

Reactivating Queer Theory:  
The Perverse Pedagogy of Pier Paolo Pasolini

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Abstract: A Marxist, anarchist, and Catholic – contradictory traditions fused into his various aesthetic practices – the Italian filmmaker, novelist, poet and public intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) remains a pivotal figure in the history of queer theory, as he insisted that queer always remain an alterity not an identity, declining submission to the alluring temptations - the repressive tolerance - of (il)liberal democracies. For Pasolini, queer marks the disruption of the politically and temporally vacuous present of postmodernity by embodying - indeed sexualizing - a radical embodied (indeed sexual) openness to the Other. Despite (or perhaps due to) his own practice of paying for sex with young men – employing several for roles in his movies - Pasolini judged neo-capitalism a form of fascism that converted the working classes to bourgeois wannabes, reenacting their own subjugation through compulsive consumption and adoration of authoritarian leadership. To position himself outside the Italian public whom he tried to teach, Pasolini emphasized his status as outsider: a queer ex-communist, faithless mystic, cutting critic. A clairvoyant magical realism informed his public pedagogy, decrying the genocide not only of aboriginal peoples but of European civilization itself as humanity had become, he insisted, soulless. A former schoolteacher, Pasolini's lifelong pedagogical engagement with Italian society defined his aesthetic efforts in

film, poetry, and prose, reactivating the ancient by juxtaposing it with the new, his art an invocation of the sacred despite its profanation of normality. Pasolini's recourse was pedagogical: to bear witness through language and its "consecration" no objectification of reality: rather enacting a searing testimony to the tragedy of humanity's spiritual self-immolation. Pasolini's pessimism – his dialectic of abjection and sublimity – seeks, however, the resurrection of (queer) collective life. Reactivating Pasolini becomes an educational opportunity to rethink the meaning of queer today.

## Introduction

Pasolini remains central to any theorization of "queerness."<sup>1</sup>

Angelo Restivo

"Probably Italy's major intellectual of the twentieth century,"<sup>2</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini was an artist and educator, these two modes *d'être* intertwined, his subjective synthesis<sup>3</sup> reconstructed from its Catholic-Communist sources.<sup>4</sup> The identity of such synthesis was authorship,<sup>5</sup> as Annovi explains, the "center of his artistic and intellectual practice."<sup>6</sup> Such an assertion can

sound suspicious to the postmodern (and its subspecies, the post-human), as Benedetti acknowledges: “For some time the word author has had a suspicious ring to it. To some it calls up the ‘obsolete realm’ of the subject, made up of states of mind, intentions, goals, responsibilities.”<sup>7</sup> When inflated or isolated, those can become caricatures of a human being, a being who can hardly be human without these, each one of which, not incidentally, is embedded in relationships with others, including non-human others.

Embedded was the case with Pasolini, who even invited audience members to participate in his (especially theatrical) art, akin to the classroom teacher who invites (or even requires) students to say what they think, words possibly permeating interpersonal boundaries, imprinting themselves (not only) within the teacher’s subjectivity. However impersonal professionalism encourages teachers to be, relationships are formed, expressed

through subject matter (double entendre intended). The endlessly repeated relational character of the person does not obviate the person: after all, what is to be related if not our individual selves and those of other creatures with whom we share the planet?

“Pasolini feels the need to address the reader,” Annovi notes, “not merely to provide information,”<sup>8</sup> but also to establish and maintain a “direct relationship with his audience, an intellectual dialogue aimed at producing new forms of knowledge and agency.”<sup>9</sup> For Pasolini, that relationship to those in his midst – informed by those who were not, including the deceased – was ‘real, personal, and almost physical.’<sup>10</sup> Pasolini took others in, not only politically but also viscerally, to whom he replied pedagogically. To enact public pedagogy required that he become a speaking subject, the author of his presence and participation in the public sphere, structured as those were by what was absent,

especially temporally. Pasolini brought to his public pedagogy not only his life history but the nation's history, the state of European civilization after the Holocaust, itself both a specific and unique event, as well as a metaphor for the spiritual immolation neo-fascism inflicted.

Pasolini, Duncan points out, was “the most autobiographical of writers,” as “his investment in and identification with what he produced was total,”<sup>11</sup> making “the material into an expression of his own personality,”<sup>12</sup> as Gordon puts it, “a recurrent pattern of self-inscription in his work.”<sup>13</sup> In such subjective presence, “art [becomes] bound up with the director’s *personal* expression; it is precisely his unique personality that gives the work organic unity.”<sup>14</sup> For such an artist, art “must express – at every level – the author’s absolute individuality.”<sup>15</sup> Annovi adds: “the author, like the viewer, is a corporeal, material being, not just an abstract function,”<sup>16</sup> as “Pasolini linked authorship and homosexuality,”<sup>17</sup>

both performative reconstructions of subjectivity and materiality, addressed pedagogically to his “students,” e.g. his contemporaries in Italy and worldwide.

