

Birds in the Roman sky: Shooting for the sublime in *La Grande Bellezza*

Giuseppina Mecchia

University of Pittsburgh, USA

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Abstract

The movie *La Grande Bellezza* stages the most recognizable sights and sounds of the city of Rome, in a referential gesture that brings us back to the past glories of Italian cinema. This is why the movie has been accused of pandering to foreign – mostly American – audiences, an accusation that was in fact encouraged, rather than prevented, by the winning of the 2014 Oscar as best foreign movie. This essay argues, instead, that Paolo Sorrentino anchors his movie in the aesthetics of the sublime as a profoundly ethical category, based in our emotional and affective response to infinity and loss. In the movie, Rome not only serves as a postcard-like, picturesque backdrop for a sublime perception of historical time; the city's skies open up to inhuman and even saintly figures, and remind us that what is needed in today's Italy falls nothing short of a profound ethical and political reformation.

Keywords

Aion, ethics, *La Grande Bellezza*, loss, melancholia, reformation, Sorrentino, sublime

For vast and unchecked wealth is accompanied... by extravagance... and quickly breeds ostentation, and vanity, and luxury... The ruin of such lives will gradually reach its complete consummation and sublimities of the soul fade and wither away and become contemptible. (Longinus, 1890: XLIV)

Theatricality, the grotesque, satire, and social critique have long characterized Italian cinema, and the city of Rome has been a preferred stage for this kind of representation. While I am going to argue that the primary aesthetic mode of *La Grande Bellezza* is actually different – that is, the sublime – much in Sorrentino's

Corresponding author:

Giuseppina Mecchia, University of Pittsburgh, Department of French & Italian, 1328 B Cathedral of Learning, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA.

Email: mecchia@pitt.edu

movie derives quite directly from its predecessors. It is not surprising, then, that when *La Grande Bellezza* was released in late 2013, one of the most immediate emotions experienced not only by the critics but even by any minimally aware viewer was a deep feeling of cinematic recognition: yes, this is what *Roma*, or certain scenes of *La Dolce Vita* by Fellini, felt like, this is what the characters of Ettore Scola in *La Terrazza* might have said or done. The city of Rome did not first become cinematic – or more exactly, *photogenic* – under the lens of Paolo Sorrentino's camera. As viewers, we were immediately confronted with an aesthetic and emotional treasure trove of past images resurrected through our memories of movies past. It was, of course, a melancholic resurrection: those were the days, that is the way Rome used to look like in the movies. The images of *La Grande Bellezza* were visible both to the physical eye and to the eye of the mind: they were fully perceived but also imagined through a melancholic but unquestionable process of recollection. At the same time, what we remembered was also experienced as irremediably lost: Rome's presence was ephemeral, inherently tied to the aesthetic experience and destined to disappear with it. The passing of time, then, – one of the main *topoi* of the movie – was maybe perceived most immediately at the level of the loss of what may still be considered the heroic time of Italian cinema, which can become present again only in the form of melancholic repetition.

As it happens, the same melancholia pervades the entire movie: Jep Gambardella used to be a writer, he is visited by the widower of the woman who had been his first love, his new girlfriend is an aging stripper who dies in the course of the movie, some of his friends claim a past of political engagement that may or may not have existed. Still, *La Grande Bellezza* does not end on a melancholic note: once the immensity of time lost is made visible through the sublime moments of recognition, images of salvation also start to appear. In particular, the appearance of a decrepit nun, whose sanctity the movie ultimately confirms beyond all ironic skepticism, is a prelude to Jep Gambardella's own artistic resurrection. The only aesthetic project capable of such a miracle – symbolized cinematically through the taming of the storks by the Saint and Jep's renewed literary commitment – is the building of an experience of the sublime. Neither the beautiful, nor the profoundly unaesthetic political reality of a city – and arguably a country – that has lost even the memory of its own historicity can sustain Jep in his old age. The *Aion* – the inhuman time of the cosmos – just won't be ignored: no party, no new loving attachment can avoid the immeasurable reach of a cosmic order that the city of Rome both hides and makes visible in the apparent eternity of a sublime survival. Irony, of course, is another mode of relating to our past: as Marx is purported to have remarked, if history repeats itself, the event is first experienced as a tragedy, then as a farce. There undoubtedly is a certain teasing undertone in the movie's depiction both of its protagonists – Jep as an aging dandy and writer and the 'frenemies' that he entertains in his lavish apartment – and maybe also of the bourgeois elite who will go to watch the movie precisely to wallow in the sublime moments that constitute its core affectivity. Still, all irony is dissolved at the end in the resurrection of Jep's literary project, and in the profound sense of death that pervades his social milieu.

