Acid Messianism: Pier Paolo Pasolini's Script for 'San Paolo'.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD at the University of the Arts London.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my nephews
Elliot and Laurie
with love.

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Epigraph

'Finale. — The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light'. [1]

Theodor W. Adorno

'Something else happened at the turn of the century; all the expectant novelty promised by a new decade didn't cross the thereshold of the 21st Century. Instead, all those cultural movements slowly ground to a halt and events became algorithmic rather than chronological. Time was converted in space (the Millennium Bug was real, the clocks did get fucked up).[2]

Mark Leckey

'The end doesn't exist, something will happen'.[3]

Pier Paolo Pasolini, in Abel Ferrara's *'Pasolini'* (2019)

'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not'.[4]

Silouan the Athonite

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[1] Adorno, Theodor W., and E. F. N. Jephcott. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Radical Thinkers. London; New York: Verso, 2005. Pg. 247.

[2] Leckey, Mark. *Statement- Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore: Ghosted on VHS, 25 Years Later 2024*, Press Release. 2024. This quotation was found via Matthew Higgs's Instagram post on the 26th of April 2024, in which he posted a press release from Gladstone Gallery, which had published a new VHS edition of Leckey's '*Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore'*. The original post can be found at matthewhiggs2015 on Instagram. An image of the post has been included as part of the list of figures Pg. 220. Fig 8.

[3] Ferrara, Abel, *Pasolini*. Capricci Films, Urania Pictures S.r.l., Tarantula, 2019.

[4] I take this quotation from Gillian Rose's epigraph to her book— Rose, Gillian. *Love's Work*. Vintage, 1997.

Abstract

When he died in 1975, Pier Paolo Pasolini left a manuscript entitled *'Plan for a Film About Saint Paul'*, posthumously published as *'San Paolo'*[5]. This practice-based thesis provides an original interpretation of '*San Paolo*' as the conceptual hinge between *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*[6] (1964) and *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'*[7] (1975), constituting a previously unacknowledged trilogy in Pasolini's work. The research operates across art practice and critical theory to question how this new trilogy engenders a concept of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit'* (that which—*remains unsaid within the work but which demands to be unfolded and worked out*[8])', '*acid*' thought, messianic time, and '*translatability*' to configure a new understanding of Pasolini's work. The conceptualisation of a new trilogy, allied to these concepts, also produces a methodology of filmmaking in my practice, centred around a 'muppet' style puppet of Pasolini.

The theoretical portion of the thesis seeks to employ the sacred force of history drawn from Benjamin and Pasolini as the grounds for critiquing neoliberalism as a late capitalist project which denies any vision of the future outside of its own narrow— and dystopic— ideology. A new understanding of the apocalypse is explicated to frame Pasolini's cinema and my work as activating futurity beyond neoliberal ideology with *revelation* and *hope* at its core.

Within the script for *'San Paolo'*, Pasolini exchanges the sites of St. Paul's life, based on the New Testament, with cities, countries, and events from Western Europe and North America from the Second World War to the mid-1970s. My practice reworks this procedure of transposition, drawing parallels between St. Paul and Pasolini— implying a spectral link between the two— to explore humour, cultural

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[5] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014.

[6] *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Biography, Drama, History. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964.

[7] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975.

[8] *Giorgio Agamben. What Is a Paradigm. 2002 1/10*, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0. 3minutes 30 seconds.

objects as a repository of memory, and fragmentary notions of time as key to a new understanding of Pasolini's cinema, messianism, and alternative political futures.

Introduction

Pier Paolo Pasolini was murdered in the early hours of the 2nd November 1975 on the shores of Ostia, a *comune* of Rome, the city's gritty de facto seaside resort. The murder is still unsolved. What is known is that Pasolini picked up a local sex worker, Giuseppe Pelosi, street name Pino la Rena (Joey the Frog), before driving to the desolate beach. Pelosi was arrested in possession of Pasolini's car the next day, confessed to the crime and was sentenced to nine years of incarceration. There was much speculation about the veracity of Pelosi's guilt at the time of the murder. Although 53 years of age, Pasolini was still a physically fit and powerful man; Pelosi was a slight boy of 17, and the violence of the beating that killed Pasolini seems unlikely to have come from one less physically capable individual who bore little sign of injury when arrested. The police were accused of tampering with the murder site, and the ground showed evidence of several persons present around the body. In 2005, Pelosi retracted his confession, saying that he was forced to confess the crime under threat of violence to his family from men with *'southern accents'*. [13]

There are several theories as to the individual, or possibly group, that murdered Pasolini. Pasolini was under active persecution by several powerful religious and political groups, many with ties to organised crime[14]. There is an element of a

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[13] More detailed accounts of Pasolini's murder can be found in Elizabeth Castelli's introduction to the *'San Paolo'* script and Barth David Schwartz's biography of Pasolini—Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014; Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

[14] Barth David Schwartz's biography of Pasolini provides the most detailed breakdown of Pasolini's unsolved murder, with an afterword to the second edition of the biography dedicated to the case's history. Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg 641-671. As Schwartz illustrates, there has been much speculation as to the motivation of the crime, ranging from an opportunistic robbery gone wrong to an assassination planned by members of the government, oil companies, and organised crime in cahoots. While there is evidence to suggest Pasolini's murder was politically motivated, particularly the investigation undertaken by the lawyer Stefano Maccioni (Pg. 649-655 of Schwartz's *'Afterword'*), there is also an overwhelming amount of speculative and contradictory accounts of how the deeply unfortunate events occurred. As such, the murder remains an open case in Italian law, with the allegation of assassination by Maccioni and others remaining unproven.

martyr's death in Pasolini's murder; like the early Christian community, his libellous and transgressive proselytising of radical ideas was ultimately silenced with violence. His untimely death on the eve of the completion of his two most scandalous works— '*San Paolo*' and *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* [15] (1975)— leaves a suspended moment, primed with potentiality.

Many of the figures discussed in this thesis, like Pasolini, arguably left the world prematurely. Walter Benjamin, Mark Fisher, and St. Paul each took or had their life taken under the threat, heavy imposition, or direct violence of the state. And like Pasolini, the intellectual legacy left by Benjamin, Fisher, and St. Paul is a bulwark against the machinations, coercement, and untrammelled power of state-sanctioned violence. An untimely death leaves a hole, a space of possibility is opened, and a sad but protean instant of speculation is made available to take up the ideas left by these figures and apply them anew. The following thesis operates in this lacuna of potentiality.

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[15] *'Salò'* was released on the 23rd of November, 1975, exactly three weeks after Pasolini's murder. *'San Paolo'* was completed in 1974 but not published by Einaudi until 1977.

Claims, Bounds, and Structure of the Thesis

This is an interdisciplinary project that aims to find the messianic potential of '*San Paolo'* as part of a previously unacknowledged trilogy in Pasolini's oeuvre, investigated through an art practice which draws on critical theory. The academic, theoretical, and practical work generated seeks to offer means of conceptualising political futurity beyond neoliberalism.

The first two chapters of the thesis situate a new trilogy in Pasolini's work, through a traditional academic methodology, as a means for critiquing neoliberalism and imagining new political futures. The theoretical section of the thesis builds on this scholarship, drawing out of the new trilogy a methodology of '*acid messianism'* and '*translatability'* based upon Pasolini, Benjamin and Fisher's philosophy. The practical work actualises these conceptual paradigms in the process of adapting the newly proposed trilogy as a series of films and scripts.

The research area of the thesis is within Pasolini studies and art practice. The work also operates in the field of '*research-led practice'* with the exegetic interpretation of film, literature, and philosophy as a crucial and generative feature of the practical work operating in tandem, or often ahead, of the more explicit art-making processes.

The thesis offers an original contribution to Pasolini studies through the explication of a *new* trilogy in Pasolini's work, constituted of '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*(1964), '*San Paolo'* and '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* (1975), with a radical reassessment of '*Salò'* as a film shot through with Pauline features—evident in the '*San Paolo'* script— and a redemptive finale oriented around futurity and hope. The conceptualisation of *acid messianism* and *translatability* as methodological and practical arenas for producing artwork is drawn from this new academic contribution to thought on Pasolini. And it is through the establishment of these methodologies that the practice-based translation of the '*San Paolo'* has been based, with the video, script, and performance works themselves offering an original contribution to Pasolini studies via the field of contemporary art practice. The practice contributions also display a new viewpoint on the undercurrent of

apocalypticism in Pasolini's work, its poetic-political aesthetic form, and a rearticulation of these ideas through *translatability* and *acid messianism*.

This is not a contribution to conservative theological practice— but a drawing in of Judeo-Christian and sometimes occult thought of the apocalypse to find a reaffirmation of hope in the contemporary moment. The thesis engages thought and modes of practice that, while currently disparate, could be brought together and assert the conditions for life beyond neoliberalism.

The elusive conditions of *hope* in a politics that escapes capitalism uses the life, cinema, and writing of Pasolini— focused around the script for *'San Paolo'*— as a point of departure for messianic thinking in the time-space of an eschatological and apocalyptic period. Pasolini's work is a conceptual spine throughout the thesis from which exegetic interpretations of his work are made, theoretical implications of these readings are drawn out, and a methodology of art practice in film and writing is explored. In this sense, Pasolini is a Virgil-like figure of the thesis, the primary guide within a time before the apocalypse and the possibility of a secular political *revelation*. Mark Fisher, Walter Benjamin, St. Paul, and Giorgio Agamben are recurrent figures throughout the thesis, producing a philosophical scaffolding by which to think within eschatological, messianic time.

Some of the theoretical portions of the thesis, and much of the submitted practice, gather a diverse crew of figures, thought, and modes of practice to engender messianic hope. Puppets, snowmen, golems, Andy Kaufman, Amiri Baraka, Etel Adnan, Tacita Dean, Bruegel, William Burroughs, the Delphic Oracle, memories trapped in place, and occult ritual (to name a few) are variously drawn on in this document as transgressions, transmutations, and avatars in the field of experience defined by messianic eschatological time. These disparate but connected elements are organised by a principle of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*'— that which *'remains unsaid within the work but which demands to be unfolded and worked out'* [16]— a conceptual theme, like messianism and apocalypse, that runs throughout the thesis.

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[16] *Giorgio Agamben. What Is a Paradigm. 2002 1/10*, 2008.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0. 3minutes 30 seconds

The last two decades have seen a notable rise in interest on the writing of St Paul, including books by Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Agamben[17]. Edited anthologies of work on Paul have brought together writing by Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Gilles Deleuze, alongside secondary literature generated by this material[18].

The following thesis draws on Benjamin's messianic thinking and a notion of the sacred as the basis for a re-evaluation of Pasolini's work, with my synthesis of these related positions producing a methodology of *'acid messianism'* rooted in non-chronological notions of time, *translatability,* and the concept of duality and doubling. Pasolini's script for '*San Paolo'* is central to the thesis, and it is through Pasolini's vision of St. Paul that I situate my analysis, explication, and potentiality for Paul's life as a messianic event. The thesis seeks to add to a contemporary dialogue of secular philosophy engaging with Pauline concerns, but it is bounded by Pasolini's script of Paul's life— and, to a lesser degree, the book of Acts and Paul's Epistles— rather than engaging with the philosophically distinct paradigms of Pauline thought offered by Badiou, Žižek et al.

The main body of the thesis comprises four distinct but interlocking chapters. *'Terms and Pier Paolo Pasolini's Idiolect'*, and *'A New Trilogy'* utilise scholarship on Pasolini as a methodology to argue for a previously unacknowledged trilogy in his work. *'Acid Messianism and Translatability'* is a theoretical chapter which draws

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[17] Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005. Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. Žižek, Slavoj. *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* Verso Books, 2009. Žižek, Slavoj. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Short Circuits. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003.

[18] Caputo, John D., and Linda Martín Alcoff, eds. *St. Paul among the Philosophers*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009. Jennings, Theodore W. *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013. Løland, Ole Jakob. *The Reception of Paul the Apostle in the Works of Slavoj Žižek*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. Odell-Scott, David, ed. *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians: 7*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2007.

from the conceptualisation of a new trilogy, alongside Benjamin and Fisher's philosophy, to develop a methodology of thinking and practice—*acid messianism* and *translatability*— articulated in the final chapter *'Practice: Case Studies'*.

'Terms and Pier Paolo Pasolini's Idiolect' provides a gloss of how e*ntvicklungsfahigkeit, apocalypse, eschatology,* and *messianism* are utilised throughout the thesis. Each of these terms is used recurrently, and this section situates their precise understanding and conceptual capacity within the thesis. This is followed by a brief biography of Pasolini to ground his unique political, religious, and aesthetic vision— and idiosyncratic use of language— both central to my assessment of his oeuvre and the basis for my practical work.

'A New Trilogy' provides an extended gloss of *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1964), '*San Paolo'* and *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* (1975), showing how the three works can be read in dialogue as a new, speculative trilogy in Pasolini's oeuvre. The chapter highlights duality, messianism, the sacred, and hope as crucial to Pasolini's work and thinking around St. Paul and begins to highlight the textual, filmic, and theoretical methods for engaging these themes.

'Acid Messianism and Translatability' introduces a contemporary critique of neoliberalism, drawing on Mark Fisher's work, as the starting point from which to develop a conceptual model of *'acid messianism'.* Benjamin and Agamben's messianism is allied to notions of the 'sacred' to articulate a new political sensibility informed by my reading of '*San Paolo'* and the newly proposed trilogy. A process of creative production I have dubbed '*translatability'* is offered as the method by which messianism and political futurity can be engaged and enacted, which, again, draws on Benjamin, Pasolini, Fisher, and Agamben's work.

'Practice: Case Studies' introduces and grounds my practical work in the preceding academic and theoretical chapters. Three video works, titled— *'Pier Paolo'*, '*On Sacred Time'*, and *'The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or to Live in Hell and Not Despair',* are presented—with links provided to a Vimeo account for viewing each work— alongside a script entitled *'The Séance, or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen'.* Each work is presented in turn, with the means of production,

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motifs, and references explicated as an example of *'acid messianic'* and *'translatability'* methodology. The scripts for each work are included at the end of the thesis as an appendix (see contents table), with page numbers given to guide the reader to the section under discussion.

Terms and Pier Paolo Pasolini's Idiolect

Entvicklungsfahigkeit.

This thesis uses the notion of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*' as a conceptual compass. First proposed by Ludwig Feuerbach, '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*' is, in direct translation to English, the 'development ability' of a work. Agamben describes the agency of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*' as that in which *'a work, be it a work of science or art or scholarship has some value, it will contain this philosophical element. It is something which remains unsaid within the work but which demands to be unfolded and worked out'*. [19] Agamben goes on to designate philosophy as having '*no proper territory',* a field of '*no specificity'.* Instead of residing in strict epistemological bounds, philosophy is a fragment contained within elements of culture, politics, theology, and science. It is something '*scattered in every territory. It is always a diaspora, and must be recollected and gathered up'*[20]. '*Entvicklungsfahigkeit*' can then be said to be the means by which these dispersed morsels of thought are recognised and advanced upon. The methodology employed throughout this thesis uses this logic of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit';* the selection and putting into constellation of diverse figures, thought, artworks, and practices is based on the implicit *'demand'* of the *'unsaid'* element I recognise as crucial to describing an instance of a messianic flash in the time of the eschaton. *'Entvicklungsfahigkeit'* is the string that holds the, at first look, disparate rosary beads of references used within the thesis. '*Entvicklungsfahigkeit'* is, to again use Agamben's gloss of the concept, '*similar to the fragment of messianic time scattered and disseminated in the profane time'.*[21] The messianic logic of Benjamin's work is directly employed throughout my theoretical and practical work; images, music, and theory sown throughout history are called upon to activate the *'unfolded'* and *'unsaid'* element held within them. And that in relation this action can begin to describe the conditions of a messianic instance.

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[19] *Giorgio Agamben. What Is a Paradigm. 2002 1/10,* 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0. 3minutes 30 seconds.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

The unfortunately truncated lives of Pasolini, Fisher, Benjamin, and St. Paul are also understood in terms of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*', the capacity of their thought to be extended, elaborated, and to attribute unsaid or unperformed capacities of their work. To take up what they have produced and find new arenas for their thought and new methods of activating the ideas. In this sense, my process has been more akin to a repetition— with difference— of the ideas, a collaboration out of ordinary temporality rather than appropriation.[22] Repetition, duality, and doubling occur throughout the thesis and in the thought and practice of these figures. In '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*', a reperformance of this mode of thought occurs. A replete, profligate capacity, rearing its head at the moment of near collapse—a moment of messianic event in thought, culture, history and artworks. The conceptualisation and use of Pasolini's work in the thesis verges on hagiography— along with the related notions of martyrdom and relic— all distilled fragments of a life, which become modes of rewriting, adaptation, and doubling of experience. The thesis and practice are a means for these ideas to come to the fore.

Apocalypse, Eschatology, and Messianism.

> *For man also does not know his time:*
> *Like fish taken in a cruel net,*
> *Like birds caught in a snare,*
> *So the sons of men are snared in an evil time,*
> *When it falls suddenly upon them.*
> *—Ecclesiastes 9:12*

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[22] This idea is also drawn from Agamben's reading of '*Entvicklungsfahigkeit*' - *'According to another methodological principle-also not discussed in this book- which I often make use of, the genuine philosophical element in every work, whether it be a work of art, of science, or of thought, is its capacity for elaboration, which Ludwig Feuerbach defined as Entwicklungefahigkeit. It is precisely when one follows such a principle that the difference between what belongs to the author of a work and what is attributable to the interpreter becomes as essential as it is difficult to grasp. I have therefore preferred to take the risk of attributing to the texts of others what began its elaboration with them, rather than run the reverse risk of appropriating thoughts or research paths that do not belong to me'.—*
Agamben, Giorgio. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2009. Pg 7-8.

The time-space of this thesis is apocalyptic. The theorisation of this period draws most heavily on the Judeo-Christian conceptualisation of this time— but moves its implications from theology, using these ideas to describe and consider the time of apocalypse as a contemporary, secular, and political moment. The feeling of being poised at the precipice of oblivion, that all of humanity might evaporate at any minute, is a recurrent and often derided notion in the history of ideas. The central tenet of Jesus Christ's teaching was that the end of time was imminent; one of St. Paul's key theo-political issues in his epistles is explaining the delay of *parousia* (the second coming and inauguration of the apocalypse) promised by Christ as occurring within a generation— *Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* Matthew 24:34–35, Mark 13:30–31, Luke 21:32–33

My assertion of the apocalypse as a fruitful space for imagining the future steers hard away from the prediction of worldly destruction at a particular time. The folly associated with apocalyptic thinking is partly due to the prophecy of Nostradamus-like figures that litter history. Alongside Jesus, in the Christian tradition alone, we can list the Shakers, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and several Popes as placing a date on when the apocalypse will arrive. What I am concerned with is not a specific date but taking seriously the idea that hyper-accelerated global capitalism has brought the possibility of an existential threat to the majority of life on earth. Environmental collapse, nuclear war, or an incurable pandemic would be the short list of possibilities in which a very material secular apocalypse may well occur. The arrival moment of these catastrophes is unknown— and perhaps will never come— but the genuine possibility of their potential occurrence situates us in an apocalyptic time.

Nevertheless, the acceptance of operating in what might be the last days of history is not of a nihilistic bent. Instead, I suggest that this realisation opens a singular rupture of knowledge and the possibility of a reaffirmation of hope as something hidden and most available at the very limit of experience. The most desperate, potentially catastrophic condition provides the key to reimagining politics beyond the bounds that might seem immediately feasible. This understanding of hope in the future as a veiled truth rests on the notion that to be hidden presents the possibility of being recovered. In being lost, the potential of being found. And that,

in a bog of desperation, the worst and final moments of history, when blind faith is the only condition available, is when hope achieves its true form akin to a secular prayer for salvation. The time-space of apocalypse and the possibility of hope in its midst is well described in the following fragment by Benjamin, which bears the symbolic mark of the Damascene fall of St. Paul, — *'knowledge comes only in flashes in a moment of simultaneous illumination and blindness'.*[23] Knowledge as an optimistic hope of the future, beyond capital, born in the shadow of impending doom, is a core concept of the work presented here, and the practices enacted and described are an attempt to articulate a means of uncovering, revealing, or producing this hope.

Apocalypse and Eschatology

As apocalyptic thought is so contested and variously used, I thought it prudent to offer a personal gloss of it and related terms to correctly situate my thought outside of what could be perceived as more cartoonish Hollywood visions of the end of time.

The original Greek for the apocalypse, *'apokalyptein'* was to *'uncover, disclose, reveal'*[24]*,* and I ground my reading under this definition of the word. The notion of the apocalypse as a time of unveiling, uncovering, or revealing opens the possibility that while this action might have a catastrophic and destabilising effect, it is *not* the end of time and history as we know it. As Samuel Weber has noted, if the apocalypse can be revealed *'it must in some sense or other have already been "there" all the time'.* [25] The apocalypse is then something imminent within the world and merely needs to be found.

Giorgio Agamben illustrates the potential quietness of this 'uncovering' as akin to a gesture or quotidian activity.

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[23] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002. Pg. 456 [N1,1].

[24] from apo "off, away from" (see apo-) + kalyptein "to cover, conceal" (from PIE root *kel- (1) "to cover, conceal, save")

'Apocalypse | Etymology of Apocalypse by Etymonline'. Accessed 20 June 2024. https://www.etymonline.com/word/apocalypse.

[25] Weber, Samuel, *One Sun Too Many*, in Szendy, Peter, *Apocalypse Cinema and Other Ends of the World*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

"A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come."[26]

The apocalypse might well be the end of one kind of world, time-space, or history— but it will also be the inauguration of a new, but already present, reality. I do not perceive this to be a secular heaven on earth— with the problematic utopian issues this would present— but simply a condition of thinking and life beyond capitalism.

The space in which the apocalypse might occur is also crucial to concretely utilising it as an idea. The apocalypse is the event moment of *'revelation'* in time. But the period in which it might occur is best described as the *eschaton*— the last moments of time prior to the apocalypse, with *'eschatology'* designating the study and understanding of this last period. Again, my interest in this term is related to its religious origin, but in a distinctly secular fashion. Eschatology is, in this sense, the time I have already described as an acceptance of the possibility for the end of humanity. To understand the contemporary moment as one haunted by the threat of runaway ecological catastrophe or nuclear war.

