

1 How I imagine you

Since you are the one to whom my little instructional treatise is addressed it is as well for me to describe you as I imagine you. It is very important because it is always necessary to talk and act in concrete terms.

As your name immediately suggests, you are Neapolitan. And since the question poses itself insistently, before going on with a description, I shall have to explain briefly why I wished you to be Neapolitan.

I am writing early in 1975 and — although it is some time since I was in Naples — at this period Neapolitans represent for me a category of persons who are both in concrete and in ideological terms sympathetic to me. In fact during these last few years (to be precise the last decade) they have changed very little. And this is very important for me even if I know that for this reason I may be suspected of the most terrible things, even appearing to be a traitor, an outcast, a good-for-nothing. But what can one do? I prefer the poverty of the Neapolitans to the prosperity of the Italian Republic; I prefer the ignorance of the Neapolitans to the schools of the Italian Republic; I prefer the little dramas which one can see in the Neapolitan slums — even if they are somewhat naturalistic — to the little dramas of the Italian Republic's television. I feel very close to the Neapolitans because we are obliged to understand each other. With the Neapolitans I have no physical reserve because in their innocence they have none with me. With the Neapolitans I can presume to be able to impart something because they know that in giving me their attention they do me a favour. The exchange of knowledge is therefore something absolutely natural. With a Neapolitan I can simply say what I know because the way I see his knowledge is full of almost mythical respect and yet of gaiety and affection also. I consider a row to be also an exchange of knowledge. One day I noticed that in the course of an effusion of affection a Neapolitan

was taking my wallet; I drew his attention to it and our affection increased.

I could go on like this for pages and indeed turn my treatise into a treatise on the relationship of a member of the middle classes from Northern Italy with the Neapolitans. But for the moment I restrain myself and turn to you.

First of all you are, and must be, very pretty. Not perhaps in the conventional sense. In build you can be small and indeed even a little skinny; your features can already show the marks which with the years will inevitably turn your face into a mask. But your eyes must be black and shining; your mouth a little wide; your face fairly regular; your hair must be short at the neck and behind the ears; whereas on your brow I have no difficulty in granting you a fine quiff, high, warlike and perhaps a little exaggerated and ridiculous. I would not mind if you were a bit of a sportsman and therefore slim in the hips and solid in the legs. As for the sport, I would prefer you to like soccer so that now and again we can have a game together. And all this — all this about your body — let us be clear, has not in your case any practical or interested aim; it is a pure aesthetic thought, one moreover that puts me at my ease. Let us understand each other: if you were ugly, really ugly, it would be all the same provided you were as likeable and normally intelligent and affectionate as you are. In that case it is enough if your eyes are laughing — just as if instead of being a Gennariello you were a Concettina.

Some people might think that a boy like the one I am describing is a miracle. In fact you can only be a middle-class boy — that is, a student in his first or second year at grammar school. I would be prepared to admit the miraculous nature of the case were you Milanese, Florentine or even Roman. But the fact that you are Neapolitan makes it impossible for you — even if you are middle-class — to be anything but beautiful within. Naples is still the last plebeian metropolis, the last great village with cultural traditions, moreover, which are not strictly Italian; this general and historical fact levels the social classes physically and intellectually. Vitality is always a source of affection and candour. In Naples both the poor boy and the middle-class boy are full of vitality.

So as I have chosen you, you have chosen me. We are equals. We are exchanging favours. Naturally if this is read by others this

instructional text of mine is a lie since you are lacking: it lacks your dialogue, your voice, your smile. So much the worse for those readers who cannot imagine you. If you are not a miracle you are an exception — that is certain. Perhaps even for Naples where so many of your contemporaries are disgusting Fascists. But what else could I find to make this text of mine unusual at least in the literal sense?

6 March 1975

2 How you must imagine me

I could tell you so many things, Gennariello, that you need to know about your mentor. I do not wish to make a list of details which will certainly emerge little by little as occasion arises. In fact our pedagogical discourse will be full of parentheses and divagations; whenever something in the news is urgent enough and important enough to interrupt our discourse we shall interrupt it.

I should like to pick out one point: that is, what people say about me, which is how you have known me up to now (supposing that you know of my existence). What you know about me from other people is euphemistically summed up in a few words: 'a writer-director, greatly discussed and very discussable', a 'not very orthodox Communist who makes his money in the cinema' and 'a bad lot — a bit like D'Annunzio'.²

I shall not start a polemic over these pieces of information you have received with touching unanimity from a fascist lady and from a young person from the extra-parliamentary movement, from a left-wing intellectual and a pimp.

I know this list is a little in the style of 'the man in the street'. But remember: you must not fear anything and above all you must not fear those negative descriptions which can be endlessly twisted.

All Italians can call each other Fascists because in all Italians there are some fascist traits which, as we shall see, is explained historically by the lack of a liberal or bourgeois revolution; all Italians can for more obvious reasons call each other 'catholic' or 'clerical'. Finally, all Italians can call each other politically

'common man'. And that is precisely what concerns us at this moment. Not because you and I have broken what by now should be the tacit pact between civilized people which consists in never calling each other 'Fascists' or 'clerical' or 'man in the street', but because it is I who accuse myself, here and now, of a certain 'common man' attitude.

What is it that I (as a man in the street) see that finds something in common between 'a fascist lady, a member of the extra-parliamentary movement, and a pimp?' It is a terrible, invincible anxiety to conform.

It often happens in our society that a man (middle class, Catholic, even potentially fascist) noticing consciously or unconsciously this anxiety to conform, makes a decisive choice and becomes a progressive, a revolutionary, a Communist; but (very often) to what end? In order to be able to live at peace with his anxiety to conform. He does not know it but the fact that he has crossed over courageously to the side which stands for right and reason — I am using the word in its philosophical as well as its current sense — permits him to come to terms with the old habits which he believes have been regenerated, reified. Whereas they are, in fact, nothing more than the old anxiety to conform.

This has always happened during these thirty post-fascist but not anti-fascist years. But things got worse from 1968 onwards. Because, on the one hand, of what we can call official, national conformism, the conformism of the 'system' has become infinitely more conformist from the moment when power became consumerist power, therefore infinitely more efficacious in imposing its will than any other preceding power in the world. The process of persuasion to follow a 'hedonistic' concept of life (and therefore to be good consumers) renders ridiculous any authoritarian effort at persuasion — for example, to follow a religious or moralistic concept of life.

On the other hand, the great masses of workers and the progressive élites have remained isolated in this new world of power — an isolation which if, on the one hand it has preserved in them a certain clarity and hygiene both mental and moral, has also made them more conservative. It is the fate of all 'islands' (and of the 'marginal areas'). So the conformism of the Left, which was always there, has become fossilized in these last years.