Ultimately, in the face of the sublime enormity of loss, mockery becomes shallow and compassion has to prevail, as I shall try to demonstrate in the pages that follow.

Why the sublime?

The immensity of time and the irretrievable nature of the past is part of what Kant called the mathematical sublime: the experience of infinity felt by the finite human consciousness. A less-debated aspect of this kind of aesthetic experience is its political – or maybe anti-political – nature. And in fact, the sublime temporality of death dominating *La Grande Bellezza* also alludes to the loss of another kind of time associated with the cinema of the 1960s and 1970s: the historical time of politics. The movie's mixed reception in Italy was certainly tied to Sorrentino's rejection of politics and his quasi-mystical apprehension not only of time but also of ethical and artistic choices. I will go back to the political implications of the movie a bit later, but I will say right from the start that Jep's ironic deconstruction of his friends' recollection of their past political engagement is mostly represented as an essential prelude to the experience of the sublime itself. Talking about politics in today's Rome is no longer possible. We can only stage the loss of politics, and in the immensity of that loss we can at least find an aesthetical release of emotions. Privileging the *Aion* over historical time might end up being not only a renunciation of all political relevance, but also a denunciation of what people might say today with regard to a heroic personal past whose political relevance now appears uncertain and delusional. The Sublime, then, is what is left when the Beautiful disappoints and the Just recedes into historical undecidability and, ultimately, cosmic insignificance.

Not every viewer, of course, can be assumed to have gone through the same emotional and critical steps while watching the movie. However, we will see that the organization of the sights and sounds that constitute *La Grande Bellezza* is in fact perhaps best discernible from this perspective. Some reviewers have chosen to view Sorrentino's recreation of already constituted images of Rome as a pandering to what international audiences expect from an Italian movie. I think, instead, that this deeply melancholic, self-referential gesture is embedded in a specific aesthetic choice oriented on the one hand toward some essential, a priori qualities of cinema itself, and on the other toward the past and present possibilities open to the recording of the moving images related to the city of Rome.

The enduring if rather decaying beauty that is the subject of the movie – that is, the moving images proper to the city of Rome and its present inhabitants – is itself capable of evincing the feeling of the 'nostalgia of old photographs' and the 'perception that mortality is at some point to be stopped in its tracks' (Cavell, 1971: 75). This is, according to Stanley Cavell, one of the main contributions of cinema as a technical support for perception and understanding. As I have already said, Rome's peculiar kind of photogeny¹ is an essential part of the history of cinema itself, so that the viewer is haunted by the impassable temporal expanse separating his or her consciousness from the movies of a past era. In this respect, the viewer is in the same position as Jep Gambardella, who keeps gliding through the gardens and the archeological

monuments of a past glory that belongs both to him and his adoptive city. And as for Gambardella, death and melancholia are the main invisible realities made visible to the spectator by the visibility of the city's beautiful sights.

Paradoxically, then, the *beauty* of Rome, although omnipresent in the movie, is not what is really wanted here: in fact, this is just a trick, like the disappearance of the giraffe staged by the magician in front of an astonished Gambardella in one of the movie's scenes. Rome tricks you into thinking that you will find 'great beauty' there. This is the illusion that led Jep to spend 40 years in Rome, where he failed to write anything of value, getting lost instead in a project of social and sexual seduction. Similar to Kierkegaard's seducer, Jep needs to abandon worldly distraction if he wants his soul – and not just his aging body – to survive. Like the monuments of Rome, Jep's meticulously preserved and carefully clothed body is not what is really needed here. There are, for sure, beautiful, postcard-like portraits of Rome's monumental views; however, the camera immediately moves away from them, coming back again and again to the blue expanses of the sky or of the River Tiber and the inhuman sounds of bird callings. These are the empty spaces of a Roman sublime irreducible to the city's 'great beauty' or to any historical-political past. Only when Jep Gambardella is able to recognize that he can find neither beauty nor an enduring, valid political project in Rome, but only the sense of life and death that the city fosters, will he be able to resurrect his own aesthetic project.

How do you film the sublime?

