

## CHAPTER 5

### Pasolini's Acceptance

#### *Rei Terada*

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Writing “on June 15, 1975”—“an election day,” he observes—Pier Paolo Pasolini composed a terse text of three or four pages, “Repudiation [Abiura],” to preface an edition of the film scripts of his *Trilogy of Life*. *Trilogy of Life* is what Pasolini called his films *Decameron* (1971), *Canterbury Tales* (1972), and *Arabian Nights* (1974), and the films are discussed, by others and most of all by Pasolini himself, as sensuous presentations of the vitality of the poor.<sup>1</sup> In “Repudiation” Pasolini claims to abjure his erstwhile goals of celebrating the innocence of the body and the political potential of “the youths and boys of the Roman subproletariat.”<sup>2</sup> Further, he asserts that the potential must never have existed as he imagined it (xviii), or else the youth would never have been able to participate so fully, as he thinks they do, in the degraded condition of Italian society: “If those who were *then* thus and so, have been able to become *now* thus and so, it means that they were potentially such already then; therefore, also their way of being *then* is devalued by the present. . . . The collapse of the present implies the collapse of the past” (xviii–xix). In light of the lives of the youth, Pasolini decides that he can no longer believe in the political and moral benefits of what was called in the 1970s “sexual liberalization” (xix). Although Pasolini’s motives and concepts are necessarily unclear in a text so short, what he is negating in existential terms, as we’ll see, includes both parliamentary politics (election day) and the early 1970s social movements that cast themselves as alternatives to it. And he does not fail to ask the obvious next question: “Where will the repudiation of the *Trilogy* lead me?”

Pasolini negates his personal and public projects simultaneously, assuming their psychological inextricability.<sup>3</sup> He ceases to believe in people he knows—the “beloved faces of yesterday” (xx), “private sexual lives” (xviii)—

and also in the potential of a class, a belief on which his work and activities had thoroughly depended. What interests me initially in Pasolini's account is its separation of particularities that count as lost, and which he must bury and mourn, from a political life that he considers nonexistent and not possibly existent, and which he refuses to treat with a similar respect. It would confer too much tangibility on political Italy to treat it as extinct. Yet the period in which Pasolini lives extinguishes many forms of social being, and a tenuousness about one's very sense of existence is a common problem. The difference between these things must somehow be registered, his essay suggests. In what follows, I would like to ask what function Pasolini's insistence on existential terms—what he and others were, their way of being or not—may have, and how it is related to what he calls "acceptance," or confronting how one would continue without hoping for a real political Italy.

One feature of Pasolini's perspective in "Abiura" is the scale of it: the condition he describes is without horizon, an agoraphobic leveling of the present and past that leaves him without reference points for a future. He grapples with the nonexistence of a world. We might recall Hannah Arendt's conviction that the "world" is an artifact of work that is not an inevitable condition or outcome of human life, or Giorgio Agamben's thought of a state of exception that "coincides with reality itself."<sup>4</sup> Without endorsing Agamben's entire theorization of exception, we can admire his resonant evocation of the phenomenology of the totality he imagines, in which walking down the street or any everyday action may either transgress or carry out the messianic law that has superseded ordinary law: "The law, inasmuch as it simply coincides with reality, is absolutely unobservable."<sup>5</sup> Agamben's description is useful for thinking about a range of ways of life in which the apparent absence of the political appears as a characteristic of "reality itself."

Pasolini answers his own question, "Where will the repudiation of the *Trilogy* lead me?," in this way: "I am adapting myself to the degradation and I am accepting the unacceptable. I am maneuvering to rearrange my life [Dunque io mi sto adattando alla degradazione e sto accettando l' inaccettabile. Manovro per risistemare la mia vita]" (xx). This answer is even more enigmatic than the question. What counts as "accepting the unacceptable," and what would be the point of it? How should we understand a mental state whose obscurity, even impossibility, is indicated by the linguistic contradiction with which Pasolini names it? The strangeness of the text's "acceptance" signals the profound unfamiliarity of its psychic territory. For all that we condescend to disavowal and melancholy as aberrant states of mind—

assuming that they are failures to recognize and accept recognizable and acceptable conditions—it is their absence here that startles the reader. Five minutes of acceptance from Pasolini and we are stopped in our tracks; we no longer know what it means. Further, acceptance by Pasolini in particular carries special weight, since he had no general disposition to value positivity. Pasolini once wrote the sentence, “I cannot accept anything of the world in which I live”; he was so vocal in his protests that he was harassed with petty prosecutions (mostly for obscenity) all of his life, “roughly 365” times.<sup>6</sup> We might guess, then, that his standard for acceptability would be fairly high. “Repudiation” doesn’t explain what makes the unacceptable acceptable; rather, it gives clues, mostly by specifying what is unacceptable. In reading Pasolini, then, I consider the question “What is the value of accepting the unacceptable?” as a philosophical question, as well as its pertinence to his object, the nonexistence of Italian politics (and perhaps even the historical formation of European politics per se).

Although others have addressed similar issues in Pasolini’s generation and in our own, Pasolini’s attempt is distinct in its suggestion that even the potential for the political does not and has never existed: to say this is to suggest that the conditions for modern political life have been wholly misconstrued. By following Pasolini’s associations, I hope to indicate some ways in which that may be the case. First, however, I’d like to look closely at Pasolini’s text for suggestions about what acceptance of the unacceptable is for him in 1975.

### *Repudiation*

“Repudiation” and an article often known as “The Disappearance of the Fireflies,” which appeared in February 1975, address the periodization of modernity as a matter of finality that can be verified as a coroner might verify a death. Both essays use vitalist and anthropological figures, and Pasolini’s thought is more or less ethnically essentialist and troubling in that regard. But the vitalist figures do the work of allowing one to wrap one’s mind around what Pasolini wants to call “extinction.” For him, extinction pertains to particularities and attachments that can be killed and mourned; registering extinction is part of the exercise of sorting the dead from the nonexistent.

“Repudiation” is written mostly in very short paragraphs of a few sentences each. In the middle of the text some paragraphs are clustered into

sections sequenced (a), (b), and (c). Pasolini calls parts (a), (b), and (c) “delaying elements [elementi ritardanti]” of his discussion (xviii). The unmarked segment of the essay that precedes (a) ends:

Private sexual lives (such as mine) have undergone the trauma of false tolerance and physical degradation, and that which in sexual fantasies was pain and joy, has become suicidal disappointment, shapeless sloth.

However, those who, annoyed or scornful, criticized the *Trilogy of Life*, should not think that my repudiation leads to their “duties [doveri].”

My repudiation leads to something else. I am terrified of saying it; before saying it, as is my real “duty,” I search for delaying elements. (xviii)

Sections (a), (b), and (c) follow, which correspond to circles of expanding circumference and to reflections on the past, present, and future. They reflect on the disappointing objects of Pasolini’s affection, his critics and the condition of contemporary society, and the demise of politicized “people[s] [populi]” outside Italy: “Outside of Italy, in the ‘developed’ countries—especially in France—the die has long been cast; long ago, the people have ceased to exist anthropologically” (xix).

