

Il diverso (the different one)

Susan Potter

The flesh lodges a reading regime and contains a powerful way of seeing, through invisible eyes.

—Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism*¹

Everyone knows that Pier Paolo Pasolini was a homo, but no one knows how to talk about it. It is avoided or acknowledged before moving on to more serious, less vulgar things—poetry, cinema, reality. The proper name Pasolini often appears in a list alongside Cocteau, Genet, Rimbaud—and let’s also add Pasolini fan Bruce LaBruce—as writers, artists, and filmmakers who all stand in for the “amoral ‘criminal’ expression of desire.”² Pasolini’s sexual notoriety, his love of young rough trade, further amplified by lurid rumors of paid communal sexual practices, aka circle jerks, was perversely sanctified by his killing, its sensational publicity, and the never-ending will to know the truth of What Really Happened.³ Homosexuality as discourse, characterized by now seemingly out-moded twentieth-century registers of suspicion and connotation, continues to motor this everlasting speculation.⁴

The image of Pasolini’s dead, mutilated body is a stunning stun-grenade tossed into our contemporary happy story of marriage equality and genderqueer diversity. His body suffers, unjustly, unbearably, the disciplining forces of modernizing societies—including homosexual discourse itself—enacted by various informal, media, or state-sanctioned agents. It’s hard not to see Pasolini’s lifeless body as the condensation of all the violence he endured in his lifetime, an

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attempt to obliterate the memory of his tenacity, a testament to his persistent will to be. As Maurizio Viano reminds us, “He was tried thirty-three times—once even after his death—in a grotesque ritual in which power merely aimed at reinforcing its (self) image as power.”⁵ Being brutally outed, however damaging and difficult that was for the young poet, seems to have been the catalyst for the development of a particular Pasolinian style of publicity and bravado.

It is another gay artist, John Di Stefano, who has most perceptively drawn attention to the significance of Pasolini’s sexuality for his intellectual and creative projects. As Di Stefano writes, “Pasolini was homosexual, but there was no precedent for the *type* of homosexual he embodied, nor the version of masculinity he proposed.”⁶ Di Stefano curates this embodiment in two incompatible images that he brings together at the end of his essay/performance text “Picturing Pasolini”—an image of the gay writer/filmmaker and an image of the dead queer or *finocchio*.⁷ In the first image, by Dino Pedriali, the director sits naked on the end of a bed reading a book, his legs splayed open to reveal his sex, what was always promised but never revealed in the infamous trope of crotch shots in *Teorema/Theorem* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, IT, 1968). Created as part of a series commissioned by Pasolini for a larger project, the photograph, as Di Stefano points out, “satirizes the very notion that [Pasolini’s] (gay) body is separable from his intellect, or that the (gay) body perverts the mind of an otherwise brilliant poet and filmmaker.”⁸ On the following page of his text, Di Stefano reproduces the police photograph of Pasolini’s dead body as it was discovered in early November 1975 in Ostia, close to a popular seaside resort southwest of Rome. His justification for this second difficult-to-view and hard-to-forget image: despite all of the discursive work it performs as proof of the justifiable fate of queers, as license to gay hate, as perverse evidence for straight minds of perversion, as warning to those who challenge the social order, it has become counterintuitively valued as a gay image of resistance, like that of the dead body of Che Guevara.⁹ Bringing together this incommensurable pair of images is one of Di Stefano’s queer methods for ensuring that we keep in mind Pasolini’s gay bodies, their complicated liveliness and deadness. Their posthumous publication in the essay and accompanying performance tape is a way of extending beyond his lifetime Pasolini’s autonomous tactic of homo publicity, a kind of evasive guerrilla-style alterity.