Before I start discussing how Sorrentino tried to insure that the sublime could emerge as the dominant aesthetic mode of *La Grande Bellezza*, a few general remarks will be useful to lay the ground for my argument. While I have already mentioned the Kantian notion of the mathematical sublime, it is not irrelevant to remember that the sublime first appeared as a concept and critical category during the Roman Empire, in the work *On the Sublime* attributed to Longinus (1890). While this treatise only concerned itself with literary works, the city of Rome is mostly associated with the iconic classical architectural style of its ancient buildings, as well as with the sacred buildings of the late Renaissance and the Baroque, an era associated with a reprisal of the sublime in the wake of the Counter-reformation. In painting, for instance – an art that, together with photography, is most commonly associated with the aesthetics of the cinematic image – the opening up of the skies in the frescoes decorating the ceiling of Roman baroque churches and palaces stretches the limits of our perception by deploying the spatial infinity of the heavens.

Since, as we will see, the filming of the sky is one of the main instruments for shooting the sublime in *La Grande Bellezza*, we should remember that a sublime

optical and sound situation . . . makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable. It is a matter of something too powerful, or too unjust, but sometimes also too beautiful, and which henceforth outstrips our sensory-motor capacities. (Deleuze, 1989: 18)

Looking away, then, is a coping mechanism that allows our affective and perceptive apparatus to recover from the confrontation with an overwhelming sensory experience. An example of this mechanism is found when Jep goes to meet Ramona – the beautiful but slightly common, already past-her-prime stripper he saw perform in her father’s nightclub – in her villa in the outskirts of the city. He finds her in a rather absurd position, treading water in a small pool with the help of an absolutely ridiculous swimming donut, but Ramona’s character is also immediately brought back to the dominant effect of the movie precisely by a switch in Jep’s focus, as he deflects his gaze toward the pine treetops and the infinity of the blue Roman sky.

What has been called ‘the romantic sublime’ is also a version of this shift towards spatial and temporal infinity, first theorized by Edmund Burke in England,² and then integrated into a fully developed moral and aesthetic philosophy by Kant and the German Romantics in the mid- to late 18th century. The early 19th century is often considered the peak of the sublime as aesthetic notion and artistic project, while during the second half of the 1800s various theories of modernity as the age of instrumentality, markets, and technology seem to condemn the sublime to the dustbin of aesthetic experiences. In the case of cinema, the most modern and for a long time arguably the most technological of 20th-century arts, the issue of the sublime has become a fertile and disputed battleground. While in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Walter Benjamin famously argued that cinema is the art form that maybe best symbolizes the loss of the auratic aspect of the world, and the main orientation of contemporary film criticism is oriented toward instrumental and socio-economic analyses of film production and distribution, it has been remarked that the phenomenology of cinema – its affective impact on the spectator – is deeply tied to other forms of experience:

Viewers must face . . . the sublime: a sudden, shocking encounter with an order of magnitude of being (such as the infinite) that nearly outstrips our abilities to perceive and process it . . . Such an experience is affective, deeply emotional, and potentially truthful in a manner that need not be strictly rational. (Pence, 2004: 55)

In the context of a discussion of *La Grande Bellezza*, and the kind of aesthetic reception of the city of Rome that the movie creates, such a definition of the sublime potential of the cinematic image seems particularly poignant.

If the sublime does not reside in the object, but in the relation that is established between the viewer and the world, it is particularly important to detach the images related to the classical aesthetics of the beautiful from their picturesque, postcard-like quality and insert them in a different aesthetic and affective realm. There are various techniques that are classically associated with this enterprise, all aiming at ‘tearing a real image from clichés’ (Deleuze, 1989: 21). This effect is accomplished through a ‘committed pursuit of the auratic’ (Pence, 2004: 38) through the use of the fixed camera or of extremely controlled tracking shots, the extreme close-up, the use of natural sounds and of a musical soundtrack, the conscious use of special effects in order to induce a sense of magic and wonderment. There is a whole cinematic techné

of sublimity which Sorrentino masterfully puts to work in *La Grande Bellezza*, as we shall now finally see through a reading of some key scenes.