Pasolini confides that his repudiation leads him to something he is afraid to name, and he has still not named it as long as he remains in part (c), the last delaying passage. Now, these delaying sections render a world that is dead interpersonally, sexually, and anthropologically. Deadness, of course, is a trope of vitalism that projects the organic nature of such things as languages and peoples, and Pasolini’s analysis never departs from this uncomfortably vitalist assumption. In the closing paragraphs of “Repudiation,” Pasolini returns still more explicitly to the figure of the dead body of Italy: “I know that, even if—as is very probable—there will be a victory of the left [in the 1976 election], the nominal value of the vote will be one thing, the real value something else. The first will demonstrate the unification of modernized Italy, in a positive sense; the second will demonstrate that Italy—except, naturally, for the traditional communists—is by now, as a whole, a depoliticized country, a dead body whose reflexes are purely mechanical” (xx).<sup>7</sup> Tracking the social form of Italian unification, the contemporary world is most of all a depopulated one. Although he complains that ethnicizing the problems of political groups misses the point, he makes an even stronger ontological claim, that the extinction of Italy is an anthropological issue. This claim references Pasolini’s lasting concern for the disappearance of historical cultural forms that cannot be maintained, replaced in kind, or revived

artificially. The function of this anthropological move is to close off any idea of cultural revival.<sup>8</sup> Thus Pasolini attributes to his critics the hope that the various difficulties are “an unpleasant circumstance that will certainly resolve itself,” and replies, “as if an anthropological change were reversible” (xix). At just the moment when the point of entropy is reached in his description of the contemporary scene—when “both the intellectuals on the right and the intellectuals on the left think, in exactly the same way”—the essay’s own delaying also comes to an end. The intellectual discourse in Italy comes to be identified with a delaying tactic; it is itself a delaying tactic. Pasolini both participates in it and works through his participation in it by absorbing anthropological extinction.

Now, Pasolini implies that the extinction of the people and hence the impossibility of politics, the perception of which is being evaded, is easy to miss because it is just the same thing as the consolidation of the nation-state that supposedly makes the modern political process possible. In other words, Pasolini is suggesting that abstract citizenship is a contradiction in terms. “The Disappearance of the Fireflies” associates industrialization with the fading of fireflies from the Italian evening and uses the phases of this disappearance as a principle of periodization: before, during, and after the disappearance of the fireflies. Here Pasolini asserts that early 1960s industrialization

involved the first true unification of our country. In other countries this unification was superimposed logically over monarchic or bourgeois and industrial revolution-imposed unifications. Perhaps the only precedent to the Italian trauma produced by the clash between pluralist archaism and industrial equalization was pre-Hitler Germany. In that country also, the values of different specific cultures were destroyed by the violent recognition process of industrialization, with the consequence of producing those gigantic hordes who had neither the ancient peasant or artisan roots or not even a modern bourgeois background, and who made up the savage, abnormal and unpredictable bodies of Nazi troops.<sup>9</sup>

The unification that, according to Pasolini, Italian regions had long ignored is here achieved suddenly through the dispositif of modernization. Like Foucault, or for that matter Weber, Pasolini assumes that radical changes to culture may occur in stealth forms when they can be mistaken for “a simple modernization of techniques.”<sup>10</sup> Pasolini recurs to the vitalist figure of extinction, this time that of the firefly, to render the irrevocability of the processes he describes. Although the strong periodization he proposes here

may seem to contradict his claim in “Repudiation” that the potential for politics never existed, attending to modernization in Pasolini’s thinking helps to show in what sense that could be. The people, the political category of the universalizing modern nation-state, cannot exist because before the technologies of that state are introduced, there are only specific, plural peoples; after, the same technologies that call forth the abstract category of the people systematically eliminate the peoples whose differences would lend value to the European political system construed as a working through of differences. The people could exist only if peoples with actual distinctions worth debating still survived; but the peoples were destroyed so that the abstract universalized citizenry, the people, could take their place. Most modern political theory would instead see the construction of the people as the always shifting work in progress of specific peoples to create a common space. Alternatively, this space itself may be seen as a transcendental form unattached to any specific substance. Pasolini sees the dissolution of the specific peoples instead as the aporetic precondition of modern political life, which ensures the nonexistence of what it claims to bring into being. Modernizing homogenization offers a discursive and representational system in exchange for the handing over of anything one might have talked about or represented; the concept of the people is created by what makes its fulfillment impossible. The disappearance of peoples and the nonexistence of the political thus develop along with the nineteenth-century nation-state. Roberto Esposito writes of Hannah Arendt’s awareness of this phenomenon: the aporetic inability of representation to represent multiplicity rather than unity; I return to this later on.<sup>11</sup>

To actively repudiate these categories would be to realize that they never were nor could be what they were supposed to be. Recently, Georges Didi-Huberman has used Pasolini’s “Fireflies” essay to typify a despair of resistance that he finds continued in Agamben. Attentive to the resonance that the idea of organic light must have had to Pasolini as a filmmaker (and to himself as an art historian), he argues that images continue to offer openings for resistance.<sup>12</sup> Didi-Huberman’s is the position I would call late modern—one that wants to say that the fireflies are potentially alive and the political a possibility to be recovered. This point of view and the historical framework of the political whose possibility it continues to assume, however, causes certain acts to appear as mere resistance (and indeed as mere existentialized survival), as in the title of Didi-Huberman’s book, *The Survival of the Fireflies*. Pasolini’s rejection of political possibility, on the other hand, rejects an

entire order of thinking in which the political is preserved as a remnant or potential as compared to the given of capitalism, whose existence is never presented as similarly attenuated. For Pasolini, the cost of relying on the idea that political life is preserved as an unactualized, resistant potentiality is the reinforcement of capitalist givens as setting the terms for presentness and actuality.

Pasolini refers to people in the two distinct senses above: local peoples with particular cultures and languages and to the people who would be the pan-Italian citizenry. Although Pasolini's shift from poetry in Friulian to Roman writing and cinema is often read as a shift from regional to class-based thought, and late in his career Pasolini states in the most definitive way that dialects are moribund, "Repudiation" still assumes the significance of the very disappearance of ethnographic diversity.<sup>13</sup> Linguistic diversity is now connected to the political through their existential distinction—languages are dying out like the firefly while Italian political existence is a contradiction in terms.<sup>14</sup> The dead need to be sorted from the nonexistent, but the actual things that have been killed have been killed in the service of nonexistent entities that should not be grieved.

