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Introduction

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ABSTRACT: Pier Paolo Pasolini's own phrase 'the scandal of self-contradiction' ('lo scandalo del contraddirmi') from 'Le ceneri di Gramsci' (1957) encapsulates one of his most salient characteristics. Deeply influenced by a religious childhood, he became an atheist without loosing a powerful sense of the sacred; he was a Marxist expelled by the Italian Communist Party, a revolutionist with a great admiration for the past, a deeply anti-bourgeois bourgeois.

INTRODUCTION

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Pier Paolo Pasolini's own phrase 'the scandal of self-contradiction' ('lo scandalo del contraddirmi') from *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (1957) encapsulates one of his most salient characteristics. Deeply influenced by a religious childhood, he became an atheist without loosing a powerful sense of the sacred; he was a Marxist expelled by the Italian Communist Party, a revolutionist with a great admiration for the past, a deeply anti-bourgeois bourgeois. The Italian poet, novelist, and director seemed to be constantly striving to deepen and multiply inner contradictions and to make them a provocative and programmatic cipher of his own life and poetics.

The contributions to this volume explore a particular constellation within Pasolini's tensions. They were first presented at the 2011 conference 'Jenseits Europas: Pasolini und das abendländische Erbe' ('Beyond Europe: Pasolini and the Western Heritage'), which took as its starting point the observation that, during a period of forward-looking Western modernism at the height of the 1960s economic boom, Pasolini engaged intensively with classical texts from the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions. To name just the most famous examples, he wrote the play *Pilade* (1966–70) and the film script *San Paolo* (1967/68) and made the films *Edipo re* (1967), *Medea* (1969), and *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* (1969/70).

However, Pasolini was not only a classically-trained philologist, deeply rooted in European culture and able to translate Greek tragedies into Italian. He was at the same time a surprisingly modern figure, moving between and beyond different traditions, identities, and positions, as well as a radical critic of contemporary capitalism and consumerism, constantly striving to find a sacred reality within or beyond a homogenized Western world. Pasolini looked to Africa and Asia for possible alternatives to the hegemony of Western neo-capitalism and consumerism, and, on closer inspection, his interest in ancient myths and texts was also an attempt to look for the 'other' – inside and outside of Europe.

After recognizing that both the Italian rural communities and the sub-proletariat of Rome and Naples had been assimilated and integrated into capitalism, he placed his hopes in the non-industrialized spaces of Asia and, in particular, Africa. The way in which Pasolini engaged with Aeschylus's *Oresteia* can be taken as a good example of the complexity with which he approached and re-wrote European Classical texts. In the case of the film *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*, which proposes to transpose Aeschylus's trilogy from ancient Greece to contemporary Africa, a temporal and a geographic other of the modern West constantly shift into each other, ending up thoroughly intertwined. The operation is that of a multistable displacement that not only acknowledges the problems of interpreting modern Africa through the lenses of Europe's past but also highlights those problems and questions its own premises. Pasolini's play *Pilade* imagines the continuation of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and challenges the founding myth of Western democracy. Projecting into the myth the atrocities of twentieth-century fascism and Communism as well as the delusions of economic growth, it unsettles any sense of development through progressive rationalization and integration. In particular, through the constant reversals undergone by the title figure, who ends up isolated and abjected as truly other, it also reflects upon the aporias facing intellectuals and critics of contemporary capitalism.

Finally, in the film project *San Paolo*, Pasolini examines the intersection of contemporary questions with biblical answers; he seems particularly interested in sharpening Paul's inner tensions in such a way that any reconciliation or solution appears to be impossible. The 'Damascene conversion' turns into a dramatic aspect change from persecutor to persecuted, but Paul's subsequent Christian missionary practice and the foundation of the Church are presented not as positive outcomes of this event, but rather as problematic consequences of a reversion to a negative, power-related pragmatism.

In all these cases, we encounter unstable and constantly shifting perspectives, which lead us back to another important source for this volume: in the context of the research focus 'Kippbilder/Multistable Figures' of the ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, a study group[1] was formed under the research hypothesis that multistable figures may provide a productive model for approaching the unique, ex-centric way in which Pasolini stages and manages to sustain apparently incompatible positions.[2]

When one sees a multistable figure, such as the famous image that can be seen as a duck or a rabbit, one sees either one aspect or the other, but not both at the same time (Fig. 1 in the article by Manuele Gragnolati). Two shifts take place from one aspect to the other, which are connected but which also remain symbolically distinct. In the case of the so-called Rubin vase, both aspects even contradict each other to a certain extent; nevertheless, one cannot reduce the image to either aspect. Indeed, the image entails both aspects, but it doesn't form a synthesis. The phenomenon of multistability can therefore provide an interesting model to understand better Pasolini's attempt to create contradictions without ending up in any synthesis or reconciliation.
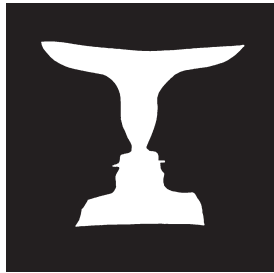
Rubin Vase, in Edgar Rubin, *Visuell wahrgenommene Figuren*
(Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1921).