For a contemporary Roman sublime

La Grande Bellezza opens on an unequivocally sublime note, thanks to wholly cinematic effects pursued both through images and sounds. Sound, in fact, is essential to the Roman sublime such as Sorrentino presents it to us: before we even see any image, we hear for almost one entire minute the chirping of the birds. Only later do we see an image of the Gianicolo gardens, which are first identified by the midday cannon shot that occurs every day just underneath the panoramic terrace characteristic of this location. In other words, the airy, heavenly expanse of the Roman skies precedes the representation of the theatrical, even comic aspect of the city, whose figuration is in fact inaugurated by the excessive, theatrical sound of the cannon shot itself. In the five initial minutes, the sights and sounds of the two Gianicolo terraces are given even more space, according to a visual/audial rhythm that rests between the sublime and the comedic. The sounds of the water rushing through the beautiful Gianicolo fountain and the spare, contemporary choral piece sung by a choir taking advantage of the acoustics of the building itself, are juxtaposed against the somewhat comical presentation of the site given in a heavily accented Japanese by a clearly Roman guide to a group of tourists.

We see the terrace, and the highly recognizable view of the city of Rome that opens up from this location. However, the camera is positioned so as to include in the first frame of the initial traveling shot a large portion of the empty sky, detached from both time and place. At the same time, the soundtrack features a lyrical choral piece by David Lang, sung in Yiddish by a foreign-looking female chorus. Entitled 'I lie,' the piece musically and linguistically evokes the longing for the arrival of one's beloved, and therefore that moment of suspension between solitude and the appearance of something that, by the end of the song, has 'gekumen,' that is, has finally 'arrived.'

The significance of this opening cannot be overstated, and in particular I should remark that the singing of a choral piece will be one of the recurring refrains associated precisely with the 'auratic' – or 'sublime' – moments in the movie, just like the visual presence of the birds. Even more importantly, the contrast between the auratic and the grotesque or the comical is also repeated, as the sublime choral notes that closed the first scene are immediately followed by the wild scream of one of the dancers at the wild party featured in the second scene of the movie, which occurs in a very different, although equally recognizably Roman location: the private terrace belonging to the apartment of Jep Gambardella himself, transformed into a club-like space where a rather vulgar disco pop song – itself an adaptation of a 1970s song by Raffaella Carrà – excites the middle-aged, heavily made-up party guests to express a theatrical, sweaty eroticism. There too, however, we find a somewhat unexpected, reflexive aesthetic interruption, where a much sparer, poetic musical interval accompanies the gracious movements of a woman wearing – what else? – a bird

costume and feathers. Thus, as with the scene with Ramona in her swimming donut, the absurdity of the grotesque is immediately reabsorbed into the dominant effect of the movie, which pushes the viewer toward a sublime aesthetic experience.

And in fact, both the birds, with the Roman sky serving as their privileged but not unique celestial backdrop, and modernist lyrical vocal music are called upon to signify the sublime throughout the movie. The music of Henrik Gorecki, Wladimir Martynov, and Zbigniew Preisner will preside over the lyrical and sublime moments of the movie, which will be either tied to the experience of loss and death or to the intimation of a possible incarnation of transcendence mostly related to the arrival, on Jep's very terrace, of the decrepit nun known as 'The Saint,' with annexed flock of northern and eastern European storks. The storks, although a rare appearance in the Roman sky, do in fact have an established migratory route along the shores of the Tyrrhenian sea. Another bird that we also see appearing in the most sublime moments of the movie is the swallow, that most mystical of birds³ which has always been a fixture in the skies of Rome from March until October. In a way, the movie works in such a way that the appearance of the birds corresponds to the arrival of the beloved in the song by Lang featured in the first scene of the movie: when they appear, something has indeed 'arrived' that can take Jep and the viewer away from the decadent vulgarity that is also a sure marker of the city of Rome and its inhabitants.

The Roman sublime, then, mostly functions as an interruption of the grotesque and the comical, and competes for the attention of Gambardella and of the spectator in their wonderings through the streets and monuments of Rome. For example, we see Jep in the Roman ruins of the Appian Aqueduct, shot in a way reminiscent of the framing of the same landscapes sought by Romantic painters, to the mixed sounds of chirping birds and 'My Heart's in the Highlands, My Heart is not Here', Arvo Pärt's vocal adaptation of a poem by Robert Burns. But this thoroughly Romantic landscape is, in a way, profaned by the pretentious and empty performance of the actress Talia Concept. In his interview with the young actress, the acerbic writer-turned-critic Gambardella challenges her to give a coherent aesthetic vision for her work that he then tries to demystify as a cheap trick, completely devoid of real suffering and emotion. Gambardella is particularly harsh on the actress, but it is soon after this scene that we get acquainted with his own artistic trajectory, which is also a fall from grace: he had become famous in his late twenties with the publication of his first novel, followed by his move to Rome from his native Naples. We know nothing about the novel, except its highly meaningful title, which brings us back, I argue, not so much to literature, but to the cinema as art form.