We can see such a line of distinction being drawn in one of the keynotes of Pasolini's late work, the song "Sul Ponti di Perati": "On the Perati Bridge, a black flag is flying." It is sung by the whole company in *Salò*, where it is taken by the characters to pertain to present as well as past circumstances. A World War I song, anthologized by Pasolini in his collection of Italian poetry, "Sul Ponti di Perati" was repurposed for World War II to commemorate the doomed Alpine division Julia, which suffered massive casualties in Albania. In *Salò* it is sung by torturers and victims together, and so also seems to describe the pointless doom of the youth in the film. "Che son partiti, non son tornati [those who left have not come back]," it goes; "La meglio gioventù va soto tera [the best of youth goes underground]."<sup>15</sup> The notion of resistance does not capture the tonality of this song, which is sung while a victim is being raped in the background. It is sung with feeling by the fascists. Although people could be singing simultaneously for opposite reasons, the possibility is nonetheless suggested that even from within fascism one can recognize the loss within the song. In this way fascism is given a background from which it emerges and which it has not even entirely left behind, in which it is fascism and yet still partly something else. In this case, fascism can be understood as a violent and distorted response to something even more violent that is referenced by the song. This is how Pasolini reads

the bodies of the Nazi troops in “Fireflies,” as well—they’re monstrous and abnormal, but at the same time are reflections of the violence of modernization. Pasolini’s camera dwells on the face of one of the youths as he seems to decide to join in the song. The expression and affirmative decision of this youth suggests that the song is a space in which the sources of violence can be acknowledged and lamented. What goes on in the finding of this space is not resistance; it’s the registration of an ongoing catastrophe. The scene is not about saying yes or saying no to the matrix of violence, but rather asserting one’s presence before it: “Yes, this disaster is my disaster: I exist now within this disaster, even as it is trying to extinguish my existence.”

It is just when the illusion of the political, whose existence is predicated on the ability of public thoughts to be different, disappears from “Repudiation” that Pasolini writes, “It is time to confront the problem: where will the repudiation of the *Trilogy* lead me? It leads me to adaptation” (xx). If we had not been tipped off earlier, this would come as a surprise: the nonexistence of the political in Italy is not the problem? But it’s true: that is not the problem of “Repudiation,” but the premise of it. Even Pasolini’s rejection of his former goals is not the problem of the essay, but another premise of it; the problem, the question to be answered now according to Pasolini, is where it leads. Pasolini answers first by reflecting on where it does not lead. The critics of the *Trilogy of Life*, he writes, “should not think that my repudiation leads to their ‘duties.’” He explains that the duties prescribed to him “[concern] the fight for progress, improvement, liberalization, tolerance, collectivism, etc., etc.” (xix). These prescriptions have undergone a collapse similar to that of his love objects covered in part (a). They have participated in, provided the terms for, the production of what Pasolini sees as a “degeneration [that] occurred precisely through a falsification of their values” (xix). Rather, saying that he is led to acceptance and adaptation is Pasolini’s “real ‘duty’ [reale ‘dovere]” (xviii), and this “real ‘duty’” is something different from working with a corpse and, further, different from merely saying that the political does not exist in Italy (which has been the burden of the “delaying elements”). Pasolini is discriminating between the difficult things he can say and do, that indeed he is in the habit of saying and doing and getting arrested for, and the terrifying thing he can’t at first name, terrifying because it lies outside their orbit. In other words, it’s relatively unremarkable, in Pasolini’s view, for him to say that Italy, along with the other developed countries, is a dead body. What is terrifying to say is that his realization of this worst-case scenario leads him to adaptation and acceptance. It’s the

acceptance and not the deadness that is terrifying—an acceptance that still remains undefined.

In the last phrases of the essay, Pasolini replaces “duties” (“*doveri*,” always in quotation marks) with “commitment” (“*impegno*”; no quotation marks): “I am maneuvering to rearrange my life. I am forgetting how things were *before*. The beloved faces of yesterday are beginning to yellow. Before me—little by little, slowly, without further alternatives—looms the present. I readjust my commitment to a greater legibility (*Salò?*) [*Riadatto il mio impegno ad una maggiore leggibilità (Salò?)*]” (xx). Acceptance is now approached through tentative figures of perception in which a featureless present looms into view through the reluctant fading of memories and alternatives. The figure is the cinematic one of focus, film development, or even film direction in the sense captured by the French word for direction, *realisation*. The introduction of “legibility [*leggibilità*]” shifts subtly from what Pasolini himself sees to what Pasolini may give to be seen—from remembering or looking at a represented image (on yellowing paper), to a different kind of perception of what is hard to see because it is present, and finally to a visuality that may be read like language (in keeping with Pasolini’s ideas as a film semiotician). In the context of filmmaking, legibility hints at a recalibrated neorealism that may, this time, succeed in bringing into view a present that has been singularly repellent to the eye. At the end, in the form of a question, Pasolini offers *Salò*, one of the more upsetting films ever made, as the fruit of acceptance and legibility. It’s no contradiction, however, that *Salò* is both Pasolini’s example of acceptance and a nearly unwatchable film—maybe the single film, until very recently, that viewers are most likely to refuse to watch.<sup>16</sup> Whatever acceptance of the unacceptable was to Pasolini, if he had lived longer he would have been arrested for it, too. For he describes an acceptance that looks like protest, a giving up that we experience as a demand, an adaptation that appears as a provocation.

### *From the Trilogy of Life to Salò*

To understand the subtlety of the psychic process he is demonstrating, it’s worth understanding how “Repudiation” emerges from a line of cinematic thought that was under way before the texts of 1975 were written. Through a kind of latency, Pasolini’s awareness of the nonexistence of the political actually precedes his passage from *Trilogy of Life* to *Salò*. “Repudiation” marks, not the absolutely new emergence of that hypothesis, but Pasolini’s

loss of his former proposed solution to it—the creation of an invigorating sexual culture—and hence a heightening of its urgency as a problem. Pasolini promises to “readjust” his commitment to the legible, to focus on the nothing that is there instead of the something that ought to be. Not a first but a second response to a perception of political nonexistence at the present time and place, repudiation is an active mode of realization, a going beyond of the perception that the political does not exist to realize that it could and should not. Recognizing the development of the repudiation of the political in Pasolini involves reading tensions within the *Trilogy of Life* itself; for the *Trilogy*—which confines itself to historically or geographically distant times and places—is in practice as much about the nonexistence of a political Italy (which never appears) as it is an imagination of how people might live differently.<sup>17</sup> As Pasolini later realizes, the potential, the otherwise, the elsewhere that he depicts both assumes and evades contact with the nonexistence of the political now.