To operate under these acceptances and definitions of apocalypse and eschaton is a double-bind. In order to see the potential for a reaffirmation of hope in the apocalyptic moment— and that the apocalypse might simply be a *'small displacement'* in the fabric of the current reality— a further acceptance of the apocalypse in its more commonplace definition is also required. A foreboding of imminent, humanity-ending cataclysm.

Messianism

Within this framework of the apocalypse as an event persistently threatening to occur (either as the earth turned into a fireball or the *'small displacement'* of a

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[26] Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. First edition. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993. Pg 52

gesture that changes everything) and the eschaton as the possible time-space in which this can materialise, the figure of the messiah arises.

In Judeo-Christian thought, the messiah is a figure who comes as a saviour, inaugurating the move into heaven as saved from the evils of this world. The messiah is then the chief agent of apocalyptic time, the one with the unique power to bring about revelation and the move from the current world into the next. For Christians, this person was Jesus Christ and the state of being in eschatological time originating from the delay of his promised *parousia* (second coming). In the Jewish faith, the messiah has yet to come; although various people have claimed to have been the Jewish messiah.[27]

The use of messianism in this thesis, again, makes secular and expanded use of the concept while still drawing on its Judeo-Christian origin. Using Benjamin and Agamben's theoretical framework for the means and capacity of messianism, it is freed from simply being the appearance of a God-like figure. Instead, it describes a particular type of historical time, a connection between things, and a quotidian repeatable quality.

In the *'Acid Messianism and Translatability'* chapter, I will unpack the philosophical mechanics of Benjamin and Agamben's messianism in which the '*dialectal-image'* and the now-time of *'jetztzeit'* are crucial to describing the unusual understanding of time and ontology in which messianic moments arrive. What is offered here is an initial gloss of the messianic as an agent of futurity in eschatological time and the diffusion of messianism— beyond a singular figure— into history and cultural objects.

In this reading, messianism operates in the tension between what is past and a contemporary moment, the historical-material conditions of the world and the potential for the present to activate these forces in new and revolutionary ways. In finding instances where history and the present meet— mediated by objects of culture like literature and forms of image making—the 'real' reality the apocalypse

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[27] Sabbatai Zevi is the most notable and intriguing example of these false messiahs.

finally uncovers is possible. Fredric Jameson describes this concept of the messiah, and messianism, as a condition that '*is available to do something rather different to temporality and in particular to its future dimension, to its way of conceptualising futurity'.* [28]

In divorcing the occurrence of the messiah from an individual, the appearance of the messianic can occur in objects, rituals, places, images, text and most fruitfully in the combination of these instances. It takes an animistic view of the world as filled with sacred energy, a condition Pasolini describes as *'divine manifestations in the stones, the trees, the neighbours, anything…'*[29]. The mark of the messianic potential is akin to the description Agamben gives of *'entvicklungsfahigkeit';* it is '*something which remains unsaid within the work but which demands to be unfolded and worked out'.* [30] The impulse within something to be enacted, and therefore implicitly aimed at future conditions. The messianic force held within history, cultural objects, and place is then something which can cause a rupture in experience, a break in reality in which the future seems suddenly available. This thesis takes this understanding of a messianic fragment as available in previous works of art and literature as the material for making new artwork.

Jameson provides an illuminating description of this sensing something unsaid, and perhaps unsayable, as a messianic urge in our experience of reality which appears as an *'alternate world, our alternate world… one contiguous with ours but without any connection or access to it. Then, from time to time, like a diseased eyeball in which disturbing flashes of light are perceived or like those baroque sunbursts in which rays from another world suddenly break into this one, we are reminded that Utopia exists and that other systems, other spaces, are still possible'.*[31] From this view, messianism is not a passive activity of waiting for a messiah to enter but a *practice* of *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'* in which fragments of, say,

[28] Jameson, Fredric. The Benjamin Files. Verso Books, 2022. Pg. 12-13

[29] Stefania Benini, *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*, Toronto Italian Studies (University of Toronto Press, 2015). Pg.4.

[30] *Giorgio Agamben. What Is a Paradigm. 2002 1/10*, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0. 3minutes 30 seconds

[31] Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010. Pg. 620.

text and image can be gathered up on the basis of the almost imperceivable messianic force contained within them, and by placing them in constellation apocalyptic, future-orientated visions of the future become possible.

The notion of time as non-chronological is crucial to how this messianic form of *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'* takes place. Instead of seeing historical events as locked in strict order, the form of messianism offered by Benjamin suggests that historical time is more akin to a series of palimpsests, time as a lamination of experience rather than a series of discrete units placed in order. The process of *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'* is the hotwiring of the past and the present across these laminations to imagine the future. To experience this notion of the past as immediately recuperable and usable— that the present can have as much effective change on the past as the past does on the present— is the unique *'time of the now'* that messianic thinking affords. Agamben offers St. Paul as the originator of this practice—

> *'There is nothing more exemplary, in this sense, than Paul's gesture at the point in which he experiences and announces to his brothers the contemporariness par excellence that is messianic time, the being-contemporary with the Messiah, which he calls precisely the "time of the now" (ho nyn kairos)…but it also has the singular capacity of putting every instant of the past in direct relationship with itself, of making every moment or episode of biblical history a prophecy or a prefiguration'.* [32]

Messianism becomes a form of prophetic prefiguration '*in which rays from another world suddenly break into this one*'[33].

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[32] Agamben, Giorgio. *'What Is an Apparatus?' And Other Essays*. Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.
Pg. 52-53
[33] Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010. Pg. 620

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Pier Paolo Pasolini lived from 1922 to 1975 and continues to be a controversial political and cultural figure, with an astonishing output of work that evolved from poetry written in regional Italian dialect into novels, plays, journalism, critical theory, and cinema. His life and work trace a dramatic revolution in Italian life from a largely agrarian country to fascism and the Second World War, and finally, hyper-accelerated modernisation as a state post-1945. Pasolini's early cinema, poetry, and fiction sought to illustrate a regional Italian class seduced and subsumed by modernisation. Towards the end of his life, Pasolini's initial concern with Italian peasantry expanded— and focused more intensively on cinema and journalism— to describe a universalised notion of collective experience in history, bound by an a-temporal sacred force.

This thesis is routed in an expanded reading of the *'San Paolo'* script drawing on Pasolini's broader output of cinema and writing. However, as the research took place, particularly in the practice element of the work, the figure of Pasolini became increasingly intertwined and essential to the work. As Elizabeth Castelli says in her introduction to the '*San Paolo'* script—

> *'It is not generally defensible (or productive or interesting) to pay much attention to the biographies of writers and artists when analysing and interpreting their work, and yet with Pasolini, one feels called to make an exception to this ordinarily salutary caution'.*[34]

As with Castelli, I believe a framework for Pasolini's idiosyncratic, scandalous, often paradoxical nature is required to correctly situate the oft-quoted *'doubleness'* and *'duality'* at the heart of the work and his identification with St. Paul as a conflicted figure. This contrary worldview is extended into Pasolini's definition of *'modernity'* as the increasing commodification of bare life under *'neocapitalism'*— terms I will gloss in my *'Modernity and Prophetic Neoliberalism'* chapter— and the pernicious, expanding bourgeoise class. Pasolini's appeal to a prehistory of

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[34] *Introduction: Translating Pasolini Translating Paul.* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. xxi.

lumpenproletariat life is crystalised as the *'sacred'* — a reality unfettered from capitalism— a mystical form of materialism which opens his work to messianic possibility.

The following section is intended to briefly outline the contrary nature of Pasolini's cultural, political, and religious outlook, as in part rooted in his biography. Scandal, duality, modernity, and the sacred are each unpacked and glossed in terms of Pasolini's singular usage.

Duality

Pasolini was born in the northeastern city of Bologna to Susanna Pasolini, nee Colussi, a schoolteacher with liberal politics, and Carlo Alberto Pasolini, a lieutenant in the Italian Army fascinated with fascism. Pier Paolo had a difficult relationship with his father, an alcoholic and prolific gambler who would be arrested for gambling debts several times in Pasolini's childhood. Pasolini's deep love for his mother and Carlo Alberto's avowed fascism distanced Carlo Alberto from Pier Paolo and his wife, instating an oedipal schematic to the family home. While Pasolini read Freud's work, the negation of the father and union of the mother that played out in his own life should be understood primarily under the yoke of myth rather than psychoanalytic theory. The biographical evidence makes it clear that the dynamic within the family of unreserved fealty to the mother and hate for the father was already recognised by Pasolini by the age of three.

> *'Q. — What was your mother like when she was young? How do you remember her?*
>
> *A.— I only have the faintest memory of her from when I was very small. Then she suddenly sprang into prominence when I was about three and from that time on my whole life has revolved around her.*
>
> *Q.— Your life suddenly changed and took the direction that you have followed up until the present. Right?*
>
> *A. —Yes, everything changed when I was three. When my mother was about to have her baby I began to suffer from a burning feeling in my eyes. My father held me down on the kitchen table, held my eyes open with his fingers and poured drops into them. And that's the "symbolical" moment at which I*

stopped loving my father'.[35]

The myth is, in typically Pasolinian style, reorganised— the *father* is not killed, but by violently attempting to cure the son's illness, is rejected. The symbolic significance of the eyes as the point in which the Oedipal figure is inaugurated suggests that, for Pasolini, in 'killing'— i.e removing his love of his father— a new form of sight and subjectivity is founded. The oedipal act does not result in a blinding but a new clarity of vision. Even more saliently, by the time Pasolini made his version of the Oedipus myth, *'Edipo Re'*[36] (1967), he made the following comments in a published introduction to the script for the film.

> *'I am no longer terribly interested in the subject of the researches of Freud and Marx. I'm no longer at all seriously involved in that academic bog that turns Oedipus into a whipping post for Freudian or Marxist theories... I want to stress the fact that now, at forty -five years of age, I have emerged from the wilderness of Marxist and Freudian dogma. But where have I got to?'.* [37]

This statement was made in 1967, a year before Pasolini began work on the script for *'San Paolo'* in earnest; the oedipal act is still pertinent to Pasolini's thinking— but there is a desire to further renegotiate its meaning beyond a Freudian interpretation. The *scandal* of oedipal violence can be read as Pasolini's first performance of libellous rebellion against the societal status quo, which would continue for the rest of his life. Wallace P. Sillanpoa suggests that the rejection of the world Pasolini was born into would eventually evolve into a deeply contrary personality; even an acceptance of unity in self becomes contradictory and paradoxical.

> *"'I cannot accept anything of the world where I live', Pasolini once claimed in a newspaper interview. This held true for all cultural and literary, as well as social and political, questions. The one constant in Pasolini's criticism is its refusal to adhere for any length of time to solicited or self-imposed canons...His desire to contradict and contradict himself was his only insane*

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[35] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 304

[36] *Edipo Re*. Arco Film, Somafis, 1967.

[37] Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg 471.

consistency".[38]

In 1944, Pasolini's younger brother, Guido, joined partisan forces fighting against fascism. He was killed by a rival group of communist guerillas fighting for Tito's Yugoslavia. The death and grieving of his brother further consolidated Pier Paolo and his mother's union and alienation from Carlo Alberto, whose gambling and alcoholism intensified in the aftermath of Guido's death. The absurdity of a death originating from forces ostensibly fighting for the same cause —liberation from fascism, a cause Pasolini, of course, also supported— begins to illuminate the perpetual state Pasolini found himself within of simultaneously arguing for and against various forms of cultural, religious, and political structures. A *'duality'* of position that can be most clearly seen in Pasolini's depiction of a figure of St. Paul, who in Pasolini's reading, offers an example of divine illumination *and* the pernicious organisational violence of the state. Guido's tragic death becomes emblematic of the paradoxical and often violent arrangement of Pasolini's thought. Contradiction and rebellion, established in his early familial experiences, become the founding myth of Pasolini's sense of self.

Scandal

Pasolini and his mother moved to Rome in 1950 without Carlo Alberto, and the close bond between the two would continue for the rest of his life, often living with his mother for extended periods. The move was provoked by the accusation that Pasolini engaged in indecent sexual activity with students under his charge at a school in Casarsa, where the family had moved at the end of the war. Although acquitted, the trial marked the start of perpetual legal action for a range of supposed offences, including *'blasphemy, pornography, insulting the national religion, and corrupting minors'* [39] that would dog Pasolini until his death. The religious, political, and legal

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[38] Sillanpoa, Wallace P. 'Pasolini's Gramsci'. *MLN* 96, no. 1 (January 1981): 120. Pg. 129. Sillanpoa gives the following as sources for these quotations Pasolini, in *"Paese Sera,"* 18 novembre, 1966, now in Empirismo eretico (Milano: Garzanti, 1977), p. 150. and Dario Bellezza, *"Poesia della vita"* in Perche Pasolini, op. cit., p. 33.

[39] *Introduction: Translating Pasolini Translating Paul.* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. xxi.

forces behind these accusations may also have been the originators of his death[40], murder as the final instrument of silencing Pasolini's scandalous work.

As Wu Ming notes, by the time he began work on the script for '*San Paolo*' Pasolini

> *'"…has already gone through four arrests, 16 charges and eleven trials, in addition to three assaults by neofascists (all dismissed by judges) and a police search of his apartment, to look for firearms. "As soon as I'll have a bit of time", he writes in an unpublished note, "I'll publish a white paper on a dozen of judicial sentences against me: without comments. It will be one of the most comical books published in Italy. But now things aren't comical anymore. They are tragic, because they aren't anymore about the persecution of a scapegoat […]: now it's about a vast, deep, and calculated endeavour of repression, to which the most reactionary part of the judicial system has zealously dedicated itself…"'.*[41]

Pasolini's identification of the establishment as a *'vast'* and *'reactionary'* force against all, not just himself as a sacrificial scapegoat, galvanises Pasolini's work as a form of scandal in opposition to institutional dogma. Pasolini frequently draws on *'scandal'* to undermine or highlight the false moralising or easy sublimation of political opposition under capitalism. Although Pasolini first had scandal thrust upon him— the allegation of abuse— scandal becomes the means by which Pasolini articulates his non-reconcilable doubleness of position. The rupturing of normal life through scandalous writing and film becomes the primary means of his work. An occasional communist, thrown out of the party for his homosexuality and alleged paedophilia, he was more interested in Gramsci and, as quoted above, dismissive of Marx. An avowed atheist whose work is deeply indebted to Roman Catholic religion and sought a sacred connection to a pre-modern world of myth. An openly gay man in a country where homosexuality was still a crime. He was a sexual revolutionary for men who held traditional notions of the boundary of sexual freedom for women. On the other hand, he was resistant to the consolidation of homosexuality into the political status quo on the basis that it would nullify the very queerness at the heart of his sexuality. At each junction that his politics might find what we now call

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[40] Please see footnote 10 of this thesis for an explication and references to the unsolved nature of Pasolini's death and its possible conspirators.

   [41] Wu Ming. 'The Police vs. Pasolini, Pasolini vs. The Police'. Versobooks.com. Accessed 15 September 2021. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2719-the-police-vs-pasolini-pasolini-vs-the-police.

intersectionality, or even just solidarity, Pasolini's scandalous nature ran so deep that it scandalised many who might have been considered allies. His infamous article against the political movement of May 68' is a prime example of this— '*The PCI to the Young!! (Notes in Verse for a Prose Poem Followed by an "Apology")*' [42] — dismissed the student protesters as the entitled children of the bourgeoisie fighting against a police force of the disenfranchised, the sons of the true proletariat driven into the employ of state violence by virtue of having no other economic option.

Pasolini's biographer, Barth David Schwartz, has suggested that this desire to subvert or reject political or social acceptance and solidarity bordered on narcissism. And that this narcissism was born of the total and unwavering love of his mother. While under her grace, Pasolini did not feel the need to pursue the favour or acceptance of others; he could scandalise without remorse. Unlike Oedipus, Pasolini does not undergo symbolic immolation as penance for the transgression of rejecting the father for the love of the mother. Instead, the contravention of familial unity, as a form of scandal, becomes the basis for breaching a range of conservative and capitalist norms that Pasolini would brand under his own notion of 'modernity', which I will gloss in the next section of this chapter.

Scandal is then, for Pasolini, a means of criticism and production, a way to stir up controversy by telling paradoxical and contrary stories. Scandal answers his own question of '*I have emerged from the wilderness of Marxist and Freudian dogma. But where have I got to?'.* [43]

Scandal and Duality

Pasolini elaborates on the concept of scandal as stretched between two points of contradiction embodied as a duality or doubleness of identity.

'I am scandalous. I am so to the extent to which I stretch a cord, an umbilical

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[42] '*The PCI to the Young!! (Notes in Verse for a Prose Poem Followed by an "Apology")* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. 150.

[43] Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg 471.

cord, in fact, between the sacred and the profane' [44]

This conceptualisation of Pasolini as a figure that comes to contaminate stories with paradoxical duality is why it is essential to have some biographical understanding of him as a person within this thesis. Pasolini's tacit scandalous nature runs throughout the work and is seen most explicitly in the '*San Paolo*' script. There are various attempts across the literature on Pasolini to describe this tendency for scandal as a duality in terms of an *'anti-Hegelian'* [45]opposition to history and politics as teleological and ultimately synthesisable. While there is some merit in this attempt to describe Pasolini's desire to promote the idea of reality as *'anti-Hegelian'*, as, for Pasolini, '*nature does not know "overcomings". Everything in it is juxtaposed and coexists'* [46]. But, any attempt to lock Pasolini's rationale of scandal/duality as a concrete philosophical position is ultimately undermined by its contrary and idiosyncratic logic. The heretical capacity of scandal and duality, as noted by Alessandro Giammei and Merjian H. Ara—

> *'only makes sense in the form of poetry'. As soon as one tries to articulate it as a cogent doctrine or political theory, it reveals the disquieting face of its paternalistic narcissism. Its fragile, queer metaphysical essence, rooted in fetishism, only thrives in the speculative dimension of lyricism and figural fiction.'*[47]

This thesis takes Pasolini's idiosyncratic form of scandalous duality as the '*speculative dimension*' on which to build a new trilogy within Pasolini's work. The *'umbilical cord'* of scandal as a duality is the means by which messianism can be brought into the work, as it also operates in the uncanny repetition of history, contamination of the sacred with the profane, to open ruptures of revelatory meaning.

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[44] Siciliano, Enzo. *Pasolini: A Biography*. First American Edition. New York: Random House, 1982. Pg. 359

[45] Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*. Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg. 26

[46] Ibid. Pg 26.

[47] Giammei, Alessandro, and Ara H. Merjian. '*A Force of the Past'* in *Heretical Aesthetics: Pasolini on Painting*. London New York: Verso Books, 2023. Pg 2-3.

Modernity and Prophetic Neoliberalism

> *'There is one aspect in which Pasolini the poet and novelist wholly coincides with the Italy of the neo-capitalist turning point, and he coincides with it in the sense of a foreseen crisis, or as someone who has become aware, intensely aware, of the "unhappy conscience" of the moment. And while the fire of imagination continued to blaze within him, he never abandoned the role he had chosen for himself as the "unhappy conscience" of his fellow human beings'.*[48]

> —Enzo Siciliano '*From Literature to Cinema*'

Pasolini moved to Rome in January of 1950, propelled by the allegations of abuse in Casarsa. The region of Friuli had, to this point, been the majority focus of his poetry: the peasantry and idyllic landscapes seemingly outside of time. Pasolini's first significant poems are written in Friulian, a dialect which, until the efforts of Pasolini and a small group of like-minded writers, had existed solely as an oral tradition with no recorded literature. These pastoral, lyrical poems are the first sign of Pasolini's enamoured notion of a past free of capitalism and moralism, and a world mythical bound to history. Pasolini's political-poetic conception of this world is peopled by a 'sub-proletarian' class untouched by modernism and what he believed to be the encroaching and debilitating logic of the bourgeoisie. The Marxist inflexion of 'sub-proletarian' and 'lumpen-proletarian' (both are used interchangeably by Pasolini) should not be overplayed in Pasolini's conception of this as a class of people. For Pasolini, the 'sub-proletarian' group is a state of divine innocence untouched by capital's influence, rather than a proto or pre-revolutionary vanguard. The Pasolinian 'sub-proletarian' is as much a mental state as an economic one. The version of reality this group exists within (in Pasolini's conception) operates through myth, honour, and almost animalistic urges—

> *'The characteristics of the lumpenproletariat are prehistoric, are indeed pre-Christian; the moral world of a lumpenproletarian does not know Christianity. My characters for instance do not know what love is in the Christian sense; their morals are the typical morals of all the south of Italy*

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[48] Siciliano, Enzo *From Literature to Cinema* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 5.

and are based on honor'. [49]

As already noted, this pseudo-ethnographic and rose-tinted concept of the peasantry is only really understandable with the paradigm of Pasolini's *'speculative dimension of lyricism and figural fiction',* which *'only makes sense in the form of poetry'.*[50] The valorisation of this condition can also be read as a reaction to Pasolini's almost pathological hatred of 'bourgeois' life, categorised as *'horrible conventions, horrible principles, horrible duties, horrible democratism, horrible fascism, horrible objectivity, horrible smiles…a member of the bourgeoisie, whatever he does, is always wrong'.*[51]

The move to Rome intensifies this split between 'sub-proletarian' and 'bourgeoise' worldviews. The post-war period in Italy was marked by the 'economic miracle' that much of Western Europe and America underwent, fuelled by the Marshall Plan, hyper-accelerated global trade, and newly opened markets. Dubbed 'il boom' in Italy, the effect of this rapid modernisation, communication, and the cultural shifts it engendered were particularly stark. Pasolini's arrival in Rome provided him with a front-row seat to this national shift. Unlike other Western European capital cities, Rome was only made the country's capital in 1870; Turin and Florence were first used as the centre of power after the unification of Italy. While holding administrative power as the seat of the papacy, Rome, historically, had almost no industry. And so, the 'il boom' of the post-war period transitioned a considerable portion of the populous from agrarian life to industrial urban workers in a few decades. Pasolini's unique view of this cultural and economic reorganisation was of the 'sub-proletarian' peasantry leaving its idyllic, mythic, almost Edenic sphere, unrooting and thrusting them into a commercialised world of bourgeoise taste and sensibility. Pasolini's concern is not with this group becoming economically disenfranchised by its move into modernity; rather, he is concerned by

[49] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Leonardo Fioravanti, Omar Zulficar, Nazareno Natale, Giuseppe Francone, Antonietta Fiorito, Dan Perry, et al. '*Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World'. Film Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1965): 31–45. pg. 36.