Like the subjectively present teacher, Pasolini inscribes himself in the material (words, images, ideas) in his studio as he creates unique artistic forms: the poem, the novel, the film. Perhaps that sense of “indirect” or, as Annovi phrases it, “authorial”<sup>18</sup> subjectivity – “to turn actively towards the exterior, without fearing to lose itself in this”<sup>19</sup> - accounts for his refusal of collective identity<sup>20</sup> – including “gay”<sup>21</sup> – and his dismissal of minoritarian sexual politics generally.<sup>22</sup> For a place at the table Pasolini substitutes the promiscuity of a sexualized spirituality: “this is my body given to you, do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>23</sup> Erotic desire, as Gordon notes, operates for Pasolini as “desire for essential, ontological plenitude.”<sup>24</sup> As he did in *La Ricotta* (1963), Castelli explains, he uses “religious/mythic imagery ... to ground a

political critique.”<sup>25</sup> As he told an English journalist:

[T]he ‘opposite’ of religion is not communism (which, despite having taken the secular and positivist spirit from the bourgeois tradition, in the end is very religious); but the “opposite” of religion is capitalism (ruthless, cruel, cynical, purely materialistic, the cause of human beings’ exploitation of human beings, cradle of the worship of power, horrendous den of racism.).<sup>26</sup>

Sexual promiscuity among men, including among men of different generations and class locations, was sacred: God’s work on earth.

For Pasolini, Castelli notes, religion remained the site of “the revolutionary power of human solidarity, a bulwark against the materialist noise of bourgeois culture.”<sup>27</sup> In silent night solidarity was cemented, in the alleys of the borgata of Rome.

Religion remains an experience of decentering that encourages non-coincidence not only with intrasubjective but also

intersubjective even transcendent experience. Despite the (absolute?) gap between here and eternity, one can become attuned to what is and might be beyond the material world.<sup>28</sup>

Such attunement is not automatic; it is a medium of spiritual discipline, in which one labors to translate into a communicative – artistic, curricular -medium what one has experienced spiritually and intrasubjectively. “It is not only the criterion of immanence to the text that distinguishes the artist’s deep self from the worldly self,” Benedetti explains,

but more importantly the deep self’s involvement in the act of creation, with its obscure and tortuous labor, with its itinerary of sufferings and disappointments, things that succeeding criticism and theory have altogether excluded from their discourse. The thematics of reception have replaced those of creation.<sup>29</sup>

An exclusive emphasis on reception – including uncritical



attunement to the transcendent - to the exclusion of self-critical creation renders translation an imitative undertaking, risking coincidence (e.g. coinciding) with what is: conformity. Annovi notes that Pasolini associates “authorship” – I would also associate teaching – “with a radically antagonistic stance toward all forms of artistic, social, and intellectual conformity, identifying conformism with social and cultural oppression.”<sup>30</sup> Antagonism can be subtle, even civil, but it does not mistake what is for what should be.

At war with conformity – political, artistic, sexual - Pasolini emphasized “authorship” as a “revolutionary subject” position – contra the death of the author, the-death-of-the-subject discourse.<sup>31</sup> Pasolini also knew that Power – in our time materialized as techno-capitalism - imposed “a single model and destroys the differences between the peasantry and proletarian, so that the latter aspire to become petit bourgeois.”<sup>32</sup> Such a

homogenous universal state<sup>33</sup> means that “all transgressive acts, whether linguistic or formal, will in turn become normalized,”<sup>34</sup> evaporating in “the void of a normality without memory.”<sup>35</sup> Not only subjectivity is eviscerated, so is the body in “the assimilating power of mass consumerism, which concede[s] a form of false sexual tolerance in order to control, violate, and use the body’s innocence.”<sup>36</sup> In its incorporation into the normalized sexual order, tolerance terminates queer desire by ghettoizing it into identity. For Pasolini, homosexual desire is incompatible with modern society’s false sexual tolerance,<sup>37</sup> with what Pasolini termed “permissive power” or “repressive tolerance,” fueled by the “consumerist incitement to desire” that accomplishes, “social speaking, a political form of control which a repressive fascism itself could never accomplish.”<sup>38</sup> The reference is to twentieth-century probably Italian fascism, but such control through consumerism represents an updated version, “a fascism which is indistinguishable from a brutal command to enjoy.”<sup>39</sup> The fusion

of superego and id dissolves the ego, ensuring the “impossibility of meaningful action.”<sup>40</sup> Video games – not historical action – are the order of the day.

The fusion of satiation and deprivation would result, as Pasolini put it in 1968, in “bourgeois entropy,”<sup>41</sup> which, Castelli points out, “he rather presciently predicted would overwhelm modern society and render the peasant and the worker invisible.”<sup>42</sup> Such entropy would eradicate “authenticity,” flattening speech into information exchange, evident, he thought, in “the horrendous language of television news, advertising, official statements,” and of course consumerism, and which he called “a genuine anthropological cataclysm.”<sup>43</sup> Images, objects, ideas, human beings: all reduced to competing products on a store shelf, webpage on a smartphone screen.