Such a reading especially suits the last film in the *Trilogy of Life*, *Arabian Nights* (*Il fiore delle Mille et una notte*, 1974), in which mostly Italian actors, speaking Italian while playing Arabian characters, try to suggest how one might live as a slave and still possess sexual pleasure and personal integrity. One of the protagonists is a young female slave, Zummurud, whose last owner has given her the ability to choose her next owner. She uses this opportunity to select a barely adolescent boy whom she educates into the sexual arts. Their subsequent separation is resolved at the end of the film when Zummurud, who has been living as a boy king as the result of a misrecognition—enjoying her word become command, even taking the opportunity to crucify one of her former abusers—happily sheds her mask of sovereignty and exclaims, “Don’t you recognize me? I am your slave!” With this the lovers fall back into one another’s arms, having won from each other all the recognition they need for their fulfillment. *Arabian Nights*’ contempt for power takes for granted a world in which the property relation of human beings excludes most of the population from any form of political expression, and asks how one would then strategize a life. Gender, economics, social status, and theology all contribute to the enslavement of the protagonists, while their response is to prefer eroticized and personalized slavery to false sovereignty. Although *Arabian Nights* is an unusually florid exoticist fantasy—outlandishly so—the thought experiment that it conducts remains a common scenario for transnational art films today. In more palatable guises, they often concur that the phenomenology of societies in the aftermath of global



Screen shots from *Arabian Nights* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1974), the last film in the *Trilogy of Life*.

capitalism consists in a constant exposure to violence, interrupted by idylls that allow one to recuperate temporarily.<sup>18</sup> In this light, “Repudiation” invites us to a new phase of Pasolini’s already low political expectations in *The Trilogy of Life*. In the new phase, the interpersonal and sexual opportunities are no longer seen as modeling a future or a past.

It is as part of this project, then, that Pasolini comes to consider the Republic of Salò (Italian Social Republic), a puppet or remnant state that possessed no constitution and no economic funding independent of Germany. *Salò*’s opening scenes of administrative establishment stress that the events are supported by a substantively false governmental structure. But rather

than “shed[ding] light on the historical phenomenon of fascism,”<sup>19</sup> Pasolini explains fascism as a still ongoing process that uses the illusion of a political Italy. *Salò* is a meditation on the various historical repetitions of this nullity that compose the history of modern Europe.<sup>20</sup> Through its reference to the revolutionary-era text by Sade which it repeats,<sup>21</sup> *Salò* places the possibility of history as farce as far back as revolutionary Europe—in other words, at the same time as the inception of liberalization and supposedly universalized political representation. A history that is already farce for Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* becomes pornography for Pasolini. Once as tragedy; twice as farce; again and again as pornography.

Sexual liberation is only one of the possibilities *Salò* rules out, although the spectacular quality of its inclusion can make that hard to see.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the film shows almost no dissident sexuality whatsoever: almost all of the sexuality in the film is official and normative according to the laws we hear read out. What counts as anomaly is created by official code.<sup>23</sup> The professional madams responsible for introducing and contextualizing the orchestrated sex acts of each day maintain a carefully matter-of-course tone (along the way, they reveal that they have been coercively educated into their current tastes and opinions—circumstances that they divulge with the same coolness, as though they were also part of the inevitable course of the world). What is not tolerated is any autonomous organization of one’s sexual life. Thus *Salò* becomes in part a pedagogical film for straight citizens; by identifying with the victims, they can see what it would be like to try to survive in a sexually prescriptive world—a world in which you could be tortured to death ostensibly for refusing to perform one kind of act rather than another.<sup>24</sup> If what counts is subjugation to code, there are only two acts of sexual dissidence in the film: an affair between two female inmates and another between a maid and a guard who are promptly executed. In an aggression against the *Trilogy of Life*, Pasolini goes out of his way to refute the idea that these private arrangements could suggest a way of inhabiting slavery: the executed maid is played by Ines Pellegrini, who plays Zummurud in *Arabian Nights*; Franco Merli, her lover Aziz in *Arabian Nights*, plays another victim whose tongue is removed.

In “Fireflies” Pasolini sketches several phases of fascism that parallel the years before, during, and after the extinction of the fireflies: these are fascist fascism, postwar Christian Democratic fascism, and late Christian-Democratic fascism. “Before the extinction of the fireflies” (i.e., around 1965), “Christian-Democrat fascism is a total and absolute extension of fascist fas-

cism”; after, “fascist” values (family, church, order, etc.) are “falsified” and playacted, while others are actually substituted; and by 1975, Pasolini writes, there has been a further “decisive mutation compar[able] to that in Germany fifty years ago” that begins “a new era in human history” and exposes a “dramatic power void.” Pasolini declines to refer contemporary fascism back to Italian wartime fascism because in Italy, according to him, “The fascist models were only masks that were donned and removed in turn [We might think here of Zumurrud’s mask of sovereignty—RT]. When the fascist movement fell, everything returned to its previous order.” The previous order, fascist fascism, and postwar Christian-Democrat fascism fall in line, for better and for worse. All former phases, however, differ from the 1975 version of Christian-Democratic fascism, in which “all these things [the language and gestures of contemporary officials, their ostensibly fascist values] *actually are masks*” (my emphasis). Pasolini’s oxymoron, “*actually are masks*,” conveys that only now are things—not merely pretenses—empty in actuality, so advanced is the modernizing process of homogenization that calls the people into being as a void. He reserves apocalyptic language for this actualized power void. For “in history the void cannot remain in existence” as void, he argues, but will give way to positive disaster. The *Eighteenth Brumaire* echoes in this passage as well, but in reverse: the collapse of available positions does not prepare a place for the people but contributes to the violence-attracting void the extinction of regional peoples has created. The disaster, finally, will connect contemporary Italy to German Nazi fascism in a way that dwarfs its heretofore indirect connection through Italian wartime fascism. In other words, Pasolini distances himself from the notion of continuity between Italian wartime fascism and the “Christian-Democrat fascism” of 1975 only because continuity underestimates how fascistic the present is: fascistic not because it continues a past fascism, but because the conditions have been prepared for an even more robust fascism. These conditions are the processes of unification and neutralization that, according to Pasolini, weren’t strong enough to produce “nationalized and therefore falsified” values in Italy in the 1940s. If, for Pasolini, the culprit is the nation-state, that is not because of the particularism of the idea of ethnicized nation, but just the opposite, because the universalization of modernist abstraction makes it impossible for groups to maintain their political differences.

What should provoke us further is that the villa in *Salò* recalls the classical prototype of the nation-state: the distinctly bounded *polis* in which thinkers like Arendt and Schmitt still believe earlier in the twentieth century.

The city-state of *Salò* is Pasolini's riposte to Rossellini's *Paisà*—the title of which is Neapolitan for “little town” while also containing the idea of *pais*, state. In *Porcile* (1969) Pasolini portrays such a medieval city-state and the outlaws who wander and terrorize the desert beyond it: we travel with the beautiful criminals, from which position we can understand the thinness of the city's legality. In *Salò*, we enter the villa and never leave it. The opening scene that introduces its plenipotentiaries also depicts its geographical location, its distinction from other cities, and the codification and distribution of its written laws: for example, anyone who mentions God in any way is condemned to die. When the torturers explain the laws to the victims, they emphasize, as camp administrators are reported to have done, that no one knows what happens there and that there are no longer any other possible modes of existence. The inmates are “beyond the reach of any legality,” they proclaim, before going on, “Here are the laws.” Reflecting the operation of late Christian-Democratic fascism, people(s) disappear within the walls and are never seen again.

