of the villagers, now hiding behind the latticework of a brick wall – a strange procession trudges by: a broken down bus, its windows papered over, drawn by horses, and flanked by foot soldiers. These figures in a landscape are accompanied by the aria "Du holder Abendstern" ("Oh thou lovely star of eve") from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, and from the villagers' comments it is clear that the bus is functioning as a hearse. This is the most concrete embodiment we have of the Germans; and yet it puzzles still further, rather than rendering them more substantial. Shot in close-up, the soldier from whose lips the Wagner melody seems to be emanating looks more Italian than German, and his lip movements are not perfectly synchronized with the performance of the aria. At one point the voice continues, no longer accompanied by an orchestra – the opera has no such solo vocal line – and the effect is even stronger of a melody in his headspace, communicating itself to his mouth.

All this is arresting in the overall context of the film. In the following sequence a different shooting star appears, a flare lighting up the countryside as the villagers seek refuge. From the strange funeral procession it is clear that the Germans, too, have their stars upon which they wish – in this case the *holder Abendstern*, in a Wagnerian setting that belies all Teutonic stereotypes.[12] The celebrated playing off of Verdi against Wagner in music history – reflected in Rizzuto's comments in the Leto epigraph at the head of this section – is implied, but defused, in the German obsequies being intercut by the Italians' grief: the two are paralleled, not contrasted. A tenuous link between the two worlds is created by a solitary Italian who appears in the wake of the procession, claiming that the Germans have taken his bus, but he is clearly delusional. Immediately ahead of his falling down dead, the gentle strains of Wagner return over the man's Cassandra-like utterance: "To find the Americans you first have to find Dante['s rebels]." So the fluid boundaries of "reality" and fantasy are reflected in national characterization and distinctiveness. In these two sequences the common ground of lamentation dominates, just as the requiem (beyond Verdi's) was the great musical leveler to the common denominator of mortality. As a repository of cultural memory,

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the soundtrack of a historical film such as that of the Taviani brothers can be historically suggestive of a time frame transcending the status of Germany as ally or foe.

The confrontation in the wheatfields brings a clash between ideology and basic humanity (one figure passes water to another, whom he then recognizes as an enemy; he reverts to his uniformed rather than his natural self, and promptly fires at point blank range). The highly stylized sequence reaches a surreal peak when a row of gladiators rears up, hurling spears at the blackshirt who has just killed "Achilles," the name adopted by the oldest villager. The body of the blackshirt – a multiply impaled St. Sebastian (see Figure 16.2) – evokes both a wartime map of the peninsula, studded with arrows marking the direction of allied advances, and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, whose Japanese Macbeth falls to a hail of arrows from his own men. This allows the Taviani brothers a *Macbeth* beyond Verdi's, one that suggests an "ideal" version of Italian history, in which the end of fascism is administered by its former followers. This whole dramatic interlude has been accompanied by the Last Judgment section within the "Dies Irae" of the Verdi *Requiem*, a blaze of trumpets invoking the gladiators. Combatants represent a confused blend of the Italian factions, a blend achieved at the symbolic level by Verdi as an icon of Italian unification.

And that lends substance to carnivalesque motifs in this and other Italian postwar films in quest of ideal identities. After the battle, Galvano and the Contessa share a bed in a nearby village, Galvano pretending to the lady sheltering them that they've been man and wife for 30 years. "It's the war," as the Contessa says; the alliance of peasant and master, let alone mistress, seems destined to remain a utopian one-night political stand. The heralded arrival of the Americans, at long

Figure 16.2 Verdi's Day of Judgment for an Italy at war with itself. *The Night of San Lorenzo* (aka *Night of the Shooting Stars*) (1982). Giuliani G. De Negri, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

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last, brings not clarity, but a kind of liminal stage of rumination (Galvano declines to travel home with the others, needing further time to muse on what has just transpired). Sun showers combine aspects of baptism (not for the first time in the film) with a ritual cleansing, new light, but also exceptional conditions (in terms of historical fidelity, a comparably impossible union is that between the church and communism in a film deemed to be more realistic: Rossellini's *Rome Open City*).

The cathartic effect of Verdi's apocalypse, followed by the return to a communal home, is not, however, the end of the film. Its final note is far more ambiguous. Visually, the opening bookend returns, with a view out through an open window, across a cityscape beneath the canopy of a fantastic sky. The voice-over continues, and finally its audience is revealed: a baby whose inability to comprehend any of the preceding tales lends the whole story a retrospective confessional mode. And this voice, outwardly so assured, addressing this child of uncertain provenance, finishes with a rendition of the poem learnt in childhood to ward off fear – almost a secularized prayer. The benediction of the Taviani brothers' film reaches no cadence – its dramatic gesture, strongly underpinned by Verdi's *Requiem*, is overhauled by the anxieties of 1980s Italy and the country's reappraisal of where it has come from.

Coda

In the interplay between "cinema and memory," Susannah Radstone (2010: 341–342) pleads for further research on "the articulation of memory *across* media" and "on the ways in which cinema memory travels across and between nations [. . .] Questions of cinema memory's journeys across spatial and national borders connect too with [. . .] the question [. . .] of how cinema memories travel across time and between one historical moment and the next." Such issues are embodied in this chapter's claim for the recognition of cinematic memories that are often more subliminal: those of its music. Italian music, especially Verdi's, is present on film soundtracks with a whole range of inflections emanating from, but not confined to, the nation. Restaged, but also reconfigured – by Visconti, Bertolucci, and the Taviani brothers – Verdi becomes a site for grappling with the notion of a second Risorgimento in post-World War II Italy.