Now one of the commonplaces most typical of the left-wing

intellectual is the desire to deconsecrate and (to invent a word) to desentimentalize life. In the case of the old progressive intellectuals, that is explained by the fact that they were brought up in a clerico-fascist society which preached false sanctity and false sentiments. And so the reaction was correct. But today the new power does not impose that false sanctity and those false sentiments. Indeed it itself is the first, I repeat, to wish to be liberated from them altogether along with all their institutions: the army and the church, for instance. So the polemic against sanctity and against sentiment on the part of the progressive intellectuals who continue to grind out the old values of the Enlightenment as if it had mechanically become part of the human sciences is useless. Or else it is useful to the existing power.

For these reasons you should know that in the instruction I shall impart to you there is not the least doubt that I shall push you towards every possible deconsecration, towards a lack of respect for all institutionalized feeling. Yet the basis of my teaching will consist in persuading you not to fear a sense of the sacred and of those feelings which consumerist secularity has deprived men of, thereby transforming them into ugly and stupid automatons that worship fetishes.

13 March 1975

3 More about your teacher

I should like to add something more to what I said to you in the previous section, 'How you must imagine me'.

We shall have a lot to say about sex. It will be one of the most important of our topics and I shall certainly not lose the chance to tell you some truths in this connection even if they are simple ones which nevertheless will, as usual, greatly shock Italian readers, who are always ready to cut dead the reprobate and turn their backs on him. Well, in that sense I am like a negro in a racist society which has felt the need to indulge in a spirit of tolerance. That is to say, I am tolerated.

Tolerance, you must know, is only and always purely nominal. I do not know a single example of real tolerance. That is because

real tolerance would be a contradiction in terms. The fact that someone is 'tolerated' is the same as saying that he is 'condemned'. Indeed tolerance is a more refined form of condemnation. In fact they tell the 'tolerated' person — let us say the negro whom we have taken as an example — to do what he wishes, that he has every right to follow his own nature, that the fact that he belongs to a minority does not in the least mean inferiority, etc. But his 'difference' — or better, his 'crime of being different' — remains the same both with regard to those who have decided to tolerate him and those who have decided to condemn him. No majority will ever be able to banish from its consciousness the feeling of the 'difference' of minorities. I shall always be eternally, inevitably, conscious of this. So certainly the negro will be able to be a negro, that is to say, will be able to live out his 'diversity' freely, even outside the physical and material ghetto which in the days of oppression was assigned to him.

Yet the mental picture of the ghetto lives on invincibly. The negro will be free, will be able to live normally without obstacles to his difference etc, but he will always remain inside a 'mental ghetto' and woe betide him if he should leave it. He can leave it only on condition that he accepts the point of view and the mentality of those who live outside the ghetto: that is to say, of the majority.

No feeling, no gesture, no word of his can be 'coloured' by the particular experience which is lived by someone who is conceptually enclosed within the limits set for a minority (the mental ghetto). He has to deny all of himself and to pretend that his experience is a normal one for the minority.

Since we took as our starting-point our master and pupil relationship (in particular 'what I am to you') I shall illustrate what I have said somewhat aphoristically by means of a concrete case that concerns me.

In recent weeks I have had the opportunity to make public announcements on two topics: abortion, and the political irresponsibility of the men who are in power.

Who is in favour of abortion? No one evidently. One would have to be mad to be in favour of abortion. The problem is not to be for or against abortion but for or against its legalization. Naturally, as I am *against* abortion, I cannot be *for* indiscriminate, total, fanatical, rhetorical abortion. As if to legalize abortion was

a joyful, peace-bringing victory. I am for prudent and painful legislation. That is to say, in terms of practical politics on this occasion I share the position of the Communists rather than that of the radicals.

Why do I feel the guilt of abortion with particular anguish? That, too, I have stated clearly. Because abortion is a problem of the vast majority which regards its cause, sexual intercourse, in such an ontological way as to render it mechanical, banal, irrelevant by an excess of naturalness. In this there is something that obscurely offends me. It confronts me with a terrifying reality. (I was born and lived in a repressive, clerico-fascist world).

All this has given my statements on abortion a certain 'colouring', which derives from my particular and different experience of life and of sexual life.

Everyone leapt on me like mad dogs, not because of what I said (which was of course entirely reasonable) but because of that 'colouring'. Stupid, blind, mad dogs. All the madder, more stupid and blind the more (as was evident) I asked for their solidarity and comprehension. Because I am not talking about Fascists. I am speaking about 'enlightened people', 'progressives'. I am speaking about 'tolerant' persons. So that is the proof of what I was telling you. So long as 'the odd one out' lives 'his difference in silence', shut up in the mental ghetto assigned to him, all is well; and everyone feels gratified at the tolerance they are granting him. But if he says a single word about his own experience as someone 'different', or merely dares to pronounce 'coloured' words 'coloured' by his own experience as someone 'different', there is an outbreak of lynching just as in the darkest clerico-fascist times. The most vulgar contempt, the worst schoolboy jokes, the fiercest incomprehension, cast him into degradation and shame.

Well, dear Gennariello, the fuss over this question of abortion was matched by the absolute silence on the question of the Christian Democrat bosses. And by the by, let us be clear about it, I certainly did not make a statement on a purely administrative level — that is to say, on the level of public morality. But this is a point we shall discuss in the next section, the subject of which will be language.

20 March 1975

4 How we shall speak

So we were saying last time that while there was a great uproar on the question of abortion there was the silence of the tomb on the question of the ineptitude — it borders on the criminal — of the Christian Democrat bosses. Or else the discussion was turned into a continuing and boring argument on bad government and on under-government with perhaps an obscure reference to the intervention of the Communists; that is to say, to that 'historical compromise' which, they say, is merely the codification of an existing state of affairs.

You see, Gennariello, the majority of anti-clerical and democratic Italians give themselves great airs because they feel that they are living in a virile way 'inside' history. They accept realistically its capability to transform reality and men, being entirely convinced that this 'realistic acceptance' is the result of the use of reason.

But I do not, Gennariello. Remember that I, your teacher, do not believe in that history and that progress. It is not true that things necessarily progress. Very often either the individual or society regresses or deteriorates. In that case the transformation *must not* be granted; its realistic acceptance is in reality a guilty manoeuvre to assuage one's own conscience and to go on as before. And that is the opposite of a rational process even if it often has, linguistically, the appearance of a rational argument.

Regression and deterioration cannot be accepted — even if with indignation or with anger — because, contrary to appearances, they are in this specific case profoundly rational acts. What is needed is the full force of cold rejection, of desperate useless denunciation.

Anyone who accepts realistically a transformation which is a regression and a deterioration means to say that he does not love those who are the victims of that regression and that degradation: that is to say the men of flesh and blood who surround him. Anyone who, on the other hand, protests with all his might — even with the might of his feelings — against regression and degradation says that he loves men of flesh and blood. A love which I have the misfortune to feel and which I hope to communicate to you too.

The Christian Democrat bosses are precisely the ones most

guilty of not loving those who are degraded by the false progress of history.