During Pasolini’s lifetime and after his death it was impossible in the Italian cultural sphere to connect directly Pasolini’s homosexuality with his art. It was not until the early 1990s that Italian scholar Maurizio Viano was able to do so, drawing on the work of gay theorists and historians such as Richard Dyer and David Halperin to insist that “Pasolini was a great artist, not in spite of his homosexuality but in part because of it—because of what he saw from his

particular position *inside the homosexual discourse*.¹⁰ Yet being inside a homosexual discourse does not mean that one identifies with all of its many-tentacled ways of subjectifying people and their erotic lives. As Angelo Restivo suggests, commenting on *Teorema*, it was “vitaly important . . . for Pasolini to conceive of homosexuality as primarily an alterity, not an identity.”¹¹ All of Pasolini’s films, all of this writing, his key words—language, writing, poetry, cinema, reality—need to be considered in terms of Pasolini’s particular version of homosexuality and gay desire. Viano again:

It is . . . plausible to assume that “reality” became [a signifier] through which the homosexual text would *emerge from the depths*. Pasolini himself suggested the psychosexual tensions implicit in his treatment of ‘reality’ through frequent allusions to his “hallucinated, infantile, and pragmatic love for reality” as something that is “religious in that in some way it is fused, by analogy, with a sort of immense sexual fetishism.”¹²

Di Stefano picks up and reorients this discourse, ventriloquizing Pasolini’s voice, its unstable perspective, irony, and experimentalism to stage a different kind of emergence of a homo-text—or, better, homo-image—not “from the depths” but rather from the damage to the material surfaces of the printed word. In his witty, erotic photo-collage essay, “My Affair with Pasolini,” a carefully torn page disrupts the legibility of a conventional psychoanalytic reading of Pasolini’s sexual subjectivity to reveal the sexually explicit scenes (fantasies attributed to Pasolini, cultivated by Di Stefano) that lie just behind it:

Di Stefano’s text, in playfully mocking the psychoanalytic interpretation, is deliberately ambiguous and provocative—this man in the first and second lines could be Pasolini’s father, and its repeated assertion of “man” evokes in negative form the young men or teenagers who Pasolini often cruised. The detailed sexual specificity of Di Stefano’s text models in order to demonstrate how for Pasolini “the enunciation of excoriating critique depends on the monstration and exhibition of a concrete and concretely desirable body.”¹³ John David Rhodes’s point just quoted arrives via a close reading of the ambiguous bodies of the young non-actors in Pasolini’s last film, *Salò o le 120 giornate de Sodoma/Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, IT/FR, 1975), in which he confronts the “pro forma” denial of that film’s erotics.¹⁴ The performance of that denial is analogous to earlier critical failures to pay attention to Pasolini’s homosexuality.

Let us keep gay sex in mind—can we?—while at the same time recognizing that Pasolini cultivated an artistic persona and voice that sustained “the art

homosexuality. He had a morbid love for his mother, and a quite predictable hatred of his father - the man you desired the most and who you could never allow yourself to love, but had wished to possess; the man you wanted to fuck hard and violently and by whom you wanted to be fucked passionately; the man whose cock you wanted to suck as if it were a milk-giving nipple; the man who you wished would ejaculate all over your chest and whose cum would envelope you. Why did we never see this on the screen? Why did we never read this in your books? Why did we have to wait years for it to be said by someone else? Why did you deem the only acceptable way for your

Figure 1. Excerpt from John Di Stefano, "My Affair with Pasolini," in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, eds. Martha Gever, Pratibha Parmar, and John Greyson (New York: Routledge, 1993), 300. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