The officials' proclamation is at once tendentious and true: in a way, the question of legitimacy is more prominent the less a realm, or a law, interacts with an outside (either external or internal to itself). Deleuze points out that while Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968) works out a problem introduced into a society from an agent (Terence Stamp) outside it, “in *Salò*, on the contrary, there is no longer a problem because there is no outside: Pasolini presents, not even fascism *in vivo*, but fascism at bay, shut away in the little town, reduced to a pure interiority, coinciding with the conditions of closure in which Sade's demonstrations took place.”<sup>25</sup> For Deleuze, the nullity of everything portrayed is its most important characteristic. In *Salò* even fascism and perversion are being playacted—with real weapons and bodies—as much as sovereignty and normativity are. Pasolini's “fireflies article” and other writings put an ominous spin on what such emptiness is and means. In these writings the nullity brought by unification and the destructive liveness of “fascism *in vivo*” are related causally and a hair's breadth apart. Pasolini's perception in “Fireflies”—that at the time of production, playacting goes all the way down, so that underneath is not even “a heap of bones and ashes. There would be nothing, just emptiness”—imagines a paradoxical “nothing” *in vivo* that is the support of living fascism. In the terms of the regnant neutralization of 1975, more and more of the denizens of Italy are gathered inside.

Deleuze describes the difficulty that *Salò* explores in formal terms, noting that Pasolini's visual style in *Teorema* and *Salò* shifts from an emphasis

on cuts, and thus the creative consciousness of montage, to a kind of “sequence” (C2 174) to which Pasolini earlier professed an aversion and whose projected consciousness dovetails with the position of the camera.<sup>26</sup> In an unrelated passage of *Cinema 1*, Deleuze calls this position “the anonymous viewpoint of someone unidentified amongst the characters” (CI 72).<sup>27</sup> The position corresponding to that of the camera is that of the narrator in the list of possible social roles Pasolini specifies in the credits of *Salò*: “Gentlemen [Signori],” “Narrators,” “Victims,” “Servants,” and “Guards.”<sup>28</sup> Celeste Langan has connected neutralization to “mediatization” in the context of European political theory, pointing out that the term “mediatization” is invented around 1800 as part of the pursuit of “a permanent neutrality, beyond or in the middle of the war of all against all.” Schmitt objects to the neutralization of “politics” through media in “The Age of Neutralization and Depoliticizations” (1929), Langan reminds us.<sup>29</sup> “Media” in the contemporary sense, in other words, came to prominence along with rationalization’s attention to neutral and exchangeable spaces. Further, mediatization is itself built upon a more general notion of mediation invented at around the same time. Hegel’s articulation of mediation in the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic period furnishes the dominant philosophical vocabulary for the unification of the nation-state whose neutralization Pasolini specifically deplores.<sup>30</sup> In *Salò*, if the neutral perspective is that of a camera that makes much of its own passivity, it is literally ever present because we’re watching the film that the camera has made possible by preselecting what counts as there. Pasolini’s *Salò* is an image of totality and an image of the false, a totality that is fraudulent to the same degree that it produces what counts as everywhere.

Deleuze remarks (in 1985) that the great political cinema of the twentieth century “know[s] how to show how the people are what is missing”: the Spanish people in Resnais’s *La Guerre est finie*, “the German people in the Straubs’ *Unreconciled*” (C2 215–16). Instead of “addressing a people, which is presupposed already there,” Deleuze continues (C2 217), filmmakers may bring “the consciousness that there were no people, but always several peoples, an infinity of peoples, who remained to be united, or should not be united, in order for the problem to change” (C2 220). These nonunited people—for Deleuze as for Pasolini, paradigmatically ethnic or linguistic minorities within their milieu—begin with “communication of the world and the I in a fragmented world and in a fragmented I which are constantly being exchanged” (C2 221). But Deleuze argues that filmmakers call a new people to come into being by filing these missing-peoples reports: that is

exactly not what *Salò* is arguing against. Embedding the nonexistence of the political in the history of modern Europe since Sade, it neither assumes that the people should exist, nor assimilates the given reality in the hope of getting through mediation to a better or at least necessary world. Rather, Pasolini asks us to look at nullity in order to see modern political citizens as contradictions in terms.

### *Pasolini and the Political Horizon*

What we might call the science fiction features of “Repudiation”—its figures of degeneration, ruin, and anthropological extinction—insist on the contradiction: the unthinkable is the case, and we are thinking it. The post-Auschwitz tropes of *survivre* and “damaged life,” more recent psychoanalytic trauma theory, modern and postmodern “end of history” figures, and Agamben’s development of messianic time and limbo are related ways of dealing with related paradoxes.<sup>31</sup> Pasolini’s version raises the possibility that the nonexistence of the political has been considered unthinkable in the same way that trauma is thought to be unthinkable. This apparent unthinkability in turn, however, can be understood as an illusion of modernity.

Roberto Esposito’s *Concepts of the Impolitical* (1988) is the most sustained and philosophically ambitious work that responds to the Italian parliamentary crises of the 1970s. Esposito takes another tack in describing a constitutive aporia, considering historical examples that have imagined the limits of the political—chief among them works of Arendt, Hermann Broch, Canetti, Weil, and Bataille—in order to argue that the impolitical is not opposed to the political but “is the political considered from outside.”<sup>32</sup> In Arendt, the impolitical is the aporetic inability of representation to represent multiplicity rather than unity; in Broch, it is an inexpressible “alterity . . . presupposed outside the (idea of) the political”; and in Canetti, it is the dominance of a drive to unity in which life itself participates. The privileged point of reference for Esposito’s argument is the ruin of Weimar, the same context that gives rise to Schmitt’s *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* and *Concept of the Political*. Esposito replies to Schmitt by giving the impolitical a formative and yet self-dividing function within the political:

The identification between freedom and slavery, autonomy and control, which marks contemporary politics (but is latent [présent en germe] in *all* politics) marks the “zero point” (*Nullpunkt*), the “negative pole,” “which

our epoch has reached.” Adopting a positive anthropology once again means not taking into account “that the desire of an absolute and unrestrained liberty for play . . . presses ceaselessly toward the control of one’s neighbor”: this occurs “thanks to the infernal interchangeability of masochism and sadism; a mechanism with which the slave himself is familiar”; like all political regimes, the democratic regime includes it, for all that it is preferable to the other regimes, when it can only break control into a chain of local micro-servitudes; it even—here the great Arendtian impolitical theme returns—penetrates to the dynamic of revolutions, as we will see further on.<sup>33</sup>

The “zero point” of the impolitical is the “identification between freedom and slavery” (the identification that Pasolini explores in *Arabian Nights*). Adorno calls this “unfreedom”—the internal ability to mistake slavery for freedom and vice versa. For Esposito, the impolitical is a transhistorical, logical necessity that all politics must reckon with. He therefore insists that there can be nothing apolitical or antipolitical about the impolitical, since the impolitical is the blind spot within the political.