Called *L'apparato umano* (The Human Apparatus), it is at least verisimilar that Jep's novel might be alluded to as an indirect reference to the aesthetic of cinema. The human body and mind are an 'apparatus,' precisely like the camera, the instrument that Epstein (2014) considered endowed with a new, peculiar form of intelligence. Unattached, constantly moving from one environment to the next in a city that is not his own, the Neapolitan Jep is the ultimate *flâneur*: his mobility, his smooth, almost rolling walk – reminiscent of the one perfected by the actor

Toni Servillo in his previous, masterful portrayal of Giulio Andreotti⁴ – makes him the perfect recording apparatus for the sights and sounds of Rome. In several shots, in fact, Jep's point of view coincides with the position of the camera, which is of course quite common in strictly focalized narrations such as this one. And indeed, it is primarily Jep's own 'human apparatus' that oscillates between the main aesthetic modes and effects present in the movie: the viewer is led to see the world mainly through Jep's own sensibility, which is alternately mean and poetic, cutting and sentimental, attuned to the recording of both grotesque and sublime impressions.

Because Jep shares fully in the decadence of the Roman intelligentsia that surrounds him – he is just another aging celebrity in a stunningly resilient chorus of past, geriatric glories – the aging, overweight, drug-addicted former showgirl portrayed by Serena Grandi is a particularly poignant case in point. The viewer cannot but superimpose the memory of her former grace and sex appeal on to her present, grotesque appearance. But Jep, now 65 years old, is himself becoming grotesque, with his slightly excessive, almost over-the-top dandy attire and his reliance on cosmetic treatments. In his portrayal, we see that what might distinguish him from his friends and fellow revelers is only a more aware, keener 'human apparatus,' that makes of his character the representative of what cinema can offer to a city and an intellectual class hopelessly mired in their past glory: an enduring affective and aesthetic access to the sublime as the realization of the incommensurability between human and cosmic time, a compassionate connection to death and sorrow and the dim hope of aesthetic redemption and revelation. It is this kind of connection that ultimately renders a purely ironical reading of the movie's portrayal of the Roman elite impossible, as a certain participative emotional and aesthetic involvement with other characters and situations does finally bring Jep toward a more sympathetic, non-judgmental approach to his surroundings. That is also what allows him to go back to his aesthetic project, after many decades of 'lost time.'

What are the politics of the sublime?

The sublime is commonly considered a pessimistic, even reactionary approach to history and politics. It is not by coincidence that it first became a dominant Romantic category in the works not only of Edmund Burke, but also of French and Italian post-revolutionary writers such as Vittorio Alfieri and François de Chateaubriand. One could even say that this negative political connotation is one of the main reasons for the mixed reviews the movie received in Italy, where not many people are ready to confront the absurd vacuity of its present political situation in all of its despairing truth: not only are Italy's bourgeois elites incapable of engaging in any political present, but they might not even remember what Italian politics might have been in the past. When historical memory fades into a self-deceiving lie, we are actually forced into seeing the sublime appearance of a frightening temporality that is not reducible to political, historical, or even strictly intellectual categories.

Jep, of course, brings this perspective a step further, questioning not only the present condition of Italian politics, but also the self-aggrandizing, false memories that some of his peers have of their past political glories. This is, of course, mostly true of his cutting reaction to the story that his friend Claudia tells about herself: she is proud of her intellectual profile, she has always been politically engaged, she has written many important novels. Jep, increasingly irritated, ends up with a starkly mocking rebuttal: Claudia's political engagement in the late 1960s and early 1970s was mostly an excuse to have sex in the university bathrooms, and her books were published by the presses of 'the Party' (clearly the now-defunct Communist Party, the old PCI) because of nepotistic considerations. Her politics are therefore questionable *in toto*: not only her high-bourgeois present, but also her purported past engagement are denounced as ethically and politically indefensible. Jep, at least, does not pretend: he openly recognizes that he has been drifting for almost 40 years, mired in an ethical and political swamp that cannot be wished away.