of having no stable discursive identity."¹⁵ He was and is a kaleidoscopic figure, with twists in perspective revealing another Pasolini that is still integral to other images of the poet-director, even if critically unseen or yet to be seen. Let us repeat one more time Teresa De Lauretis's incisive first sentence in her essay that recuperates Pasolini's film theory: "That Pier Paolo Pasolini was a man of contradiction, a figure in excess of its cultural ground, is worth repeating."¹⁶ Let us now abandon the pretty, childish metaphor of the kaleidoscope. Contradiction is an intellectual scandal, something to be avoided at all costs, a sign of ambivalence, bad thinking, of a dialectic gone awry. As Jane Mills points out in the roundtable discussion, Pasolini was not interested in utilizing the political and intellectual models of dialectical thinking. Rather he sought to contaminate dialectics, if not blow them up. Naomi Greene astutely observes that "the extreme positions he struck often had the salutary function of questioning accepted modes of thought, on the left as well as on the right."¹⁷ Reassessing Pasolini's writing (of all kinds, from essays on theory to novels, poetry, memoir, and reviews) as forward-looking contributions to critical theory, Giuliana Bruno thinks of Pasolinian contradiction as a postmodern mode of "cultural inventiveness."¹⁸ It is a way to inhabit differently, precariously, dominant social formations, to unsettle them in order to view them from gay, analogical, archaic, or Byzantine perspectives. We could say that this was Pasolini's way not of becoming a new or different type of homosexual (a personage, another case history, however transgressive) but rather of developing a strategically equivocal positionality, a positionality that we might name retrospectively as queer. Pasolini saw himself operating under the sign of contamination, violating intellectually and socially condoned ways of thinking.¹⁹ He endeavors to be "inconsumable"—in much the same way that with *Salò* he aspires to make a film that could not be digested as entertainment—in order to resist being folded into pre-existing, determining systems of thought and ideology—and sexuality.²⁰

Homo-realities

What exactly is Pasolini's homo "thing?" Once you see it you can't unsee it: homosexual subtext. What you see and don't see: the bodies of two young men writhing and fighting in the dust to the music of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Pasolini's first film, *Accattone* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, IT, 1961). But this batters down too tightly on a certain knowing style of sexual intelligibility. The so-called problem with homosexual discourse is that it can seem to be all over the place, there and not there, troubling that other unnamed (hetero)sexuality that takes its ubiquity and centrality—its naturalness—for granted.²¹ Reading for homosexuality can purify a more complex, uneven socio-cultural situation, one that is more legible in *Comizi d'amore/Love Meetings* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, IT, 1965). Pasolini appears as interviewer-provocateur in this *cinema-verité*-style documentary, teasing out the changing perspectives, values, and feelings of Italians across generations and regions towards sex, the family, and sexual identity. Quite astoundingly, as Restivo notes, that film documents the co-existence of the uneven emergence of a modern gay identity (and thus also a heterosexuality that emerges in its wake) alongside practices of sex between men organized according to different social and gendered models.²² Even if you have seen the film, it might be hard to recall Pasolini's interview with a group of young men in a bar in Catanzaro, Southern Italy. This scene, fleeting and deliberately obscured by the word "AUTOCENSURA" flaring up on screen as some of the soundtrack fades out, documents a diverse range of attitudes towards "inverts" before, as Restivo describes it, "one of the boys says, 'Even though I go with them, it disgusts me.' And then his friend says, 'I go with them too.'"²³ Even in 1965—even in 2023—we need to suspend our contemporary sexual knowledges, or what we think we know about cinema and its representations of desire.

Restivo's critical observation points to an alternative way to approach Pasolini's earlier and later films in terms of their contamination of sexuality—in the sense of the co-presence of antithetical discourses and materialities compacted across time. There is another scene much earlier in *Accattone* that, as Rhodes notes, is often discussed (or misremembered) in terms of its symbolism: the moment when Accattone (Franco Citti) stands on the balustrade of a Roman bridge across the Tiber, the Ponte Sant'Angelo, next to one of its ten angels.²⁴ Rhodes pauses over this brief sequence to articulate his approach. While he wishes to bracket metaphorical interpretations to foreground the urban, classed and historical materiality of the Rome of Pasolini's films, he nevertheless draws attention to some of the different orders of contamination of the metaphorical (sacred and profane) and the metonymic (the persistent embodied presence of working-class Romans long after their brutal displacement by fascist urban

development).²⁵ Rhodes's detailed account of the paratactical cinematography and editing of this sequence, its discontinuities and loose Kuleshov effects, demonstrates how Pasolini's celebrated valuation of the referential is always doubly coded: mediated by, and articulated to, the specificities of a film style not exactly identical to its concrete camera spaces or its fleshly camera-beings.²⁶ The lattice-like aesthetic deformations (Rhodes's word, ghosting Kracauer?) that comprise the film's referential style sustain its "brusque sensuality" (again Rhodes's phrase) anticipating indirectly (holding the potential for) the homoerotic image of the men fighting in the dust to come. Cinematically, the desire of men for each other is suspended, its particular practices and modes of being unintelligible, together and apart across the screen time and historical times of the film.