One could say that in Pasolini's hands, the Greek and Judeo-Christian classics transform themselves into unsettling figures constantly shifting between West and East, North and South, the present and the past, rationality and myth, identity and otherness. Subjectivities, geographies, and traditions are thereby intertwined in a complex and unstable way and become multistable. With his 'euro-eccentric' striving against consistent identities as well as against the uprooting process of capitalist homogenization, Pasolini appears more inspiring than ever in a moment when Europe is constantly reduced to an anxious identity ('the Fortress Europe'), to a business location for investors, or to a 'monetary union'.

The contributions to this volume are arranged around what might be understood as three multistable figures – subjectivities/geographies, geographies/traditions, and traditions/subjectivities. They are followed by Alain Badiou's paper 'Destruction, Negation, Subtraction', by the

English translation of the poem 'L'uomo di Bandung', which is accompanied by some photographs taken during a trip to Africa made by Pasolini in the early sixties, and by Joulia Strauss's diptych 'mythisnow—pasoliniandeuropetoday'. The contributions belong to different intellectual and disciplinary fields, but they are bound together by a fascination with Pasolini's ability to recognize contradictions, to intensify and multiply them, as well as to make them aesthetically and politically productive.

SUBJECTIVITIES / GEOGRAPHIES

The volume begins and ends with Pasolini's critique of an ideal of reason which, as inherited from Greek antiquity and allegorized, for instance, by the goddess Athena in Aeschylus, was considered to be capable of founding a rational moral and political order that would succeed in integrating different subject positions and subjectivities without relapsing, through violent exclusions of otherness, into the very barbarism that it attributes to historical and geographic others. As Christoph F. E. Holzhey's contribution '"La vera Diversità": Multistability, Circularity, and Abjection in Pasolini's *Pilade*' shows, Pasolini's imagined continuation of the *Oresteia* challenges an ideology of rational foundation and progress by moving through a series of aspect changes prompted by sudden events that allow for some integration while also creating new divisions. After all possible alliances among the principal characters – Orestes, Electra, and Pylades – have been played through, Pylades curses reason for its deceptive, consoling, and violent function and embraces his abjected position of true diversity beyond intelligibility. However, Holzhey argues, rather than functioning as the play's telos, this ending is an open one and participates in the paradoxical performance of a self-contradictory subjectivity and a circular temporality without entirely giving up hope for a truly different alternative.

Robert S. C. Gordon's article 'Pasolini as Jew, Between Israel and Europe' examines a remarkable trope in Pasolini's encounter with the cultures and geographies of Europe and its beyond: his imaginary identification with the figure of the Jew. Gordon examines in turn the site of Israel and its Jewish citizens; the *Lager* and the Jews as victims of genocide; and finally the figure of Saint Paul and his earlier Jewish identity

as Saul, both sacred and a figure of the Law, as a model for the twenti-eth-century Church and its ambiguous response to Nazism. In all three of these threads, Pasolini's Jew is a 'queer' and destabilizing trope for exploring the border of the European and the non-European, the self and the other.

Giovanna Trento's article 'Pier Paolo Pasolini and Panmeridional Italianness' engages Pasolini's aesthetic, poetic, and political approach in terms of the complementary dichotomy of national and 'local' issues, on the one hand, and transnational and panmeridional topoi, on the other. Trento argues that despite his 'Third World' and Marxist sympa-thies, Pasolini showed strong poetic and political attention to national narratives and the building of Italianness. But Pasolini's 'desperate love' for Italy and Italianness, Trento argues, can be fully grasped only if we read it in the light of his fluid, transnational and panmeridional approach marked by different – and at times antithetical – factors, such as the pan-Africanist perspective and the colonial memory. Pasolini was indeed able to build a deterritorialized and idealized never-ending South: the Pan-South (*Panmeridione*) – that is, a fluid, non-geographical topos where 'traditional' values are used in non-traditional and subver-sive ways with the goal of resisting industrialization, mass media, and late-capitalist alienation.