Within Italy, Verdi always blended high art and popular appeal, and on that score alone he provides a powerful instrument for re-visioning and re-sounding history, in the interaction between images and soundtrack. "Verdi" soon transcended music. Starting with its Risorgimento incarnation as a catch cry of nationalism – "Viva Verdi" (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:V_E_R_D_I.jpg), as a contraction of "Viva Vittorio Emanuele re d'Italia" – the iridescent name came to identify a popular parliamentarian and a myth-laden icon of the Italian cultural imaginary. Recently Verdi has become a more transnational figure through the global resonance of the three tenors and through worldwide direct simulcasts of opera

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performances from the Met. Those developments are, in turn, part of the history of Verdi's reception.

Both Wagner (Flinn 2004; Hillman 2005) and Verdi exemplify how ideological, music-historical, and historical overtones can meaningfully be integrated into a film, creating a more rounded view of history than the written word or the visual image allow. Nor is such use of music in a historical film confined to Europe: throughout Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), the leitmotif of Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* – which is nothing less than the unofficial US funeral music – is similarly bound to a national subconscious. Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 took on polyphonic historical inflections at the hands of directors of the new German cinema (roughly 1962–1982), from Nazi appropriation through to anticipation of the symphony's supranational role, as European anthem (Hillman 2005). To a degree, the continuity of cultural history that it provided amidst the discontinuities of a Germany divided after the war parallel the recruitment of Verdi for evoking a second Risorgimento amidst the different fault lines of postwar Italy. As the most representative name in Italian opera, Verdi is enlisted as a national identity marker – but this time on film soundtracks, in a different cultural history, that of a more complex historical film.

Notes

1 His name figured as a national catchcry in the fervor of Risorgimento aspirations (see "viva Verdi," p. 343). At Cavour's request he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1861, resigning in 1865. In 1874 he was named a Senator of the Kingdom by King Victor Emanuel II.

2 With reference to "the impact of opera on nineteenth-century audiences," musicologist James Hepokoski (2009: 76) writes: "the aesthetic and the sociopolitical were intertwined and mutually reinforcing."

3 Another instance of fiction being no stranger than fact: "When Giuseppe Verdi died in 1901, 'comrade' Mussolini was selected by his fellow pupils at Forlimpopoli to deliver a tribute in the local theatre, and the young socialist gave a bravura impromptu performance in which, to loud applause, he recalled the great patriot of the Risorgimento who had lived to see his dreams shattered by the reality of united Italy and in particular by the persistent gulf between the ruling classes and the proletariat" (Duggan 2008: 372).

4 Steinberg and Stewart-Steinberg (2007: 269) posit "the re-emergence [in post-World War II Italian cinema] of an operatic subjectivity – the return of the repressed – in displaced form – namely, in film. Moreover, this operatic subjectivity emerges now at the level of the unconscious. Paradoxically, the articulation of operatic subjectivity as cultural unconscious lives up to the old Risorgimento project. Opera, or more precisely the operatic unconscious, traverses and survives fascism to become an important site of a post-fascist national unconscious."

5 Rossini is a professor of history and Rizzuto his "captor," commissioner on the island to which Rossini has been banished as a political prisoner. For a fuller discussion of this film, and in particular of Verdi's significance, see Crisp and Hillman (2002).

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6 But at a very late stage, for which the choice of *Il Trovatore* is apt in relation to musical history: "Verdi's operatic practice at this time still seems to have been its fundamental readability as culturally Italian. *Il Trovatore* is probably the last Verdian opera of which this may be said" (Hepokoski 2009: 103).
7 A point that, for Visconti's contemporary audience, may well have resonated beyond the Austrians: "nearly a million Italians found ways of securing exemptions from military service during the war" (Duggan 2008: 521).
8 Combining both parts of Eric Hobsbawm's memorable description of the "opera house of the mid and late 1800s as 'that characteristic cathedral of bourgeois culture'" (quoted here from Hepokoski 2009: 76).
9 A further reference to sleepwalking, if one thinks of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (as one almost has to, with the cinephile Bertolucci). Also, most likely, to Cesare Pavese, as Gino Moliterno points out (private correspondence) – inasmuch as he translated into Italian *Moby Dick*: Cesare's pupils are studying this text in a scene at the end of the film.
10 For a work that premiered in 1912, this choice probably carries the further connotation, with an eye to the film's title, of coming immediately before the ultimate revolution within European history, World War I.
11 In this as well as in its impossibly starry skies, Manchevski's *Before the Rain*, another depiction of a civil war, pays homage to the Tavianis' film. When the two small girls encounter GIs and pull faces, the Tavianis' scene is strongly reminiscent of the gargoyles at the beginning of the film.
12 This is at loggerheads with Pierre Sorlin's (1995: 78) interpretation on both counts: "the few Germans that it portrays conform to stereotypes by killing innocents and singing Wagner arias while retreating."

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