In Pasolini's later films, a more contaminative version of gay desire is figured as a negative force, one that lies in wait, latent. This is the term that D. A. Miller reaches for instead of subtext to talk about the hardly detectable presence of a homosexual discourse in *Medea* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, IT/FR/DE, 1969). Avoiding the well-worn, automatic knowingness of subtext, latency registers the difficulty of articulating the queer, (self)destructive effects of a Pasolinian gay desire: "Latency: perhaps this is why the obvious 'homo' coloration suffusing *Still Life* and *Incident* alike *defies articulation in the obvious ways*. . . . For whichever form it takes, the homo 'thing' deters all sexual expression, gay or straight."²⁷ ("Still Life" and "Incident" are Miller's campy neologisms for elements of the film's queer style, respectively its visually homoerotic inanimate group shots—or in Miller's preferred vernacular "clump-shots"—and its minor, enigmatic narrative events.) Reduced to talking archly about the director's "homo 'thing,'" Miller's phrase connotes the body (male genitalia, anus, gay sex) and at the same time a high theory abstract concept (a homo version of Lacan's *das Ding* or the Thing). For Miller, *Medea* is the one who "gets' sex," enjoys it, and understands "its ego-killing force"; she deprives Jason of "his *reasons for heterosexuality*."²⁸ By the end of the film, seeming to return to an earlier archaic, spiritual role but inhabiting a more destructive version of it, she is no longer wife or mother but child-killer, destroyer of family, alliance and sexuality alike. In Pasolinian fashion, Miller recuperates *Medea* to a still persistent campy gay fandom and queer theory's antisocial thesis, the self-shattering negativity of sex that gay desire makes culturally visible.²⁹

If *Medea* makes only just detectable the capacity of gay desire to render any kind of sexuality impossible, in *Teorema* gay desire functions in a different negative form: pleasurable and passive, and seemingly concretely, cinematically embodied in the body of its seductive star Terence Stamp. Across the first half of the film, the unnamed visitor played by Stamp solicits as if through some

weird gravitational force a schematic series of sexual and subjective crises in the other characters, members of a wealthy factory-owning Milanese family: mother, daughter, father, son, and the woman whose labor supports this heteronormative enterprise, their maid. The second half of the film documents the after-shocks of their sexual encounters: the maid's pagan-like spiritual awakening culminating in a miraculous levitation before her return to earth in a ritual burial; the daughter's catatonia, unable to inhabit a "normal" heterosexual subjectivity; the son's coming out and sublimated artistic creativity; the mother's gay-like cruising of young men who appear as strange, not-quite-identical replicas of the Stamp figure; the final catastrophic collapse of the father's straight sexual subjectivity and social identity as he strips himself naked in the proximity of a public toilet, in a train station, a possible gay beat, before suddenly reappearing, screaming, in a grey stony desertscape. Damon R. Young, in a very fine close reading of the film, argues that the family's visitor provokes a desire that, in gay French philosopher Guy Hocquenghem's words, "has no place in the social structure."³⁰ In other words, quoting Hocquenghem again, the film mobilizes gay desire as the overdetermined cultural expression of "something—some aspect of desire—which appears nowhere else, and that something is not merely the accomplishment of the sexual act with a person of the same sex."³¹ The beautiful visitor is a visual lure who seems to but does not embody this gay desire structurally; rather, as Young argues,

This "no place" is inscribed *not in any image of sex between men or representation of homosexual identity* . . . but rather in a kind of perversion or *dérive* of the film's syntactical construction. . . .³²

There is no space here to appreciate the sophisticated nuance of Young's argument but only to notice that even with this turn, Pasolini's film aesthetics remain inevitably anchored to, and dependent on, the alluring body of a young male star—even after, and perhaps even more so, he disappears from screen to become only a recent memory.