The concept of the impolitical may function as a way to cope with the loss of horizon, encrypting that loss by rendering it structural and internal to a politics that continues to be taken for granted as another structural necessity. Pasolini rather suggests that what has happened is not a structural problem but a deception. Instead of following subtle traces of the proto- and postpolitical (e.g., underlining the nonhegemonic quality of power in *Salò*), Pasolini stresses that the fact that conditions are never hegemonic does not mean that politics is by definition not nonexistent, that the political is either immortal or undead and, either way, transhistorical. Similarly, a strict construction of the worst, like Derrida’s in “No Apocalypse, Not Now,” prevents a hegemonic model (of, for instance, totalitarianism) from being asserted, but the counterdanger of the strict construction is that it stores “the worst” permanently in the future and uses the possibility that something can always be worse to deflect past and present catastrophes that may be utter even if they are not absolute.<sup>34</sup>

When I mentioned that the loss of a political horizon is often treated as trauma, I meant that it is handled as though it could never register in experience. A correct Kantian understanding of the impossibility of experiencing the zero degree of anything is mobilized to conserve the value of whatever there is at the time, because it is by definition not nothing. However small

that value is acknowledged to be, because it's never nothing it is also maximal, like the difference between life and death (hence the prevalence of the organic figure in the texts I have been reading). The premise of biopower, the irreducible value of life, is a subset of the conflation of value and fact, the conserving of value in whatever existence is available. According to Pasolini, such an attitude encourages faithfulness to politics although "it is by now, as a whole . . . depoliticized . . . a dead body whose reflexes are purely mechanical" ("Repudiation," xx).

The impulse to credit the smallest twitch of the proto- or postpolitical is well and deeply grounded in the post-structuralist critique of presence and hegemony, and in rightful suspicion about where the ability would come from to say when a potential is defunct. No one occupies a vantage from which to pronounce the end of history. The temporal logics of surviving and remaining complicate the picture by allowing that the present may be a continuation of a past catastrophe. In these logics, the questionable nature of the power to say when the worst has occurred is balanced by the equally questionable nature of the power to say when the worst has stopped occurring. This second logic, as mobilized, for instance, by Lanzmann's *Shoah*, implies that there is no after in the sense that the boundary of the catastrophe cannot be fixed; rather, there is open-ended catastrophe to which neither presentness nor pastness can be denied. Thus Didi-Huberman criticizes Lanzmann from a historicist perspective for acting as though Auschwitz is not over.<sup>35</sup> I've rehearsed Pasolini's rather elaborate argument for why he is not doing the same thing. To see his project as identical with those is to set aside his emphasis on arriving at acceptance and adaptation (to which we have still attributed no content), the results to which his recognition, he writes, leads him.<sup>36</sup>

Pasolini, similarly, writes in "Repudiation" that Italy "is by now, *as a whole*, a depoliticized country" (xx). As we've seen, Pasolini is indeed pointing out that it is "as a whole," as the false unity into which it has been made, that a country has no political dimension. This does not mean that there is no struggle; Pasolini writes, and dies, toward the beginning of the so-called Years of Lead, and in the "fireflies" article guesses at some of the turmoil ahead. So by what right does Pasolini eliminate the possibility of other, perhaps as yet unseen ways to channel political energies? Autonomian writings published around the time of Pasolini's death also understand their society as postpolitical. They claim that this very understanding, however, enables their activities to be political in an expanded sense: "if 'the end of politics'

means the search for new dimensions of antagonism on levels other than the one defined by concrete needs (wage struggles, the ‘attack on income’ as a refusal of poverty, etc.) then with the Italian movement the ‘end of politics’ has a different meaning, not at all psychologistic, literary or philosophic. For there the ‘end of politics’ involves a search for new *political* areas of struggle.”<sup>37</sup> For Pasolini this struggle is best thought of as something other than the political, rather than a rejuvenation of the political energies in a nonrepresentational form. For him, those nonrepresentational forms have died with the fireflies, and didn’t the very notion of what it means to be political in modernity arise along with those forms, from which it may be inseparable?

If Marazzi and Lotringer envision a corrigible society that needs to refine the political in new areas, isn’t that possibility of renewing the political the danger that haunts their writings and threatens to return it to the inside of Italy? My point is not that social and cultural phenomena contain no potential to create justice, nor that nothing could replace parliamentary politics, but that Pasolini’s insistence that the political is nonexistent and not about to be remade applies to social movements as well as to formal politics, to the potential for Italian politics as well as its current state. In this way it may be further toward conceptualizing something different for the very reason that it abjures political possibility.

### “Acceptance”

After delaying, acceptance. Pasolini’s acceptance is strange because it furnishes an account of something of which there could seem to be no account—acceptance of the unacceptable. To get at the function of Pasolini’s repudiation of his former strategies—the outcomes it carries of acceptance and adaptation—I’d like to make one final comparison between Pasolini’s “Repudiation” and a culturally adjacent text that is its mirror image in nihilistic acceptance: Primo Levi’s essay “Stereotypes,” from *The Drowned and the Saved*, which was published in the same year as Esposito’s *Concepts of the Impolitical*, 1988.<sup>38</sup> This is where Levi criticizes the “schematic image of prison and escape” that “bears little resemblance to the situation in the concentration camps” but is part of an idealized before, during, and after that appears only in retrospect.<sup>39</sup> Levi makes this criticism as he answers a question from the floor, so to speak, about why so many European Jews (and other persecuted segments of the population) did not more actively flee their elimination. His most radical point comes in the sentences restricted to those who, indeed,

chose not to flee, since obviously many others did emigrate, and many could not, as Levi also makes clear. Levi nonetheless suggests that the phenomenon, in any crisis, of there being many people who choose to stay must be accepted—that it cannot be expected to be otherwise. Levi's considerable acknowledgment of all the people who were not in denial would seem to indicate that things could have been different. Yet finally his argument for acceptance is not historically or culturally contingent: "Many Europeans of that time—and not only Europeans, and not only of that time . . . [were] denying the existence of things that ought not to exist."<sup>40</sup> He ends the essay by comparing the state of mind of those who stayed behind with that of Europeans vulnerable to destruction by the Cold War powers, and invokes the threat that nuclear warfare poses "to the entire human species, indeed to all life on earth, with the exception perhaps of the insects":

The threat is different from that of the 1930s: less close but vaster; linked, in the opinion of some, to a demonism of history, new, still undecipherable, but not linked (until now) to human demonism. It is aimed at everyone, and therefore especially "useless."

So then? Are today's fears more or less founded than the fears of that time? When it comes to the future, we are just as blind as our fathers. . . . There are Polynesia, New Zealand, Tierra del Fuego, the Antarctic: perhaps they will remain unharmed. Obtaining a passport and entry visa is much easier than it was then, so why aren't we going? Why aren't we leaving our country? Why aren't we fleeing "before"?<sup>41</sup>

Levi's question is largely rhetorical: its unanswerability is turned toward the reader in order to suggest that the question is wrong. The quotation marks around the word "before" indicate what Levi argues elsewhere, that "before" is an illusion created by history. The conclusion that there is no "before" in which to flee is central to Levi's project of doing what he can to tear the public imagination of Auschwitz from hindsight fantasies; its refusal of pathos distinguishes Levi from many contemporaries.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, as Levi accepts that many will persist in storing catastrophe in the future, Levi himself assumes that the time of catastrophe is the future when he writes, "When it comes to the future, we are just as blind as our fathers." Levi's critique of the idea of "before" deflects criticism of the tendency to be blind to the present, a tendency Pasolini attacks when he includes a long list of the ongoing degradations his critics "don't notice" in 1975 ("Repudiation," xix).