Due to this “civilizational destiny,”<sup>44</sup> the actually existing author represents “a living protest,”<sup>45</sup> declining a static identity<sup>46</sup>

that, by its collectivist conformist structure, can be quickly incorporated into a heteronormative status quo. “He wanted,” Annovi observes, “to remain essentially unrecognizable to power,”<sup>47</sup> requiring one to be “unrecognizable.”<sup>48</sup> Gordon explains:

By being unrecognizable – elusive, in permanent movement, present in and through the past and future, positive and negative, apocalyptic and integrated – the “radical” Pasolini delineates a position as a subject which, for the first time since the 1950s, is one of limited control and centrality, at least within the ambit of the homologizing system.<sup>49</sup>

Within such a predatory predicament, any possibility of that – remaining unrecognizable to power, in private as well as public - requires “continuous struggle” through “permanent invention” and, “constant self-reinvention,”<sup>50</sup> no self-enclosed state of simulation but, as Castelli points out, “part of that lifelong

endeavor to intervene in the culture of his moment.”<sup>51</sup>

Introducing (and promoting) a new conceptual product is not intervention which, in consumer culture, only can occur subliminally. How to furtively peek underneath the endless displays of distraction the truth of the situation is not only a subversive maneuver behind enemy lines; it is a temporal act that creates lived distance between oneself and the present moment, e.g. historical consciousness, a felt and thought-through sense of what time it is. Preserving the past renders the now present.

In the West it is late or postmodernity, often portrayed as decline, evident in the corruption of democracy,<sup>52</sup> and not only in the United States. Subjective freedom – that inner capacity to transcend what is, including oneself – has been traded for comfort and convenience; consumption constructs freedom not as spiritual or political but as choice of what’s available for purchase on the shelf or the screen. Freedom becomes an empty signifier in

such a space of exchange, agency reduced to choice, both reduced to clicks, movements of fingers on devices substituting for thought and action in their even early modern senses of instrumental intervention. What was once termed “society” – the commons - is now only a marketplace, even of political candidates. “In every field,” Benedetti notes, “modernity has always moved to the cry of ‘Long live freedom!’”<sup>53</sup> Like the compulsive celebration of the new, the “cry” confirms that its contrary is the case. We late-moderns are neither free nor new, enslaved to contingency – historical, now ecological, always subjective - as were our predecessors. Perhaps “thinking what has never been thought before” was always unlikely, but now – without a “now,” without historical time or subjective presence – all that can be thought is what has been thought already.<sup>54</sup>

“The modern epoch has produced two great terminal myths,” Benedetti declares, “the death of art and the death of the

author.”<sup>55</sup> To which I add a third: historical time. Indeed, “no longer progressive,” Benedetti notes, history “piles up around one in an unwieldy heap,”<sup>56</sup> heavy almost crushing so that one slips to the side, struggling to say something distracting, something *new*. “Late-modernity’s bereavement,” she concludes, “is over the impossibility to create; it perceives itself as a terminal culture.”<sup>57</sup> It is the end-time, perhaps not eschatologically or (not yet) climate-wise, but culturally, as human life becomes consumed by technology.

Technology is now a sinkhole swallowing subjectivity, spitting out its digital remains: avatars, identities, networks of likes and dislikes. Just as “queer” has already happened – the post-queer moment is neither queer nor a moment<sup>58</sup> – the death of art “[h]as already happened,” Benedetti observes, “and without any tragedy. All art is felt as posthumous; its current products are nothing but relics.”<sup>59</sup> The young curtsy but queer - a

generationally specific concept - is no religious icon pointing beyond itself. It is not even an idol, only a relic, exhumed from the alien past, stripped of immediacy and import, leaving only survivors, aging bodies imprinted by its excess.

Ah youth: for almost all of us only the material matters. Convenience, comfort, and the conformity to which they commit us seem small change. It's just another lifestyle: there is nothing exceptional to experience when stripped of its abrasive embodiment. Dismayed at the replacement of "lived experience" by "lifestyle," Pasolini decried consumer capitalism, specifically its conversion of everything into objects of exchange, e.g. the installation of a homogenous pseudo-society in which tolerance meant repression.<sup>60</sup> Such tolerance became, in Gordon's phrasing "a false and monovalent force which conceals coercion and actually reinforces difference and prejudice."<sup>61</sup> While the old fascism – that of Mussolini – was "reactionary and pernicious,"



Pasolini allowed, “the new fascism ... is more insidious, elusive and destructive ... [it] assimilates and homologizes all – including previous forms of anti-fascism – through consumerist leveling, and through neo-capitalist development, which has no regard for the more pluralistic and experiential progress.”<sup>62</sup> Progress, even incremental and experiential, is relegated to the dustbin of history, another one of those malevolent metanarratives our evil ancestors invented to enslave.