Agnese Grieco's paper 'The Body of the Actor: Notes on the Rela-tionship Between the Body and Acting in Pasolini's Cinema' deals with the specific physiognomy of the actor within Pasolini's 'cinema of poetry'. It argues that Pasolini's films allow the spectator to experience directly a complex and polyvalent reality beyond the traditional idea of 'representation'. As a fragment of that reality, actors quote and present themselves beyond and through their interpretations of a role. Instead of conceiving of the actor as a 'professional of fiction', Pasolini employs a variety of actors who are able fully to convey their own anthropologi-cal history. It is particularly the body of the actor, Grieco concludes, that becomes a door opening towards a deeper reality. For instance, the figure of Ninetto Davoli can push us back towards Greek antiquity, and the codified art of the comedian Totò or the iconic fixity of Maria Cal-las can interact with the African faces of the possible interpreters of an African *Oresteia*.

Claudia Peppel's essay 'The Guest: Transfiguring Indifference in *Teorema*' explores the figure of the guest, which has always been closely connected with myth and whose appearance often triggers the dramatic

conflict. Peppel focuses on *Teorema*, in which a sensual stranger causes a bourgeois family to acknowledge its delusions. When he departs, the members of the family are left in a state of unfulfilled yearning, searching for new meaning. While critical literature on Pasolini regularly points to the importance of the figure of the guest but rarely analyzes it, Peppel discusses theories of the guest and hospitality to illuminate the role of the stranger in Pasolini's film. The guest's exceptional state, which is removed from everyday life and removes others from their everyday lives, is meticulously staged and resembles the evenly-suspended attention of the psychoanalyst. He triggers projections, desires, and, ultimately, existential crises.

GEOGRAPHIES/TRADITIONS

Manuele Gragnolati's paper 'Analogy and Difference: Multistable Figures in Pasolini's *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*' discusses Pasolini's preference for the figure of contradiction and his opposition to Hegelian dialectics by exploring his attempt to look at Africa's process of modernization and democratization in the 1960s as analogous to the synthetic transformation of the Furies into Eumenides at the end of Aeschylus's trilogy. Gragnolati shows that Pasolini is aware of the dangers of analogy, which risks imposing the author's or filmmaker's symbolic order onto that of the 'other' represented in the text or film, and he argues that Pasolini seeks to deal with this danger by constantly shifting back and forth between differing positions. *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* can thereby be thought as a multistable figure that is left suspended and not only resists synthesis, but also problematizes its own feasibility and challenges its own legitimacy.

Silvia Mazzini's article 'Pasolini and India: De- and Re-Construction of a Myth', argues that while in the 1960s the myth of India became a veritable spiritual fashion, for Pasolini this fashion trivialized the sharp contradictions of a country at once poor and splendid, full of traditions and subversive, rich with mysticism and pragmatic vitality. The collection of journalistic articles *L'odore dell India* (1961) and the documentary *Appunti per un film sull'India* (1968), which originate from Pasolini's first journeys to the so-called 'Third World', intertwine sharp sociological analyses with instinctual observations and remarks. Mazzini shows that between the effluvia of incense and the adventures

of a tiger, one can catch a glimpse of the Pasolinian vision of a humanity which is at once disruptive, archaic, and subversive, and which represents an alternative to the standardization of the consumerist society and its tendency to suppress and absorb any cultural difference.

Francesca Cadel's paper 'Outside Italy: Pasolini's Transnational Visions of the Sacred and Tradition' points out that in the 1940s and 1950s Pasolini's themes were all related to the specificity of Italian society, history, and traditions, while, beginning with the 1960s, Pasolini started travelling around the world, widening his perspectives on a rapidly changing world. Hence he developed new critical patterns, combining an increasing interest in sprawling transnational post-colonial economies with his strenuous defence of tradition and the sacred within human societies. Cadel uses different examples—including Pasolini's Indian travelogues—to show how his initial devotion to Italian millenary traditions and peasant cultures finally led to an open vision and understanding of human behaviours and mores, beyond any national boundary.

Pasolini's literature, film, theatre, and essays engaged with Classical tragedy from the mid-1960s onwards. As Bernhard Groß shows in his paper 'Reconciliation and Stark Incompatibility: Pasolini's "Africa" and Greek Tragedy', this engagement forms a modality in Pasolini's politics of aesthetics that seeks to grasp the fundamental transformation from a rural-proletarian to a petit-bourgeois Italy. Since the mid-'60s, Pasolini was concerned with the bourgeoisie and its utopian potentials, which he sought to make productive by reading Classical tragedy as a possibility to make contradictions visible. Pasolini realized his reading of the Classical tragedy by having 'Africa' and 'Europe' – as he understood them – confront one another without mediation. By means of film analyses and film theory, Groß argues that this confrontation, especially in the films on the ancient world, generates an aesthetic place where the incompatible can unfold in the spectators' experience.