Let us leave aside the first phase of their regime, which was clearly the continuation of the fascist regime, and let us go on immediately to the second phase; that in which they continued to exist and act in the same way as before, although the power they served was no longer the paleo-capitalist (clerico-fascist) power but a new one — the power of consumerism (with its feigned tolerance). In this second phase there was an atrocious succession of political murders and criminal behaviour. And it is of this that the bosses of the Christian Democratic Party are, in the case in point, also formally guilty because the possibilities are three in number:

One: the Christian Democrat leaders (or a group of them) are directly responsible for, or are the instigators of, the 'strategy of tension' and of the bombs. The scandal of the SID³ (military intelligence) would suffice to demonstrate unequivocally the validity of this hypothesis. And moreover this can be read between the lines of the recent — even if in another sense explicit — accusations of de Martino.

Two: if the Christian Democrat leaders nevertheless did not know everything, or almost everything, a lot, or even a little, about these matters, they would be incompetents who do not notice what is going on under their noses.

Three: the Christian Democrat leaders know everything about the murders, or almost everything, or a lot, or at least a little, but are pretending not to know and remain silent.

In all three cases the Christian Democrat bosses who have held the power during these years should get out, disappear, not to say worse.

Instead they not only remain in power, they *speak*. Now it is their language that is the stumbling-block. In fact every time they open their mouths they do nothing but lie: from insincerity, from guilt, from fear, from cunning. Their language is the language of the lie. And since their culture is a rotten legal and academic culture monstrously crossed with technological culture, their language in concrete terms is pure teratology. One cannot listen to it. One has to shut one's ears.

The first duty of intellectuals today would be to teach people not to listen to the linguistic monstrosities of the Christian

Democrat bosses and to scream with disgust at every word they utter. In other words, the duty of intellectuals would be that of rejecting all the lies which through the press and above all through television inundate and suffocate the admittedly inert body of Italy.

Indeed almost all the intellectuals in the opposition substantially accept what the Christian Democrat bosses accept. They are not at all scandalized at the monstrosity of the language of the Christian Democrat bosses.

My dream in our relationship of master and pupil, dear Gennariello, would be to speak Neapolitan. Unfortunately I do not know that language. So I shall make do with an Italian that has nothing to do with the Italian of these powerful figures and their equally powerful opponents. The Italian of a cultured and humanistic tradition which does not fear a certain 'manner' which in a relationship like ours is inevitable.

So the preambles are finished. Next time I shall give a summary sketch of our scheme of work, a sort of index, and then at last I shall start the lessons.

Scheme of work

This more or less — with a thousand punctuation marks and parentheses caused by the arrogance of actuality in which you will feel you have a right to privilege, thus taking advantage of my weakness — is the scheme of work.

A first series of chapters will be dedicated to your most immediate 'educative sources'. You will at once think of your father and mother, of school and of television. But it is not like that: your most immediate educative sources are dumb, material, objective, inert, merely present. And yet they speak to you. They have their own language which you, like your companions, can decipher extremely well. I am speaking of objects, of things, of the physical reality that surrounds you. On that subject, contrary to what you expect, I shall have some sharp remarks to make. The language of things from which you receive your first education is not boring, I can assure you. (Forgive me if I adopt certain mannerisms when I imitate 'how to speak to boys'.)

After the chapters dedicated to the pedagogical language of things (of commodities or consumer goods) I shall dedicate a long section of the book to talking to you about your companions who are clearly your true educators. They are the unconscious and therefore all the more irresistible bearers of absolutely new values, which only you and they live out. We — your fathers — are shut off from them. Those values, indeed, cannot be translated into our language. Yet it is in a paternal language that I shall attempt to speak to you about them: and I shall require in a somewhat paternal manner your comprehension or curiosity. . . .

The third part of our treatise will be on the two parents who are your official educators, if not your dis-educators as well. Yet as we shall see, between their pedagogic intentions for you and the realization of these intentions there is a layer of immense thickness: it concerns your relationship of love and hatred with them. In short, I shall explain to you what happens in the family.

Then we shall move on to the school, that is to say, to that organizational and culture organism which has totally dis-educated you and places you here before me as a poor idiot who has been humiliated, indeed degraded, incapable of understanding, caught in a trap of mental pettiness which, apart from anything else, causes you suffering. The anti-school (that is to say, the political polemic against school which you have taken in and assimilated from the debate of the last few years, a debate now completely impoverished and deprived of authority) is no less diseducative. It imposes on you a conformism no less degrading and cruel than that of the school.

First I shall talk to you about your elementary school teachers and then about your secondary school ones, those duplicates of fathers and mothers, authors of your uneducated state. (If instead someone had educated you, he could only have done so through his being rather than through his speech. That is to say, with his love or his possibility of love; it does not follow that in some cases the most humble of your teachers may not be a man who belongs not to the sub-culture but to culture.)

The fifth part of the treatise will be the press and television, these terrifying pedagogic instruments which lack any alternative. On that topic nothing will halt my fury, which is that of someone who, as you see, is gentle. In short, up to this fifth section, the subject of our series will be in substance pedagogy itself. It is from

this long look inwards that the continual outward glances will derive their meaning. On the other hand, as Barthes says in one of the aphorisms in his latest magnificent book (*The Pleasure of the Text*) probably 'we are scientific for lack of subtlety'. I shall try not to be scientific even if I cannot claim to be sufficiently 'subtle' in my treatment of the various themes.

Once these five important chapters are finished the five more important sections will begin and on them I shall spread myself without any preconceived limits and with all the freedom of improvisation.

They will deal first with sex, second with behaviour, third with religion, fourth with politics, fifth with art. In all this a pragmatic attitude will dominate. In other words I shall give you advice. To complete this list, I feel that it is a secret between the two of us. Hurrah. Certainly I do not think that there is anyone — at least in my world, the world of so-called culture — capable of minimally appreciating the idea of compiling a pedagogic treatise for a boy. An enormous vulgarity makes them think of and receive such a treatise as a chat that is completely and perfectly 'legible'. All right: it means that instead of dedicating it to the monstrous shade of Rousseau we shall dedicate it to the scornful shade of de Sade.

3 April 1975

5 The first lesson, given to me by a blind

Our first memories are visual ones. In memory life becomes a silent film. We all have in our minds an image which is the first, or one of the first, in our lives. That image is a sign, or to be exact, a linguistic sign. So if it is a linguistic sign it communicates or expresses something. I shall give you an example, Gennariello, which to you as a Neapolitan may sound exotic. The first image of my life is a white, transparent blind, which hangs — without moving, I believe — from a window which looks out on to a somewhat sad and dark lane. That blind terrifies me and fills me with anguish: not as something threatening and unpleasant but as something cosmic. In that blind the spirit of the middle-class

house in Bologna where I was born is summed up and takes bodily form. Indeed the images which compete with the blind for chronological primacy are a room with an alcove (where my grandmother slept), heavy 'proper' furniture, a carriage in the street which I wanted to climb into. These images are less painful than that of the blind, yet in them too there is concentrated that element of the cosmic which constitutes the petty bourgeois spirit of the world into which I was born. But if in the objects and things the images of which have remained firmly in my memory (like those of an indelible dream) there is precipitated and concentrated the whole world of 'memories', which is recalled by those images in a single instant — if, that is to say, those objects and those things are containers in which is stored a universe which I can extract and look at, then, at the same time, these objects and things are also something other than a container.