[50] Giammei, Alessandro, and Ara H. Merjian. '*A Force of the Past'* in *Heretical Aesthetics: Pasolini on Painting*. London New York: Verso Books, 2023. Pg 2-3.

[51] Quandt, James. *'Teorema: Just a Boy'.* The Criterion Collection. Accessed 19 April 2024. https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/6823-teorema-just-a-boy.

consumerism's ability to instil an amnesia in the 'sub-proletarian' worldview, turning its subjects into a bourgeoise class. The stark contrast between the 'sub-proletarian' and 'bourgeoise' reality is breathlessly described by Pasolini—

> *'The face of the subproletarian appeals to me, because it is clean (while the face of the bourgeois is dirty); because it is innocent (while the face of the bourgeois is guilty), because it is pure (while the face of the bourgeois is vulgar), because it is religious (while the face of the bourgeois is hypocritical), because it is crazy (while the face of the bourgeois is prudent), because it is sensual (while the face of the bourgeois is cold), because it is immediate (while the face of the bourgeois is calculating), because it is kind (while the face of the bourgeois is insolent), because it is unguarded (while the face of the bourgeois is dignified), because it is incomplete (while the face of the bourgeois is refined), because it is trusting (while the face of the bourgeois is hard), because it is tender (while the face of the bourgeois is ironic), because it is dangerous (while the face of the bourgeois is soft), because it is fierce (while the face of the bourgeois is blackmailing), because it iscoloured (while the face of the bourgeois is white)'[52].*

Becoming bourgeoise is to lose a naive subjectivity rooted in myth, sensuality, and an *'incomplete'* openness to reality. Andrea Righi describes this as *'neocapitalism represent[ing] for Pasolini a noncoercive transformation of social practices, a passive reshaping of forms of life that altered society at an anthropological level. In short a new form of fascism'.* [53] For Pasolini, the capitalist-consumerist paradigm inaugurated post-1945 infects culture, politics, and religion as *'a genuine anthropological cataclysm'*[54] which is ideologically inescapable.

It is via this view of modernity as a vast unavoidable juggernaut that Pasolini explains what could be viewed as hypocritical positionality as definitively 'bourgeois', stating that even if you were *'horribly implicated'* [55]in bourgeois life via education— as Pasolini was— or through inherited wealth and privilege it was a

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[52] Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*. Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg 206.

[53] Righi, A. *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011. Pg. 75.

[54] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg xxvii.

[55] Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 491.

state that could be viewed '*objectively, from outside*'.[56] The form of modernity that Pasolini perceives is due to its totalitarianism of existence—

> '*Because the bourgeoisie is triumphant, is making bourgeois out of the workers on the one hand, out of the peasants and ex-colonialists on the other. In effect, through neocapitalism, the bourgeoisie is becoming the human condition. Whoever is born in this entropy cannot, by any means, metaphysically exit from it. It is all over*'. [57]

Capitalism and the violent commodification of the body, sex, friendship, and history enrapture the peasant class, divorcing them from the rural idyll Pasolini saw in the Friulian landscape, and people. But, as Alessia Ricciardi has articulated, '*to believe Pasolini genuinely desires a return to an archaic, rural society is absurd*'.[58] Instead, his '*fascination with an arcadian, peasant existence must be construed as an imaginative response to a messianic, rather than pragmatic or empirical, potential. In his poetic encounters with the specters of history, Pasolini encounters not only the revenants of the past, but also the arrivants of the future*'. [59] The fragment of hope to be recuperated from the prehistorical world of the 'sub-proletariat' is the mystical, supernatural, and messianic force that Pasolini would brand as the *'sacred'*. Before moving on to Pasolini's sacred answer to the embodied political shift he was observing, I would like to clarify the terms by which this general system of capital-driven oppression can be named.

Pasolini would variously brand this political moment as modernity, neocapitalism, and neo-fascism. These terms are used interchangeably and synonymously in much of his work. And as such, it is prudent to point out where they overlap, and what I perceive Pasolini as registering, namely, the appearance of a neoliberal order.

In regard to modernity, Pasolini was designating the period after the Second World War in which capitalism had entered an accelerated form and an affective,

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ricciardi, Alessia. *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pg. 125.
[59] Ibid.

psychological hold over Western civilisation. From a contemporary perspective, this period would typically be labelled post-modernity. The idiosyncratic use of 'modernity' by Pasolini, I believe, stems from his emphasis on *modernity* as coming from The Age of Reason, Industrial Revolution, and the Enlightenment, and that these were the crucial intellectual movements which would replace the *sacred* prehistory he wanted, in some way, to revitalise and bring into the present. Modernity is, in Pasolini's sense, the final act of this catastrophic shift and a lexical means of pointing to the past, more so than the present and future that *post-modernity* implies.

In describing the political conditions of this *modernity,* Pasolini stresses that capitalism has taken on a new form, changing the way in which people are capable of relating to each other, form a political consensus, and, most pertinently, how they are even able to think. Pasolini describes this affective form of oppression through capital as having an influence on his own mind. *'I am adapting myself to the degradation and I am accepting the unacceptable. I am manoeuvring 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[60].* In order to describe the *affective* capacity of capitalism in the immediate post-war period, Pasolini uses the terms *neo-fascism* and *neocapitalism*. These terms began to appear in interviews and Pasolini's journalism from the late 1960s until his death. The period in which he would begin the *'The Trilogy of Life'* film cycle— his first attempt at a joyful sexual egress from *modernity*— and its eventual *'repudiation',* which would culminate in '*Salò'* as an apocalyptic answer to capitalism's infection of the mind, as well as an economic state. I will provide an extended commentary on *'The Trilogy of Life'* and its *'repudiation'* in the next chapter. First, a more precise definition of what Pasolini implies by neo-fascism and neocapitalism is required to contextualise his thought.

In regard to neocapital, I believe Pasolini is talking about the aforementioned shift in capital's power over the psyche, rather than the typical political designation of a

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[60] *Repudiation of The Trilogy of Life.* In Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. xx.

blending of capitalism with social welfare and government intervention typified by Keynesian-style economic models. This is implied by his usage of the term in a pejorative and negative sense, which accentuates the *capital* part of the term, with *neo* representing its new form, rather than the more usual meaning as an adjusted form of capital with its worst excesses removed.

The introduction to this section starts with a quote from Enzo Siciliano in which he highlights Pasolini's preternatural ability to have '*foreseen*' a shift in the way capitalism functions, with *neocapital* standing in place for what would develop into neoliberalism.

There is one aspect in which Pasolini the poet and novelist wholly coincides with the Italy of the neo-capitalist turning point, and he coincides with it in the sense of a foreseen crisis, or as someone who has become aware, intensely aware, of the "unhappy conscience" of the moment[61].

The claim that I make here is that while neoliberalism came into conception during his lifetime, it was a term in juvenescence throughout Pasolini's life. And as such, Pasolini brought together various terms— such as *neocapital*— in order to describe the *'unhappy conscience'* this thesis describes. And that in this sense, Pasolini held a prophetic understanding of neoliberalism's *affective* and dominating ideology by the end of the 20th century.

While neoliberalism's originary doctrine had been laid down by Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises in the mid-40's[62], it would not become the dominant political ideology until its uptake in the 70's and 80's by Reagan and Thatcher, after Pasolini's death. However, the general creep towards a form of capitalism, in neoliberalism, that David Harvey describes as *'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating*

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[61] Siciliano, Enzo *From Literature to Cinema* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 5.
[62] Hayek, Friedrich A. von. *The Road to Serfdom*. Repr. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2006. and Von Mises, Ludwig. *Bureaucracy*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007 were both originally published in 1944 and are regarded as the 'founding texts' of neoliberalism.

individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade[63] had already begun to burgeon in the post-war period. Whether Pasolini engaged in a close reading of Hayek's work is unknown. I would, though, argue that Pasolini was anticipating its hegemonic ascent with its shadow evident in his work, political position, and the terms I have highlighted in this text.

George Monbiot and Peter Hutchison define neoliberalism, more decisively than Harvey, as *'an ideology whose central belief is that competition is the defining feature of humankind. It tells us we are greedy and selfish, but that greed and selfishness light the path to social improvement, generating the wealth that will eventually enrich us all. It casts us as consumers rather than citizens'*[64]. I, and from my reading of Pasolini, so would he, lean closer to Monbiot and Hutchison's definition of neoliberalism.

While it must be taken that Hayek and Mises' initial theorisation of neoliberalism was in good faith, with the general idea that freedom is best supported by this form of economic-political organisation and the 'trickle-down' of wealth it proposes, I believe that from a contemporary perspective, and in Pasolini's sensitive reading of his own moment, its intellectual formation was always flawed, and a powerful case can be made for it as a project which reasserts class power.[65] This is particularly starkly put in Karl Polanyi's assessment of the type of 'freedom' neoliberalism appeals to. Harvey summarises this as—

'In a complex society… the meaning of freedom becomes as contradictory and as fraught as its incitements to action are compelling. There are, he noted, two kinds of freedom, one good and the other bad. Among the latter he listed 'the freedom to exploit one's fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gains without

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[63] Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, U.S.A. 2020. Pg. 2.
[64] Monbiot, Georges and Hutchison, Peter, *The Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism*. Allen Lane, 2024. Pg 1.
[65] This is asserted in Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, U.S.A. 2020. Pg. 16 with Harvey drawing on economic data and the work of Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy.

commensurable service to the community, the freedom to keep technological
inventions from being used for public benefit, or the freedom to profit from public
calamities secretly engineered for private advantage'[66].

And that, ultimately, in order to sustain the narrow frame of 'freedom' that
neoliberalism allows for, forms of authoritarianism and violence would need to be
employed—
'then the only way this liberal utopian vision could be sustained is by force, violence,
and authoritarianism. Liberal or neoliberal utopianism is doomed, in Polanyi's
view, to be frustrated by authoritarianism, or even outright fascism. The good
freedoms are lost, the bad ones take over'[67]. And so while neoliberalism, as a
political and economic project, may not be authoritarian in its conception, it will
increasingly have to resort and appeal to authoritarianism in order to continue as a
hegemonic force.

Pasolini himself makes this equation in the script for '*San Paolo'*, with the '*Dream*
of the Macedonian' scene, during which the Macedonian character '*speaks of*
neocapitalism, which satisfies only the material well-being…of the Nazi revival; of
the substitution of blindly technical interests for the ideal interests of classical
Germany'[68]. As already detailed, we can read *neocapital* as synonymous with
neoliberalism in Pasolini's usage. And, that this form of '*material well-being'* has
fundamentally damaged the nature of human life— *'the "reality" of the innocent*
bodies has been violated, manipulated, tampered with by the consumerist
establishment; in fact, this violence on the bodies has become the most macroscopic
element in the new human era'[69].

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[66] Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, U.S.A.
2020. Pg. 36.
[67] Ibid Pg. 37-38.
[68] Pier Paolo Pasolini and Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. Verso,
2014. Pg. 8
[69] *Repudiation of The Trilogy of Life.* In Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and
Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New
Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. xviii.

All of which serves to highlight my reading of Pasolini's associated terms, under modernity, as a prophetic and *affective* description of what will come to be known as neoliberal ideology. One final parallel between Pasolini's work and descriptions of this new form of capital is in the paradoxical relation neoliberal ideologues hold towards the level of intervention and bureaucracy it needs from the state, professes not to want, but nevertheless requires. As Harvey points out:

'To guard against their greatest fears—fascism, communism, socialism, authoritarian populism, and even majority rule—the neoliberals have to put strong limits on democratic governance, relying instead upon undemocratic and unaccountable institutions (such as the Federal Reserve or the IMF) to make key decisions. This creates the paradox of intense state interventions and government by elites and 'experts' in a world where the state is supposed not to be interventionist'[70].

The claim by neoliberals is that bureaucracy is the domain of the nanny state, and free enterprise frees us of this economic burden. But, as Harvey points out, in order to sustain itself, neoliberalism requires vast and complex '*undemocratic and unaccountable institutions'.* As I will go on to show in the next chapter, in Pasolini's '*San Paolo'* and '*Salò',* the very nature and *requirement* for this bureaucracy becomes the means for telling St. Paul's rise to power, and the validation of the libertines' transgressions in '*Salò'*, with Pasolini again divining the core and implicit authoritarianism of neoliberalism.

Pasolini's use of *neo-fascism* is then a term that highlights that *modernity* and *neocapital*— as in Pasolini's idiolect— are forms of politics that are implicitly fascist, either from their origin, or teleologically, rather than Pasolini referring to a specific neofascist political movement.

Given that Pasolini uses these terms with such fluidity and idiosyncrasy, I will use the term *modernity* in the following chapters as encompassing the forms of nascent neoliberalism I believe Pasolini to be summoning. Namely, an overtaking of

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[70] Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, U.S.A. 2020. Pg. 69.

experience by an affective sense of life as dominated by the market logic of capitalism, which reached its zenith with neoliberalism as the dominant political ideology from the mid 1970's onwards. In this sense, Pasolini was prophetic in articulating the psychological and emotional trauma of this politics. As he put it, *'In this society, only productivity has the force of law, and all productivity tends to negate culture. To produce it is not necessary to educate oneself. The young people who want to enter this industrial and paleo-industrial world follow the lines of force imposed by technology and reject the arts and literature. It is a mechanical and automatic law, and young people unconsciously abide by it'*[71]. Pasolini is here foreseeing *'productivity'* as a market logic pushed to political ideology, imbibed and internalised at an *unconscious* level. This is Pasolini's attempt to describe something new occurring in the way capital operates, with its newness accounting for the overlapping, slippery, and often singular way in which he employs language to describe it.

The Sacred Revenant

> *' When I look at things, I have a rational, critical eye that I take from my secular culture, middle-class and then Marxist. Therefore there is a continuous critical exercise of my reason over world events. But my real vision, the older, more archaic one, given to me at birth and shaped in my early childhood, my original vision is a sacred vision of things. In the end, I see the world like those who have a poetic vocation do, that is, like a miraculous, almost sacred fact. And nothing can desecrate my fundamental sacredness'.*[72]

The '*rational, critical eye*' Pasolini here associates with signals his admission as a bourgeois subject. But, again, he carves out a special status for himself as born into an '*older, more archaic*' realm of the 'sub-proletarian' class, attuned to a vision of the world buried beneath the ravages and homogenising force of modernity. The aforementioned duality of personality that underlays Pasolini's psyche is here

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[71] 'Reflections after the Stonewall Riots: Pier Paolo Pasolini – Anarchist Federation'. Accessed 10 November 2023. https://www.anarchistfederation.net/reflections-after-the-stonewall-riots-pier-paolo-pasolini/.

[72] Bertolucci, Giuseppe. *Pasolini Prossimo Nostro*. Documentary. Ripley's Film, 2006. 51 minutes 12 seconds.

performed in the split of bourgeois intellect infused with the clear-sighted spirituality of the peasantry. It is a mystic-materialist separation, highlighting what Pasolini saw as his acute ability to read the contemporary political moment and the subterranean bubbling up of a more 'real' reality of the 'sub-proletarian' that modernity has overrun. Pasolini's damning view of *'neocapitalism'*[73] pushed him to look harder at the world he saw slipping away, attempting to find what was available in this world that remained impervious to capital. The element he saw as presenting an alternative, a fragment that held the '*revenants of the past, but also the arrivants of the future'*[74], was *'the sacred'*.

Pasolini's sacred is not just sanctioned by religion or the contingent moral codes of a particular society. The sacred is a primordial, mercurial, undirected force in a subterranean realm of experience that occasionally bubbles to the surface of our reality. And it is a moment that defies a chronology of time and temporal experience— it is something unimaginably ancient, and while fleeting, is indestructible and, as such, stretches deep into the future. Stefania Benini describes the Pasolinian sacred as '*caught between the violent sacred of the pagan past and the Christian sacred interpreted in an immanent heretical key. The sacred emerges as a threatened but powerful hidden reality. It inhabits the foundations of our world and resurfaces ghostlike through the cracks of global neo-capitalism.*[75]

Unmoored from the idea that the sacred is only that sanctioned by a religious authority, and operating as a force through time and history, the sacred takes on the special mantle as an object connected to a deeper reality. It is a mysterious experience of the world revealing deeper truths, an example of life beyond ideology, a limit-experience like birth, death, or unconditional love which '*pertains to a hic et nunc (here and now) corporeal dimension, which inscribes in the flesh – in its eros and even more in its thanatos, in its scandalous finitude – the presence of the real'.*[76]

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[73] Used in Pasolini's own idiosyncratic sense, detailed in the previous section of this thesis.

[74] Ricciardi, Alessia. *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film.* Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pg. 125.

[75] Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh.* Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg. 15.

[76] Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh.* Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg. 9.

The sacred instance is almost, by definition, indescribable. It is a supernatural, *'queer metaphysical essence'* [77] that operates in a speculative realm requiring a mystical-religious form of belief for access. It could describe grand magical acts such as miracles, as well as the most imperceptibly slight instances of experience. It is a form of animism— an essence that, while not always accessible, permits everything with a persistent opportunity for potentiality in the world. It is at this junction that Pasolini's sacred matches the possibility given in *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'.* The sacred does not require God but an availability to be impacted by the unknown, serendipitous, and strange. Pasolini described this state as follows— *'I am an atheist. But my relationship with things is full of the mysterious and sacred. For me, nothing is natural, not even nature'*— it affords the world a plasticity of potential; even nature is unmoored from a neutral state. The sacred undercuts the world as an illusion, with this truer clandestine reality only occasionally bubbling up between the cracks of the immediately available world. The crime of modernity, as Pasolini understood it, is that it turns everyone into a bourgeoise figure, and *'the bourgeoisie… is the manifestation of that fall from nature that occurred with the rise of industrialization. The bourgeois is intrinsically evil and unable to perceive the sacred'.*[78]

In Pasolini's usage, *'sacred'* becomes a shorthand for this 'real' reality, manifested in objects, experiences, people, and locations that exceed a false common-sense reality imposed by modernity—

> *'Ancient, preindustrial man could feel the presence of the sacred in any object, in an event, at any level of his life. Divine manifestations in the stones, the trees, the neighbours, anything… Nowadays the sacred world of the peasant has obviously fallen. It's a world I was born into, but as I grew up, I entered another world, an industrial world, dominated by reason, secularism. The contradiction in me is that I still see reality as an apparition'.*[79]

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[77] Giammei, Alessandro, and Ara H. Merjian. *Heretical Aesthetics: Pasolini on Painting.* London New York: Verso Books, 2023. Pg. 3

[78] Maggi, Armando. *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Pg. 9.

[79] Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh.* Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg 4

The 'contradiction' or duality of position Pasolini is here signalling is of the materialist intellectual negotiating and critically engaging the world and the mystically sighted figure awed, overwhelmed, and sensuously engaged within it. But this mystical vision creates the possibility of perceiving an underlying truth to the world.

Stefania Benini's *'Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh'*[80] has provided a book-length exploration of Pasolini's worldview as a tie between the mythic and material —the profane and the sacred— as held in hand at the same time, defiantly resisting the two elements into a new position. Benini describes this withholding, saying, *'Pasolini's vision is justified by its philosophical basis, since he does not believe in the Hegelian dialectic and grounds his thought in the coincidentia oppositorum (unity of opposites)'*[81]. The scandalous duality of Pasolini is precisely the ground on which the sacred worldview operates. In this duality, Pasolini conceptualises 'the sacred' as a tool for hacking away at the dogma and ideology of capitalism, and the affective pernicious form he prophetically envisioned, which we now call neoliberalism. As Alessia Ricciardi noted, the sacred impulse in Pasolini is not a melancholic dwelling on a lost state but a way to welcome *'arrivants of the future'*[82]; the sacred is the desire for a conversation with the *'spectres of history'*[83] as a form of hope in imagining anew what the world could be.

The capacity for the sacred to escape typical chronological conceptions of time— the rational, critical time-space of capital— is essential to Pasolini's view. In the introduction to *'San Paolo'* Castelli describes this propensity for an alternate understanding of time in Pasolini as *'His conviction that temporal difference is illusory- that there is no distance between then and now- and his consistent worrying over the separation between the historical and the religious, the real and the ideal'*[84] and which Castelli earlier notes as *'simultaneously theological/ religious and*

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[80] Ibid

[81] Ibid Pg. 26.

[82] Ricciardi, Alessia. *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film.* Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pg. 125.

[83] Ibid. Pg 125.

[84] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay.* London ; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. xxxiv-xxxv.

political'.[85] The sacred acts as a lamination of historical periods and instances. The biblical time of St. Paul can reassert itself as *'a past only materially destroyed, but that survives dialectically through culture, myth, and memory'.*[86] The sacred impulse of the 'sub-proletariat' exists in this collective consciousness of cultural myth. Pasolini continually asserts that this is not siloed as a history of culture and religion but as an active political force. A belief in a *'force of a prelogical experience of meaning*[87]*',* a pre-theological communion with the sacred. Pasolini's rebuttal to modernity's corrosive ordering of life is to return to the sacred energy that reframes the past as an active force. In much the same way Benjamin would understand the persistent potential of the messianic as a historical return, Pasolini's poetry and film enact a communion with history, which is both effective upon the past and the present.

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[85] Ibid Pg. xxi.

[86] Trentin, Filippo. *'"Organizing Pessimism": Enigmatic Correlations Between Walter Benjamin and Pier Paolo Pasolini'. The Modern Language Review* 108, no. 4 (2013): 1021–41. Pg. 1026.

[87] Righi, A. *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri.* Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011. Pg. 82.

A New Trilogy

The insistence that secular messianism offers productive, hopeful, and speculative thinking of what the future can be takes a newly proposed trilogy in Pasolini's work as its case study. From an exposition of these films— using the concepts of apocalypse, messianism, duality, modernity, and the sacred— a methodology of practice is produced with '*acid thinking',* translatability, and messianism as its methods. What follows here is an introduction to the renewed trilogy I see in Pasolini's practice, beginning with '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1964), the script for '*San Palo'* as a centrepiece, and ending with Pasolini's last film '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* (1975).