TRADITIONS/SUBJECTIVITIES

By focusing on Pasolini's uncompleted film project *San Paolo*, Luca Di Blasi's article 'One Divided by Another: Split and Conversion in Pasolini's *San Paolo*' analyzes the notion of split (the split in the structure of time and, above all, the split of the figure of Paul) and concentrates

especially on the very moment of Paul's Damascene conversion. Di Blasi refers to the *Kippbild* as a model that can be used to understand better certain ambivalences in Pasolini's Paul. Locating Pasolini's reading of the founder of the Church in a triangulation with two major contemporary philosophers, Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, Di Blasi shows that two opposing possibilities of interpreting Paul – as militant subject of a universal event and its necessary consequences (Badiou) and as representative of softness, weakness, poverty, *homo sacer* (Agamben) – fit perfectly with the two aspects of Pasolini's Paul. Pasolini's profoundly-split Paul thus represents a dichotomy which disunites two major figures of contemporary leftist thought.

Bruno Besana's article 'Badiou's Pasolini: The Problem of Subtractive Universalism' also deals with Pasolini's script about Saint Paul, but from the perspective of Alain Badiou's theoretical essay *Saint Paul and the Foundation of Universalism* and of Badiou's different thoughts on Pasolini, on the logic of emergence of novelty, and on its thwarted relation with universalism. Two main points appear in Besana's comparative reading. First, the idea that radical novelty or change can only be built in a 'subtractive manner', i.e. via the appearance of something that, by its sole presence, erodes the consistency upon which the present is structured. This is developed through Pasolini's ideas of 'inactuality' and 'forza del passato' and by Badiou's concept of 'event'. Second, a fundamental paradox inherent to the logic of change: change is only possible if it is organized in a set of coherent consequences, but the organized mode (for instance, the party) of such consequences inevitably reduces change to a constant compromise with the present.

Hervé Joubert-Laurencin's article 'Figura Lacrima', which explores Pasolini's figure of Christ, consists of two interconnected parts. The part called 'Lacrima' argues that Pasolini's Christ sheds a small tear which is analogous to the salvific tear of Dante's Bonconte da Montefeltro. This heretical tear is not explicitly referred to or shown but can only be perceived through the coherent text represented by the ensemble of Pasolini's films. The part called 'Figura' argues that Pasolini invents the new concept of 'figural integration', which extends beyond Erich Auerbach's analysis of medieval figural and typological interpretation and allows him to conceptualize a kind of non-dichotomous tension between the poles structuring his thought and art. Joubert-Laurencin argues thereby that Pasolini's scandal of Christ's small tear is not the simple provocation of a sinful Christ, but the utopian image of a West

that frees itself from its own closure through the promise of another world, coming not from somewhere else but from the powers of an outside that it possesses within itself.

Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky's paper 'Cinematographic Aesthetics as Subversion of Moral Reason in Pasolini's *Medea*' explores the 1969 film *Medea*. Pasolini's Medea, masterfully played by Maria Callas, betrays her homeland and her origin, stabs both her children, sets her house on fire, and dispossesses Jason of his sons' corpses. But Deuber-Mankowsky argues that it is ultimately not these acts that render the film particularly disturbing and disconcerting, but, rather, the fact that the spectator is left behind in suspension precisely because Medea cannot be easily condemned for her acts. Pasolini's film and its cinematographic aesthetics thereby not only subvert the projection of Medea into the prehistorical world of madness and perversion, but also undermine belief in the validity of the kind of moral rationality developed and constituted in an exemplary way by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. In particular, Pasolini seems to relate conceptually to Nietzsche's artistic-philosophical transfiguration of Dionysus and to accuse belief in a world of reasons of failing to grasp the groundlessness, irrationality, or even a-rationality of reason itself.

NOTES

1   See the materials available at <http://www.ici-berlin.org/core-project-spannung-tension/kippbildermultistable-figures>. Also originating from the same project are the following volumes: Sara Fortuna, *Wittgensteins Philosophie des Kippbilds. Aspektwechsel, Ethik, Sprache* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2012) and Multistable Figures: *On the Critical Potentials of Ir/Reversible Aspect-Seeing*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey (Vienna: Turia + Kant, forthcoming).

2   See also <http://pasolini.ici-berlin.org>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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