Free from the past, young and old can stare into their devices, extricated from History, granted a second life, a simulated sphere of endless amusement, assault, avatars and avarice. “Today,” Pasolini lamented, “youth are nothing but monstrous and ‘primitive’ masks of a new sort of initiation (negative in pretense only) into the consumerist ritual.”<sup>63</sup> In 2018 many Italian youth and their elders, enraged by their exclusion in this neo-fascism, raised their fists in salute to the new old

fascism.<sup>64</sup> Amnesia accompanies the presentism of consumerism.<sup>65</sup>

“From Friuli to the Roman ‘borgate’ and then to the Third World,” Duncan suggests, “Pasolini’s poetics and politics sought authentic spaces not yet enveloped by the consumerist ethic he found so pervasive in mainstream Italian culture,” adding that: “In the end, what he seems to have discovered was that there was nowhere left to go.”<sup>66</sup> This flight from space became, then, a journey into time, reactivating the past, that “anachronistic presence”<sup>67</sup> of what he prized, those palimpsests of pre-modernity. For Pasolini, pre-modernity is a modernist’s move, as it rejects the temporally evacuated presentism of consumer capitalism, that “ahistorical fracture,” as Gordon phrases it,

which simply leaves Pasolini at a loss as to how to sustain subjectivity-within-history, which is his defining state, when history has turned in on itself (what he calls “the new

prehistoric age” in his poetry) and will tolerate only the inscription of commodified, reified, subjugated subjects.<sup>68</sup>

Reinscribing the subject requires evacuating the subjugation of the temporally empty present for the historical past. Rejecting the postmodern command to “make it new,” Pasolini reactivates the old, reinscribing in the now what was repressed,<sup>69</sup> making “forms in experimentalism – or of pastiche or eclecticism – a potent vessel for subjective plenitude.”<sup>70</sup>

These “patterns of self-inscription,” Gordon notes, etched through affirmations of nostalgia and regression, also “inform Pasolini’s evolving notion of education, or pedagogy.”<sup>71</sup> Gordon describes a teacher who “stimulates curiosity through scandal, revelation and drama, and becomes a ‘means not an end of love’ for the students,” love that “oscillates between the Platonic and the erotic, reclaiming the subjective by precluding the model of teacher as object or model or fetish.”<sup>72</sup> Subjectivity spills out

through the teacher's self-inscription in the curriculum, the teacher's relationship to what and who is being taught, relationship at once personal and political, as through "love" the teacher aspires to set students free: from the teacher, from themselves, from the late modern moment threatening to consume them.

#### Reactivation

"The collapse of the present implies also the collapse of the past."<sup>73</sup>

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Because time disappears in late or postmodernity – all there is a temporally evacuated "eternal present"<sup>74</sup> – there can be no subjective threading of the past through the present, thus no subjective coherence, and the self, like the concept of "author," disappears precisely "because he or she is revealed to be an empty instance, without psychological referent."<sup>75</sup> Without life history – or History - the present moment is all there is, filled as it

can be with fantasies and distractions, when not dissolved by the screen.

When we are fused with what is – what is on the screen in front of us loses its material specificity and becomes an envelope in which we become embedded – we may not find our way out. This inability to extricate ourselves from what now surrounds us is emblematic of late modernity. “Whatever we do,” Benedetti notes, “we remain prisoners to the already-written or the already-thought.”<sup>76</sup> No longer living in the embodied actuality (abrasive, frustrating, fragile, for Pasolini sacred) but instead suspended in simulation - in a “parallel universe” Benedetti suggests – “neither originality nor repetition exist since every word is citation.... It is a tomb-world, where everything that happens has already happened, and where nothing can happen ever again.”<sup>77</sup> Again: this essay is surely an instance.

Submerged in the screen, what we require, Benedetti

suggests, is a “little fissure that grants us a viewpoint external to the universe in which we are locked.”<sup>78</sup> In separation from devices one might notice something not on the screen, become capable of carving a space of non-coincidence wherein one might think “something that has not already been thought.”<sup>79</sup> Certainly separation – a “fissure” in Benedetti’s conceptual architecture – might allow air into the room, the “tomb-world” of the screen - but thought, even an actually “new” idea, won’t open the window. Nose to the “new” ensures suffocation.

“Compulsion for the new” animates “modern artistic logic,”<sup>80</sup> Benedetti reminds, with its obsessive even frenzied “critique of conventionality, the idea that convention is something ridiculous.”<sup>81</sup> Enter the so-called creative destruction of convention. “If all is dead,” Benedetti proclaims, “everything is possible again.”<sup>82</sup> That satire could become serious if we change “is” to “seems,” implying not the naïve, infantile destruction of

what is but the reactivation of what is lost. In raising the dead we ourselves might be disinterred.

If you're still reading you know I have one dead man very much in mind. "Like a specter," Annovi knows, "Pasolini seems to wander through the ruins of a present unrecognizable to him or to us."<sup>83</sup> Is that because we are not only among but are ourselves the ruins? We are no longer here because "here" is no longer here: only the ruins remain. Without emplacement we lost souls wander in the cloud, circulating inside the screen, a flicker, a finger, an image. Closing the screen, shutting down the machine, one faces one's own screen memories,<sup>84</sup> through which one sidesteps to feel the chair on which one is sitting, the floor on which one is standing, knows the place where one is, what time it is. In place, with time, in remembrance, through study, one might experience what Pasolini termed "the scandalous revolutionary force of the past."<sup>85</sup>