Like Levi, who points out that "we" do not seem to be going anywhere,

Pasolini does not exempt himself from historical pressure. Rather, it is noticing this pressure upon himself—in the terms above, “the damage”—that opens his eyes, as he would have it, to the distinction of the present moment:

Everyone has adapted either by refusing to notice anything or by inertly rendering the news less dramatic.

But I have to admit that also having noticed, or having dramatized, does not protect at all from adaptation or acceptance.

Therefore I am adapting myself to the degradation and I am accepting the unacceptable. I am maneuvering to rearrange my life. (xx)

Reading with Levi suggests another way to interpret the ending of “Repudiation” in an unimaginable acceptance. One thing that Pasolini is doing is noticing what he is already doing; his assertion of adaptation and acceptance is as descriptive as it is prescriptive. It’s almost a syllogism: no one is protected from degradation; therefore Pasolini is not protected, and must be found among the people who are adapting to and accepting it. This acceptance is no more or less extreme than Levi’s observation that it may well not be possible to protect most of the people on earth.

Yet Pasolini is able to do what Levi implies is not to be expected, and gives up on his object—the people, the political of Italy—in the present, in fact concludes that he has already done so, even though that nonexistent object had supported his identity, his work, and his idea both of the state and of its alternatives. With other late work by Pasolini, “Repudiation” shows how one does—how sometimes people do—act before, although it means turning away from everything that has previously been thought meaningful and instituting an unknown self.<sup>43</sup> We might adapt Derrida’s thesis that forgiveness is paradigmatically of the unforgivable and suggest that acceptance is paradigmatically of the unacceptable. Levi adduces the poem by Christian Morgenstern in which the good German citizen (of 1910, before both wars) cannot fathom that he has been hit by a car because it happens on “a street where traffic is forbidden.”<sup>44</sup> Pasolini’s introduction of paradoxical language—acceptance of the unacceptable—points out that thinking the unthinkable can become caught in a similar categorial cul-de-sac: it can be seen to have occurred only at the end of time, and this is not the end of time: therefore, it could be worse; therefore, it’s not yet necessary to change. For things to be different, the unthinkable must already have happened, “without further alternatives” (“Abiura,” xx). To act before, it must be understood to be too late—in this case, too late to begin with.

That's why for Pasolini it's not just a matter of noticing the political nullity of Italy, but of including the idea of political possibility within it, leaving only acceptance and adaptation—but an acceptance and adaptation that are hostile to the given—as conceptual spaces in which to start filming *Salò*. The poetic analogue to the late prose texts is Pasolini's meticulous negation of his first book of poetry, *Poesie a Casarsa*, in his last, *Le nuova gioventù* (1975; called after the phrase in “Sul Ponte di Perati,” as I mentioned). Repudiation here takes the form of the strikethrough. For example, Pasolini rewrites “Fountain of water in my country. / There is no fresher water than in my country. / Fountain of rustic love” as “Fountain of water in a country not mine. / There is no staler water than in this village. / Fountain of love for nobody.”<sup>45</sup> Both poems are in dialect, although by the time of the latter Pasolini has declared categorically that “dialect and the world that expressed it no longer exist.”<sup>46</sup> No longer conceivably nostalgic, Pasolini now writes dialect poetry that places neither nostalgia nor hope in dialect.

Similarly, the acceptance and adaptation of “Repudiation” build a language for alternatives to the present that does not assume that the political will be born from its impossibility. In an interview on the day before he died, Pasolini is asked whether he would do it if, with “magic thought,” he could make disappear all that he detests, even though this would include the industries, institutions, and audiences that support his own work. When Pasolini replies that that is what he is trying to do, the interviewer, Furio Colombo, asks, “If you remove all this . . . what's left?” Pasolini responds, “Everything. I am what is left, being alive, being in the world, a place to see, work and understand.”<sup>47</sup> The title Pasolini gives to this last interview is “We Are All in Danger.” There is no basis on which he can deliver this message if he is still invested in potential.

### Notes

- 1 See, for example, Moravia, “Dall’Oriente a Salò,” 93–95, quoted by biographer Enzo Siciliano in *Pasolini*, 342–43.
- 2 Pasolini, “Abiura,” in *Trilogia della vita*; Pasolini, “Repudiation of the Trilogy of Life,” in *Heretical Empiricism*, xviii. Subsequent references to these editions appear in the text.
- 3 Generalizing a personal disaster, or personalizing a social one, is a style of magical thinking that seems, and may be, paranoid. Yet this magical thinking informs accounts of disaster per se, suggesting that the personalization of disaster is a mark of its reach. A quasi-canonical example would be Mary Shelley’s

- conflation, in *The Last Man*, of political disillusion and reflection on the deaths of most of her own family in an image of civilization's dissolution.
- 4 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 134–35; Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 105.
- 5 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 105.
- 6 Pasolini, "Civil War" (1966), in *Heretical Empiricism*, 148; Lawton, introduction to *Heretical Empiricism* by Pasolini, xl n3.
- 7 In the event, in the 1976 national elections the left parties failed to consolidate and the Christian Democratic Party remained the largest in Parliament. This situation framed the intensification of violence—the Years of Lead—that Pasolini did not live to witness. See Potter, "The Italian Election," 7–8.
- 8 Compare Pasolini's argument elsewhere that the contemporary working class is not the same as in Marx's time and so in need of a different theory. See Pasolini, "The PCI to the Young!! (Notes in Verse for a Prose Poem Followed by an 'Apology')" (1968), in *Heretical Empiricism*, 155–56.
- 9 Pasolini, "La scomparsa delle luciole," originally published as "The Power Void in Italy," *Corriere della sera*, February 1, 1975. Also in *Ecrits corsaires*, 184–95. Christopher Mott's English translation of this text is available on the blog *Diagonal Thoughts*, <http://www.diagonalthoughts.com/?p=2107>. For commentary, see Consolo, "The Disappearance of the Fireflies."
- 10 Pasolini, "La scomparsa delle luciole."
- 11 Esposito, *Categorie dell'impolitico*.
- 12 Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles*.
- 13 For the idea that dialects are moribund, Siciliano, *Pasolini*, 364.
- 14 Pasolini's lack of control over anthropological figures punctuates his motif of "undevelopment"—for instance, in his statement that "for Italy it is all over. But Yemen can be saved entirely" (lines from Pasolini's short documentary *Le mura di Sana'a*, quoted in Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City*, 151).
- 15 In the film, as in life, the song is sung with feeling as a recognition of the sorrow of its end, in the very place where that end is being accomplished, as well as by (as it were) believing fascists. Pasolini takes the phrase "La meglio gioventù" as the title of his last book of poetry (also 1975). On this scene in *Salò*, see Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 311–12. Maggi points out that Pasolini anthologizes this song in his collection of Italian poetry, and explains there that it is a World War II song based on a World War I song. According to Pasolini, "World War I saw 'a vast production of war songs' because of the static character of this world conflict" (Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 311). The translatability of songs from conflict to conflict reinforces the impression of stasis.
- 16 Technological developments have made instances of extreme violence more easily representable and more common, and directors such as Lars von Trier and Chan-Wook Park have explored their cinematic and philosophical possibilities. A part of von Trier's production company, Zentropa, made pornographic films for a time. Von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) and Srdjan Spasojevic's *A Serbian Film*