Salò's coda

Perhaps that is also the fate of the two anonymous male figures dancing together at the end of *Salò*. In the room from which the four elites—the Duke, Bishop, Magistrate, and President—take turns to watch the torture in the courtyard, a young fascist guard sitting on the floor next to a radio turns the dial to what sounds like popular American band music. While this music track known as "Son Tanto Triste" was original to *Salò*, it is overly—deliberately—derivative,

pastiching the languid, lulling beats of the Hollywood dance hall.³³ How to read this rarely discussed scene that on its face gives us a benign image of two men moving intimately together?³⁴ Both have dark curly hair, a tangible reminder (remainder) of Pasolini's former lover and muse, Giovanni "Ninetto" Davoli. They are barely distinguishable, embodying fascist and capitalist tendencies towards standardization, while also condensing the physical ideals of beauty of the girls and boys of the opening sequence—a demonstration of the flattening, de-pluralizing effects of a phallogentric visual economy. The film offers a final image not of sex but of physical tenderness between men, a connotatively gay vision undercut by the spoken word when one asks, "What's your girlfriend's name?" and the other responds, "Marguerita."³⁵ Are they not the most watchable bodies of the entire film precisely because in their visual anticipation of the progressive acceptance of the gay couple, they shift, if ever so imperceptibly, the queasy erotic ambivalence that Rhodes identifies?³⁶

The dancing couple concludes a film whose momentum is driven by a deeply misogynist symbolic logic, distributed and sustained by the film's distinctive aesthetic regime. For Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, the point of Pasolini's loose adaptation of Marquis de Sade's novel, *Les 120 journées de Sodome, ou l'École du libertinage/The 120 Days of Sodom, or the School of Licentiousness*, is not its thematic and spectatorial structure of complicity but rather the specific way in which the film solicits our "nonmoral" interest in watching violence.³⁷ Bersani and Dutoit argue that the film demonstrates and lures spectators into a different kind of dispersed state of mind: "By pleasantly scattering our aesthetic attention, *Salò* keeps us from focusing directly on narrative centers of violence."³⁸ The dance scene is the film's final proof. The pan shot that sets up the scene encodes this scattering of attention: the camera first centers in the frame the back of the voyeurs' chair, a dark impenetrable blot resembling a schematic eye, before panning left to bring the two guards into the same shot. This cinematic articulation, framing their bodies in the same space, is the starting point of the dance scene. The movement of the two guards towards each other is accomplished again cinematically via a shot-reverse-shot structure, but this only commences a short time later, after the final sequence of deranged, eroticized torture, implying that the dancing couple are its reverse sound-image. Despite repeated viewing, it is hard to keep in mind the exact sequence of shots that comprise the dance scene because the final torture scene interrupts it.³⁹ In other words, the pleasant memory of the dance scene includes within it the structural occlusion or forgetting of the violence within which it is enmeshed. The dance scene gathers all of the film's preceding ambivalent, self-dampened arousal and nonmoral interest in violence into its final, curious disturbed form. In our era of media distraction and ecological catastrophe, even if we can

acknowledge, as James Vaughan does in the roundtable discussion, that Pasolini was a prophet in his understanding of the deep, pervasive damage to human subjectivities wrought by consumer capitalism, it still seems hard to keep a bead on Pasolini's hard-won perspective.

