



E L I O P E T R I



Cinecittà Holding
presents

ELIO PETRI

curated by Jean A. Gili



Cinecittà Holding

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Gian Maria Volontè

The least hierarchical understanding of cinematic work

Interview by Guy Braucourt, in *Écran* 72, n. 6, June 1972

La classe operaia va in paradiso is a dialectical movie, not a propaganda film. It's a critical, somewhat expressionist analysis of a case of working class' "un-awareness." We have tried to X-ray the reality of the working class, in both its professional (factory) and private(wife, kids, leisure...) context simultaneously. Communist critics criticized the movie for distorting the relations between the workers and the Party, but it's a dimension we deliberately erased to the benefit of another aspect of the problem; that of the worker caught up in consumer society's traps and seductions, the worker whose goals are limited to a car, a television, a sports game on Sunday, and who does not participate in politics, even during union conflicts... I think it is a reflection of a very precise aspect of today's reality, and that the movie constitutes a critical discourse on consumption as an attempt at putting consciences to sleep. The worker that I play in the movie is not conscious of the process, but it constantly costs him dearly, and each time it costs him, he discovers a small piece of his condition...

Petri is probably the director who has the least hierarchical understanding of cinematic work, and the one who establishes the best dialectical relations with all of his crew members. For him, a movie is a collective where everyone contributes ideas; it's an economic collective too, and the crew members are, in fact, the movie's owners.

In general, I work on my characters like an investigator who gathers all possible information on the question in which he's interested. My preparation is done therefore on a more journalistic level than a dramatic one, and is based on the same material that is gathered and used by the screenwriter to build his subject. That's how, for the police superintendent in *Indagine su cittadino di di sopra di ogni sospetto*'s, the way he walks, his attitudes, his

language, even the way he combs his hair, corresponds to a precise tradition that goes back in Italy to the time of the Bourbons. The image of this tradition is often found nowadays in ministries. And for the worker in *La classe operaia va in paradiso*, I talked for a long time with factory workers about their work-related health problems, such as neuroses, crippling arthritis, and pulmonary infections...

Ma cos'è questa crisi?

Interview by Aino Monicelli, in *Cinema italiano*
I Giornalisti, Rome/Bari, Editori Laterza, 1979

The relationship with Petri is a different relationship, more difficult, more confrontational, than the one with other directors. In fact, with him, we reached moments of significant tension. Really, because Petri needed to constantly put his strength to the test with his own collaborators. Of course, he's a very creative director; he, therefore, needs this stimulation... and that stimulation becomes a confrontation, too. For me, it remains perhaps the most interesting experience from a professional point of view, not only for the actors but for the whole crew. I'm talking about *La classe operaia va in paradiso* because *Indagine su cittadino di di sopra di ogni sospetto* already had more structure, a more precise structure, in which we moved naturally, with all of us really bringing an important contribution, but the structure was rigid. On the contrary, in *La classe operaia*, after a series of remarks he made, Petri called on the creativity of the entire company as often as possible. And he is extraordinary in his ability to squeeze his collaborators like lemons. In *La classe operaia*, work has been very interesting because of that.



Claudio Volonté, Elio Petri, Luigi Kuveiller

After his accident, the character's voice changed.

Yes, it became a deeper voice. This was Petri's idea, too. Like Rosi, he also leaves the actor a lot of room while controlling him, with the extraordinary ability to handle even proposals, because an actor moves in a space that's hard to check, from one moment to the other. So he had this extraordinary ability to synthesize, to gather... The character matures through a series of experiences that are really those of the movie shoot.

And for A ciascuno il suo?