They are, in fact, linguistic signs which, if for me personally they evoke the world of middle-class infancy, nevertheless in those first moments they talked to me objectively and demanded to be deciphered as something new and unknown. In fact the content of my memories did not superimpose itself on them; their content was only their own. And they communicated it to me. So their communication was essentially instructional. They taught me where I had been born, in what world I lived, and above all how to think about my birth and my life. Since it was a question of an unarticulated, fixed and incontrovertible pedagogic discourse, it could not be other — as we say today — than authoritarian and repressive. What that blind said to me and taught me did not admit (and does not admit) of rejoinders. No dialogue was possible or admissible with it, nor any act of self-education. That is why I believed that the whole world was the world which that blind taught me: that is to say, I thought that the whole world was 'proper', idealistic, sad and sceptical, a little vulgar — in short, petty bourgeois.

Other 'discourses of things' intervened a little later and then throughout my whole infancy and youth. Often such new 'discourses of things' — especially after earliest infancy — contradicted the initial ones. I saw rustic objects in the courtyards of poor houses; I saw furnishings and furniture which were proletarian and sub-proletarian; I saw landscapes which were not city ones but suburban or poorly rural, etc. But how long it was,

my dear Gennariello, before those first statements had doubts cast on them and were explicitly contradicted by later ones. For many years their repressive power and their authoritarian spirit were invincible; it is true that I quickly understood that as well as my petty bourgeois world — so cosmically absolute — there was another world, indeed that there were other worlds. But for a long time it always seemed to me that the only true valid world, taught me by objects, by physical reality, was my world; whereas the others seemed to me to be extraneous, anomalous, disquieting and devoid of truth.

The education given to a boy by things, by objects, by physical reality — in other words, the material phenomena of his social condition — make that boy corporeally what he is and what he will be all his life. What has to be educated is his flesh as the mould of his spirit. Social condition is recognizable in the flesh of an individual (at least in my historical experience). Because he has been physically shaped by the education, the physical education, of the matter from which his world is made.

What his parents say, what his teachers and finally his professors say is superimposed and crystallized on what a boy has been taught by things and deeds. Only the education received from his companions will be very similar to what was imparted to him by things and acts — that is to say, will be just as purely pragmatic in the absolute and primary meaning of the word.

Moreover I leap ahead immediately to say that the importance of what television teaches is enormous, because it does nothing else but offer a series of 'examples' of being and behaviour. Even if announcers, presenters and other dregs of humanity of that kind talk — and talk horrendously — in effect the true language of television is like the language of things; it is absolutely pragmatic and does not admit of rejoinders, alternatives, resistance.

You must forgive me for jumping ahead in this way, but I can allow myself to do it because we must stay for some 'lessons' with the language of things, seeing that what is really important is what things have taught you; I referred to my own personal experience only so as to come to present-day experiences — like yours in fact — thus establishing (even if blandly and somewhat idyllically) the facts of one of the most terrible generation gaps that history records.

10 April 1975

6 Our impotence in the face of the pedagogic language of things

Nothing forces one to look at things like making a film. The way a writer looks at a landscape whether urban or rural, can exclude an infinity of things, extracting from their totality only those which are either the source of emotions or useful. When he looks at the landscape the eye of a director cannot but be conscious (almost making a catalogue) of all the things in it. In fact while in the case of the writer things are destined to become words, that is to say, symbols, in the utterance of a film director things remain things; the 'signs' of the verbal system are therefore symbolical and conventional while the 'signs' of the cinematographic system are nothing more nor less than the things themselves in their materiality and reality. It is true that they become 'signs', but they are what one might call living 'signs' of themselves. All that is part of a science — semiology — which you, Gennariello, must know at least by name and at least in its vulgarized sense if you want to follow what I am saying, particularly when I am speaking about the primary language of things and their subsequent pedagogic shortcomings.

So if I had gone to the Yemen as a writer I would have come back with a totally different idea of the Yemen from what I have after going there as a film director. I do not know which of the two is more true. As a writer I would have come back with the idea, at once exciting and static, of a country crystallized in a medieval state with high and narrow red houses, decorated with white designs which are like crude goldsmiths' work, heaped on each other in the midst of a burning desert, so bright that it risks skinning the cornea, with here and there little valleys, and villages which repeat exactly the architectural shapes of the city amidst distant terraced fields of grain, barley and little vines.

As a film director, on the other hand, I saw in the midst of all this the 'expressive', horrible presence of modernity — a leprosy of chaotically planted lamp-posts — huts of cement or corrugated iron put up without logic where once were city walls — public edifices in a terrible twentieth-century Arab style, etc. And naturally my eyes *had* to alight on other things, smaller or even really tiny ones: plastic objects, tins, shoes, and textiles of

miserable cotton, tinned pears (from China), transistors.

In short, I saw the coexistence of two semantically different worlds united in a single, confused expressive system.

Naturally the modern part of such a linguistic system seemed to me to be a degrading aberration. It was, to tell the truth, objectively so because it was miserable and declared without reserve or reluctance its brash speculative intent. The Yemen is still only a small, a tiny, market for Western industries. Therefore it is scorned and ridiculed. Its disintegration seems natural. The fact that this requires a renunciation on the part of the Yemenites seems perfectly natural to German and Italian speculators; the Yemenites must agree without reservations to the proposition of their cultural and physical genocide — even if it is not mortal — just as in the concentration camps.

But let us get back to things. The language of new things which in the Yemen — and in my infancy — is a confused babble has become for you, Gennariello, an articulated, logical and normal speech. Even if something still *separates you from it* because you are Neapolitan.

I do not wish to involve you in my aesthetic sin. I hope the pack of moralists may keep away from you with those accusations of theirs which rise up from their — it has to be said — disgusting testicles (which are certainly not like your boyish ones or like mine, for I do not confuse them with the prevaricating and vulgar spirit of the Law).

My aestheticism is indivisible from my culture. Why deprive my culture of one of its elements even if it is spurious and perhaps even superfluous? It completes a whole. I have no scruples about saying so, because in these last few years I have become convinced that poverty and backwardness are not by any means the worst ill. We are all mistaken on this score. Modern things which capitalism has introduced into the Yemen have not only made the Yemenites physically clowns; they have also made them more unhappy. The Imam, the banished king, was horrendous; but the disgusting consumerism which has taken his place is no less so.

That gives me the right not to be ashamed of my 'sense of the beautiful'. A man of culture, dear Gennariello, can only be either far ahead of his times or far behind them (or even both at once; as in my case). That is why he is listened to — because in his existence here and now, in his immediate actions, that is to say, in

his present, reality possesses only the language of things and can only be lived.