- (2010)—a film about a snuff film—may have gotten past *Salò* on the most-avoided list.
- 17 For a critical analysis of Pasolini's fantasies of ethnicity, see Bongie, *Exotic Memories*. Patrick Rumble reads the linguistic dissonance of *Arabian Nights*, discussing mostly visual languages but relating these to dialect, in "Stylistic Contamination in the *Trilogia della Vita*," in Rumble and Testa, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, esp. 223.
  - 18 A great deal of work along these lines is being done in East Asian cinema. See especially Tsai Ming-Liang, *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2007).
  - 19 Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 299.
  - 20 The film's bidirectional anachronisms (backward to Sade, forward to its citations from Barthes, Beauvoir, Blanchot, Klossowski, and Sollers) indicate Pasolini's interest in periodization and intensely revisionary investment in modern history, as Cesare Casarino has shown in "Oedipus Exploded."
  - 21 Pasolini notes in a brief written introduction to the film that Sade's characters "are clearly ss men in civilian dress." Bachmann, "Pasolini on de Sade."
  - 22 It may seem that in associating Nazism with sexual dissidence *Salò* participates in a phenomenon brought to attention at the time by Foucault, and later by Andrew Hewitt: the false and retroactive "construction of homo-fascism" (Hewitt, *Political Inversions*). *Salò's* thesis is that revisions to sexual norms do not herald a new political life, however, rather than that there is any cause and effect between dissident sexuality and Nazism.
  - 23 Joan Copjec's interpretation of *Salò* preserves a distinction between "perversion" and "transgression" that allows her to maintain that the official sexuality depicted in the film is both conformist and perverse (and indeed that perversion is conformism, that it is characterized by fixity); see Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman*, 224–25. At the same time, she proceeds as though perversion is characterized by specific, logically motivated fixities, for example, preferring the back to the front of a woman because, as in Freud's theory of fetishism, the front shows difference and so "this perception is disavowed" (222). The tension is inherited from Freud, but it isn't Freud who makes it an issue that "perversion is so often confused with transgression" (224). Copjec's insistence that the confusion is only on one side indicates that what she sees as a permanent difference appears as historical to others; and her use of forms of "confuse" throughout the book indexes her policing of various categories that need to remain static.
  - 24 Pasolini suggests that the violations of law discovered inside the villa are only examples and that if we knew enough, we would perhaps see that everyone is out of conformity: the torturers discover the violations in a chain, when each culprit in turn tries to save herself by denouncing another, who denounces yet another.
  - 25 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 175. Subsequent references to *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* appear in the text.

- 26 Pasolini, "Reflections on the Long Take," in *Heretical Empiricism*. See Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 27.
- 27 I agree with Jacques Rancière that there's usually nothing necessary about the mimetic logic with which Deleuze, and film scholars generally, makes the formal and visual features of films allegorize their themes (*Film Fables*). Yet Pasolini was often this kind of film scholar, and the camera position of *Salò* may well have mimed the stance of neutralization for him.
- 28 Robert Meister notes that in their recognition of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, liberal theories of transitional justice tellingly omit the category of the beneficiary. See Meister, *After Evil*. The anonymous viewpoint is noncommittal, neutralized, but sometimes implicitly charged with tension to the degree that neutrality would seem to be impossible in the situation.
- 29 Langan, "Romantic Neutrality," 3–4.
- 30 Pasolini "hate[s]" Hegel, whom he holds responsible for "hope," in his interview with Sergio Arecco. See Arecco, *Pier Paolo Pasolini / Sergio Arecco. Hope* here means expecting a better future from the synthesis of history; Pasolini claims definitively to lack the capacity for this.
- 31 Of end-of-history figures, Bataille's assumption of "unemployed negativity" is especially germane ("The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic"). The postpolitical aspect is particularly stark in Agamben, who writes of "the inhabitants of limbo, in contrast to the damned": "Like the freed convict in Kafka's *Penal Colony*, who has survived the destruction of the machine that was to have executed him, these beings have left the world of guilt and justice behind them: The light that rains down on them is that irreparable light of the dawn following the *novissima dies* of judgment. But the life that begins on earth after the last day is simply human life" (*The Coming Community*, 5, 6–7). For comprehensive comparison between Pasolini's work and adjacent political theory, see Viano, "The Left According to the Ashes of Gramsci," 51–60; Ricciardi, "Rethinking *Salò* after Abu Ghraib"; and Righi, *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy*, 73–102.
- 32 Esposito, *Categorie dell'impolitico*, 18.
- 33 Esposito, *Categorie dell'impolitico*, 102–3. In the quotation marks Esposito is citing Hermann Broch's *Politik: Ein Kondensat*.
- 34 This point is made by Derrida, and the complementary point—that thinking the worst could be self-fulfilling in the era of nuclear deterrence—is also made. Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now."
- 35 Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*.
- 36 Other examples include Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows* and Fassbinder's *GDR Trilogy*.
- 37 Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," 12.
- 38 The larger philosophical frame for the question of nihilistic acceptance is the Eternal Return, especially its twentieth-century versions.
- 39 Levi, "Stereotypes," 152.

- 40 Levi, "Stereotypes," 165.
- 41 Levi, "Stereotypes," 165–66.
- 42 Elements of acceptance in Levi were too much for Jean Améry, for example, who complains that Levi's attitude amounts to forgiveness for genocide, while Levi remarks that Améry's refusal of acceptance is suicidal. Each sees the other as nihilistic: Améry seems to Levi to reject the world as is, while Levi seems to Améry to describe a world not worth living in. See Améry, "Resentments," in *At the Mind's Limits*, 62–81.
- 43 Repudiation was a strategy Pasolini found repeatable: "Repudiation" was not the only break letter he ever wrote. Another notorious and interesting one is the mixed-mode text "The PCI to the Young!! (Notes in Verse for a Prose Poem Followed by an 'Apology')" (1968), in *Heretical Empiricism*, 150–58.
- 44 Levi, "Stereotypes," 164–65.
- 45 "Fontana di aga dal me país. / A no è aga pi frescia che tal me país. / Fontana di rustic amòur"; "Fontana di aga di un país no me / A no è aga pí vecia che ta che país. / Fontana di amòur par nissún." Pasolini, *Poesie a Casarsa*; Pasolini, *Le nuova gioventù*, 167.
- 46 Siciliano, *Pasolini*, 364.
- 47 Colombo, "We Are All in Danger."