

illusions

**PICTURING PASOLINI:
SUBTITLES & SUBTEXTS.**

An exhibition by John Di Stefano,
The Moving Image Centre, Auckland,
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Already one third of the way into his superb book *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, Sam Rhodie is forced to stop and confess: "What makes writing about Pasolini so difficult is that the only effective way to grasp his thought is to find in one's own writing an analogy of it". It is to John Di Stefano's credit that with this installation *Picturing Pasolini* — comprising video projections, photography, and interactive book-works — he has managed to find *his* "analogy" of Pasolini's work through an admixture of autobiography, photo-biography and what might be called "fantasy projection".

In "Picturing Pasolini" (first published in the *Art Journal*, Summer 1997) Di Stefano extemporizes captions on Pasolini's photo-history: from his passion for soccer, the farcical attempt by the right-wing newspaper *Il Tempo* to frame Pasolini for a gas station robbery by publishing a publicity film still showing him holding a machine gun, to the image of Pasolini's beaten and crushed corpse after his assassination in 1975. An image, says Di Stefano, that "legitimizes gay bashing. It glorifies and warrants violence. It celebrates hatred. It is a testimony to the fears of a society. This is the last image we have to 'remember' Pasolini by."

Another of Di Stefano's texts, "My Affair With Pasolini", slides the photo-commentary (no doubt uncomfortably for some) towards the "repressions", but also the "releases",

of Pasolini's portrayal of sexuality on screen. It speaks to and for his posthumous life, reputation, existence as gay icon and weaves Di Stefano into this narrative. This is Di Stefano's "affair" with Pasolini (in the dictionary sense of "something that needs attention"). This is Di Stefano cruising Pasolini.

Di Stefano's stated manifesto is "to excise certain questions about the intersection of nationalism and sexuality embedded within the director's work and public life".

As well as the unbound book-works consisting of transparencies and a light box, the Moving Image Centre installation consisted of four polaroid prints (*Tenebre*, "Shadows") where Pasolini's image was discernible but very faint, and videos including one that projected Pasolini's words from the ceiling onto a "screen" of paper inserted into an old-fashioned typewriter. Taken together these "works" form, Di Stefano maintains, "a sort of alternative museum, a critical reframing of the public archive of press imagery, film material, and literary production left behind by the slain filmmaker".

Let us see if we can understand what Di Stefano is doing here, see if we can grasp the "analogy" he wishes to make. We can do that through an examination of Pasolini's own artistic practice, taking as an example an aspect of Pasolini's work which Di Stefano doesn't discuss, his dialect poetry, where the original in dialect

would seem to be translated into Italian at the foot of the page. As Sam Rhodie has pointed out, in fact, "the original in dialect is not the poem in dialect but the poem in Italian translated into dialect" and presented to the reader as a sort of false original. This is not a falsification on Pasolini's part but a sort of deliberate double movement, one that we can also find in his cinema: each poem (image) is poised about to become another poem (image).

The relationship between original and translation is one of double-reversal and mirrors Di Stefano's paradoxical relationship to Pasolini's work. The dialect poem (Pasolini) is original *and* translation and the Italian poem (Di Stefano) is translation *and* original. Di Stefano's "analogy" is a second-order representation of an imagined hypothetical reality, nevertheless factual, whose fictional likeness to a presumed reality is open and acknowledged.

He writes: "I saw Pier Paolo for the first time through a store window in New York's Little Italy. We cruised each other through the glass. It was 1966 and Pasolini was on his first (and only) trip to North America. When we were in bed later on I told him that I too was Italian; he wouldn't believe me."

As a first-generation Italian-Canadian now living and working in New Zealand, Di Stefano maintains that his relationship with Pasolini is "not that of a quasi-biographer, but that of a translator". To translate means many things, among them: to circulate, to transport, to disseminate, to make more accessible, to be the bearer of culture, to acculturate. The success of this exhibition was nothing but these possibilities taken together, co-present, overlapping and contradictory.