Narratively, I believe there to be an unacknowledged link between the films—

'*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* instates a radical form of poetical rupture via the establishment of Judeo-Christian thought. In Pasolini's film, the inauguration of this religion so excessively undermines 1st-century geopolitics that it requires a reformulation of how time, history and praxis are to be thought.

'*San Paolo'* is the answer to this ontological break. The story of St. Paul's life is told as answering the problem of a deferred parousia (arrival of the messiah) with Paul's unsynthesised duality of character producing the theoretical conditions under which the fragmentary, historically bound elements of messianic gesture can be enacted. The duality Pasolini highlights in St. Paul mirrors his scandalous contrary nature, and it is a duality which maintains the possibility of a messianic event while also instating the nefarious establishment of law and the Catholic Church.

'*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* thus becomes not just an allegory of fascism but a film depicting an eschatological time-space. Read via *'San Paolo', 'Salò'* depicts the final moments of messianic time in an endlessly deferred apocalyptic scene. De Sade's horrific architecture of torture and murder is used as an analogy for the neo-fascist form of modernity Pasolini saw, with the church, government, judiciary, and banking system represented by the four libertines. The film is structured through Dante-inspired circles of hell—Ante-Inferno, Circle of Manias, Circle of Shit, and

Circle of Blood. My reading of the film— in contradiction to almost all views of the film as without atonement— suggests that, as in the Divine Comedy, the end experience of this atrocious journey is redemption, with the film ending with a small gesture of hope as still present.

In the following chapter, each film is taken in turn to explicate the particular themes and relevance to a unified new trilogy. The final piece of exposition I would like to offer here is that the proposed retrospective trilogy is itself a response to Pasolini's troubled review of his work up to the point of *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'*— *'A Repudiation of "The Trilogy of Life"'*[88].

'The Trilogy of Life'.

The 'Trilogy of Life', *Il Decameron* (1971), *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), and *'Il fiore delle mille e una notte'* (1974) are Pasolini's penultimate film cycle. *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* would be completed in 1975, in part, as a *'repudiation'* of the sexual ideology Pasolini sought to employ through these films.

  Each film's canonical and mythic time-space appeals to the idea of a shared collective consciousness in literature. These are stories that are almost timeless in their quality. By adapting them for film, Pasolini wished to infuse this transcendental quality of reality encompassed through myth with a radical sexual element. This transgressive sexuality is offered in opposition to modernity, in which *'the "reality" of the innocent bodies has been violated, manipulated, tampered with by the consumerist establishment; in fact, this violence on the bodies has become the most macroscopic element in the new human era'*.[89] Modernism has subsumed sexuality as a product and washed away the sensuous, innocent, erotic version of sexuality Pasolini saw in the peasantry of Friuli.

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[88] *A Repudiation of "The Trilogy of Life"'* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism.* 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg xvii.
   [89] Ibid Pg. xviii.

The unifying theme of these stories is the power of a humanistic spirit that, while not so much against God, is somewhat indifferent to religious dogma. Sexuality, individual desire, and the human body as a site of freedom dominate the three film vignettes. Each film makes liberal use of naked bodies, both male and female, depicting sexuality unbounded from the Church's insistence that marriage and reproduction are the only moral arenas of sex.

In *Il Decameron,* Pasolini selects several portions of Boccaccio's book in which nuns break their vow of chastity, wives cuckold their husbands in comic episodes, and members of royalty take lovers of the lower class with tragic end. From Chaucer's *'Canterbury Tales'* Pasolini selected to film (amongst others) 'The Friar's Tale' which begins with a voyeuristic witness to sodomy, and 'The Pardoner's Tale' which begins in a BDSM brothel. Pasolini's adaptation of *'1001 Nights'*— titled *'Arabian Nights'* in the English release— focuses on the romance between Nur-e-Din, a young man and Zumurrud, a slave girl. They fall in love, but Zumurrud is kidnapped, and the rest of the film follows Nur-e-Din's effort to return to his love— with the majority of these side tales and adventures involving nudity, sex, and erotic elements.

By placing the films in a trilogy, the transgressive nature of sexuality as an experience outside of societal norms is highlighted. The purpose of this radical highlighting of sex is to offer an alternative to what Pasolini saw as the coercive and exploitive terms under which capitalism sexualises the body and offers a false permissive society. Pasolini's gambit was that you may be free to have sex under consumer capitalism— but it comes with a caveat— you must be subsumed and commodified as a sexual body to do so. '*The Trilogy of Life*' was an attempt to show the pre-modern freedom of sexuality as an attack on capitalism. Ben Lawton describes this procedure as Pasolini seeing '*The backbone of capitalism, he reasoned, [as] the traditional family, predicated on patriarchal values. Therefore, he reasoned, the best way to attack capitalism is to attack the family. But how do you*

destroy patriarchal family values? Sex, the more unconventional the better, became the answer for Pasolini"[90].

Unfortunately, Pasolini quickly saw this attempt to derail capitalism with a contrasting sexual ideology as a failure.

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[90] *Why Add 'The Repudiation of The Trilogy of Life' to the 2005 edition of Heretical Empricism.* In Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. ix.

A Repudiation of 'The Trilogy of Life'.

> *'I repudiate the Trilogy of Life, even though I do not repent having made it. I cannot, in fact, deny the sincerity and the necessity that drove me to the representation of bodies and their culminating symbol, the sexual organs'.*[91]

 The bourgeois decadence and venality of modernism Pasolini intended to undermine with the transgressive '*innocent bodies*' of *'The Trilogy of Life'* was a failure in Pasolini's view. Capitalism seamlessly co-opted, undermined, and revelled in the sexuality of the films, reducing it to pornography. Pasolini's prior successes and notoriety, the familiarity of the stories he adapted in the trilogy, and the copious use of nudity resulted in a large popular audience for the films. There was little availability of filmed nudity in Italy up until the early 70s and a large part of the commercial success of the films was rooted in the novelty and salaciousness of the films. Almost immediately after '*Il Decameron'* was released, a subgenre of cinema was spawned labelled '*Decamerotica'* by the Italian press. Filmmakers and distributors utilised the success of *'il Decameron'* as an opportunity to release a series of pastiches of the film under the auspices they were 'arthouse' cinema, but which were, in fact, softcore pornography. Pasolini's attempt at an attack on capitalism through radical sexuality was rapidly subsumed and perverted by the very vehicle he was attempting to undermine. Leading Pasolini to write a 'repudiation' of the *'Trilogy of Life'* films, a remarkably self-critical essay on the project's failures.

Pasolini describes the reappropriation of radical sexuality in *The Trilogy of Life'* as a *'false tolerance'* in which alternate forms of sexuality are both permitted and scorned.

> *'the progressive struggle for the democratization of self-expression and for sexual liberation has been brutally surpassed and thwarted by the decision of the consumerist establishment to concede a vast (but false) tolerance…private sexual lives (such as mine) have undergone the trauma of both false tolerance and physical degradation, and that which in sexual*

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[91] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. xvii.

fantasies was pain and joy, has become suicidal disappointment'. [92]

As with much of Pasolini's thinking, there is a contrary and reactionary appeal to this statement. If his sexuality is going to be held in a double bind of acceptance and degradation— exemplified in his failed attempt to make a transcendent form of sexual ideology through film— then he would instead prefer to hold on to a form of queerness explicitly outside that which the status quo accepts. If the *'innocent bodies'* of a pre-modern eroticism are easily absorbed by capitalism, then he must find what is deemed beyond the pale. This would be exemplified in *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma',* where Pasolini highlights the cannibalistic consumption of bodies and sex under fascism as equivalent to the emerging system of oppression that would come to be termed neoliberalism. What is unacceptable is precisely the form of sex governed by consumer capital, and the film was to be a presentation of this vision of sex, in which the quantification of bodies deletes eroticism. Through the application of technocratic and market-driven logic to sexual desire. The film is arrived at, in Pasolini's own words, by in part being overtaken by the '*degradation'* of life.

> *'I am adapting myself to the degradation and I am accepting the unacceptable. I am manoeuvring 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 alternativeslooms the present. I readjust my commitment to a greater legibility (Salo?').*[9394]

The new trilogy offered here is seated in the notion that the radical and transgressive force Pasolini sought to evoke in *'Salò'* can be found in large fragments of *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1964) and the script for *'San Palo'.* The final appeal to a sacred form of life in the eschatological scenes of '*Salò'* is Pasolini finally reckoning

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[92] *Repudiation of The Trilogy of Life.* In Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. xvii-xviii.

[93] *Repudiation of The Trilogy of Life.* In Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. xx.

with previous attempts to negotiate a way out of the form of capitalism he sees emerging (and would now be called neoliberalism)— but signs and elements of this litter earlier projects which will be called on throughout the chapter. The framing of a new trilogy seeks to put these moments of messianic hope in constellation as an egress from neoliberalism.

'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'

'Il vangelo secondo Matteo' is Pasolini's first historical film and the first film to exit the time-space of post-war Rome. The film takes all of its dialogue directly from Matthew's Gospel following the course of Jesus Christ's life from immaculate birth to his Resurrection and final command to the disciples on Mt. Galilee. While not shot in Palestine— a point I will return to later— the film's scenery, landscape, costume, props, and architectural backdrop present an immersive and believable rendering of 1ˢᵗ-century life in the Levant. The film follows the same chronology of Matthew's gospel, showing Christ's birth, baptism at the hand of John the Baptist, delivering the sermon on the mount, his retreat into the desert and temptation by the Devil, the enactment of miracles, the return to Jerusalem as King, and the final scenes of Christ's life; the last supper, betrayal by Judas, capture in the garden of Gethsemane, trial, crucifixion, and final resurrection.

'Il vangelo secondo Matteo' is shot in black and white using simple, mostly static shots, interspersed with slow panning wide shots to give a view of the landscape or track in close-up between the faces of the disciples and onlookers to Christ's life. The measured, somewhat stolid cinematography gives the film a sense of objective record—a series of events unfolding under the detached eye of a camera. Due to Pasolini only using the words of Matthew's Gospel, the film is almost without exposition; the familiar episodes of Christ's life unfold without explanatory dialogue, voiceover, or on-screen text to orientate the viewer— we are simply left to witness the event of Christ's life and gospel. The lens selection, for the most part, mirrors that of human sight; the camera's placement is head height with no use of zoom. The film could be a documentary made with the aid of time travel and secret cameras. Pasolini described his process of deciding its cinematic direction as follows—

'I have to begin to transpose the text — without the mediation of the screenplay, but just as it is, as if it were a ready-made screenplay — into a text literally unaltered but technified'. For example:

- *FS [Full Shot] of Mary, soon to be a mother.*

- CU [Close-up]or TCU [Tight Close-Up] of Mary who looks off, distressed, humble, ashamed.
- CU or TCU of Joseph who exchanges the distressed look, but in a rigid and severe way.
- FS of Joseph; the camera pans as he leaves the room.
- FS of Joseph; the camera pans as he walks through the vegetable garden (or a vineyard) and lies down under a tree.
- CU of Joseph who, tired, aching, closes his eyes and sleeps.
- FS of the angel who appears to him, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife..." [95]

The only break to a pure attempt of 1ˢᵗ-century realism is the soundtrack, which most prominently uses Bach's 'Mass' and 'St Matthew's Passion', alongside Odetta's *'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child'*, Blind Willie Johnson's *'Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground',* and a traditional Congolese version of mass, the *'Missa Luba'.* These non-diegetic musical elements provide atmosphere to key points of the story, highlighting the social-political nature of Christ's early followers, which I will later expand upon. But, in the main, the soundtrack further emphasises a production with simplicity and solemnity as its overall tone. The film's dramatic centre is the gravity of Christ's message, of sacred truths unravelled before us.

Jesus Christ is played by the non-actor and then student Enrique Irazoqui, who would not go on to have any further acting roles. Throughout the film, Irazoqui's handsome, stoic, uni-browed face is stern and fierce; we almost never see a smile. Christ is perpetually on the move; the message to be delivered is grave, and it is cataclysmic. The new world Christ preaches is not of a joyful shift from repressive law into beatific warmth and welcoming under a new Christian God; it is the news that you must renounce your father (Matthew 10:37) to enter heaven, the time to renounce is now, and the apocalypse is nigh. It is the time John the Baptist announces on the banks of the Jordon in the first part of the film — *'His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire'.* [96]Matthew (3:12).

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[95] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 63.
[96] *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Biography, Drama, History. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964. 25mins 15seconds.

Pasolini quickly squashes any expectation that Christ's message is one of easy redemption, peace, love and forgiveness. Instead, an aesthetic, spiritual, radical concept of sacred life beyond earthly law is preached by a maniacal figure predicting an impending apocalypse— *Repent the kingdom of heaven is at hand'* [97] (Matthew 3:2)*.* The key piece of dialogue in Pasolini's presentation of Christ's life is delivered with grave and fervent energy at the newly assembled apostles in the sermon on the mount section of the film— *'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword'* [98] *(*Matthew 10:34). Pasolini highlighted this passage as the heart of the film, *'"I have not come to bring peace but a sword" 'This is the key by which I conceived the film. This is what drove me to make it'.* [99]

Upon its release, this depiction of Christ as a semi-revolutionary figure must have been somewhat shocking to the Italian audience. To a contemporary viewer, I wager, it is even more radical. The unsmiling, contemptuous, defiant Jesus that Pasolini presents is at odds with the generally warm, all-forgiving, pure version of Christ that permeates most present-day depictions of him.

I will argue that in *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo',* we see Pasolini *'re-imagine a major world religion on the basis of a text, some faces, and a landscape'* [100]*,* and that through these operations he highlights the apocalyptic, poetic rupture of Christ, and engenders the scandalous, dual figure of St. Paul.

In another line I feel is crucial to the film's theological-political make-up, Christ says, *'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not*

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[97] Ibid 32mins 22seconds.

[98] Ibid 36mins 30seconds.

[99] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg. 6.

[100] 'Power, Nina and Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey *'Subversive Pasolini: La Ricotta and The Gospel According to Matthew — a Conversation between Nina Power and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith'*. Accessed 20 November 2020. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3150-subversive-pasolini-la-ricotta-and-the-gospel-according-to-matthew-a-conversation-between-nina-power-and-geoffrey-nowell-smith.

come to abolish them but to fulfill them' [101](Matthew 5:17). While the message Christ brings is one of apocalyptic rupture, it is one that will be enacted through a messianic *'fulfilment'*, a *'small displacement'*[102], or uncovering, of what is already within the law and religion of the world. The sacred fragment that allows for this messianic uncovering— the apocalypse— is shown in *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* through landscape, faces, music, and the idiosyncratic form of adaptation Pasolini begins to develop.

For Pasolini, and my own view, the implication for these concepts, which, though routed in religion, bleed and influence the profane world. *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* is a film in which Pasolini desires and provokes a reignition of the sacred as a force against the ratiocination of modernity— and this comes without the requirement of religious belief. As Pasolini himself stated, *'I'm not endowed with the faculty of accepting the idea of a religion that is metaphysical, revealed and confessional. One can live religiously even without believing in God. I feel to some extent that this is evident in the New Testament, which is open to so many interpretations.* [103]

Jesus as Apocalyptic Poet

> *'The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery; Christianity places this salvation in a life beyond, after death, in heaven;*

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[101] *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Biography, Drama, History. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964. 41mins 2seconds

[102] *"A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come."* Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. First edition. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993. Pg 52.

[103] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 121.

socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society'.[104]

The figure of Christ represented in *'Il vangelo'* chimes with the above quote by Frederick Engels. The messianic figure we are shown is deeply concerned with the injustices and hypocrisy of the world. Unlike Engel's formulation, the repressive class most prominently represented in the film is that of the Pharisees— the Judaic order of Rabbi that litigate and enforce religious law. In the film, the Pharisees parade around the streets in official uniform, and a comic-upturned conical hat is the main feature. They are clearly much wealthier than the rest of the community shown in the film and depicted as residing in the most opulent buildings of Jerusalem, often segregated from the crowd in plush surroundings. The Pharisees are immediately suspicious of Christ, but as the film unfolds, they become increasingly conspiratorial, ultimately planning his arrest as a false prophet, blasphemer, and disrupter of the peace. The Roman Empire is seen only briefly, other than the soldiers guarding the Pharisees; it is only with Pontius Pilate offering Christ's freedom, only to be turned down by the assembled crowd selecting Barabbas for imperial pardon. The focus on the Pharisees is important as it represents the political-religious class to which Christ's ministry is the radical sacred response. It also highlights Pasolini's mistrust of organised religion and the class of society St. Paul (Saul) would begin his story from in *'San Paolo'.*

I concur with George Aichele's view that *'Pasolini's Jesus does not preach pie-in-the-sky escapism, but rather down-to-earth revolution. He is more concerned with social oppression than he is with individual sin'*[105] The figure we are presented with is held in *passion* (suffering, to undergo, to endure)[106] for much of the story, condemning and pointing out inequalities on an earthly plain. This is seen during the

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[104] Engels, Frederick. *'On the History of Early Christianity'.* Accessed 19 July 2021. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/early-christianity/index.htm.

[105] Aichele, George. *'Translation as De-Canonization: Matthew's Gospel According to Pasolini: To the Memory of Paul Hessert'. CrossCurrents* 51, no. 4 (2002). Pg. 531

[106] The definition here is taken from— 'Passion | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Passion by Etymonline'. Accessed 15 February 2023. https://www.etymonline.com/word/passion.

scene in which Jesus delivers an abridged version of Matthew chapter 23[107] to a crowd. This portion of the gospel is a scathing attack on the venality of the Pharisees, particularly in its exploitation of the poor.

> *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others' - (Matthew 23:23) 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence'.* (Matthew 23:25)

While the chapter points to the hypocrisy of sinning while representing yourself without it, this is tempered by and explicated by the nature by which the Pharisees specifically sin— by profiteering from the masses. The poetical rupture of Christ's message is one that Pasolini specifies as originating in what we would call the 'sub proletariat' mass of the early Christian community. The Pharisees in '*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*' then represent the proto version of the two-part religious-political oppression of emergent capitalism that Pasolini is so concerned with and further develops in '*San Paolo'* and *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'*.

This is further emphasised in Christ's final confrontation with the Pharisees on entering Jerusalem, in which he is quizzed by agents of the scribes on theological matters to libel himself as a blasphemer. In contrast to the officially garbed Pharisee backed by a guard of Roman soldiers, Jesus is seen at the centre of his apostles— all working men— the poor of Jerusalem, and a front line of smiling enraptured children. The exchange is as follows—

> *'Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are*

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[107] *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Biography, Drama, History. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964. 1 hour 35mins 14seconds.

God's.[108]*'*(Matthew 22:16-21)

The contest is won by Christ recognising the law as it is while reinforcing his radical political message that there is an excess— a sacred element not subsumed by it. In Pasolini's parlance, this would be to say there is a portion of sacred life to be asserted outside of neocapitalism's reach. Or, that it should at least be resisted.

Shortly before this confrontation, Pasolini shows us Jesus making his way to this dispute. Crowds along the street assault and hassle him. The apostles provide a guard pushing back, cutting their way through the mass. As mentioned, Jesus and the followers depicted in *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* may be saintly, but they are far rougher, more practical, and more prone to violent action than contemporary representations. The Christ Pasolini shows is the one that overturns the tables of moneylenders in the temple (Matt 21:12-17) and spites fig trees for not bearing fruit (Matt 21:18-22). It is a figure of revolutionary action against an incumbent state.

Pasolini describes Christ as *'an intellectual in a world of the poor available for revolution'* and that a key to the film would be finding actors that could embody the sacred revolutionary potential in Christ's message through their face and body alone. In this interest, Pasolini returns to a fascination with the 'sub-proletariat' essence of life he found in the Friulian peasants as a bulwark against modernity. In '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo',* he extends the casting and cinematographic framing of faces, used in *'Accattone'*[109](1961) and '*Mama Roma'*[110] (1962), to illustrate a literal alternate body politic to the advancing form of totalising capitalism he sensed in the post-war period.

Faces

The use of faces in *'Il vangelo'* is one of the primary sites in which Pasolini provokes the revolutionary message of Matthew's Gospel. The Bible is habitually

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[108] *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Biography, Drama, History. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1964. 1 hour 25mins 18seconds.
[109] *Accattone*. Drama. Arco Film, Cino del Duca, 1961.
[110] *Mamma Roma*. Drama. Arco Film, 1962.

short of descriptive passages; the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's Epistles are particularly prone to simply stating place, individuals, and what dialogue or commandment is issued— rather than providing scenic description. We are, for instance, never told what Jesus looks like in any of the Gospels. While this has interesting theological implications— which are outside the scope of this thesis— it also opens a vast lacuna of information to be filled in producing a filmic rendering of the story.

In '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo',* this space is filled by Pasolini's underlying concern with the pre-historical 'sub proletariat' class and its difference, even in visage, to a modern bourgeois subject. The look of anger on Joesph's face when Mary shows him her pregnant belly, the Pharisee's conspiratorial nods, and Christ's numerous ecstasies in death all serve to illustrate the complete reformulation of values Pasolini's Gospel tells.

The potential for this politically rupturing capacity of Christ and his followers is encapsulated precisely within the casting and faces of Christ and supporting actors throughout '*Il vangelo'.* Pasolini fills the cinematic frame with faces from the neck up, the actors staring directly into the camera in lingering shots. Christ is shown with a limpid, darkly divine expression, at other times hubristically determined and concentrated. The Pharisees oscillate between falsely beatific and saturnine violent scowls. The early followers of Christ hold confusion, fear and hope. The extreme frontal close-up is often held on Christ's face without dialogue for extended periods— or floats between the apostles and early followers as they struggle to digest his message.

Non-actors are almost exclusively used in the film, recruited from the area where '*il vangelo'* was filmed, the impoverished region of Matera in the southern arch of Italy's boot. The following quote is Pasolini describing the process by which the atavistic complexions required for the Gospel film were recruited.

> '*When I shot The Gospel I went round and chose all the extras myself one by one from among the peasants and the people in the villages round where we were shooting…I'm only interested in an actor when he's acting an actor,*

I'm not interested in him qua actor'.[111]

When making the film, Pasolini said, *'I knew I would remake the Gospel by analogy. Southern Italy enabled me to make the transposition from the ancient to the modern world without having to reconstruct it either archaeologically or philologically.'* [112] The faces he found there were also an analogical transposition of what he imagined the Palestinian community of the 1ˢᵗ Century would be. The Italian peasantry of the region as a poor and untethered community from contemporary Christianity reflecting the Palestinian world at the time of Christ. The idea of Italians as without Christianity may seem strange; the country is indelibly linked to Catholicism, but it is a definition I take from Pasolini.