Notes

1. Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Theory and Practice* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1993), 57.
2. Julianne Pidduck, "New Queer Cinema and Experimental Video," in *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michele Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 81.
3. Barth David Schwartz's biography, originally published in 1995, tracks the public and private circulations of knowledge of Pasolini's sexuality during his lifetime in a stunning portrait of the poet-filmmaker's life and work: see *Pasolini Requiem*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).
4. See D. A. Miller, "Anal Rope," *Representations* 32 (1990): 114–33.
5. Viano, 15. Other intellectuals and artists were also often attacked and censored in this period, including Cecilia Mangini who collaborated with Pasolini on several films; for her account of this context, see Gianluca Sciannameo, "An Interview with Cecilia Mangini," translated by Liva Franchini, <https://www.another-screen.com/cecilia-mangini>, accessed March 1, 2023, originally published in *Nelle indie di quaggiù: Ernesto de Martino e il cinema etnografico* (Palomar: Bari, 2006).
6. Di Stefano, "Picturing Pasolini," *Art Journal* 56, no. 2 (1997): 23, original emphasis.
7. Di Stefano, "Picturing," 22 (figure 8) and 23 (figure 9). The essay is an abridged script from a performance tape, one of a number of works comprising Di Stefano's decades-long Pasolini Project, see <https://www.johndistefano.net/pasolini-project-2002-2005>.
8. Di Stefano, "Picturing," 22.
9. Di Stefano, "Picturing," 23.
10. Viano, 14, my emphasis. Dyer had already been making this connection in his groundbreaking work from the late 1970s, see for example his essay on Pasolini's homosexuality in *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, ed. Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1977), and also the edited collection *Gays and Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (London: BFI, 1977).
11. Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 91.
12. Viano, 16, my emphasis, quoting Pasolini from "Quips on the Cinema," in *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 225, the English translation of the writer/director's essays originally published in Italian as *Empirismo Eretico* (Milano: Garzanti, 1972).
13. John David Rhodes, "Watchable Bodies: *Salò's* Young Non-Actors," *Screen* 53, no. 4 (2012): 458. Against the appealing claims—or, perhaps, social normative demands—to

- understand the film as not erotic, against the argument (Pasolini's and critics') that the film is "inconsumable," Rhodes brilliantly asserts otherwise.
14. Rhodes sets out compelling evidence of the "litany of assent to the conviction that the film is nonerotic and nonpornographic . . . [that] seems a prerequisite talking or thinking about this film." "Watchable," 454–5.
 15. Viano, viii. Pasolini understood—instinctively, intellectually—what Leo Bersani later identifies in American culture that "the attempted stabilizing of [sexual] identity is inherently a disciplinary project": Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3.
 16. Teresa De Lauretis, "Re-Reading Pasolini's Essays on Cinema," *Italian Quarterly* 21–22 (1980–81): 159.
 17. Naomi Greene, "Reading Pasolini Today," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, no. 2 (1984): 145.
 18. Giuliana Bruno, "Heresies: The Body of Pasolini's Semiotics," *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 3 (1991): 39.
 19. Contamination for Pasolini was this and more. For an elegant account that draws attention to contamination as the condition of historical reality, biblical style, and a heterogeneous film aesthetics, see Noa Steimatsky's chapter, "Archaic: Pasolini on the Face of the Earth," in *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
 20. In her introduction to the Sydney screening of *Salò* on 11 December 2022, Catharine Lumby reminded us of Pasolini's way of approaching this film and others as "inconsumable" or "indigestible": see Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Le regole di un'illusione: I film, il cinema*, eds. Laura Betti and Michele Gulinucci (Roma: Associazione Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1991), 190. Compare Rhodes, "Watchable."
 21. On how this interdependent discursive structure emerges as an effect of classical Hollywood style under the Production Code and persists after its demise, see respectively Novid Parsi, "Projecting Heterosexuality, or What Do You Mean by 'It'?" *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 13, no. 2 (38) (1996): 161–86; and Lee Wallace, "Continuous Sex: The Editing of Homosexuality in Bound and Rope," *Screen* 41, no. 4 (2000): 369–87.
 22. Restivo, 81–3.
 23. Restivo, 82.
 24. Gian Lorenzo Bernini redesigned the bridge in the late 17th century but did not make all of its angels. The angel in this scene, the Angel with a Cross, was sculpted by Ercole Ferrata. Thanks to Jane Mills for pointing this out to me, and see her essay on *Accattone* in this Dossier.
 25. John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 44–5.
 26. For a similarly sophisticated approach to Pasolini's art historical and referential film style