Even a cursory look at the reviews received by the movie when it appeared in Italy gives a clear sign of the political difficulties contained in the movie's perspective. One reviewer serves to illustrate the kind of political criticism that has plagued the movie's reception: in *Contropiano*,⁵ Fabrizio Marchi lamented that the movie gives in to 'the status quo, or even better, to the tragicity of the status quo' which coincides with 'the capitalist system as an absolute, whose ideology is based on the unchangeable nature of reality' (Marchi, 2014). Less dogmatic, but equally muted appreciations not only of the movie but also of its being awarded the Golden Globe have appeared in *Il Manifesto*, where the movie is described as an opportunistic, empty aesthetic 'trap' made for an international – mainly American – audience.⁶ There is also another aspect that goes against the Italian left, traditionally secular if not straight-on anticlerical: the clear fascination of Jep for the images of Rome as the seat and private garden, so to speak, of the Catholic Church.

Of course, the nuns and cardinals of *La Grande Bellezza* are, in a way, the theatrical reincarnations of the ones populating Fellini's *Roma*, but a character such as The Saint goes in a different direction. A surprising character whose portrayal resembles in many ways St. Francis and Jesus in the movies of Pierpaolo Pasolini,⁷ the decrepit holy woman is gently mocked but not satirized, and at the end, arguably, it is her presence on Jep's terrace that seems to allow the bereft writer to find a new determination to take up writing again. The Italian elites are beyond historical salvation, and only the sublime of a miracle – signaled by the incongruous landing of the storks on Jep's terrace during the Saint's visit – can lift Jep out his existential and artistic slump. In fact, Sorrentino might actually be exceeding the aesthetics of the sublime to drift into fully mystic territory.

It is not my intention to fully rebuke the political critique of the sublime and of mysticism, as it is much too large a theoretical topic to be tackled in this essay. Bereft of a clear political thesis, the movie is an ethical, not a political denunciation of the corruption and vacuity of Italy's cultural elites. A greying gerontocracy of dubious past artistic and political glories that lives on the 'vast and unchecked wealth' accumulated through less-than-earth-shattering original work, is a milieu that

Longinus' apology for the sublime featured in my epigraph represents quite perfectly. The end of that quote can, then, present us with an ethical program that might also become political: 'the ruin of such lives will gradually reach its complete consummation.' If any subjective agency could be insured in this process of destruction, sublime aesthetics and revolutionary politics might actually go hand-in-hand.

Sorrentino's movie, then, would not only be a privileged moment when Rome serves as backdrop to the appearance of the 'tragicity of being,' but also a much-needed moment of reflection about the present loss of politics plaguing the Italian social and cultural landscape. The aesthetic miracle closing the movie does not, in this respect, override the equally urgent task of political reformation and revolution.

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Notes

1. According to Jean Epstein, there are many different kinds of photogeny – or cinematic quality – which are created not by what is filmed, but by the way it is filmed. It is an aesthetic effect achieved thanks to certain techniques, such as the use of extreme close-ups or unusual camera movements and temporal effects. We shall talk later about the use of these techniques in *La Grande Bellezza* and the way in which they achieve a sublime kind of photogenic effect.
2. The fact that Burke was also among the first reactionary critics of the French Revolution is not insignificant when, as we shall do shortly, one considers the political critique of the sublime that is at work more or less consciously in the articles of some Italian reviewers of *La Grande Bellezza*.
3. In particular, St. Francis purportedly performed a miracle in Alviano when he ordered a flock of swallows to keep quiet while he was addressing the faithful. We should also not forget that in *Uccellacci e Uccellini* ('The Hawks and the Sparrows,' 1966), Pasolini also used birds as representatives of ethical and aesthetical issues within a largely indifferent Italian social context.
4. I am referring, of course, to the movie *Il Divo* (2008), which consolidated both Sorrentino's and Servillo's fame, also, it should be noticed, against the backdrop of the city of Rome, Andreotti's own native city and political fief. On the other hand, the same sliding walk was also characteristic of another character, the Giacomo Casanova played by Donald Sutherland in the homonymous movie by Fellini dating from 1976. Jep, as an aging seducer, also recalls Fellini's masterful stylization.
5. This is an online Marxist journal that has taken up again the name of the magazine founded in 1968 by Massimo Cacciari and Alberto Asor Rosa. In the context of this essay this is not an insignificant detail, which confirms the disheartening, nostalgic mode of Italian politics even within a 'progressive' framework.
6. A very good example is the article by Cristina Piccino, 'La trappola vintage della Grande Bellezza' (2014).
7. I am thinking about the already cited *Uccellacci e Uccellini* and of *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* ('The Gospel According to St. Matthew,' 1964).

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