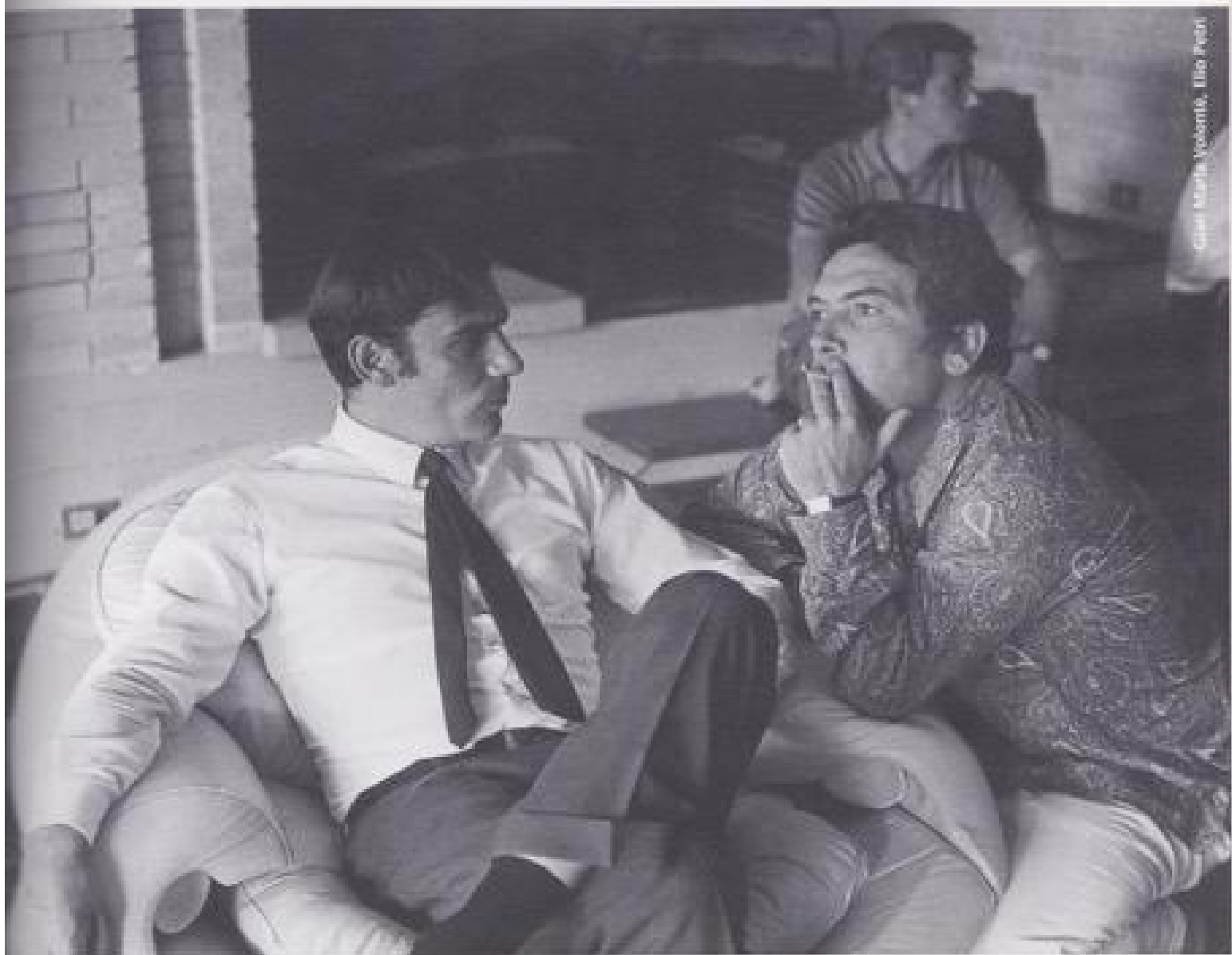
We tried to convey all of this middle-class intellectual's ingenuousness in his search for truth. He came up against a world that was completely different. This provincial teacher who was reading *Moby Dick* translated by Pavese... The set was beautiful: Petri shot with the palm trees and flowers of the strange tropical island of Sicily. We felt like we were in an aquarium.

(Interview by Jean A. Gili, 1973)

3. I feel closer to certain movies I played in more than others, but not because of the result, because the result doesn't belong to anyone. Once the shoot is over, it doesn't belong to you any more. On the other hand, during the shoot, special conditions are created. I remember *La classe operaia va in paradiso* as a rather different experience than the usual ones. Precisely because, between Elio Petri, me, Salvo Randone, Luigi Kuveiller, the director of photography, the architect Armenia Balducci who was my companion, Antonio Gabrielli, the assistant director, a very fertile collaboration, dialectical exchange relation was created.

*How do you prepare yourself for the part of someone with a strong political engagement, like for example the worker in *La classe operaia va in paradiso*?*

For this movie, we were moving in a very free context, the working-class movement of that period, the struggles of that time, the 1968 protest



atmosphere. We really focused on the reality of Novare's factory, living that reality day after day, because it was stimulating for everyone.

*What about the Aldo Moro character in *Todo modo*?*

For Moro, there was above all the book by Sciascia that had inspired Petri's screenplay. And, also, there was Petri's language that is, in a way, expressionist, and with all the references, and also the taste, for cabaret more than for the great expressionist theater. So, all of his search for a certain kind of actors, I don't know, from Tino Scotti to Ciccio Ingrassia, comes from that. The set designer made a certain kind of set too, expressionist also.

Everything was very open, very played out; The Christian Democrat's trial started in a certain kind of satirical publication that existed at that time, like *Berlinguer e il professore*, and other books like that... The roots of all that, knowing well Petri's taste and research, are to be found, I believe, in German theater, above all the Weimar period one, where there is really a taste for acting in order to provoke, to needle (*punzecchiare*), etc. Therefore, the gathering of information, in this case, didn't require us to pay attention to the realistic, historical meaning. It was about masks, and that kind of experience required a totally different attitude, towards expressive means, as well. It was a game...