> *'The Church in Italy has always been an instrument of power but I don't think its ideological power, as opposed to its practical power, has any influence over the Italian peasant. The Italian is not religious, I don't want to say pagan because that would be generic, but he is pre-Catholic in that he has remained in the state in which Catholicism found him, above all, in the South'.* [113]

The church is a governmental, but not religious, institution in Pasolini's reading of the southern Italian peasantry. And so, they were perfectly tuned as faces to re-populate his version of the Gospel with. From a contemporary political perspective, I find the essentialising of physical characteristics as indelibly tied to economic, historical, and belief systems troubling. Pasolini is routinely guilty of this modality in his work (I would point to *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana*[114] (1970) as a further example of essentialising a whole continent), but a longer critique of this impulse, I believe, is a separate to what is discussed in this chapter. For me, the interest in this methodology of casting is how Pasolini inserts his conception of a 'sub-proletarian' class— embodied by the Italian peasantry— at the heart of his telling of Matthew's Gospel. If there is any apology for Pasolini's method, it can be

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[111] Stack, Oswald. Pasolini on Pasolini; Interviews with Oswald Stack. First Printing edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969. Pg. 40.

[112] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini*. First Printing edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 1969. g. 82.

[113] *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film Maker's Life*. Documentary, Short, Biography, 1983. 21 minutes 17 seconds.

[114] *Appunti per Un'Orestiade Africana*. Documentary. IDI Cinematografica, I Film Dell'Orso, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1970.

taken from his interest in Renaissance painting, particularly Masaccio, as *'the very substance of his work as a way of looking at certain faces, at the gravity of matter'.*[115] Like Pasolini's concept of the sacred, there is something unsayable but revealed and perhaps even enchanted in the quality of certain things or people.

The non-actors employed within '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo',* although essentialised, are used to depict a historically groundbreaking community to which Christ brings his message. To extend the analogy to painting, Noa Steimatsky describes the stylistic form of the film as akin to icon painting. *'The landscape enframed by the movie camera as if it were a backdrop supports a rich texture of faces, bodies, headgear, and costumes; it evokes the gilded vertical surface of the icon receptive to the incarnation of a divine—that is, corporeal, human—figure'.* [116] The flat frontal cinematography of '*il vangelo'* renders the actors much like that of Saints in a Byzantine icon. The face of the community in '*il vangelo'* is then one prone for a new ordering of law and religion, but more saliently for Pasolini, it is also one which holds a sacred key worth protecting against the modernisation and bourgeoisification of life embodied by the Pharisee's and Roman rule.

It is against this ensemble that Pasolini positions his Christ and his description of the casting process—

> *'As I thought of representing Christ as an intellectual in a world of the poor available for revolution and I was looking for an analogy between what Christ really was and the person who might interpret him, I felt the only real possibility would be to use a poet; so I went through all the poets and two held my attention for a moment were Yevtushenko and Kerouac, but then I discovered that the photograph of Kerouac was ten or fifteen years out of date.'*[117]

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[115] Ricciardi, Alessia. *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pg 125.

[116] Steimatsky, Noa. *'"Pasolini on Terra Sancta: Towards a Theology of Film."' Yale Journal of Criticism, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1998).* Accessed 26 November 2020. pg 247 https://www.academia.edu/21567886/_Pasolini_on_Terra_Sancta_Towards_a_Theology_of_Film_See_full_revised_version_Archaic_Pasolini_on_the_Face_of_the_Earth_from_my_book_Italian_Locations_pdf_on_Academia_edu_.

[117] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini; Interviews with Oswald Stack*. First Printing edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969. Pg. 78.

The salient idea presented in this quotation is the revolution's tacit appearance in the face of Christ. An interesting fact, often quoted but rarely discussed further, is the casting of a young Giorgio Agamben as the Apostle Phillip in '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*. Given the personal association, I have often thought it strange that Agamben has written little on Pasolini or his work. One place we might find Pasolini as an influence on Agamben, particularly '*Il vangelo',* is in the essay *'The Face'* in *'Means Without End'* where he says, *'appearance becomes a problem for human beings: it becomes the location of a struggle for truth'* and *'the face is, above all, the passion of revelation, the passion of language'.*[118] Reading the film via Agamben's text, the presentation of Christ's face in '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* produces a new reality in messianic time. Both as an actor's tool and as the site in which language labours, endures, produces reality (vis-à-vis 'The word of God') and is what ultimately reveals the truth of history.

I am indebted to Nina Power and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith for pointing out this correspondence of Agamben's text and Pasolini's use of Christ's face in *'Subversive Pasolini: La Ricotta and The Gospel According to Matthew'* where they further quote Agamben, saying '*in what could easily be a direct reflection on Pasolini: … "every human face, even the most noble and beautiful, is suspended on the edge of an abyss*[119]*".* The abyss I believe Agamben is here referring to is the oblivion of the apocalypse. Christ's face in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*— struggling, fervent, dogmatic— is the site of the '*passion… a struggle for truth'* Agamben describes. A face that embodies messianic revealing.

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[118] Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*. Theory out of Bounds, v. 20. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Pg. 91 and Pg. 95.
[119] 'Power, Nina and Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey *'Subversive Pasolini: La Ricotta and The Gospel According to Matthew — a Conversation between Nina Power and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith'*. Accessed 20 November 2020. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3150-subversive-pasolini-la-ricotta-and-the-gospel-according-to-matthew-a-conversation-between-nina-power-and-geoffrey-nowell-smith. The Agamben quotation is from Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*. Theory out of Bounds, v. 20. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Pg 95.

Place

Alongside Pasolini's use of faces in '*Il vangelo',* the other notable transposition he makes onto the Gospel is that of *place*. As Nowell-Smith correctly states, *'the Gospel film re-imagines a major world religion on the basis of a text, some faces, and a landscape'.*[120] The landscape Pasolini needs to depict is one that is absent from the text. As with faces, the Bible is chronically low on detailed descriptions of physical realities; the authors are more concerned with action than the setting of a scene. It is a narrative absence throughout the New Testament that Jacob Taubes' describes succinctly and humorously—

> *'You notice Paul has very peculiar worries about nature. Of course they are not ecological worries. He's never seen a tree in his life. He travelled through the world just like Kafka- never described a tree, or mentioned one. I know types like this in Jerusalem. He doesn't write: Dear Friend, Nice weather here, or: Glorious nature all around me- he doesn't notice any of that. Just find me one place in a Pauline letter where he lets up from this passion, from this obsession, from this one theme that moves him. None at all it persists through and through. Look through Kafka's novels some time, whether there is a tree there. Maybe one on which a dog pisses. That is the only form in which a tree can even come up in "The Castle" or in "The Trial". Nature appears only as a judgement'.* [121]

It is a literary tendency that can be extended to Matthew's Gospel. Location is listed; we know, for instance, that we are on the banks of Jordan with John the Baptist, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, endures a night of agony in the garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, where he is also crucified, amongst other extant places. But no detail of these sites is given, none of the flora and fauna, architectural features, weather, or surrounding social life. As in Taubes' review of Paul's Epistles— and Kafka's work— if anything appears, it is only ever at the direct service of illustrating Jesus's divinity or message. A scene in the film shows a fig tree, only for Christ to spite it (Matthew 21:18-21). The apostles are on a boat in the sea of Galilee, but only in

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Taubes, Jacob. *The Political Theology of Paul*. Translated by Dana Hollander. Illustrated edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004. Pg. 73.

order for Jesus to walk on water towards it (Matthew 14: 22-23). In every case, only the slightest exposition is provided.

In Pasolini's adaptation of the Gospel, this lack of practical and poetical description of landscape opens a cinematographic space he filled with an archaic sacred idea of place.

'Sopralluoghi in Palestina per Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo'

Pasolini's initial response to this depopulated Biblical translation was to return to the source, visiting Palestine with the Catholic Priest and biblical scholar Don Andrea Carraro to tour the places mentioned in the Gospels with a view to film each episode of Matthew's Gospel in the exact location at which they (supposedly) unfolded: the Sea of Galilee, Mount Tabor, Jerusalem, the River Jordan, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary and the Garden of Gethsemane. This journey was completed between 27th June and 11 July 1963 and resulted in the short documentary *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*[122] (1965). The film is usually given the title *'Location Hunting in Palestine'* in English; a direct translation from Italian would be rendered, *'Inspections in Palestine for The Gospel According to Matthew'*, and while this is a somewhat clunker title, it draws emphasis to the *'inspection'* of the original *'sopralluoghi'*. The film is shot in black and white on 16mm film and is reminiscent of a low-budget travelogue. Pasolini and Don Carraro travel between the biblical locations, inspecting what they find and occasionally engaging in short conversations on the theological importance of the site. Pasolini and Don Carraro clearly have a deep respect for each other, with the dialogue erring towards the speculative rather than the factual integrity of the Gospel's claims. The most striking visual element of the film is the contrast between an ancient desert landscape with some people still engaging in traditional farming practices and the rapid modernisation of the landscape— mainly in the form of massive road infrastructure funded by Israel— and the country as a place in which leisure tourism is being quickly developed.

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[122] *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Documentary. Arco Film, 1965.

The filming of the trip seems to have been relatively incidental, initially recorded more as a set of production notes with only half an eye on a general release for a wider audience. Pasolini's description of the post-production is as follows—

> 'When I got back to Rome, I forgot all about it until suddenly Bini [Alfredo Bini— Pasolini's then producer] had to have this showing. The material hadn't even been edited; it was just spliced together, almost haphazardly, by some assistant editor whose name I can't remember. I took the spliced material and since I didn't have time to edit it, I left it just the way it was (except for a few cuts to make it fit within the time limits of the documentary). I didn't even have time to write a commentary. We went into the dubbing studio and as the material gradually passed before my eyes, I improvised the commentary and I transformed myself into the narrator. That's all I can tell you about Sopraluoghi in Palestina'.[123]

As such, the film has an unusually candid feel, with Pasolini's unmediated responses to the landscape revealing his disappointment that the detail and texture of life— imbued with sacred energy— he had hoped to find was conspicuously lacking in Palestine and the nascent state of Israel of the 1960s.

In the film's opening scenes, Pasolini voices his exceptions for filming '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* there in grave terms. *'Already at this point, I started to suspect, that there was something too modern, too industrialised in this landscape. In fact, in a few minutes as you follow our Fiat's route as it took us towards Nazareth, towards the heart of Galilee, towards Lake Tiberias you'll see a landscape contaminated by the present'.*[124]

Like Pasolini's native Italy, the untrammelled force of capitalist expansion had overtaken the landscape, rendering it unsuitable for the '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* film. As with his casting of faces, the landscape Pasolini desired to populate Matthew's Gospel with was one in which a pre-history of sacred life was still embodied and expressed— a thoroughly unmodern place by which the corrupt bourgeoisification of the Pharisee and Roman exploitation could be most evidently

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[123] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. 'Associazione Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg. 59.
[124] *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Documentary. Arco Film, 1965. 2 minutes 45 seconds.

highlighted. While considering the city of Capernaum— home of the apostles Peter, Andrew, James and John, and potentially Jesus— with Don Carraro, Pasolini laments the lack of cinematic quality in the landscape. '*Why do you think the whole of evangelical history is made of such small things, paltry, no scenography, stark, sultry, consumed by the sun?*'[125]. The journey to Palestine was to find an atavistic landscape imbued with the revolutionary, epic force of Christ's message; for Pasolini, it was not to be found in Palestine— but the *evangelical* message, contained in the smallest of things, impacted his thinking and how *'il vangelo'* would be made.

In a closing scene, Pasolini attempts to describe his idiosyncratic blending of atheism and sacred belief to Don Carraro.

> '*You see, for the two of us "spiritual" has different meanings. When you say "spiritual", you mean, above all, religious, intimate and religious. For me, "spiritual" corresponds to aesthetics… My idea that the smaller and more humble things are, the deeper and more beautiful they are, has had a thorough shaking... this thing is still truer than I imagined. So, the idea of four barren hillsides of Christ's preaching has become an aesthetic idea and so spiritual*'[126]

The quality of religious— sacred— energy as contained in the smallest thing, and even the landscape itself, permeated Pasolini's filmmaking. '*Sopralluoghi in Palestina per Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*' began with the radical notion, which I share, that memory is inscribed in place. The end of the journey propagated an intensified version of this notion, akin to the *slight gesture* Agamben evokes as part of a messianic uncovering that might be held in the scenography of a place or film. The spiritual, sacred element Pasolini saw in Matthew's Gospel— and its poetical rupture into modernity— can be aestheticised and reproduced in culture.

The solution to the problem of filming location for '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo*' would be found in the south of Italy, an area that was still largely rural, agricultural, and deeply poor compared to the north. Pasolini said, '*Southern Italy enabled me to make the transposition from the ancient to the modern world without having to*

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[125] Ibid 8min 18secs.
[126] Ibid 37mins 12 secs.

reconstruct it either archaeologically or philologically.'[127] For Pasolini, the language of architecture and the mode of living in the south of Italy was a continuation of the life he saw in Matthew's Gospel.

Matera

The region of Matera was selected for filming all of '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo';* situated in the arch of Italy's proverbial 'boot', it is one of the longest continually inhabited parts of Europe, with archaeological records dating human occupation of the area back to the Palaeolithic era. The landscape is barren limestone riddled with canyons and cliff faces. The soft stone affords easy carving with hundreds of natural and man-made caves pitting the area. While the landscape is notoriously difficult to farm and scorchingly hot in the summer, the caves provide easy habitation, making the claim of ancient and continued human residence even more believable. While these dwellings have now been modernised and are now novel tourist destinations— many of the caves are now Airbnb's— in the 1960s, they were largely abandoned. During the 1950s, the Italian state moved the remaining poverty-stricken inhabitants of the cave network into social housing. The abandoned landscape, primitive homes, and the roughly-hewed architecture of former churches and temples would be where Pasolini would set his Gospel story.

The *investigations* in Palestine had revealed the country as too modern for Pasolini's retelling of the Gospel but had intensified the notion of place as holding a sacred energy that emanated not from the sublime overtaking of Cathedrals and grand religious architecture but that the *'smaller and more humble things are, the deeper and more beautiful'.*[128] The location of Matera, at the time abandoned and overlooked but deeply ancient, fulfilled these criteria. The opening scene of Mary bearing her pregnant belly to Joesph emphasises these qualities. She is framed against a tumble-down arch on which a basic and half-improvised home has been built. The landscape is barren save an overgrown path flanked by dry stone walls. When Joesph runs into town distressed by the news of his wife bearing a child he

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[127] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini; Interviews with Oswald Stack*. First Printing edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969. Pg. 82.

[128] *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Documentary. Arco Film, 1965. 37mins 12 secs.

knows not to be his, he observes a group of children playing gleefully in the mud and dirt, half-dressed in rags but full of life and excitement, against a backdrop of a settlement barely held together and decaying under the harsh sun.

The scenic images we are presented with are extraordinary in their complete disassociation from modern urban life, but it is a paltry landscape into which the son of God is born. Casting Matera as the location for *'Il vangelo'*, Pasolini highlighted the smallness of sacred energy bound in *'a spirit of place'* and that this force of history— bound to location— opened a liminal boundary of one era into another activated by Christ's revolutionary message. The sense of a primordial and originary force haunting the area opened the capacity for Pasolini to tell a story in which he said: *'Philosophically nothing I have ever done is more fitted to me that the Gospel according to St Matthew because of my tendency always to see something sacred and mythical in the epic the quality of everything, even the most humdrum, simple and banal objects and events'*[129]. The specific quality of a *'sacred and mythic'* tendency had been erased in Palestine, but it was still surging through Matera.

Identifying a sensibility contained within landscape and *'objects and events'* which can be equated to the sacred— and so the potential for messianic uncovering— is crucial to my reading of '*il vangelo'* as a film in which political-theological fissure is revealed. It continues into my reading of '*San Paolo'* and *Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* as a thread tying the three together as a new trilogy.

The invocation of location as a *'spirit of place'*[130] is subtly used in Pasolini's earlier films *'Accattone'* and *'Mama Roma'*—where the edge lands of the Roman borgate

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[129] *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film Maker's Life*. Documentary, Short, Biography, 1970.

[130] I borrow the term '*spirit of place'* from Peter Ackroyd, who uses it to describe a particular type of historical recurrence that attaches itself to locations. The concept is used as a tool of historical perspective in *'London: The Biography'* and a narrative device for occult practice embedded within architecture in '*Hawksmoor'* and *'The House of Dr Dee'*. Its key feature is that some persistent DNA impacts itself onto architecture and specific sites. Places become prone to fire, metaphysic openings, revolutionary action, and serendipitous connections, amongst other things. Place produces a character; it generates a kind of face, existing without the need for human interaction (although it impacts human life) across timescales much longer than an individual lifetime. Ackroyd, Peter. *London: The Biography*. Reprint edition. London: Vintage, 2001. Ackroyd, Peter. *Hawksmoor*. London: Penguin, 2010.

are used analogically as the space between the old mythic world of the Italian peasantry and the modern capitalistic development architecturally represented by modern housing developments. In '*Il vangelo'*, location is used more forthrightly to illustrate the Gospel as an ancient, mythic, and sub-proletariat ghetto primed for the figure of Christ to emerge. I believe that by casting Matera in '*il vangelo'* Pasolini is tapping into the notion of place as holding sacred energy. In Pasolini's rendering, the Gospel's message becomes one bound to the landscape, and through his *aestheticisation* of the landscape through film, the spiritual message is reproduced and reactivated.

Music

One addition I would make to the place and face population that Pasolini makes to the Gospel text is that of music. Particularly Odetta's *'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child'* and Blind Willie Johnson's *'Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground'*. Both songs are haunting cries that seem to speak directly to the processes and catastrophes of enslavement, segregation, and institutional injustice. In Pasolini's usage, the songs join the dots between subjugation, class consciousness, a mythic past, and a desire to return or reinstate something against the oppression of Rome and the Pharisees. It is a remarkable and delicate transposition that suggests a congruity of experience from ancient to modern conditions. While both songs are painful laments, when framed within *'Il vangelo,'* an underlying tone of redemption and hope through belief is transmitted. It is a balancing act of pathos, and the potential for happiness, expressed in the counterpoint of music and image, that Mitch Speed identifies in the respective videos of Arthur Jafa's *'Love is the Message, the Message is Death'* and Mark Leckey's *'Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore'*—

> '*The point here is not to draw an equivalence between the barbaric legacy of slavery and the working-class struggle. Such a comparison would be ignorant, and ridiculous. The point is merely to notice how these artists share a profound understanding of the resonant tension implicit in uplifting forms, run through with the energy of contexts that are at best difficult and at worst*

Ackroyd, Peter. *The House of Doctor Dee*. New edition. London; New York: Penguin, 1994.

intolerable'. [131]

In *'Il vangelo',* both songs point to the intolerable and lost condition under which early Christians lived and where the potential for apocalyptic, messianic political action begins.

'Il vangelo secondo Matteo' as a Prefatory to 'San Paolo'.

'*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* ends, true to Mathew's Gospel, with Christ risen from the dead, standing on a mountain in Galilee. It is a short and somewhat anticlimactic scene with Christ delivering his brief final teachings to the gathered disciples, after which the credits roll. There is no grand miracle; we do not see Jesus ascending to heaven or God's hand coming down to snatch him up. His final words are, '*I am with you always, to the very end of the age'* (Matthew 28:20). The theological problem of this statement is that Jesus prophesied '*the end of the age'*— the apocalypse— to arrive in the lifetime of his disciples. The final judgement was neigh. It is this issue that St. Paul seeks to resolve in his Epistles, and through which he instates Christianity as a religion— rather than an apocalyptic Judaic cult.

In 1970, Pasolini was interviewed for a documentary on his work and life in which he said—

> *'I think that the Gospel is one of the many books of religious propaganda that have been written. There will come a time when the Gospel will be linguistically incomprehensible to humanity. The Gospel is tied to time and its historic place. The church can only survive if it continues to change and put into continual crisis its own institutionally. I'm now preparing a film on St Paul, in the film we question, not the validity of the church but its mere mode of existence. The Church will probably be able to continue for centuries to come if it creates an ecclesiastical assembly which continually negates and recreates itself. My criticism is against the Church as a power, as it is today'.* [132]

The script for *'San Paolo'* is one in which the revolutionary potential of the *'Il vangelo'* film moves into ethical ambiguities, and the institution of the church is

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[131] Speed, Mitch. *Mark Leckey: Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*. Afterall Books / One Work. Cambridge, MA, USA: Afterall Books, 2020. Pg. 24.
[132] *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film Maker's Life*. Documentary, Short, Biography, 1970.

formed. In Pasolini's telling of Paul's life, the nascent community of Christians took power and began to wield it. The simple battlefield of sacred, premodern life to be protected against the advancement of bourgeois modernisation becomes increasingly complicated— and the scandalous dual nature of Paul is used to illustrate the complex encroachment of the state into sacred life.

San Paolo- A Screenplay

Introduction

Pasolini's script for '*San Paolo*' was of extended gestation. First mentioned in a letter in 1966, the main body of the script was written between May and June of 1968 between the productions of '*Edipo Re*' [133](1967) and *Medea*[134] (1969). Pasolini returned to the script in 1974, making some additions and edits in preparation for the script being published as a book. This finished literary form of the work was released by Einaudi in 1977, two years after Pasolini's death. The English translation I use throughout this thesis was translated by Elizabeth A. Castelli and published by Verso in 2014.

The letter of 1966 was addressed to Don Emilio Cordero, the director of the — fortuitously named— 'San Paolo Film' a subsidiary to 'Edizioni San Paolo' a Christian organisation founded to commission and distribute works of film and literature in support of Catholic ideals. The titular 'San Paolo' symbolically references St. Paul's proliferation of the faith through letter writing. While Cordero initially seemed interested in the project, funding was not forthcoming, and the correspondence came to an end in 1968. '*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*' had garnered positive reviews from church officials, but Pasolini's homosexuality and scandalous reputation must have tempered these sentiments.[135] Prior to '*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*' Pasolini had made a short film entitled '*La Ricotta*' (1962)[136] depicting Christ's crucifixion, which resulted in a trial brought by the Italian State against Pasolini and the film's producer, Alfredo Bini, for blasphemy and *'insulting the religion of the state'*. The court threw the case out, but it was well-publicised in the press, which can only have added to the problem of finding funding for a project like '*San Paolo'*, which explicitly sits at the polarities of religion and politics. It is remarkable that *'Il vangelo'* was ever made, given its production overlapped with the

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[133] *Edipo Re*. Drama. Arco Film, Somafis, 1967.

