

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Where have all the Fireflies Gone?* (1975)

This is a poetic, literary interpretation of what actually happened [in our country] about ten years ago.

In the early sixties, because of air pollution, and water pollution in the countryside (our blue rivers and limpid irrigation ditches) fireflies began to disappear. The phenomenon was swift and terrible. After a few years the fireflies were not longer there. (They are now a painful memory from the past; and an older man with yet such a memory can no longer see himself in the face of today's youngsters, as he once was, because they have no store of such memories.)

That "something" that happened ten years ago I will then call "the disappearance of the fireflies." Now the Christian Democratic regime is divided into two distinct phases, with absolutely nothing in common between them, exhibiting no continuity whatsoever.

The first phase of this regime goes from the end of the war until the disappearance of the fireflies, and the second goes from the disappearance of the fireflies until today. Let us examine them one at a time.

Before the disappearance of the fireflies:

The continuity between fascist fascism and the democristian brand is absolute. There is no point in restating here the discussions in the pages of *Politecnico*: The failure to purge state agencies of ex-fascists ("epurazione"), the continuation of the legal codes, police violence, contempt for the Constitution. I will concentrate on the point that has always been made in any historical analysis: that the democracy which the Christian Democrats juxtaposed to fascism was strictly and shamelessly formal.

It was founded on an absolute majority based on the votes of the middle classes and the rural masses, managed by the Vatican. ...In this world the "values" touted were the same as under fascism: Church, fatherland, discipline, order, thrift, morality. Such "values" were also "real values." They came from the cultures and beliefs of the agricultural and pre-industrial Italy. But from the moment they were assumed as national values, they could only lose their solidity and turn into a stupid and repressive state conformity: that conformity of fascists and demo-christian power. Provincialism, coarseness and ignorance were the marks of both the elites and the masses during fascism and during the first phase of Christian Democratic rule.

During the disappearance of the fireflies:

During this period the distinction between different forms of fascism, as discussed in the pages of *Politecnico*, might have been country - I'm referring to the workers and peasant masses mobilized by the CPI - and the most advanced intellectuals and critics, had not yet noticed that "the fireflies were going

out." But this was as yet information not yet backed up by experience, formalistic at base. No one could suspect the historical reality that the immediate future would bring, nor identify what would be called "well being" with that "progress" which would bring to pass in Italy what Marx in the Manifesto had identified with genocide.

After the extinction of the fireflies:

The nationalized and therefore falsified "values" of the old agricultural and paleocapitalist orders suddenly no longer count. Church, country, family, obedience, order, thrift, morality: none of these things count any more. They survive in a marginal clerico-fascism: but no more. They have been replaced by the "values" of a new type of civilization, quite "other" (or alien) with respect to the old peasant and pre-industrial order. The same phenomenon has been experienced by other states. But it is quite special in Italy, because it really amounts to the authentic unification of our country; whereas elsewhere it was imposed either on a united monarchy, or on a later bourgeois- industrial unification...

[In the last pages of his diatribe Pasolini says he noticed a profound change in the behavior of the Christian Democratic leadership]...

My readers will certainly have noted the change in the demo- christian bigwigs: in recent months they have turned into funeral masks. It is true: they continue to flash their radiant smiles. Thickening in their eyes is the blessed light of true good humor; that is when it is not obscured by the winking glint of sharpness and cunning (something that seems to please the voters as much as happiness itself). Furthermore our leaders continue imperturbably their incomprehensible rigmarole: floating on which we can make out the bubbles of the usual stereotyped promises. Yet in reality they are nothing but masks. I am certain that if you raised these masks, you would find not even a pile of bones and ashes: nothing but a void.

How did we - or rather, these men of power - get to this point?

The explanation is simple: the pooh-bahs of the Christian Democratic party have passed from the "phase of the fireflies" to that of "the disappearance of the fireflies" without noticing it. However we might consider this almost criminal, their absolute unawareness has been total. They never even suspected that the power they retained and dispensed was not merely undergoing a natural stage of evolution, but was radically changing its nature. They were under the illusion that in their regime everything would remain the same: that they would, for example, eternally be able to count on the Vatican, without observing that the power they continued to dispense no longer knew what to do with the Vatican as a center of peasant life, so backward and impoverished. They were under the illusion that they could still count on a national army (as their fascist predecessors had done) without seeing that the power they continued to wield was already manoeuvring to create new armies, transnational in nature, resembling technocratic police forces. And the same must be said of the family, now denied the guarantee of continuity it had enjoyed since the fascist period. Now it [the family] was subject to

the power of consumerism imposing upon it radical changes, including divorce and even more, without limit or restraint....

This is what the men of power in the Christian Democratic party have undergone, in the belief that it was they who were administering all these upheavals. They never observed that it was "something else," incommensurable not only with them but with all forms of civilizations. As always [see Gramsci] it was in language that one could read the symptoms. In the transitional stage - i.e. "during the disappearance of the fireflies" - the Christian Democratic bigwigs suddenly changed their way of expressing themselves, adopting a language as incomprehensible as Latin. This was particularly true in the case of Aldo Moro: strangely enough in this case of the man least implicated in all the horrible events orchestrated since '69, in an attempt, so far formally successful, to hang on to power.

I say formally because the Demochristian leaders, with all their manoeuverings and posturing, are covering over a void. Real power proceeds without them; and they only have in their hands those useless pieces of apparatus that can make real nothing more than their doleful double breasted suits.

[Editor's note: Pasolini concludes in the following terms: It is not enough, he says, for those presently in power (whom he defines as puppets, or "wooden heads," "teste di legno") to be replaced by another set of "wooden heads," who would probably be even more backward and repressive than they. Nor does he assume the power vacuum at the center will immediately be filled by an aroused proletariat. This may in fact be Pasolini's dream, but he realizes that is not feasible. Thus his essay concludes inconclusively, and on a pessimistic note. The gadfly has done its duty. It has stung, but not brought a cure.]

Real power which those same puppets have saved for the past decade without recognizing its reality...now there is something that may just have started to fill the void (neutralizing the possible participation in the government of that communist nation talk of actually governing). As yet we may only form abstract, fundamentally apocalyptic images of such a "real power." We cannot imagine what form it might take if it were to take over from those who have been claiming to dispense and control it with their technical "modernizations." In any case, speaking for myself, let me simply state: however multinational I may be, I'd give the whole of Montedison* for one firefly.

* Montedison: Italy's giant, government controlled, electrical monopoly.

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