Pasolini imagined the past – in its “profoundly unsentimental authenticity”<sup>86</sup> - as a “counterweight to bourgeois conformism,”<sup>87</sup> a state of fusion with what is, constantly changing, updating to stay the same, as Wendy Chun appreciates.<sup>88</sup>

“Downdating” breaks the spell: Pasolini rewrote premodern myths to eject the viewer from the empty space of consumption. It is “retrospection” – as Gordon knows – that “is now strategically deployed in an effort to grasp and transform the present.”<sup>89</sup>

Pasolini relied on a “literary strategy of *affabulazione* (fable-making, mythmaking), Castelli affirms, “to address the question of temporality through recourse to myth.”<sup>90</sup> Myth could seem an odd even self-contradicting choice but through its allegorizing of contingency, replacing the apparently isolated instant into a narrative (e.g., a temporal continuum), one might re-experience the actual while being discouraged from coinciding with it, creating a space in-between what is and what it might mean.

Especially Pasolini’s “theologically inflected films,” Castelli notes,



“stage a confrontation between two incommensurate systems of value.”<sup>91</sup>

In secular society in which all relations are reduced to their exchange value, Pasolini mounted a “vigorous defense of the religious and the sublime ... against the dominant forms of power and cultural value.”<sup>92</sup> While mechanical reproduction erases time, it creates the illusion of the new by altering design and function. Pasolini critiqued the adoration of absolute difference too, each moment distinct and difference from its preceding ones, preventing us from understanding anyone or anything not immediately available to us. In *Saint Paul*, Castelli points out, he addresses himself to two different sets of tensions: his conviction that temporal difference is, at its root, illusory – that there is no difference between then and now – and his consistent worrying over the separation between the historical and the religious, the real and the ideal.<sup>93</sup>

Castelli recalls a poem Pasolini composed in 1969 while filming

*Medea* in Turkey, the year after the drafting of the Paul script. Entitled "Tarsus, from a Distance," Pasolini wrote: "Of course, if a thing changes/ it still remains what it was first.... Of course, the egg-shaped form of time connects everything."<sup>94</sup> As Michael North concludes: "All the nows are still here. What links them together is that elementary sense of presence we get by looking at where we are now, which is where we will always be, as long as we are."<sup>95</sup>

Maybe that "elementary sense of presence," being subjectively present here and now, can also become a conveyance beyond both. Due to the profanity of the present, Pasolini embraced reality as sacred.<sup>96</sup> Like a religious icon, reality imprints itself through its immanence and, for the spiritual, its capacity to incarnate transcendence. Incarnation, Pasolini avowed, structured the sphere of the sexual. Making love one can become both temporal and transcendental, rendering, as Gordon explains,

“praxis as mystical, transcendent and revolutionary.”<sup>97</sup> Praxis for Pasolini, Gordon continues, exhibits a “dual dynamic,” as it is “both retrogressive ... and, or in order to be, progressive and revolutionary,” a “dual-projected ... ethics of actions” that, significantly, is “coterminous with an attempt to resist the dehistoricization brought about by neo-capitalism, to salvage from bourgeois conservatism”<sup>98</sup> what Pasolini knew to be “the sacredness of the past.”<sup>99</sup> Drink this in memory of me.

### Nothing Else

Sex, death, political passion/My life/has nothing else.<sup>100</sup>  
Pier Paolo Pasolini

“Archiving across the chronological history of Pasolini’s public work,” Gordon summarizes, “alternatively both its cause and effect, there is a series of archetypal roles or /vocations which persistently attach themselves to and embody Pasolini’s public figure.”<sup>101</sup> Each, he continues, functions as a “filter” - perhaps like

identity - between “self and reality, and between self and public.” Each enjoys, Gordon suggests, a similar trajectory, “from an all but mystical visceral origin, to a consciously elaborated, self-imposed mask, and then to a debased, ironic residue of that mask.” From the mystical to the debased and ironic, those vocations - “the self as poet, the self as teacher, and the self as outsider”<sup>102</sup> – synthesize into one.<sup>103</sup>

At first teaching was a calling to which he replied poetically, enabling him, Gordon suggests, “to connect the self, in its core being, to the cluster of absolutes that organizes Pasolini’s philosophy – reality, history, vitality, the body, form – and to protect the self from categorization by its slippery elusiveness and mystery.”<sup>104</sup> In a series of 1947-1948 articles for *Il Mattino del Popolo*, Pasolini described teaching (in Gordon’s summary) “as an act of love for the child and for the world, an initiation into ethical and ideological awareness through a mixture of Platonic and erotic and therefore ‘scandalous’ affinity.”<sup>105</sup> Such an “affinity,”

Gordon continues, represents “an embryonic form of collective consciousness.”<sup>106</sup> Pasolini “insists on anchoring the ideological validity of an intellectual position in an operation of subjective introspection, in an elusive quality of disavowed selfhood.”<sup>107</sup>