[134] *Medea*. San Marco, Les Films Number One, Janus Film und Fernsehen, 1969.

[135] The detail of this correspondence is provided by Collins, Jason Michael in *'The Duality of Paul in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Saint Paul: The Katechon and the Collapse of a Film Project'*. *Humanities* 12, no. 6 (December 2023): 144.

[136] The short film is part of the anthology *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* Arco Film, Cineriz, Societé Cinématographique Lyre, 1963.

blasphemy trial, but the major casualty of the furore would be '*San Paolo*' as a filmic work.

By 1974, Pasolini saw the project as near impossible to finance, resulting in the script existing autonomously as a literary work. I will detail Pasolini's idiosyncratic and poetic approach to script writing at greater length, but at this juncture, it is worth bearing in mind Barth David Schwartz's note that Pasolini saw *'the making of his films, which were also books, and the making of books about film and films by others proceeded hand-in-hand'*.[137] The film of '*San Paolo*' may not have been feasible, but the resulting script should not be regarded merely as a cinematic remnant of a failed project— but a work of art in its own regard. Pasolini often published scripts alongside or after a cinematic release, with *'Theorema'* (1968) and '*Edipo Re'* (1967) as two notable examples in which the script offers extended commentary, alternative elements, and poetic devices unique from the filmed version, therefore situating the written version as a work in its own right. Given this, I believe the script for *'San Paolo'* can be taken as a 'complete' work, whilst also alluding to the visual spectacle of cinema.

The final edit to the script, made in 1974 during preparations for '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* (1975), includes the addition of the Devil. Satan is shown orchestrating the unwitting Paul using Luke (author of Acts) as an agent. Paul's life in faith and the formation of the Church are shown to be the result of Satan's coordination of Paul's duality, torn between fascistic organising and genuine holiness. The late inclusion of this pointed and instrumental narrative is surely due to Pasolini no longer worrying over securing finance for the film, the alleviation of this concern allowing Pasolini to produce a literary work quite different— and more scandalous— from what the film might have had license to perform.

The 'Outline' and Gloss of the Script.

The main body of the *'San Paolo'* script is introduced as *'Outline of a screenplay for a film about Saint Paul (in the form of notes for a production director)'*. This is

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[137] Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*: Second Edition. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 472-473.

organised as 112 numbered and separate scenes. Each scene has a heading that gives the geographical location, setting, and the time of day, for example, *'2. Paris. Interior (Twilight)'*. The headings are the script's most traditional and practical aspect, after which Pasolini details, in prose, the scenic elements, dialogue, and occasionally the cinematography required (numbers of extras, camera position, etc.), as well as the conceptual and theological ideas he wants to convey. The form in which this is delivered differs radically from the traditional script form. For instance, Pasolini does away with the convention of introducing dialogue with the character's name as a heading, alongside meditations on aesthetic features and the interrelated thematics of scenes that are not usually included in conventional script writing.

As in *'Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo'* (1964), Pasolini's rendition of Paul's life draws heavily from the Bible for its dialogue and narrative ordering to hang his retelling of Paul's story. The New Testament is dominated by the recording of Paul's deeds in Acts and his instruction to the broader Christian community in the Epistles. The book of Acts performs a biography of Paul— authored by Luke, who becomes a decisive figure in Pasolini's retelling— instating Paul as the figure to galvanise the sub-sect of Judaism into institutional Christianity; the Epistles form the theological structure of this new faith based on law (*nomos*) and its implications for behaviour, custom, and governance. Pasolini uses Acts as the narrative's template, drawing across the Epistles for dialogue. '*San Paolo'* is far less dogmatic than '*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo'* in its selection and remixing of speech found in the New Testament, distilling a considerable section of Acts and the Epistles.

Prior to the *'Outline'*, Pasolini introduces the script with a *'Plan for a film about Saint Paul'*, which I will detail after this initial gloss of the story. One element worth noting now is the definitive description of a historical transposition from the 1st Century AD to the mid-twentieth century, which Pasolini performs in the work. Pasolini description of this is as follows:

> *'The centre of the modern world – the capital of colonialism and of modern imperialism – the seat of modern power over the rest of the earth is not any longer, today, Rome. And if it isn't Rome, what is it? It seems clear to me: New York, along with Washington. In the second place: the cultural, ideological, civil, in its own way religious centre – the sanctuary, that is, of enlightened and intelligent conformism is no longer Jerusalem, but Paris.*

The city that is equivalent to the Athens of that moment, then, is in large measure the Rome of today (seen naturally as a city of grand historical but not religious tradition). And Antioch could probably be replaced, by analogy, by London (insofar as it is the capital of an imperial antecedent of American supremacy, just as the Macedonian–Alexandrian empire preceded the Roman empire)'.[138]

The script is a lamination of these two periods, with the historical correspondences further emphasised by the use of title cards. These intertitles provide exposition, stating that the period of the film we are about to watch is, for instance, occurring in 36 A.D. before we are presented with images of an occupied Paris in the midst of the Second World War.

 The script begins with the Pharisees of old Jerusalem, represented as the collaborative stooges to the Nazi regime in occupied Paris. They are the fascistic Vichy government, and Saul is the chief hunter of members of the resistance, embodied as the followers of Christ. Saul's conversion from fascist, vengeful Saul into the saintly Paul occurs on a journey. In Pasolini's version, Saul travels from Paris to Barcelona (each standing by analogy for Jerusalem and Damascus) when he is struck by Christ's message, falls from his horse, and is rendered blind. In the Bible, this is a complete transition of mental state— of belief and behaviour. In Pasolini's script, it is a transition but not a negation, rather the addition of conflicting and often intertwined positions— the pious, saintly, weak Paul and the fascistic, dogmatic organiser of Saul. I will later expand on the concept of duality as essential to my reading of the script. Still, at this point, it is worth noting the location from which duality stems— a shadow actor throughout '*San Paolo',* absent from the biblical source, the *devil.* The voice which has blinded and thrown Saul from his horse is ambiguous— but the direction to Ananias to baptise Saul, which results in a miracle of regained sight and transformation into the apostle Paul, is not Christ but *'The voice of the devil who pretends to be God'*[139].

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[138] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay.* London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 4

[139] Ibid Pg. 22

The central section of the script shows Paul expanding his proselytising and church across Western Europe before arriving, as a political-religious prisoner in New York (by analogy Rome), the location of his eventual martyrdom. By this point, the script's internal time has moved to the early 1970s. Paul is in late middle age and has spent 27 years inventing and performing what it is to be a Christian. In a room described as the sort you would see Allen Ginsberg give a recital, *'Paul comes to speak in all his power and authority as a big organizer, as apostle, as founder of the Church. His illness is appeased: his face radiates strength, security, health, and in some fashion, a form of violence'.* [140] In front of an audience Pasolini describes as encompassing *'blacks', 'beats', 'hippies', 'homosexuals', 'prostitutes',* and *'intellectuals'* Paul gives a speech taken from Romans (13:1-7) which concludes with a statement the crowd deems conservative and subjugating '*Render completely what is owed: to the one who is owed tax, the tax'*. The response from the crowd is that Paul is authoritarian, *'institutionalising'*, and obsessed with power. That a message brought in *'security'* and *'health'* cloak *'a form of violence'*.

The film reaches its climax with scenes of Paul under house arrest in a hotel but continuing his distribution of faith through letter writing. The hotel is *'is absolutely identical to the one where [Martin] Luther King [Jnr] was assassinated. (Insofar as it is possible, I would like to shoot this sequence right in the same hotel in Memphis where [Martin] Luther King was assassinated.)*[141] And it is also where the Paul of Pasolini's script will meet his end; '*Suddenly two violent, piercing gunshots ring out. The door of the lavatory is still swinging back and forth: the man who fired has barely disappeared.*[142] The final scenes of his life juxtapose Paul as instating institutions as a form of *'violence'* and the allusion to him as a martyr, a form of duality that is a refrain throughout the work.

These last scenes of Paul are cut with images of twentieth-century Rome (Jerusalem) with Luke, the author of Acts, detailing Paul's life to Satan. '*A long dialogue between the two: grinning sarcastically at his boss, Luke summarises the*

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[140] Ibid Pg. 92
[141] Ibid Pg. 100.
[142] Ibid Pg. 108.

continuation of Paul's story. Practically the goal has already been reached. The
Church is founded. The rest is nothing but a long appendix, an agony'.[143] The devil
has completed the mission of instating the Church as a diabolical institution.

The 'Plan' and a Messianic Paul.

Perhaps due to the protracted attempts at commissioning '*San Paolo*' the script
begins unusually, with an aforementioned section titled *'Plan for a film about Saint*
Paul', which reads much like a proposal outlining the intentions, themes, and a brief
gloss of the film's crucial scenes. The first line of the script explicitly defines the
work as *'The poetic idea – which ought to become at the same time the conducting*
thread of the film – and also its novelty – consists in transposing the entire affair of
Saint Paul to our time'. [144] As I will later tease out in my methodology chapter, the
unifying juncture between Pasolini's '*San Paolo*' and my project is the use of
transposition and translation of text, place, and characters to rethink time and history
beyond linear chronology. Pasolini describes the process of transposition in time as
the film's *'profound thematic'* showing—

> *The opposition between 'the present ' and 'the holy' – the world of history,*
> *which tends, in its excess of presence and urgency, to escape into mystery,*
> *into abstraction, into unalloyed interrogatives – and the world of the divine,*
> *which, in its religious abstractness, on the contrary, descends among men,*
> *becoming concrete and effective.*[145]

The enigmatic description of a divide between history and the divine provided at
this point in the script returns throughout the work, displayed in the dual character of
Paul as both saint and sinner and the institution of the Church as held between
political gain and true faith. The Paul Pasolini shows is a figure untethered from
time—unlike Christ in *'il vangelo'* who is resolutely bound to the premodern era—
my speculative suggestion of *'San Paolo'* as a sequel to *'il vangelo'*, in part, rests on
the notion of Paul as a form of time-traveller. In my estimation, the transposition into
the twentieth century is merely one of a series of recurrent eras Paul instates; his
schizophrenic nature supports the delayed but imminent possibility for a messianic
gesture to be enacted. As Theodore J. Jennings states, *'It is important to recall that*

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[143] Ibid Pg. 96.
[144] Ibid. Pg. 3.
[145] Ibid Pg. 5.

Paul has this habit of showing up at the most decisive times...Long before our recent history, we may recall the role of Paul in the thought of Augustine as the Roman world was vanishing, or in Luther as the medieval synthesis fell apart. [146] The period in which Pasolini's Paul story unfolds is as monumental and violent as the fall of Rome or the Reformation; it is the ferment and installation of capitalism as so dominant an ideology that there is almost no way of thinking beyond it. Paul's duality, which keeps sacred force alive while inventing the foundations of repressive institutions, is the basis on which Pasolini shows his impact on the present, or what Pasolini refers to as 'modernity'. The plan section also includes the following declaration from Pasolini—

> *'Why would I want to transpose his life on earth to our time? It is very simple: to present, cinematographically in the most direct and violent fashion, the impression and the conviction of his reality/present. To say then explicitly to the spectator, without compelling him to think, that 'Saint Paul is here, today, among us', and that he is here almost physically and materially. That it is our society that he addresses; it is our society for which he weeps and that he loves, threatens and forgives, assaults and tenderly embraces'* [147].

The Paul we will be presented with is directly linked to our present; he haunts modernity like a silent angel and vicious demon.

After explicating the script's intentions, Pasolini lists the major scenes to be depicted in the film, with one or two paragraphs illustrating the scene's significance. Listed here in the order he gives—

1 The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen

2 The Thunderbolt [My Note- The Conversion on the Road to Damascus]

3 The Idea of Preaching to the Gentiles

4–5–6 Adventures in Preaching

7 The Dream of the Macedonian

8 The Religious and Political Passion from Jerusalem to Caesarea

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[146] Jennings, Theodore, J Brill. 'Biblical Interpretation Volume 27 Issue 4-5: *Pasolini's Paul: Representation, Re-Use, Religion* (2019)'. Accessed 19 July 2021. https://brill.com/view/journals/bi/27/4-5/bi.27.issue-4-5.xml. Pg 510-511.

[147] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 3.

9 Saint Paul at Rome[148]

To anyone broadly acquainted with the Book of Acts, the general thrust of each episode will be evident from Pasolini's titling. Pasolini makes novel interruptions— and transpositions— of these familiar narratives, which I will further explore. The most notable of these *'outlines'* is *'The Dream of the Macedonian',* a generally under-emphasised incident of Paul's life. Which, in the Bible, is simply a message from God directing Paul's already itinerant proselyting life—

> *9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:9-10)*

Pasolini makes much more of this scene. The vision of the man is described as *'a most beautiful figure appears to him: a young German: blond, strong, youthful'.* The man tells the condition of modern Germany, *'He speaks of neocapitalism, which satisfies only the material well-being…of the Nazi revival; of the substitution of blindly technical interests for the ideal interests of classical Germany, etc., etc'.* As these words are delivered, the young man is overtaken with an illness, growing thin and pale, finally ending up on the ground. He becomes, in Pasolini's words— *'one of the dreadful living carcasses of the concentration camp … '.*

This extension to the Pauline story is given further emphasis by Pasolini, with him noting—

> *'I am prolonging this point because it is here that the theme of the film, in a fantastical visual mode, is grounded – that will be above all developed in the final part of the film, the martyrdom in Rome/New York: that is, the contract between the 'present' question addressed to Paul and his holy 'answer''.*[149]

Again, the *'Plan'* section of the script explicitly states the importance of a *'contract'* between the present and the untimely— transcendent— capacity of a *'holy answer'* by Paul. In *'San Paolo'* Pasolini considers, as he did in *Il Vangelo Secondo*

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[148] Ibid Pg 6-10.
[149] Ibid Pg. 9.

Matteo (1964), the potential of the Bible to act as an analogy and solution to the hegemonic forces of the twentieth century historically mirrored in the nascent Christian community. *'San Paolo's'* status as a sequel to *'il vangelo'* rests on the conceptual move made by Pasolini that Paul, whilst railing against the occupying 'Roman' force, represented by the Vichy government, is the figure that historically sets the hypocritical, institutionalising capacity of modernity in motion. *And* that in Paul, the messianic idea of Christ's apocalyptic-poetic message is sustained. This is the *'contract'* between an indexical historical present problem of modernity and the *'holy answer'*.

The *parousia* (the second coming of Christ)*,* promised by Jesus as arriving within the life of the original apostles, was the critical problem of St. Paul's time. Pasolini's Christ story ends with this assurance, the final scene of *'il vangelo'* stating *'I am with you always, to the very end of the age'* (Matthew 28:20), building on the guarantee of return within a lifetime *'Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened' (*Matthew 24:34)*.* This era was already upon them. Paul's answer to this theological issue is to rebind this apocalyptic vision as an endlessly deferred but always imminent possibility. Christ will return, and the parousia will unfold, but the faith must be sustained and, as such, must be enshrined as an institution. Paul's Pharisee background— the legal arm of the Judeo faith— is instrumentalised, drawing on the older sense of a messiah which might reveal the world through a 'small gesture' and a laminating of time in which, after Christ, strict chronology is no longer the order of the world. To again use Agamben's description of Paul's messianism, it is a—

> *'gesture at the point in which he experiences and announces to his brothers the contemporariness par excellence that is messianic time, the being-contemporary with the Messiah, which he calls precisely the "time of the now" (ho nyn kairos)…but it also has the singular capacity of putting every instant of the past in direct relationship with itself, of making every moment or episode of biblical history a prophecy or a prefiguration'.* [150]

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[150] Agamben, Giorgio. *'What Is an Apparatus?' And Other Essays*. Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pg. 52-53.

The unfortunate outcome of this imaginative piece of theological management by Paul, for Pasolini, is the production of a resolutely split individual. Sustaining faith through the invention of an institution that is legalistic— the *nomos* of the written word he issues— and so prone to the corruption of power, nevertheless, sustains a spark of hope, a sacred and pure desire that the world will be indelibly changed for the better. The poetic rupture that Pasolini presents in *'il vangelo'*.

In the script, the idea of Paul as duality, of resolutely split, is extended by Pasolini through depictions of scandal, illness, and hypocritical action, which I will go on to explicate. What I want to emphasise here is the notion that Pasolini's *'San Paolo'* project is an essentially messianic endeavour, with Paul cast as a figure of the past *'blasted'*[151] into the contemporary world. And that, within this messianic framing of Paul's life, he comes to represent a form of salvation, utopia, apocalypse— as well as— one of the key architects of what will grow into the neoliberal project, which Pasolini anticipated. Paul is indelibly linked to the messianic *and* formations of modernity.

For Pasolini, Paul operates in an admixture of contradictory positions—

'In fact here the story of two Pauls is narrated: the saint and the priest...I am all for the saint, while I am certainly not very tender toward the priest... [The screenplay leaves] the spectator to choose and to resolve the contradictions and to establish whether this THEOLOGICAL FILM be a hymn to Holiness or to the Chrurch'. [152]

In this sense, Paul is for Pasolini, not just a shadow actor in Christianity but its most crucial figure. In Pasolini's conception and my own, the church is not just a liturgical institution. It is the vessel, enforcer, and carrier of a particular way of thinking that bleeds the secular and the profane together. Under Paul's hand, a

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[151] Cf. Convolute [N10, 3] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002. Pg 475. *'The object of history is to be blasted out of the continuum of historical succession'*

[152] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. xvii

religious dilemma— the question of Christ's endlessly delayed revelation— is solved by invoking the messiah as an entity that can enter at any moment. The messianic is moved from a point at the end of history into the present; as Paul himself insists, this is a hidden moment, unknowable but imminent, and that *'the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night'* (1 Thess 5:2).

The script describes very few miracles; as I will show in the next section, the true, and sacred, faith of Paul is mainly shown through Paul's visions, and sickness. However, the embodied quality of Christ's message in Paul is shown in one episode, in which he unwittingly performs a miracle. In scene 65, a group of beggars steal one of Paul's shoelaces as he lectures a crowd in Naples. The shoe strap is taken back to a hovel and placed around the finger of a sick child who is immediately cured, with the script declaring '*miracle!*'[153]. The band of thieves go on to use the shoelace as a prop in mock miracles, receiving gifts in return, at which point Paul is alerted to the scheme and *'thunders with authority against the swindlers'*[154]. The strange moral of the episode shows that Paul does indeed seem to be imbued with a form of indifferent good that cures the innocent— much like Pasolini's depiction of miracles in '*il vangelo*' where Christ seems strangely unmoved by his power. But, the means by which this force is distributed is to be by him alone.

Blanton Ward extends Paul's contrary positionality and representation by Pasolini as someone whose *'writings are of acute interest precisely because of the way they stage a community-founding identification with an event of crucifixion… of a messianic figure as something that subverts power'*.[155] The crucifixion— paradoxically, given that it is the act that represents the first stage of apocalyptic unravelling— is the event around which Paul organises the new institution of the Church. Whilst holding on to the messianic potential of apocalyptic revelation. In *'Essays Clinical and Critical'* Deleuze describes this action as—

> *'Saint Paul, who keeps Christ on the cross, ceaselessly leading him back to*

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[153] Ibid Pg. 74.

[154] Ibid Pg. 76.

[155] Blanton, Ward. *'Reappearance of Paul, "Sick"': Foucault's Biopolitics and the Political Significance of Pasolini's Apostle'. Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2010). Pg. 60.

> *it, making him rise from the dead, displacing the centre of gravity toward eternal life, and inventing a new type of priest even more terrible than its predecessors. "Paul's invention, his means to priestly tyranny, to herd formation'.* [156]

The fervent, vital, poetically rupturing poet represented '*il vangelo'* is, via Paul's institutionalising of the Church, neutered and kept semi-conscious on the cross, unable to fulfil his parousia. Pasolini's vitriol towards one pole of Paul's character is due to this production of a zombie Christ, by the liturgical *'priest'* of Paul— the fascistic neocaptialist of the script.

Michael J Shapiro identifies Pasolini's invocation of Paul as the high priest of altering messianic time- '*Paul's main ideational challenge was to sell a new temporal story in order to draw his addressees into a conversation about an altered version of time…. a series of missives aimed at altering messianic time'* [157] This is the untimely, messianic figure I see as crucial to the new trilogy I propose. The trilogy I propose sees Paul caught between the premodern world of sacred life in Christ, seen in '*il vangelo'*, and the modernity of Paul's own time, which extends, in Pasolini's vision, to our present. Paul invents the conditions for this modernity to continue while keeping the messianic hope of its end through revelation. Armando Maggi describes this as '*Pasolini's view,* [of] *Paul* [as] *a figure of the past who enters modernity to announce its end'*[158].

A final point worth considering while considering the form of the *'San Paolo'* script is the influence of Erich Auerbach's *'Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*[159] on Pasolini's thought and method of filmmaking. Pasolini first read Auerbach while filming Fellini's *'Le notti di Cabiria'* [160]in 1957, on which

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[156] Deleuze, Gilles. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Pg 37.

[157] Shapiro, Michael J. '*The Politics of Zealotry: Pier Paolo Pasolini's "St. Paul"'*. Accessed 6 November 2020. http://muse.jhu.edu/article/760413. Pg. 545.

[158] Maggi, Armando. *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Pg. 24

[159] Auerbach, Erich, and Willard R. Trask. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. 1st Princeton Classics ed., 50th anniversary ed. Princeton Classics. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013.

[160] *Fellini, Federico. Le Notti Di Cabiria*. Drama. Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica, Les Films Marceau, 1957.