The point is this: my culture (with its aestheticism) makes me adopt a critical attitude towards modern 'things' understood as linguistic signs. Your culture, however, makes you accept these things as natural and makes you listen to their teaching as something absolute.

I shall try to scrape away — or at least cast doubts on — what your parents, your teachers, television, the papers, and above all boys of your own age, teach you. But I am absolutely impotent in the face of what things teach you and have taught you. Their language is inarticulate and absolutely rigid; so too the spirit of your learning-process is inarticulate and rigid, as are the non-verbal opinions which have formed in you through that learning-process. On this point we are two strangers whom nothing can bring close.

We are two strangers — the teacups say so

I shall never tire of repeating that by speaking to you I shall perhaps have the strength to forget — or to wish to forget — what words have taught me. But I shall never be able to forget what was taught me by things. Therefore in the sphere of the language of things there is a real abyss that divides us: that is to say, one of the greatest generation gaps recorded by history. What things taught me with their language is absolutely different from what things taught you with their language. But the language of things has not changed, dear Gennariello; what has changed are things themselves. And they have changed radically.

You will say to me, in your Neapolitan dialect: 'Things always change'. That is true. The world has eternal, inexhaustible changes. But every thousand years or so there comes the end of the world. And then change is total. And it is an end of the world that has happened between me at fifty and you at fifteen. So my image as a teacher is immediately threatened. It is not possible to teach if at the same time one does not learn. Now I cannot teach you the 'things' that educated me and you cannot teach me the 'things' that are educating you (that is to say, which you are

living). We cannot teach each other for the simple reason that their nature has not confined itself to changing some of its qualities; it has changed radically in its totality.

Let us look at a phenomenon that seems irrelevant. Recently 'objects' of the thirties and forties have come back into fashion — and I am shooting a film which is set in 1944. I am therefore obliged every day — with that pitiless and cataloguing eye that film-making demands — to observe the 'objects' we are filming. During the last few days, I have been shooting a scene in which middle-class young ladies take tea. So as well as other objects I have been seeing teacups.

My set-designer, Dante Ferretti, had done things on a grand scale: he had found a very precious tea-set for the scene. The cups were bright egg-yellow with white raised spots. Related as they were to the world of the Bauhaus and the air-raid shelters, they were deeply moving. I could not look at them without a pang in my heart followed by a profound feeling of discomfort. Yet these cups had about them a mysterious quality which was shared incidentally by the furniture, the carpets, the ladies' clothes and hats, the furnishings and even the wallpaper. This mysterious quality did not however cause pain or a violent regression (which I dreamt of at night) to earlier and atrocious periods. Instead it caused joy. The mysterious quality was that of their workmanship. Up to the fifties and into the first years of the sixties that is how it was. Things were still made or put together by human hands: patient old hands of carpenters, tailors, upholsterers, craftsmen who made majolica. And they were things with a human — that is to say, personal — destination. Then suddenly handicrafts and their spirit suddenly came to an end. Just when you were beginning to live. There is no break in continuity in my eyes now between those teacups and a chamber-pot.

The gap between the consumerist world and the paleo-industrial world is still wider and more total than the gap between the paleo-industrial one and the pre-industrial one. The latter in fact has only today been finally superseded — abolished, destroyed. Up till today it provided the human models and values for the paleo-industrial bourgeoisie, even if it mystified them, falsified them and made them into something horrendous (as happened with Fascism and in general with all the clerico-fascist

powers). Mystified, falsified, made horrendous at the level of power, they remained real at the level of the power-dominated world — a world which had remained in practice overwhelmingly peasant and artisan.

Since you were born these human models and those ancient values have no longer been useful to those in power. And why? Because the mode of production has changed *quantitatively*.

The truth we must tell ourselves is this: the new mode of production of things — that is to say, the change in things — gives you a basic and profound training which I cannot understand (also because I do not wish to do so). And that implies an estrangement between the two of us which is not merely that which for centuries and millennia has separated fathers and sons.

24 April 1975

How the language of things has changed

Before leaving the subject of the 'language of things' (which I am sure will have left you vaguely displeased, hostile and perhaps a bit fed up) I want to give you a series of examples which will make you understand a little better what I have been trying to say in this mysterious instructional introduction of mine.

If at your age (and even much later) I walked round the outskirts of a city (Bologna, Rome, Naples), what those outskirts said to me in their coded language was: here the poor live and the life that goes on here is poor. But the poor are workers. And workers are different from you middle-class people. So they want a different future. But the future is slow in coming. So their tomorrow — lived out by them in these outskirts and observed by you — is immensely like today. A today that repeats itself. The sons are assured of an existence similar to that of their fathers. They are destined to repeat and reincarnate their fathers. The revolution is as lazy as the sun that shines on the bare patches of grass, on the huts, on the great peeling buildings. None of this wounds the past, nor does it tear to pieces its values and its models. Urbanism is peasant. The world of the worker is physically peasant; and its recent anthropological tradition commits no transgressions. The landscape can contain this new

form of life (shanty-towns, huts, tenement blocks) because its spirit is identical with that of the villages, the peasant huts. The working-class revolution has this same 'spirit'.

If you walk through the outskirts of a city today those outskirts will say to you in their coded language: 'There is no more popular spirit here'. The peasants and the workers are 'elsewhere' even if materially they still live here. The shanty towns — thank heaven for it — have almost disappeared. But the housing schemes with their great blocks have increased enormously. One cannot speak of an amalgam between them and the old peasant world. Refuse is something frightening and extraneous. The little streams and canals are terrifying. The right of the poor to a better existence had a counterpart which has ended by degrading them. The future is imminent and apocalyptic. Sons are snatched away from similarity to their fathers and projected towards a tomorrow which, while preserving the problems and miseries of today, cannot but be qualitatively different. There is no talk of revolution, least of all when there is frenetic talk about it (a frenzy which the workers' sons have learned in a humiliating manner from the sons of the middle classes. The break with the past and the lack of rapport (even if ideal and poetic) with the future are radical.

So I was brought up by the physical reality of the outskirts of cities to certainty, to a profound, secure and irreplaceable love. You, on the other hand, have been brought up to uncertainty, to a lack of love created by a false, cruel and pitiless certainty (the 'crystallized', conventionalized and blindly aggressive consciousness of your own rights). I have dwelt on the 'language of the physical reality of the outskirts of cities', but I could have talked in similar terms of the centres of the cities and of the countryside.

City centres have all his life assured your teacher of the unalterability of the humanistic tradition and therefore of a quality of life, whether bourgeois or working-class, which is fundamentally conservative (which the workers' revolution was to regenerate but not to change). But to you the historical centres of the cities speak of a particular problem which concerns their physical conservation, their material survival: the incompatibility between their structure and the quality of life of a consumerist mass of bourgeoisie and workers gives birth to a chaos for which

neither the word 'conservation' nor the word 'revolution' has any longer a meaning.