This humbling decentering attunement to the children, enacted through the curriculum, is perhaps what Gordon has in mind when he postulates in Pasolini a “balance between authority and submission.”<sup>108</sup> That balance, he continues, has “its source in this role of the self as teacher,”<sup>109</sup> a balance akin (it seems to me) to Taubman’s conception of “right distance”<sup>110</sup> between teacher and student, separate even individual relationships that shift according time, place, and circumstance. For Pasolini, this “balance” is in the service of “love,” if a “scandalous” one, an “undercurrent” to which is the “father-son dyad that gradually comes to dominate Pasolini’s entire late oeuvre.”<sup>111</sup> It is not confined there, as Pasolini’s pedagogy and his *oeuvre* overall have their origin in “love for the world,” which, Gordon is sure, “sets

them apart, gives them that privileged relationship with truth.”<sup>112</sup>

Through such reverence the world – including (and for Pasolini especially) sex between men - becomes iconographic, testifying what lies beyond the visible. Supplication, self-abjuration, and renunciation provide passages *into* time. In a 1949 speech Pasolini declared:

what we ask of the intellectual is neither easy nor comfortable: it is a question of a renunciation. Let him too, by all means, carry out that introspective, inner, diaristic enquiry that is indeed the vital gymnastics of mankind [...]; but let him strive, in his work of his, to be more objective, and more, why not say it, Christian: let him find his place in human history.<sup>113</sup>

Renunciation runs on “diaristic inquiry,” autobiography in the service of stripping oneself of preoccupations one projects on the world. Preoccupations might remain – certainly they (sex, passion, politics) did for Pasolini – but no longer reduced to a narcissistic

lens through one sees the world. One puts those glasses down, discerning the world as a clairvoyant might, with extra-sensory even mystical clarity, an openness to what is (“objective” in the quoted passage) enables. Through self-engagement, through subjective reconstruction, that is: “I hate naturalness. I reconstruct everything,”<sup>114</sup> Pasolini proclaimed. Through art, through sex, one works one’s way into the world, into time, into one’s place in history, however opaque that place must be (awaiting definitiveness until death, as Pasolini often emphasized). Working from within one is able to shed one’s subjective skin and walk naked in the desert of our time, like the father<sup>115</sup> in Pasolini’s “Teorema,” shattered and free after being ravished by the handsome young man<sup>116</sup> who has seduced each member of the family: maid, mother, son, daughter, father. The Christian antecedent has its Communist consequence: social leveling, abandonment of greed, as the father gives away his factory to its workers.

That, I am suggesting, is reactivating queer identity today: shedding its dead skin through the reactivation of the past, in this instance the subjective presence – the perverse pedagogy - of one Pier Paolo Pasolini, for whom sex was mystical as well as political, endless acts of self-dissolution in sacred service, ethical action in the inhuman temporally vacuous world of late modernity. For the early Pasolini – through the Trilogy of the 1970s - the “self becomes an emblem of the real,”<sup>117</sup> just as the “body becomes a site for historical action,”<sup>118</sup> but by the end – in his great unfinished novel *Petrolio* – the emphasis shifts to humanity’s capacity for self-mutilation, our determination to destroy the world.<sup>119</sup> That capacity inheres within “us,” once upon a time (like Pasolini) queers who pledged allegiance to sexual experimentation for the sake of cultural revolution, but now (if partnered) settling for matrimony and biological reproduction or, if single, fast cars, fast money, grinding our way through website



after website. Our moment now mutilated, we wait for the catastrophe to come.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> 2002, 150.

<sup>2</sup> Duncan 2006, 83. The former schoolteacher - in September 1943 Pasolini started "a peripatetic school for local children whose education had been interrupted by the war" (Gordon 1996, 33) - became a nationally acclaimed novelist, poet, and filmmaker. "In an unpublished interview," Castelli (2014, xxiii) reports, "the famed Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci called Pasolini a saint."

<sup>3</sup> "The endless osmosis between Pasolini's various works," Annovi (2017, 59) explains, "is one of the mechanisms that reinforces the sense of

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coherence within his body of work, which becomes almost a closed world, navigable only if one yields to the author's instructions."

<sup>4</sup> Badiou (2014, vii) points out that the "Christian reference" was "primary" in the intellectual "formation" of Pasolini's thought, "despite (or because of) the sexual and transgressive violence that inspired his personal life and bestowed a particular coloration on his communist political choices." Of course violence structures the "eschatology" of both, the so-called Great Tribulation associated with Christianity, the proletarian revolution prophesized by Marx.

<sup>5</sup> Pasolini pronounced: "Style is something inner, hidden, private and above all individual" (quoted in Gordon 1996, 36). Despite the dismissal of individualism, including the death of the author, Annovi (2017, 17) asserts that: "The author matters today and not simply from the culture industry's commercial point of view," adding: "The author matters, more importantly, for those in nondominant positions – feminists and queer and antiracist activists, among others – who engage with creative practices in which the discourse of authorship may have positive political effects."

<sup>6</sup> 2017, 4. Even while still a member of the Communist Party (PCI), Pasolini positioned agency, structuring his formation as a public intellectual, "a bourgeois prepared to betray his social class, as exemplified in Gide, Proust, Joyce, and Eliot" (Gordon 1996, 39).

<sup>7</sup> 2005, 58.

<sup>8</sup> 2017, 9.