Pasolini provided co-scriptwriting. [161] The first chapter of Auerbach's opus is titled *'Odysseus' Scar',* which explores the concept of early Christian literature as the breaking point from Latin and Greek forms of narrative. In these earlier forms, the everyday nature of the Gospel would have been rendered in comedy: base, dirty, without the universal force of the Gods. Auerbach insists that the Bible inaugurates the admixture of high and low, the sacred and the everyday within the text, as a previously unused religious narrative form. It is a fragmentary text which *'as a composition, the Old Testament is incomparably less unified than the Homeric poems, it is more obviously pieced together-but the various components all belong to one concept of universal history and its interpretation....the reader is at every moment aware of the universal religio-historical perspective'.*[162]

Although Auerbach is referring specifically to the Old Testament in the chapter, I think we can take the general sentiment of the piece — *'the universal religion-historical perspective'*— as an axiom of how Pasolini would make much of his cinema. The concept of *mimesis (an act of imitation, reproduction, and showing),* developed by Plato in counterpoint to *diegesis* (an act of narration, rhetoric, and telling), is crucial to the stylistic form of Pasolini's films. With the exception of the documentary work, no film in his oeuvre utilises narration as the driving structure of the narrative. As I have already shown in the *'faces and places'* of the *'il vangelo'* film, Pasolini shot films and chose actors and even subjects in a way that simply *showed* a series of interlocking events.

The script for *'San Paolo'* displays all the hallmarks of this display— with biblical quotations, simple camera instructions, and no narrative voice-over, giving the script the feeling of a series of vignettes, which we are shown in order. As Pasolini notes in his opening introduction to the 'San Paolo' script *'this will not be expressed so explicitly and didactically in the film! Things, characters, surroundings*

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[161] A review of Pasolini encountering Auerbach's text can be found at Key, Andrew. *'The New Italian Gospel: Pasolini and Christ, 1962 -1963'.* Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5043-the-new-italian-gospel-pasolini-and-christ-1962-1963.

[162] Auerbach, Erich, and Willard R. Trask. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. 1st Princeton Classics ed., 50th anniversary ed. Princeton Classics. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pg. 17.

will speak for themselves'. These individual scenes give you a sense of indexed pieces of reality, more akin to photographs. For Marc James Léger, *'mimetic representation was defined by Pasolini as a fantasmatic substance that reveals the subjective dimension that sustains the symbolic order of external reality*[163]*.'* In this sense, Paul's historical transposition in the script mirrors the external reality of Paul's recurrent and timeless reappearance in history.

Paul's Duality

The dual Paul presented by Pasolini— bridging the present and past, the profane and the sacred— is demonstrated in the script via four interrelated modalities: intermittent illness, a homosexual impulse that appears integral to the appearance of this malady, Paul's face, and scandal. The internal competition between Paul's divine and devilish impetuses is embodied as much in Pasolini's description of his mental, bodily, and facial composition as his behaviour—

> *'My film about Paul is anti-Church (founded by Paul and not by good old St. Peter). The travels of St. Paul, the priest, stand in a sort of opposition to the immobility of St. Paul, the saint. So the film is also the representation of a clear dissociation bordering on schizophrenia'.*[164]

Pasolini's description of the contrast between itinerant and sclerotic performance of institutional roles is ambiguous in its qualification. We are not explicitly told which is preferable to Pasolini's logic of valorising the sacred and railing against the conformity of capitalistic logic. However, the element undeniable in much of the script, is that Paul's duality is either deeply internalised or utterly unknown to Paul.

Face and Scandal

This presentation of conflicting states is shown as a polarity— scenes in which Paul is definitively in the role of saint or neo-fascist— and simultaneously. While

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[163] Léger, Marc James. *Pasolini's Contribution to La Rabbia an Instance of Fantasmatic Realism Drive* in *Cinema: Essays on Film, Theory and Politics*. Bristol Chicago: Intellect, 2015. Pg. 161.

[164] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: My Cinema*. Bologna: Fondazione Cineteca Di Bologna, 2013. Pg. 194

interrogated by a prison guard, Pasolini describes Paul as a *'Pharisee in a double-breasted suit who looks at him simultaneously with superiority and humility'*[165]. A commanding, belittling gaze of a man who believes himself of a higher office than that of the man he is spoken to *and* the pious state of a Christian brother who recognises weakness as the strength of the world— *'my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9)*.

The use of Paul's face as the site of one aspect of his dual nature is a refrain throughout the script. He proselytises to an audience in New York (Rome) with a face that *'radiates strength, security, health, and in some fashion, a form of violence'*[166]. When debating with a group of Marxist intellectuals in Geneva (Corinth) at the home of Aquila and Priscilla, *'Paul's face is not as inspired as it was in the beginning of the speech: something dark, violent, and perhaps disturbed is in him'*.[167] Directly after his baptism by Ananias in Barcelona (Damascus) Paul's face *'has a mysterious smile, unbelievable in that face distorted by fanaticism'*[168] — the remnant of his life as Saul still etched into his complexion.

The whole script shares *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo's'* investment as the face as a site that radiates the reality of the character's inner thoughts and lives. Pasolini describes the *'horrible faces of servants, armed like gangsters'*, *'faces are discontented, troubled, impatient – or else simply resigned'*, *'the marked face, sweet and elusive, of the author of Acts appears mysteriously'*, to name three instances of a hundred-page script which features over fifty references to Paul or other characters faces. [169]

In an early form of the script (not included in the Einaudi or Verso editions), Pasolini draws a direct connection between Paul's face, duality, and scandalous nature—

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[165] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 79.
    [166] Ibid Pg. 92.
    [167] Ibid Pg. 65.
    [168] Ibid Pg. 23.
    [169] Ibid Pg. 24, 37, 38.

'Paul too was full of duality! There were two Pauls! There were two natures in Paul! Paul had two faces. And you will see them: a hard and sure face and a revolutionary face. Thus he reproduced the duality of God, and provoked scandal. Rather, he provokes scandal.[170]

Again, Pasolini emphasises the face as a site in which the essential quality of a person is manifest, or in Paul's case, the schizo-split of political and theological intention. And that this duality is the friction from which Paul's scandalising nature comes. Pasolini is also keen to highlight the contemporariness of this scandal— shifting the past tense of *'provoked'* to the present *'provokes'*. The transposition of time performed in the script is again reinforced, Paul's perverse disposition echoing through time.

Pasolini quotes from Paul's letters to show that Paul is not only an irritant to the neoliberal order that replaces fascism in the story but the nascent community he is intent on expanding and litigating, saying Paul is an *'apostolate which is 'a scandal for the Jews, folly for the Gentiles'*[171] (1 Cor. 1:23). As well as producing *'exclamations of scandal'*[172] when arguing with Peter and the other disciples.

The scandalisation of the very first followers of Christ is the transgression and political move which Paul makes to place himself as the head of the Christ cult movement and solidifies it into a religion distinct from Judaism by extending the faith to the Gentiles. The response to this shift in liturgy is recorded in the script as follows.

'So you left Paul because he preached the word also to the Gentiles, the non-elect?' 'Yes, it was for this! What Paul does is a scandal!' Peter – furious, tense, 'scandalized' – listened to this speech. And almost shaking with pain and anger, he says: 'We have to hear Paul on all these things.' Luke observes with a furtive sneer'.[173]

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[170] Ibid Pg. xxxviii.
[171] Ibid Pg. 7.
[172] Ibid Pg. 36.
[173] Ibid Pg. 35.

It is also the first appearance of Luke's collusion with the devil, which causes rifts and unrest among the faithful. While the machinations of the devil's plans are never directly revealed— bar the initial revelation that Paul's 'conversion' originated from him— Luke's face acts as a refrain throughout the script to show the installation of evil into Christianity has worked, *'by his fierce smile, hidden in a mirror, it is confirmed for us that the instigator of Satan is incarnate in him'*.[174] Or, Luke's *'downcast'* [175]gaze, which is repeatedly reported while Paul directs his followers—a suggestion of slyness and subterfuge in his authorship of Acts and travels with Paul.

The collaboration between Luke and the Devil— the final and least fidelitous addition to the script— is also its most scandalous. It is the explicit declaration of the Church as a satanic, mendacious organisation primarily concerned with power. And that it is through Paul's dual nature that this seed could be planted. The double bind Pasolini presents with this duality is that the sacred core of belief Paul carries— the emphatic and relentlessly distributed idea of Christ on the cross as a symbol of a messianic event— is the only answer to the liquidating power of modernity of which the Church is a foundational pillar.

Sickness and Homosexuality.

Another thematic trope Pasolini uses to perform Paul's conflicted nature is a mysterious illness that dogs him throughout the script. The ailment is never expressed in strict pathological terms but is described variously as manifesting as *'sores and swellings'*, causing *'convulsions'*, and unbearable pain which torments Paul and *'disfigures'* [176]him. As with Pasolini's use of the face, the appearance of the illness as disfiguring is again the aesthetic revelation of an internal disposition. It is within this state that Paul is within the saintly form of his dual nature— *'devoured by illness, humbled by God'*[177]— the illness is a sacred state of undeniable truth. This untreatable malady is also the physical representation of Paul's repressed homosexual desire, a sexualised, libidinal manifestation of the political conflict

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[174] Ibid Pg. 33.
[175] Ibid Pg 40.
[176] Ibid Pg.46, 48, 89.
[177] Ibid Pg. 30

within Paul. The illness acts in counterpoint to the fascistic organiser, signalling moments of true faith and revelation. Paul's homosexuality and illness symbolise moments of undeniable, painful, but clear visions of life beyond or in opposition to capitalism and tether his story back to the radical truth of Christ Pasolini displayed in '*il vangelo*'.

The first of these visions is the aforementioned *'Dream of the Macedonian',* which appears to Paul as he drifts into sleep while suffering from the mysterious illness. The script describes the figure in sensuous terms, *'blond, tall, strong, beautiful, with clear, sensual, and pure eyes'*[178]*,* before equating this with authenticity— *'this strong, blond young man… physically representing the interiority and the truth'.* The message delivered by this angel-esque figure is the horror of post-war capitalism as a reformulation of the fascism of the early twentieth century. The character's metamorphosis into one of the '*dreadful living corpses of the concentration camp… disfigured by repugnant sores and purulence'* mirrors the physical state Pasolini describes sick Paul. Accentuating the correlation between homosexuality, sickness, and the truth of Paul's saintly message.

Shortly after this episode, Paul is imprisoned in a Monaco prison. Pasolini again describes Paul as sick, drawing a direct correlation between Paul's physical state of the Macedonian in the dream— *'Paul suffers horribly with his illness, which covers him with sores and swellings (so much as to render him like the 'monster' of the concentration camp into which the young German* [Macedonian] *man who called on him in Germany was transformed in the dream)'.* After waking from a fitful sleep, Paul is suddenly strong — a reverse of the Macedonians fall into illness— and begins singing a '*sacred'* song. The power of this small sacred gesture produces an earthquake, a miracle in which the prison doors open and chains fall off the prisoners. Paul's illness is not explicitly homosexual in this instance but draws on the Macedonian's strength and beauty to enact one of the few miracles of the script.

Paul does not flee the prison but uses the miracle to convert the guards, the power of God blossoming and subsuming back into meekness— the weak messianism of the

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[178] Ibid Pg. 44.

Christian faith. Still held in the prison cell, Paul falls back into illness and sleep, returning, in a dream, to his childhood home of Tarsus. He wanders around the rural outskirts of the city in state of childhood amongst his school friends. Pasolini states that the landscape of the dream is that of the 'Third Heaven', which Paul had visions of earlier in the script and will later describe as the *'paradise'* of God. [179] It is in this vision of heaven that Paul's scandalous sexual revelation, the sickness that will accompany it, and the compact of the two in a form of true sacred faith occur.

> *'Finally he arrives with his companions at the stadium. Some bigger boys run races. Then in the locker room they undress completely before the eyes of the younger boys and Paul. Upon returning home, Paul feels ill. He is taken by convulsions. The same ones that will persecute him all his life'.*[180]

Armando Maggi describes alternating periods of illness and maniacal organising as '*a sort of reversed Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a man whose apocalyptic and truthful nature arises only in a state of sickness'.*[181] Pasolini's Paul is caught sexually and politically between his 'queerness' and the reactionary conformity demanded by the institution he invents. The scandal of homosexual longing is the grounds on which a true liberation of sexual life could be formed— against the false moralising and 'freedom' that Pasolini saw neoliberalism granting. Especially, given *'that Pasolini at this stage continued to think homosexual desire was—perhaps necessarily a form of social and sexual life that could not be tolerantly incorporated as "normal" behaviour"'.*[182] By presenting a homosexual Paul, Pasolini again uses scandal as a tool to tear at the totalising veneer of neoliberalism. Paul may have produced the institution that moralises, but the seed of its reformulation also lies within him.

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[179] Ibid Pg 69.

[180] Ibid Pg 48.

[181] Maggi, Armando. *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. pg 99

[182] Blanton, Ward. *'Reappearance of Paul, "Sick"': Foucault's Biopolitics and the Political Significance of Pasolini's Apostle'. Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2010): Pg 72.

The Church

The messianic message of Paul continues and extends the power of Christ's poetic rupture of time in *'il vangelo',* institutionalising a message of deferred apocalypticism. The schizophrenic figure Pasolini writes is a projection of his own reactionary and revolutionary impulses, a desire for the radical anomaly of Christ's sacred message to be continued, but an admission that the conditions under which Paul sustains the faith pollute and inaugurate the most violent and hypocritical ordering of life. Stefania Benini describes this as '*The figure of St Paul becomes an essential point of reference for Pasolini: he represents both the knot and the suture between the sacred dimension and the foundation of an institution'*.[183] The institution instated in the script for '*San Paolo'* is throughout referred to as *'The Church',* but can be taken to mean the broader soft amalgamation of all of life under the emergent, and affectively felt, form of post-war capitalism. Pasolini is again prophetically anticipating neoliberalism with his characterisation of Paul and *'the church'* as embodying what Ward Blanton calls the *'more elaborate and efficient network of economic and social relations'*.[184] Or to put it more explicitly, the dissolution of the social sphere into the economic, which is characteristic to neoliberalism.

In the script, Pasolini uses the explicit language of bureaucracy and the implication of theological *nomos*— the word of God as law— to blend 'The Church' and a broader sense of capital control. It is an additional juncture in the script where the word of Pasolini's 'apocalyptic poet' in *'il vangelo'* is melded by Paul into something far less savoury. To use Nietzsche's description of Paul, he is a man who takes the message of Christ, his *'ideas, teaching, and symbols… to tryannize over the masses and to organise mobs'*[185]

183 Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*. Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg. 192-193.

184 Blanton, Ward. 'Reappearance of Paul, "Sick"': Foucault's Biopolitics and the Political Significance of Pasolini's Apostle'. *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 52–77. Pg. 54.

185 Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Michael Tanner. *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Revised ed. edition. London: Penguin Classics, 1990. Pg. 42.

The modality of this organising is presented through Paul's rhetorical style—which mirrors the Christ of *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*— delivered in an unyielding, persistent stream of conscious-like monologues and diatribes[186]. These often feature cinematic instructions of an *'internal dissolve'* between long quotations from the bible, intensifying the feeling of a lecture conducted at delirious length—and which, again, is a stylistic trope of Christ's proselytising in *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*. The spirit of Christ's messianic message in *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* slowly souring into Paul's fascistic, power-grabbing rant.

The second and more technocratic arrangement of Paul's institutionalisation of Christ's message is described by Pasolini through the scaffolding of technical management he instils, and by which 'The Church' is inaugurated—

> *'Add a scene which takes place in a Christian 'section' of the city. Paul controls the functioning of the organization (mimeographed pages, wall newspapers, leaflets etc) and most of all the account book (the offerings of rich, industrialist citizens, etc.).*[187]

The means by which the church functions is no longer the pure word of Christ but in its reproduction and *interpretation* and, even more importantly, its economic power. An element further emphasised in a line which explicitly replaces *'theoretical discourse'* with the question of monetary organisation and *'membership'*—

> *'Replace this theoretical discourse with a frame of the organization created by Paul: sections, membership, funding, capital, banking'.*[188]

By the last third of the script, while preaching in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, various voices are heard from the crowd describing Paul as one who *'creates a law and establishes a Church. He is, more importantly, a big organizer. Half the world is now populated by his organizing centres. He doesn't miss a beat. He is an extremely*

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[186] See pages 40-43, 48-55, 62-65 for examples of these long speeches with *'internal dissolves'* Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London ; New York: Verso, 2014.

[187] Ibid. Pg 40

[188] Ibid. Pg 54.

practical man, a bureaucrat, a general'.[189] The critical feature of this quote is the use of the *'law'* (*nomos*) as institutionally integral to the formation of the Church and the valence of Paul as an organiser, a *'general'* as much as an ascetic or sacerdotal figure.

This form of reasoning— the subjugation of all things to the written word— is a central tenet to St. Paul's writing, extending the Judaic background he came from as a Pharisee to one of the pivotal axioms of the Christianity he inaugurates.

Across Acts and the Epistles, Paul stresses the importance of *nomos* (legislative law) both from God and earthly authority as that which requires most attention— *'but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members'* (Romans 7:23). *Nomos* is for Paul a theo-politico concept, which sets the space for him to regulate what is permissible in the developing Christian community—faith, social reproduction, custom, and who is the voice of authority all fall under *nomos.* Paul allowing uncircumcised gentiles into the Christ cult would be an example of where the Jewish sub-sect starts to become early Christianity, under Paul's use of *nomos.* This fanaticism with *nomos* is seen in Pasolini's script, with Paul's detractors declaring, *'He is a Pharisee ... as I had to tell you!'* *'He doesn't do anything but talk about ecclesiastical and liturgical problems, of animals strangled or not, of baptisms ... and of circumcisions, those damned circumcisions ...'*[190] Paul's description of himself in Acts, included at *two* points in the script further stress this importance of law *'Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, Pharisee as to the law, as to zeal a persecutor of the Church, irreproachable as to justice/righteousness, which is founded upon the law ...'*[191] (Acts 9:1–30), and in Pasolini's idea of Paul as *'an apostle of the new Law'*[192]— the institution of 'The Church', and by extension the new form of capitalism Pasolini saw as reducing all social relations to that of a 'law' which the market decides.

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[189] Ibid. Pg 67.
[190] Ibid Pg 66.
[191] Ibid Pg 19 and Pg 29.
[192] Ibid Pg 31.

But even this fanatical figure obsessed with *nomos* is one dualistically split. Much like Pasolini, it is a figure that is both iconoclastic and reactionary. In the script, this is illustrated most clearly as Paul unable to *'conceive of anything outside the code – of the Law! He barely abjured one Law when he immediately institutes another'*[193]. Jason Michael Collins describes this tendency for traditionalism coupled with revolution as a direct conduit to the present issue of '*hegemonic'* modernity that Pasolini is concerned with— *'Paul appears as an instigator against norms and as a conformist that, through the 20th century transposition, exemplifies contemporary capitalist hegemony as a continuation of fascism and religious conformity'.* [194]

Pasolini makes the categorical installation of Christianity through Paul's teaching in a short and damning speech given by Paul at the house of James (scene 71). Which begins with the tentative admission that Paul has founded something distinct from Christ's Judaic mystery cult, *'In a new light – the light of history and of the present and of a new language – the apostle continues to talk: 'Ours is an organized movement ... Party, Church ... call it what you like.* This is followed by the unequivocal acknowledgement of the requirement for *'hypocrisy'* — a crucial feature of Pasolini's diagnostic of modernity— in order to function.

> *We must defend this future good for everyone, accepting, yes, also the need to be diplomatic, shrewd, social. Accepting the need to be quiet about things that ought to be spoken about, not to do things that ought to be done, or to do things that ought not to be done. Not to speak, to hint, to allude. To be cunning. To be hypocritical.*

The speech's final line returns to the need for a new institution to keep the *sacred hope* of Christ's parousia alive— '*Because we do not have redemption, but a promise of redemption. We are founding a Church'*[195]. It is in this line that Pasolini's innocent apocalyptic poet *of 'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* written in 1964 under the star of innocent premodern hope in the past, is drawn under the conflicted, battered,

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[193] Ibid Pg 66.

[194] Collins, Jason Michael. 'The Duality of Paul in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Saint Paul: The Katechon and the Collapse of a Film Project'. *Humanities* 12, no. 6 (December 2023): 144. https://doi.org/10.3390/h12060144. Pg .

[195] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 78.

and beleaguered view of Pasolini in 1975. There is still the minute glimmer of truth in the messianic 'promise' of Christ, but it is one that requires a new form of faith, cutting through venality, violence, and impending doom.

These hellish procedures— and the fragment of hope— will be played out in the finale of my speculative trilogy, Pasolini's *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'*. But the transition to *'Salò'* is seen in *'San Paolo's'* most scandalous addition— that of the Devil. As Luke (author of Acts) announces in the script, The Church, veiled hope, and evil operate in close proximity—

> *'With each institution diplomatic actions and euphemistic words are born. 'With each institution a pact with its own conscience is born. 'With each institution fear of the partner is born. 'The establishment of the Church was only a necessity.'] Devils.*[196]

The Devil and the Founding of Salò

The devil appears as a refrain throughout the script for *'San Paolo',* most notably involved in Paul's conversion instructing Ananias to baptise Paul following his blinding on the road to Damascus— *'The voice of the devil who pretends to be God. Scene among the devils'.*[197] And then, as the secret hand working through Luke to influence Paul and produce a hagiography of his life in Acts— *'Concepts expressed by a new intervention by Satan and his instigator. The devil 'Instigator' imitates the voice of God, which utters the sentence… Leave Barnabas and Paul available for the mission for which I have destined them'.*[198]

The correlation of neoliberalism and the devil of *'San Paolo'* is expressly put in a monologue delivered by Luke directly at the *'spectator of the film'*—

> *'No desert will be more deserted than a house, a plaza, a street where people live in the 1970s after Christ. Here is solitude. Side by side with your neighbour, dressed from the same department stores as you, customer in the same stores as you, reader of the same newspapers as you, spectators of the*

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[196] Ibid Pg 38-39.
[197] Ibid Pg 22.
[198] Ibid Pg 31 and 36.

same television as you, there is silence.

This silence is then expressed in terms of an existential rift, a false peace enforced by *power,* represented as the proverbial desert of temptation and judgement that both Christ and Paul retreat into at the early stages of their journeys.