As for the countryside, the difference between what it taught me and what it is teaching you is still more enormous. For me it was the certainty of a continuity with the origins of the human world and gave meaning to each minimal gesture, to each word, so that they almost acquired the character of a rite. Moreover it represented to my eyes the spectacle of a perfect world. For you, however, the countryside speaks of a spectral and almost timorous survival. Its function (mechanized, industrialized) remains alien to you unless you wish to engage with it professionally. For the rest, it is an exotic place for atrocious weekends and for the no less atrocious little villas to alternate with the atrocious flats in the city (all atrocious to me, naturally).

You will understand gradually in the course of these lessons, dear Gennariello, that in spite of appearances these talks of mine are by no means panegyrics of the past (which in any case I did not much like when it was the present). They are different from anything a man of my age can say today: they are talks in which 'conservation' and 'revolution' are words which no longer have meaning (so, you see, I am modern too).

I see, however, that even this page of examples continues to remain vague and general. Therefore next time I shall speak to you about a concrete example: I shall talk to you about the city of Bologna.

1 May 1975

Bologna, a consumerist and communist city

Why do I take as an example of non-verbal 'discourse' — which because it is non-verbal is endowed with a persuasive power which nothing verbal possesses — the city of Bologna? Simply because Bologna is not a 'typical' Italian city: it is a unique case. But at the same time it puts itself forward as a very advanced specimen for a possible and improbable Italian city of the future. Its anomalous nature is due to the fact that it 'developed' during the last few years in accordance with what are now the sanctified norms of consumerist progress — but at the same time it is a Communist

city. So the Communist administrators have had to confront the problem imposed on them by the capitalist development of the city. You live in Naples so naturally all this must appear almost incomprehensible to you. And the same goes for almost all other Italian cities. Thus for you the regional and provincial administrators are simply ancient corrupt viceroys. The 'king' is somewhere else and somewhere else is rapidly changing forms and methods. The viceroys have an intuition that this is so but their torpid consciousness knows nothing of it. As far as the transition is concerned, however, they behave perfectly: they are retarded in their looks and mentality but very advanced in their cynical acceptance of power's new course — that is to say, its new modes of production.

But let us get back to discussing the city of Bologna. What it says to you is: 'Gennariello, admire me. I am the richest city of the north which development has made more opulent — opulent to the point of being like a French or German city. If you were to emigrate here your consciousness could not but be continually amazed by this fact. Moreover here we are Communists and therefore clean and honest. This, too, is a privilege compared to the world from which you come. Naturally if you emigrated here you could not do other than vote Communist. Those two 'blessings' — wealth and a Communist administration — create a democratic optimism which cannot fail to throw you into a state of ecstatic prostration first of all, and then to make you a convert though not too fanatical a one.'

To me the city of Bologna says: 'I can compare myself to the Bologna which you left thirty years ago. I know you admire me and that you still consider me the best city in Italy, second only to Venice even where beauty is concerned. But I know that something disappoints and divides you. It is not regret for that city of thirty years ago, which is no longer there though it has kept its form intact: what disappoints and divides you is the evidence of what I am now. It is through your character and your culture that I in fact speak to you. My objective reality would have no words for you. The first and only proposition of my silence would be: "I am a stranger and incomprehensible to you." If I can still talk to you through your character and your culture that is thanks to the conservative function which the Communist Party has had here. So you are tempted to settle here, to work

here, perhaps to live in the house in via Zamboni where you were born or in the one in via Nosedella where you passed your adolescence and wrote your first verse. But the same phenomenon — the fact that I am a separate land, an island — which tends to keep you here, thrusts you back almost in terror into the unprivileged parts of my happiness. Of course you find traumatic the alien nature of an urban centre and an industrial zone which practically covers the whole countryside — both caught in a cycle which leads to a future substantially different from any past you know. You are upset to see an uproar that recalls the Latin Quarter with the triumph of the couple and the presence of hooliganism. The boasted democratic game (as your friend Scalia calls it) with meetings, workers' control, participation, makes you feel uncomfortable. But I know that what, more than anything else, makes you worried and almost distressed so far as I am concerned is the fact that I pose problems concerning the development of transnational consumerism to a Communist regional governing body. Which in resolving the problems accepts them. And in accepting these problems — in practice, which is always an unuttered theory — it accepts the world that poses them: that is to say, the world of the second and final bourgeois revolution. What an Italian city has become, for good or ill, is here accepted, assimilated, codified. At the same moment as I am both a developed and a Communist city I am not only a city where there is no alternative but I am a city where there is no alterity. That is to say I am a forerunner of the possible Italy of the historical compromise in which, in the best of cases (that is, in the case of an effective Communist administrative power) the population would all be petty bourgeois, the workers having been anthropologically eliminated by the bourgeoisie.

But we shall dwell more on that point, Gennariello, when I come to talk about your contemporaries in whom we meet, along with psychological embourgeoisement, the phenomenon of regression to that kind of barbarism which was always considered to be popular culture and therefore phenomena representing departures from the norm which are the unpublished matter of history.

8 May 1975

Boys are conformists twice over

Today let us begin the second chapter of our treatise. After the pedagogic language of things, which has had such a great and lasting influence on making you what you are, let us go on to the pedagogic language of your contemporaries who at this time in your life — at fifteen — are your most important educators. In your eyes they supersede both family and school. Fathers and teachers they reduce to gaping shades. No great effort is needed to obtain this result: indeed they are not even conscious of it. To destroy the value of every other source of education it is sufficient for them simply to be there: to be there as they are.

They have in their hands two most potent weapons: intimidation and blackmail. This is something as old as the world. In boys the conformism of adults is already ripe, fierce, complete. In a refined manner they know how to make their contemporaries suffer — and they do it much better than adults because their desire to cause suffering is gratuitous; it is violence in the pure state. They discover this desire as a right. They invest in it all their intact vitality and naturally their innocence as well. Their pedagogic pressure on you knows neither persuasion nor comprehension nor any form of pity or humanity. Only when your comrades become friends do they perhaps discover persuasion, understanding, pity, humanity — but your friends number four or five at most. The others are wolves and they use you as a guinea-pig on which to try out their violence and on which they can test the excellence of their conformism.

The conformism of your contemporaries derives directly from the adult world. The pattern is the same. But unlike adults they always have something new. That is to say, they incorporate what are essentially new values compared to those lived and codified by adults. That is where their power lies. It is by means of this something new — by their way of being and of behaving (since it is purely a matter of what is 'lived') — that they impose themselves as the true mutual teachers. Their 'novelty' is not spoken, nor even thought, but only lived; by going *beyond* the world of the adults it contests it even when it accepts it totally (as happens in repressive or outright fascist societies). You are crushed by a 'novelty' of this kind and it is this 'novelty', which you fear you may live imperfectly while you see it lived perfectly

by your companions, that is the core of your eagerness to learn. It cannot be taught to you by adults (including myself) and so though you listen to adults, although you work with a will to assimilate the wisdom of the fathers, you have in your heart a single disturbing desire — that of sharing with your comrades that novelty of learning from them, obsessively, every day. In short, your companions are the depositories and bearers of those values which are the only ones to interest you. Even if they are the slightest, almost imperceptible variants on the values of fathers.