<sup>9</sup> 2017, 9. In so doing, she adds, "Pasolini offers a distinct approach to the intersection of creativity, socio-political commitment, and subjectivity" (ibid.).

<sup>10</sup> 2017, 24.

<sup>11</sup> 2006, 84. Over time, Gordon (1996, 107) suggests, Pasolini's "autobiographical impulse" becomes "pastiche, often a pastiche of the very forms of self-narration," adding that "it takes on a cacophony of other voices instead of reformulating a single voice" (1996, 110).

<sup>12</sup> This phrase – describing the concept of *auteur* - is François Truffaut's (quoted in Annovi 2017, 86). Annovi (2017, 87) adds that "the idea of *auteur* is key to the construction of Pasolini the author." Its sexual correlate – desire differentiated according to the distinctiveness of person, place, moment – is adamantly anti-homonormative, homonormative as

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uncritically accepting heterosexual models of marriage, monogamy and reproduction.

<sup>13</sup> 1996, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Annovi 2017, 86.

<sup>15</sup> 2017, 87.

<sup>16</sup> 2017, 133.

<sup>17</sup> 2017, 143.

<sup>18</sup> 2017, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Badiou 2014, ix.

<sup>20</sup> 'For [James] Baldwin,' Posnock (1998, 227) points out, "identity is closer to being possessed than to being in possession."

<sup>21</sup> Pasolini was not alone. Baldwin admitted: "The word 'gay' has always rubbed me the wrong way," adding, "one's sexual preference is a private matter" (quoted in Posnock 1998, 327). "Like many of his generation," Posnock adds, "he had no interest in gay liberation movements" (Ibid.).

<sup>22</sup> Pasolini was, Castelli (2014, xxii) notes, "an anti-clerical Catholic."

Likewise, he was an anti-gay lover of especially heterosexually-identified young men (see Duncan 2006, 85). He was, Duncan (2006, 95) notes, "never very keen on the term 'homosexuality,' and, throughout his life in fact, preferred the term 'different,' or 'difference,' to point to his sense of indefinite otherness with respect to bourgeois society." Being "different" cast homosexual desire into a consciousness oppositional to capitalism. It was also an expression of "friendship" even "love," Duncan (2006, 96) continues, but sometimes "passion" and even "evil."

<sup>23</sup> Luke 22:19.

<sup>24</sup> 1996, 213.

<sup>25</sup> 2014, xxix.

<sup>26</sup> Castelli 2014, xxxii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Subjects with which I grapple in *Moving Images of Eternity* (in press).

<sup>29</sup> 2005, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Annovi 2017, 7.

<sup>31</sup> "[T]oday," Benedetti (2005, 7) observes, "wherever one turns, people now talk only of texts, hypertexts, intertexts, and metatexts, of readers who dialogue with the texts, and of texts that dialogue with other texts. The author who longer exists; or rather, we speak as if that were the case." She adds: "The author obviously has not disappeared, and her function has

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never been as strong and central as it is in today's literary communication" (Ibid.) "[T]he theoretical concept," Benedetti (2005, 60) continues, "will always remain bound to the real person by way of the negation.

<sup>32</sup> 2017, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Grant 1969, 33. In their dystopian visions of the future, the Canadian Christian Platonist and the Italian Communist Queer intersect.

<sup>34</sup> 2017, 11.

<sup>35</sup> 2017, 95.

<sup>36</sup> 2017, 127. For Pasolini, Annovi (2017, 131) notes, "the bodies of the Roman subproletariat are outside of history, or, rather, they belong to the metahistorical dimension of the outcast."

<sup>37</sup> 2017, 128.

<sup>38</sup> Blanton 2014, 117.

<sup>39</sup> Blanton 2014, 119.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon 1996, 180.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Castelli 2014, xxviii.

<sup>42</sup> 2014, xxviii.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in 2014, xxviii.

<sup>44</sup> The phrase is George Grant's (quoted in Potter 2005, xliii). "It has been made clear by both Grant and Heidegger," Nicholson (2006, 333) explains, "that technology is not the mere assembly of machines and devices that we make use of; beyond that, it is the form taken on by reality itself in the modern age, that reaches right into ourselves and so comes to constitute our way of thinking as well as acting."

<sup>45</sup> Annovi 2017, 128.

<sup>46</sup> As a moniker for singularity, identity can facilitate inner movement at crucial moments, as in "coming out," but it binds singularity to what is projected in public. As public figure – identity is the interface between private and public - Pasolini complained about his own "mystification" by the Italian public, the actual "agent" of which, Gordon (1996, 54) explains, was "Industrial power and its corollary, state and political conformism." In Barthes's "euphoria over the author's dispersion," Benedetti (2005, 54) detects "the anxiety of being watched, the uneasiness over an identity constructed by the readers, which comes back to haunt the writing subject, trapping him in an unwanted image, heavy and tiresome." Does the public side of sexual identity ensure the same? Is that white picket fence surrounding the gay family also prison bars?

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. For Pasolini, Annovi (2017, 34) notes, “power has become absolute and omnipresent so that it is everywhere.”

<sup>48</sup> 2017, 12.

<sup>49</sup> 1996, 74.