- via a reading of place and landscape in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo/The Gospel According to Matthew*, IT/FR, 1964), see Steimatsky: “This is the face of the earth. Its expression, its return look, its *praesentia*, is unraveled by a consecrating perception, now identified with the movie camera” (165). I am experimenting here with John Osias’s memorable phrase “Suddenly the flesh and ‘camera-beings’ *disengage*,” (original emphasis) in the opening of his review “Pasolini’s *Medea*: Nature Uberalles,” *Daily Californian*, August 19, 1971, <https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/52932?ln=en#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=3&r=0&xywh=3908%2C1187%2C6330%2C4046>, accessed January 26, 2023. I first encountered this phrase in Daniel Humphrey’s book *Archaic Modernism: Queer Poetics in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020). Like me, Humphrey finds Osias’s language “useful and evocative” (81).
27. D. A. Miller, “*Medea*,” *Film Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2012): 14, my emphasis. While latency evokes the sense of a hidden force, it is also analogous to a more negative potential, in the Agambian sense.
 28. Miller, 16, original emphasis.
 29. For a taster of the genealogy and debates regarding the so-called “antisocial thesis,” see for example Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean, “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 819–28. One of the reasons Pasolini should be of continued interest for scholars of queer cinema and queer theory is the ways in which, through diverse genres of writing and film aesthetics, he articulates the conscious, psychic, and culturally material specificities and pluralities of gay subjectivity, homosexual discourse, same-sex desire, and sex. On *Medea* as gay icon, see for example Humphrey’s touching anecdote in his “Acknowledgments” about a Pasolini costume party that in part also memorializes Douglas Crimp, viii. For more evidence of Pasolini’s camp following, see Viano’s account of attending a screening of *Salò* in which the gay male audience anticipated and mimicked lines of dialogue and action, 298–99.
 30. Damon R. Young, “*Teorema*’s Death Drive,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Queer Cinema*, eds. Ronald Gregg and Amy Villarejo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 338; citing Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 71; the original in French is Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel* (Paris: Fayard, 1972).
 31. Hocquenghem, 50.
 32. Young, 338, my emphasis.
 33. Uncredited in the film, the track composed by Franco Ansaldo and Alfredo Bracchi is included in the CD collection “Pier Paolo Pasolini” (Mediane Srl. Italy, 2008).
 34. Theatre director Neil Bartlett’s assessment of this scene is similar to that which emerges from my close analysis:

In the film’s final sequence, two young men dance in a luminous room full of paintings. Does watching them make us dream of a beautiful future in which these young men might somehow magically escape from all the horrors? Or does their clumsy

waltz in fact remind us of all the crimes they make no attempt to stop, indeed see no need to stop? . . . The last shot, despite being the calmest and possibly the loveliest in the film, typifies its power. Thirty years on [after first viewing the film in 1979], it now seems to me the most desolate, the most disturbing, the most challenging of all the film's images.

See Neil Bartlett, "Watching *Salò*," 16, in *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1975; The Criterion Collection, 2008), DVD booklet.

35. Armando Maggi discusses the final scene, briefly asserting, contra Roland Barthes, that the film is not a failure because it does have a proper ending. Maggi notes the scene's "implicit homoerotic undertone" while arguing that the ending signifies a new beginning in its evocation of the anticipated marriage of the one of the guards: see further Armando Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 337–338.
36. Compare the two female captives who have sex together. On this scene, Viano remarks that "one finds in *Salò* the first and only example of female homosexuality in Pasolini's films, and it has positive connotations" (300). Given the lack of subjectivity of these figures, the place of this scene in the sequence of betrayals that leads to the scene of cross-racial sex and murder, I am not so sure.
37. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, "Merde Alors," *October* 13 (1980): 32. Even though I am familiar with and admire Bersani's style and his well-known strategy of opening essays with a highly provocative statement—a tactic I have deliberately echoed in the first sentence of this short essay—as a female embodied person it was still shocking to read Bersani and Dutoit's opening line: "The vagina is a logical defect in nature" (Bersani and Dutoit, 23). They are, of course, inhabiting the misogynistic perspective of the film and the text it adapts, but still. Apart from Catharine Lumby, who introduced *Salò* at the Sydney retrospective, almost all of the women I know (no, not a statistically valid sample) have viewed the film only once, if at all. In his discussion of viewing *Salò* in public, Viano testifies that in his experience, audiences were usually dominated by men (298).
38. Bersani and Dutoit, 29.
39. The film's taint extends beyond its spectatorial experience to its critical perception. Viano, for example, presages his allegorical reading of *Salò* with a confession: "I admit to my own inability to derive theoretical insight from these scattered observations" (299).