There are historical moments — like the one we are living through — when boys also believe, however, that they know what the new values are that they live, or else believe that they know what the new way is in which they already have established values. In those moments the power of intimidation and blackmail of your contemporaries is still more violent. Within the framework of assimilated conformism — as in the days of the savage hordes — from the paternal social order, they add a new dose of conformism: that of revolt and opposition.

Ours is not then the case of an explicitly repressive or fascist society. We live at least nominally in a period of parliamentary democracy, of well-being and tolerance. That 'extra' the boys live is not therefore a fascist 'extra', an extra of dedication to authority; there is also an 'extra' of disobedience, of anarchy, of dedication to working-class revolution. In the time of Fascism, when I was an adolescent, my comrades gave me daily lessons not only in how to be virile and vulgar but also in how to be rowdily loyal to the fascist authority. Today your comrades give 'repressive' lessons not only of attachment to authority in its destructive aspect (Fascist) but also — and indeed above all — of revolutionary spirit, whether Communist or extra-parliamentary.

So contemporaneously every day you receive a tremendous lesson on how to behave and think in a consumerist society.

As you see, we are in the snake-pit. The examples are infinite and always ambiguous. It is not easy to help you with all your weakness and complexes in your struggle against all the others who are strong in being individually champions of the majority. Yet I shall try to help you, even if the way I indicate to you will be difficult. Naturally we will have to spend a lot of time on the chapter which deals with your contemporaries, those boys who

are attempting to sort out the confusion in which they throng around you and from which you nevertheless deduce a unique and very clear way of living.

15 May 1975

They are alive but should be dead

I shall make you a brief list of the types of your contemporaries whom I shall describe to you in this section of our course. It is an incomplete list, but we shall bring it up to date whenever it seems right to do so. First I shall describe to you those boys who can be called more or less 'obedient', the fact that they sometimes pose as dissenters, rebels, extremists, etc, is unimportant, just as it is unimportant that they have long hair which has crystallized by now into the ridiculous and rather repellent style of a totally conformist initiation. Then I shall describe to you those boys who can be called more or less 'disobedient', that is to say, the few real surviving extremists, the maladjusted, the deviants; and finally — these are extremely rare — the 'educated'.

The list of types in the first group, with which we shall begin, is more or less as follows: those 'destined to be dead', the 'sportsman', the 'future executives', the 'orthodox Communists', the 'non-neurotic repressed', the hooligans, the Fascists, the Catholic activists and finally, the average ones. Naturally while describing them I shall always keep in mind the two Italian variants, which are still fundamental: the middle-class boys and the working-class boys, the boys of the North and those of the South.

It is very difficult for me to describe the first types in the first group — those 'destined to be dead'. They are those who, up to a dozen or score of years ago, in Italy and above all in the South and among the poorer classes, would have died in their first infancy, in that period which is known as the period of infant mortality. Science intervened — but à propos medicine, read at least the first pages of Ivan Illich's *The Tools of Conviviality* — and saved them from physical death. So they survived and in their lives there is something artificial and 'against nature'. I am fully aware that I am saying horrible things and even some apparently reactionary

ones. But on this point I have encouraged you warmly several times not to be surprised, far less shocked (as many readers of our lessons will be). To find something 'artificial' or 'against nature' in those who as children were saved from death by medical techniques would have been something atrocious or reactionary in a world where one of the fundamental values was truly the conservation of the species and where that conservation took the concrete form of the preponderance of births over deaths. But in a world like ours in which such a fundamental human value is being overthrown (for humanity to save itself we must avoid the excessive preponderance of births over deaths) the moral gratifications of another age no longer make sense. So do not be shocked: the children who are born today are no longer aprioristically 'blessed'. Judgment as between benediction and malediction has been suspended. But those who are born 'in excess' are decidedly not blessed. Who are those who are born 'in excess'? Evidently one cannot tell. This is certain — a child knows intuitively, immediately, after only a few days of life, if its arrival in the world is truly wanted or not. If it feels not truly wanted, or worse, unwanted, it falls ill. The neuroses which cause the most terrible and incurable repressions are due to this first feeling of not being received into the world with love. Now, objectively speaking, no child nowadays is any longer received into the world with the love of an earlier time when he was by definition 'blessed'. Everyone knows, even if they are not conscious of it, that the destruction of humanity follows from over-population. So if all the 'sons' feel this lack of blessing at their birth — which makes them sad and unhappy throughout their childhood and youth — those who into the bargain have been 'snatched' from the innocent death of childhood feel with still greater violence their guilt at being in the world, at demanding to be fed and looked after.

Some years ago there was a certain illusion — one of the many stupid illusions of that time — that the human race was improving precisely because of medical science and better nutrition, that children were stronger, taller, etc. A brief illusion: the new generation is infinitely weaker, uglier, sadder, paler, more ill than all the preceding generations one can remember. The causes of this are numerous, and I shall attempt to analyse them all in the course of our lessons; one of them is the presence among

the young of those who should have died, and there are many. In certain cases (the South, the poorer classes) the percentage is very high. All are either depressed or aggressive — but in a manner that is either painful or unpleasant. Nothing can cancel out the shadow which an unknown abnormality casts on their lives.

22 May 1975

We are beautiful so let's get dirty

If my hypothesis is correct that, in the classification of your contemporaries, 'the obedient' find a place, and first and foremost 'those who were destined to die' — that is, those whom medical science has saved from 'infant mortality' and who are therefore 'survivors' — what is their pedagogic function as far as you are concerned? What do they teach you simply by their existence and the way they behave?

The first characteristic, as I have said, is the unconscious feeling that their coming into this world was unwanted: that they are a 'burden' and 'not needed'. That can only increase their desire for normality, their total and unreserved adherence to the horde, their urge not only not to appear different but not even to appear distinguishable.

So they teach you above all to live in aggressive conformism — something which, as we shall see, is taught you by almost all categories of your 'obedient' contemporaries. We shall analyse it better by continuing our discussion. But I should like to dwell for an instant on three privileged points in their pragmatic teaching which, because it is pragmatic, is all the more easily assimilated.

First of all, your contemporaries teach you renunciation — a renunciation made absolute, habitual, daily, by their lack of vitality, which in them is a real physical fact but in others, like yourself, may be a temptation. They should have died — or rather in other social circumstances they would certainly have died. They must instinctively reduce to a minimum the effort of living, which in social terms means renunciation. It is true that as a friend of mine from Chia⁵ says — a young boy who remembers the proverbs of the elderly — 'the world belongs to the clever and the idiots enjoy it'. It is one of the greatest truths my ears have ever

heard. But as an old bourgeois rationalist and idealist — that is to say one of the 'clever' ones — I continue to detest with all my strength the spirit of renunciation: it is after all the desire for integration and for becoming like the 'man in the street'. Don't be afraid to be ridiculous: don't renounce anything. Let idiots enjoy the world and greatly envy their happiness all your life — as I do.