<sup>50</sup> 2017, 125.

<sup>51</sup> 2014, xxii.

<sup>52</sup> “The Nazis applied the term *Lügenpresse* (lying press) to the mainstream press,” Sunstein (2018, June 28, 65) reminds; U.S. President Trump refers to the “FAKE NEWS media,” which, he says, “is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!” The phrase is not the exclusive property of authoritarian rulers; it now depicts the “post truth” culture widely available online. Timothy Snyder, a historian of the Holocaust, cautions that “post-truth is pre-fascism” (quoted in Darnton 2018, June 28, 72).

<sup>53</sup> 2005, 181.

<sup>54</sup> As this essay demonstrates.

<sup>55</sup> 2005, 188.

<sup>56</sup> 2005, 200.

<sup>57</sup> 2005, 202.

<sup>58</sup> Nor is it political; see, for instance, Ruffalo 2016.

<sup>59</sup> 2005, 190.

<sup>60</sup> Restivo 2002, 150.

<sup>61</sup> 1996, 70.

<sup>62</sup> 1996, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Blanton 2014, 119.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/its-the-right-wings-italy-now/562256/>

accessed 2018-07-16.

<sup>65</sup> And of standardized testing, implied in Salvio’s perceptive discussion of curriculum’s capacity to censure the past: see 2014, 275.

<sup>66</sup> 2006, 100.

<sup>67</sup> 2006, 100.

<sup>68</sup> 1996, 54.

<sup>69</sup> “What gets repressed is not the lost object,” Benedetti (2005, 202) asserts, “but the fact that it constitutes a loss.”

<sup>70</sup> Gordon 1996, 46.

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<sup>71</sup> 1996, 38. Gordon cites Pasolini's professional activity as at teacher between 1944 and 1949, as well as four articles for *Il mattino del popolo* in November 1947 and July 1948.

<sup>72</sup> 1996, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Gordon 1996, 73.

<sup>74</sup> Benedetti 2005, 22.

<sup>75</sup> Benedetti 2005, 51.

<sup>76</sup> 2005, 208.

<sup>77</sup> 2005, 211.

<sup>78</sup> 2005, 212.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> 2005, 115.

<sup>81</sup> 2005, 113.

<sup>82</sup> 2005, 190.

<sup>83</sup> 2017, 3.

<sup>84</sup> The Freudian phrase denoting, in Britzman's (2006, 108) definition, "vivid details of insignificant content, that serve as a place holder for the forgotten." More aggressively phrased, screen memories cover up what the subject wants not to remember.

<sup>85</sup> (Quoted in Castelli 2014, xxviii). The phrase, Castelli (2014, xxviii) explains, "comes from the closing lines of Pasolini's documentary *Le mura di Sana'a* (The Walls of Sana'a), which he made as a plea to UNESCO to preserve the cultural legacy he encountered in Yemen," now almost destroyed, a pawn in Middle East warfare politics.

<sup>86</sup> Castelli 2014, xxix.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> See 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Gordon 1996, 95.

<sup>90</sup> 2014, xxix.

<sup>91</sup> 2014, xxix. That confrontation occurs in every scene in Pasolini's *Gospel According to Matthew*, as I point out (Pinar 2017).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> 2014, xxxiv-xxxv.

<sup>94</sup> 2014, xxxv.

<sup>95</sup> 2018, 177.

<sup>96</sup> Annovi 2017, 62.



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- <sup>97</sup> 1996, 66.
- <sup>98</sup> 1996, 66.
- <sup>99</sup> Quoted in 1996, 66.
- <sup>100</sup> Quoted in 1996, 174.
- <sup>101</sup> 1996, 75.
- <sup>102</sup> All quoted passages from 1996, 75.
- <sup>103</sup> 1996, 77.
- <sup>104</sup> 1996, 75.
- <sup>105</sup> 1996, 77.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup> 1996, 39.
- <sup>108</sup> 1996, 78. "In Pasolini's model," Stone (1994, 45) notes, "teacher and disciple oscillate, and the best students will teach their teachers."
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>110</sup> Taubman 1990.
- <sup>111</sup> 1996, 78-79. In contrast, for Pasolini, Gordon (1996, 79) suggests, "the role of the poet casts the self as an innocent (often a mother's son)."
- <sup>112</sup> 1996, 81.
- <sup>113</sup> Quoted in Gordon 1996, 83. And for Pasolini, "every man has only one epoch/in life" (quoted in Gordon 1996, 108). That era imprints one character, a key element of one's individuation, separating subjectivity. In "A un ragazzo," Gordon (1996, 169) notes, "the melancholic tone derives in part from an acknowledgement that the poet is divided from the boy by his experience of history, and can only communicate as a father-figure, not a brother, nor as a desiring subject."
- <sup>114</sup> Quoted in Gordon 1996, 191.
- <sup>115</sup> Performed by Massimo Girotti: 1918–2003
- <sup>116</sup> Performed by Terence Stamp: 1938- .
- <sup>117</sup> 1996, 242.
- <sup>118</sup> 1996, 249.
- <sup>119</sup> 1996, 289.