The second thing those 'destined to die' teach you is a certain obligatory tendency to be unhappy. All young people of today, your contemporaries, are unpardonably guilty of being unhappy. Apparently there are no more idiots — unless in Naples or Chia. They are all 'good' — and so they all have good unhappy faces. To be good is the first commandment of the power of consumerism (into whose mental universe and mode of behaving you, poor Gennariello, were born) — 'good' so as to be happy (the hedonism of the consumer). The result is that their happiness is completely false; meanwhile an immediate unhappiness spreads in all directions.

On the other hand, Gennariello, you must know that contrary to the sublime proverb from Chia there is also a happiness known to those who are good. The proverb says in fact, that 'the world belongs to the clever', referring decisively to possession, to power. But over and above the possession of the world by the bosses, there is also its possession by intellectuals — and this is a real possession, just like that of the idiots. It is simply a question of a different cultural level. It is the cultural possession of the world that gives happiness.

Do not allow yourself to be tempted by champions of unhappiness, of idiotic sourness, of stupid seriousness.

The third thing you are taught by 'those destined to die' is the rhetoric of ugliness. Let me explain. For some years young people, boys, have been doing everything possible to appear ugly. They get themselves up in a horrible way. They are not happy until they are totally masked or made ugly. They are ashamed of curly hair, of the rosy or brown gleam on their cheeks; they are ashamed of the light in their eyes, which is due to the candour of their youth; they are ashamed of the beauty of their bodies. Among all this madness those who triumph are precisely the ugly, who have become the leaders of fashion and behaviour. Those 'destined to die' certainly do not have a splendid youth. But you,

Gennariello, are splendid.

At the risk of appearing a bit cowardly and racist — of creating, that is, a category of persons whom one is invited to condemn, I have inveighed somewhat against those 'destined to die'. No. Among those 'destined to die' there are beings as adorable as yourself and just as clearly destined to live. If I have polemicised with particular violence against the teaching which those 'destined to die' impart to you, it is because I have taken this category as a symbol of the average — the average which teaches you these very same things without that element of desperation which corrects, justifies and renders them humane.

29 May 1975

Madonnas don't weep any more

With profound, almost consuming pleasure I remember those mornings in school when, instead of giving a lesson, my professors allowed themselves to be distracted by some idleness and sense of freedom and talked to us about other things. They were — at least in my memory — mornings in May or June when term was almost ended. There was a perpetual sun, still and immense — the sun of the summer poems of Sandra Penna.⁶

Well, Gennariello, today is just such a morning, when teachers don't feel like teaching and talk about something else.

Above all the elections are coming up — so what is more natural?

What requires to be said is very hard even if in my capacity as teacher I must be calm. So. Until ten years ago when the elections were upon us Madonnas wept; today high magistrates are kidnapped. The problem is as follows: what connection is there between these two phenomena? I believe that there is, first of all, a connection in terms of *opposition* and of incommensurability — a world in which the tears of a Madonna are somehow important as opposed to, and incommensurate with, a world in which such tears no longer count for anything at all. What has intervened is precisely the end of a world. Millions and millions of peasants and also of workers — in the South and the North — who remained true to themselves over an epoch, certainly much longer than the

two thousand years of Catholicism, have now been destroyed. Their 'quality of life' has been radically changed. On the one hand, there has been a mass emigration to bourgeois countries. On the other, they have been overtaken by bourgeois civilization. Their nature has been abrogated at the wish of the producers of commodities. But I have talked about this before and will often talk about it again. The connection which at least on a mechanical level brings together the tears of Madonnas and the kidnapping of magistrates must be examined.

The connection is organizational and pragmatic. And as such enigmatic. How in fact were the tears of a Madonna planned and brought about? Did a parish priest come to Rome, get the agreement of some senior official in the Vatican, obtain the necessary means, etc? Or did the agent of some high-up authority in Christian Democracy (the Fanfani⁷, Andreotti or Scelba of those days) descend on some chosen village, contact the parish priest, give him the necessary orders? Or did the parish priest do it all on his own, interpreting the tacit wishes of those in power who needed to be re-elected, if possible with an increased majority? The fact is that the plot always worked perfectly and no one was ever unmasked.

In this respect the kidnapping of magistrates and the tears of Madonnas are perfectly matched. Indeed they are in substance the same thing.

Certainly the mechanism of the first organization (the Madonna's tears) — even if in Sicily, for example, the Mafia cannot have been uninvolved — was much more simple than the mechanism of the second organization (the kidnapping of a magistrate); for the latter an immensely more refined criminal apparatus is required and over and above that the intervention of the CIA⁸ at least (until recently by way of SID, and now?). Moreover whereas once it was sufficient to induce souls ingenuously to fear divine judgment — the Madonna's tears were anti-Communist — now it is necessary to create two tensions in people's hearts: an anti-Communist one and an anti-fascist one. Apparently while these elections are coming up we are in a phase of anti-fascist tension. Yet, yet, yet — while in the case of the massacres of Brescia and Bologna one can definitely talk of an anti-fascist campaign 'mounted' by the Christian Democrats, who are in power and no longer now Catholic, in the case of the

NAP⁹ one cannot definitely talk about Fascists or rather there is no wish to have them talked about. It seems we are faced by a new and devilish scheme — to kill two birds with one stone: to leave it in the air whether it is a case of Reds or Fascists, thus creating at one and the same time an anti-Communist and an anti-Fascist tension.

Certainly a lot depends on the person of the kidnapped magistrate. It has to be said meantime that the resemblance between Sossi and Di Gennaro¹⁰ is strange. In any case, while I do not know Sossi personally I know Di Gennaro very well. He was public prosecutor in the trial of my film *La Ricotta*¹¹ which was accused (in a fascist manner) of slandering religion.

Now in my memory no one is more reactionary than this Di Gennaro. His concluding speech against my film was so deeply reactionary in religious terms that — as the numerous intellectuals and journalists who heard it can testify — it came close to Grand Guignol and the ridiculous, not to mention vulgarity. It was the oral masterpiece of the clerico-fascism of the fifties (the trial took place in 1963). That is to say, on the cultural level of the same clerico-fascism which organized the Madonna's tears. Now one has to ask oneself: what political connection is there between this man of the old Right, who is reactionary and hard but also ambiguous (since the trial of my film was manifestly an act of persecution which implicated the Vatican and the entire official apparatus of Christian Democrat power) and those who kidnapped him? Why was he chosen? What logic connects the kidnapped person and his kidnappers? I shall never be able to reply to these questions except purely on the level of ideas. And that is what I shall try to do by continuing this digression as long as necessary.

5 June 1975