> *'There is no other metaphor of the desert than everyday life. 'This is not representable since it is the shadow of life: and its silences are interior. It is a blessing of peace. But peace is not always better than war. In a peace dominated by power, one can only protest by not wanting to exist. .... 'I am the author of the Acts of the Apostles…Diabolical discourses (passage of three years in the desert).[199]'*

Luke— author of Acts— as the puppet of the Devil, describes, in poetic form, the interior desert of an individual under neoliberalism, the conditions of which have been set by the Devil's collusion with an unwitting Paul. The '*diabolical discourses'* of Paul's retreat into this literal and metaphorical desert suggest that the devil performs an extended and veiled indoctrination of Paul's psyche— off-screen— under the rubric of a neoliberal worldview. The script's conclusion redoubles Luke's initial prophecy of hypocrisy and individualism.   While the final days of Paul's life and assassination play out, the script cuts to scenes revealing the true legacy of Paul's preaching, images of the Church founded in his unwitting pact with Satan and Luke.

In a closing scene, we see St. Timothy clothed in gold and *'crushed under his mitre'* [200]in a church populated by the establishment figures shown at the stoning of St. Stephen (scene 7), the first Christian martyr. '*A group of authorities: high officials, puffed up like turkeys in their grand uniforms; political men, in their black double-breasted suits, with vulgar and hypocritical old faces; the throng of their bejewelled ladies and their servants, etc., etc.'* [201] Alongside the gross decadence of wealth and ceremony '*the altar encrusted in gold – a true and real golden calf – full of baroque affectations and neoclassical flourishes, work of total unbelief, official, threatening, hypocritically mystical and glorifying, clerical, of the master*[202]' the *'barely audible'*

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[199] Ibid Pg 25.
[200] Ibid Pg. 105.
[201] Ibid Pg. 105.
[202] Ibid Pg. 105.

words of Paul are heard in voiceover- *'let them therefore adorn themselves with modesty and moderation, not with braids and gold ornaments or pearls or sumptuous clothing, but with good works'* [203] *(*1 Tim 2:9-10). The contradiction of Paul's efforts, originating from his duality of the psyche, is performed in the juxtaposition of martyrdom and the creation of the nefarious institution of the Catholic Church.

Just before this undermining of Paul's legacy, we are given an unflinching reveal of the devil's use of Paul and the prophetic effect of his legacy—

> *'Feet that are walking on a street in Rome (that is, Jerusalem) are framed [by the camera]: then the feet stop in front of a door. It is the door of Luke's building. The visitor is seen from the back, and, for the whole episode, will be seen from the back. He is, as we will see, Satan. He enters the building and goes up to Luke's apartment. A long dialogue between the two: grinning sarcastically at his boss, Luke summarises the continuation of Paul's story. Practically the goal has already been reached. The Church is founded. The rest is nothing but a long appendix, an agony. The Destiny of Paul doesn't interest Satan: let him be saved and go to Paradise anyway. Satan and his hired assassin laugh sarcastically, satisifed. Luke gets up, takes a bottle of champagne from a cabinet, and the two of them repeatedly drink a toast to their Church. They drink and get drunk, evoking all the crimes of the Church: a huge, long list of criminal popes, of compromises by the Church with power, of bullying, violence, repressions, ignorance, dogmas. At the end, the two are completely drunk and they laugh thinking of Paul who is still there, travelling around the world preaching and organizing'.*[204]

Paul is unwitting to the end; even in his death, the consequence of his dual nature is unrevealed to him, and perhaps even to God— *'let him be saved and go to Paradise anyway'.*

To Salò

Towards the end of the script, Pasolini makes a note that cuts us from the narrative, focusing the camera on himself didactically giving *'the reason for making a film about Saint Paul. All the crimes and faults of the Church as a story of power are nothing in the face of the faults of today in which the Church passively accepts an*

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[203] Ibid Pg. 105.
[204] Ibid. Pg 96.

irreligious power which is liquidating it and reducing it to folklore'. [205] I believe we can take the '*irreligious power'* which liquidates the church to '*folklore'* as its complicity into a neoliberal order, uncoupled even from the duality of Paul. Paul's devilishly inflected side, which accounts for '*all the crimes and faults of the Church as a story of power'* has produced the conditions for a neoliberal reordering of life, but what Pasolini laments is the loss of Paul's sacred side, which in the late twentieth century has been diminished almost to a nub. It is under these conditions that I make the leap from the script for '*San Paolo'* to *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'*— the concurrence of the final edit of *'San Paolo'* with *'Salò's'* production suggesting that Pasolini's concern for a world overtaken almost completely overtaken by *'irreligious'* sentiment requires an absolute abject depiction. But one in which a sacred fragment of hope can still be seen.

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[205] Ibid. Pg 96.

Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma

Introduction

> *'Here is the seed, the sense of everything...you don't even know who, right at this moment, might be thinking of killing you... we are all in danger'*[206]

Pasolini made this statement to Furio Colombo in an interview conducted on November 1[st.] 1975, the night he was brutally beaten to death. '*Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma' (1975)* was finished, its Italian release coming three weeks later; banned three weeks after that. Censorship in most other countries followed. As a public intellectual for whom the prefix 'infamous' has become a ubiquitous addition to his name and work '*Salò'* became the unintended finale to this sensationalised version of Pasolini's legacy. The proximity of the film release and Pasolini's death has drawn many cheap readings of life imitating art, reaping what you sow, and, as Andrew Key puts it, that many saw Pasolini as *'not just disgustingly sexual, but overly intellectual'.*[207] It is a film credited with spawning extreme cinema as a genre, infamous for its ability to shock, appal, and distress its viewers. My first encounter with '*Salò'* was in a film studies class before the introduction of 'trigger warnings' to teaching; the screening finished with less than half the students it began with. I make no denial that it is an often uncomfortable, sometimes harrowing, film to watch. Within the English-speaking world, it is often the only reason many are aware of Pasolini, which is an unfortunate collective oversight of a rich output. All that said— I believe '*Salò'* to be a much-misunderstood film. The viciousness of violence, sex, and humiliation tends to draw a reading of the film, which fails to penetrate the surface of a complex constellation of ideas.

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[206] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *We're All In Danger; The last interview with Pier Paolo Pasolini* in *In Danger: A Pasolini Anthology*. Edited by Jack Hirschman. San Francisco, Calif: City Lights Publishers, 2010. Pg. 233

[207] Key, Andrew. *'The New Italian Gospel: Pasolini and Christ, 1962 -1963'*. Versobooks.com. Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5043-the-new-italian-gospel-pasolini-and-christ-1962-1963.

On re-watching the film in preparation for writing this section— which I guess was my seventh or eighth viewing over twenty or so years — an unexpected effect was produced. A familiarity with the violence had set in. The deeply shocking acts, while not completely neutered, were expected. The initial traumatising blow of the film had lessened through repeat exposure. The knowledge that the set was described as *'paradoxically jovial and immature'*[208], that the cast held football matches against Bernando Bertolucci's crew who were filming *Novocento* (1976) nearby, and the scenes of coprophilia were concoctions of chocolate mousse further acting as a vaccine to the borderline terror of the original viewings. The most extreme scenes seemed drained, and while still awful, they retreated a little, the blistering violence dulled. The overall contrast of the film changed, with the dialogue used as horrific acts were performed and the subtlety of language between scenes taking on a new colour and importance, no longer muddled by stress and anxiety. I had already teased out the argument offered here, but this final viewing consolidated my assurance that *'Salò'* is a deeply complex, nuanced, and rich film with violence used as a means, not an end. My proposition here is based on rereading the film as informed by the '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* and *'San Paolo'* projects. By doing so, two key under-engaged concepts are made clear, and I believe move the film's modus operandi from the popular idea of it as sadistic voyeurism— to that of a film acutely manifesting a point of apocalypse in two interlocking theo-political notions.

The first is the spectral presence of St. Paul within the script of the film, Paul's induction to the Word of God *(nomos, law)* as regulation within social reproduction, and Pasolini's recognition of the themes of *'San Paolo', already outlined,* being at the forefront of his mind in the making of '*Salò'.*

The second is the explicit thematic use of Hell, Revelation, apocalypse, and judgement the film performs. All of which points to *hope* as a function of utopian and messianic thinking. The small light of hope is given in the film's final scene and the three alternative endings Pasolini conceived for it, each of which I will engage with.

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[208] "*Salò*"*: Yesterday and Today*. The Criterion Collection. 18mins 46 seconds. 2002.

Gloss

Pasolini's *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* is a very loose adaption of the Marquis de Sade's *'120 Days of Sodom'*, the fealty shown to the original text in his previous adaptations[209] through narrative, language, or aesthetic form are absent in '*Salò'*, with Pasolini's *'120 Days of Sodom'* drawing on the auratic quality of Sade's absolute abasement of life and rampant moral turpitude. As often described, the film is an analogy between fascism and the corruption of power. The rough structure of Sade's book is followed— a group of young people are imprisoned in a mansion, after which they are subjected to increasingly baroque forms of rape and torture by a group of libertines, free of moral shackles. I will return to an idea of structure, system, and architecture that Pasolini carries from Sade, but this is approximately where Pasolini's translation of Sade's work ends.

In Pasolini's film, the story is transposed to the northern Republic of Salò in Italy between 1944 and 1945. The Republic was a short-lived client state to Nazi Germany and the final version of Benito Mussolini's fascist government. A sign for Marzabotto, south-west of Bologna, is seen in these establishing shots. But, if you are aware of Pasolini's biography, it is hard not to think of the verdant agricultural country and villages of these opening scenes as the landscape of Friuli, where Pasolini spent his time during the Second World War. In this sense, the beginning of *'Salò'* returns Pasolini's cinema to a form of Italian Neo-Realism, depicting a reality of life under war and fascism. It is in this landscape that Pasolini was informed of his brother's death, saw his father work as a wholehearted fascist soldier, and had to negotiate conscription into the Italian Army, desertion during the Italian Armistice, and living for eighteen months under the Italian Social Republic of which the libertines of *'Salò'* are senior figures.

 The story starts with the four libertines; a Duke, Bishop, Magistrate, and President, signing a book of 'regulations', the contract for the film's diabolical acts. The book's full constitution is never given— but its transgressive code is made evident from the beginning— instructing the libertines to nonconsensually marry each other's

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[209] I'm thinking here of *'Medea'*, *'il Decameron'*, *'Epdipo Re'*, *'il vangelo secondo Matteo'*, *'Il fiore delle mille e una notte'* and *'I racconti di Canterbury'*.

daughters. The young women's kidnapping and enforcement of the marriage carried out by gleeful soldiers. One soldier seems less enthusiastic— and will later enact one of the few moments of hope in the film— but at this stage of the film, meekly apologies with the banal appeal of complicity in evil *'sorry we are obeying orders'*[210].   Following this first assault on moral reason, we watch the libertines and their military guard carefully select a group of Italian youths from the rural areas around the North of Italy. Large groups of children and young adults have already been rounded up and held captive in palatial but now abandoned and decaying mansions. Groups of civilian men and women guard the prisoners, boasting of the means by which they captured them. The libertine's scheme may be somewhat clandestine, but it has been executed with the complicity of many others who are not military but of a professional middle class.

The libertines choose their cohort on the basis of physical perfection. For instance, a young woman is rejected due to a missing molar tooth. But what excites the four men most is the selection of bourgeoise prisoners. The son of a Judge— a friend of the Magistrate— is selected with delight, as well as the daughter of a Professor. Some of the group are drawn from the Italian peasantry, caught out in the fields, but Pasolini does not extend the metaphor of power and corruption in a simple dichotomy of those who hold power exercising it over those without. Instead, a refrain of everyone as victim and persecutor is instilled with one of the libertines triumphantly declaring, '*the bourgeoisie has never hesitated to kill its own sons*'[211].

Nine boys and nine girls are finally chosen, alongside the libertine's daughters, a group of soldiers, and four middle-aged brothel madams. The doomed horde retreating to a mansion in Salò, on the coast of Lake Garda— the town selected by Mussolini for the headquarters of his final fascist Republic.

Over a set of carefully orchestrated days, they rape, humiliate, and pervert social norms through the use of ceremonies, meals, storytelling, rules, music, and dance,

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[210] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 7 minutes 3 seconds.
[211] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 8 minutes 25 seconds

culminating in the final execution of the majority of the prisoners. The madams officiate the progressively intense action, beginning each evening with sadistic— supposedly erotic— stories, songs, and dance to excite the libertines. This ceremony is repeated over a series of evenings, organising a descent into Dante-esque levels of hell— *'The Circle of Mania', 'The Circle of Shit',* and *'The Circle of Blood'.* None of these 'circles' are in Dante's *'Inferno',* but*,* as with Pasolini's translation of Sade, there is an implication that modernity has produced sins and desires that exceed the original texts' imagination.   The line between innocent and exploiter becomes increasingly blurred throughout the film; the prisoners show acts of solidarity but also betray one another. The libertines, soldiers, and madams seem increasingly damaged by their violence, at some points frenzied by it, and others depleted, unable to hold on to the escalating need for desire. The film's timeframe is specified as 1944-5, with Allied bombers heard throughout, suggesting the libertines are well aware of this being their final hellish party, and that the end of their world and power, through fascism, is coming to a close with the end of the war.

'Salò' ends with a third act of judgement and murder. A few of the prisoners have lost their lives during ritualised torture, but the libertines have taken more pleasure in deferring death, revelling in the captive's pleas to be killed as a form of freedom. Instead, they record transgressions in the book of 'regulations' to be meted out in their final orgy in a yard at the back of the mansion, filled with fire pits to brand the prisoners, instruments to amputate limbs, and machines for execution. The penultimate scene of *'Salò'* puts the viewer in the place of the libertines. We are shown one of them seated in a window, watching the final spectacle of torture and death. The camera shows the libertine peering at the courtyard through binoculars and then cuts to the view through the binoculars, literally placing you in his shoes. These final shots suggest your complicity in the violence. If you've made it this far into the film, you are no longer abused by it but complicit as voyeurs. The closing images further outline the extension of systemic violence beyond even Sade's vision, with Pasolini saying that for *'The executions for example, I have used the four modes of killing still practiced by our legal institutions: hanging, shooting, the garrot and*

the electric chair, methods de Sade hadn't really thought of, or couldn't with all his subtlety conceive'[212]

 Andrea Righi observes that *'Salò'* performs not only an analogy for fascism's abuse of power but also capitalism's abuse of desire as an archetype for freedom— as Righi says, *'Salò'* shows that *'In consumer society, individuals are at the same time victims and victimizers; they take advantage and are simultaneously exploited by the system that is based on an endless cycle of production and consumption'.*[213] The libertines themselves describe this as the quintessence of their form of life— *'The libertines refinement is to be at once the executioner and the victim'*[214]

It is in this imagination of the film that I build my concept of *'Salò'* as a finale to a trilogy of *'il vangelo secondo Matteo'* and *'San Paolo'*. Pasolini's analogy of advanced capitalism and modernity as an infernal feedback loop of violence begins to add texture to the somewhat cliched idea of '*Salò'* as a poor critique of fascism via sensationalised violence. This reading opens the film to the complexity of Pasolini's dual characterisation of Paul as a savour and sinner and how both forms resonate within the contemporary political sphere.

Reading '*Salò'* as the culmination of a new trilogy also opens *hope* as a crucial and overlooked feature of the film. The reference to Dante's *'Inferno'* and the end of history is not pure nihilism but a state which approaches a gap in experience through which redemption can be reached. The world Pasolini shows in the film is not comparable to the one Sade depicts; it is worse. In Sade's '*120 Days of Sodom'* we read the isolated immorality of an individual in defiance of the state. The depravity `*Salò'* represents is both the form the state functions— and which forces all its members to be victims *and* abusers. *However,* the limit experience of confronting

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[212] Bachmann, Gideon, and Pasolini Pasolini. 'Pasolini on de Sade: An Interview during the Filming of The 120 Days of Sodom'. *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1 December 1975): 39–45. https://doi.org/10.2307/1211747. Pg. 42

[213] Righi, A. *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri*. 1st ed. 2011 edition. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pg. 89

[214] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzione Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 1hour 16minutes 44 seconds

this extreme reality is a revelation, an apocalyptic vision, in which a fissure of hope is sparked.

St Paul and Law

The influence of the '*San Paolo*' project on '*Salò*' is evident through the violence authorised and meted out by institutional figures— with their vehement adherence to 'law'— and the appearance of a veiled quotation from Paul's epistles in a key scene of the film. As already mentioned, the '*San Paolo*' project was in its final stages of editing as '*Salò*' was written and filmed, and Paul's fanatical fascistic organising has its fingerprints across the film. The Church shown in '*San Paolo*', founded in unwitting cahoots with the Devil, reaches its logical and diabolical finale in '*Salò*' with the Duke, Magistrate, President, and Bishop representative of the venal and hypocritical pillars of modernity— nobility, the legal system, politics, and religion. Bar aristocracy— which he has surprisingly little to say— Pasolini had felt the injustice and power of each of these arms of the state and continued to be at battle with. *'Salò'* is a display of the violent core of fascism drawn from its perverse moral code. But it can be more accurately described as a film showing how these themes do not neatly begin and end in the early Twentieth Century. Instead, the fascism of that time has transmuted and installed itself at the heart of the neoliberal project, and its beginning was with Paul in the first century CE and his zealous desire for regulation through law.

The Book of Regulations

'Salò' opens with the four libertines solemnly signing and stamping a small red book in an evidently serious and contractual act. A close-up of the book reveals it to be a school exercise book with the handwritten and flamboyant title of 'regolamenti' (*regulations*). The just legible printed name on the cover reads *'Bella Copia'* *(Beautiful Copy),* presumably the company name for the notebook, and a perverse joke given what it contains. The signing ceremony ends with the Bishop declaring, *'All things are good when taken to excess'*[215]*,* this curious and aphoristic statement

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[215] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 4 minutes 12 seconds.

signalling the venal logic of their plan. The book contains the rules of their orgy, announced to the prisoners as the repository for *'The laws that will govern your lives',* and by following its liturgy to the letter, to its absolute *excess,* the immorality of their action is somehow reversed. The libertine's logic, like Paul in *'San Paolo',* sees the fealty to law as the ultimate regulation of good. It again calls into the present Paul's great admission at the close of *'San Paolo'* that under the Church you can be legitimated *'to do things that ought not to be done… To be hypocritical…because we do not have redemption, but a promise of redemption. We are founding a Church'* [216]. The sacred promise of revelation mutated into an injunction akin to Aleister Crowley's *'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law'.* [217]

It is, in effect, the Bible of the film, a reminder that the transgression perpetrated by them is mandated by a perverse structure of legislation, which draws its power from the written word. The book of regulation contains what Ryan Calabretta-Sajder describes as *'dictating accurate rules for the "industrial" micromanagement of the spaces and ways of their own perversion'.* [218] It is immorality yoked and validated to the logic of neoliberalism's *'industrial micromanagement'* of life, all of which is inaugurated by St Paul.

The twisted logic of a book that contains *'The laws that will govern your lives'* is extended to the processes of pseudo-democratic performance the libertines engage in. The selection of the prisoners at the beginning of the film uses a transparent ballot box [219] into which each libertine posts his 'vote' for who should be brought to the mansion. Whilst judging who has the most beautiful bottom— a competition with a first prize of immediate death— one of the libertines makes a different selection to the others but concedes on the basis that it is right to *'yield to the opinion of the majority'.* [220] The hypocrisy of these gestures towards democracy is obvious in

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[216] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 78
[217] Crowley, Aleister. *Book of the Law*. New Ed edition. York Beach, Me: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1977.
[218] Calabretta-Sajder, Ryan, ed. *Pasolini's Lasting Impressions: Death, Eros, and Literary Enterprise in the Opus of Pier Paolo Pasolini*. S.l.: Fairleigh, 2020**.**
[219] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 9 minutes 30 seconds
[220] Ibid 1 hour 21 minutes 10 seconds.

that it does not extend beyond the four libertines. The ritual and legislative procedure is one that calls for minute detail. While one of the madams tells a story of her first abuse by an older man, one of the libertines interrupts, complaining at the lack of vivid and accurate description of the penis, wanting to know its precise *'dimensions'*[221]. The dichotomy of a call for complete order amongst continual chaos produces an unsettling and undermining quality to the film, intensifying the evil as necessary and premediated in law.

The fetishisation of detail and empirical documentation is an element of De Sade's story preserved in Pasolini's retelling. Sade's book is filled with precise descriptions of architecture, diets, bodily parts, and the number of victims required to enact his evil, fevered, dream of freedom. Sade's story pushes the enlightenment project into its dark extremity; Pasolini's co-option of this fascination with detail instead exposes the technocratic impulse of 20th-century fascism preserved in neoliberalism's obsession with mining data from the human body.

In an interview on the project, Pasolini expressly joins the synergy of power, legislation, and violence that Sade invokes—

> *In power, in any power, legislative and executive, there is something ferocious. In fact, in its rules and in its practices it does nothing but sanction and allow the most primordial and blind violence…the powerful in De Sade do nothing but write Rules and then regularly apply them'.*[222]

This form of reasoning— the subjugation of all things to the written word— is a central tenet to St. Paul's writing, and Pasolini's depiction of him in '*San Paolo'* filled as it is with '*the functioning of the organization (mimeographed pages, wall newspapers, leaflets etc) and most of all the account book (the offerings of rich, industrialist citizens, etc.).*[223]

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[221] Ibid 25 minutes.

[222] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 182-183.

[223] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg 40.

Across Acts and the Epistles, Paul stresses the importance of *nomos* (legislative law) both from God and earthly authority as that which requires most attention. *Nomos* is, for Paul, a theo-politico concept, which sets the space for him to regulate what is permissible in the developing Christian community—faith, social reproduction, custom, and who is the voice of authority all fall under *nomos.* Paul allowing uncircumcised gentiles into the Christ cult would be an example of where the Jewish sub-sect starts to become early Christianity, under Paul's use of *nomos.* The theme of law over circumcision is one of the principle points of Paul's use of *nomos* in the script for '*San Paolo',* and is repeatedly returned to[224]. The argument between Paul and Peter is over this management of Gentiles into the new faith, and whether they could even be preached to without following the old law—

> *'So you left Paul because he preached the word also to the Gentiles, the non-elect?' 'Yes, it was for this! What Paul does is a scandal!' Peter – furious, tense, 'scandalized' – listened to this speech. And almost shaking with pain and anger, he says: 'We have to hear Paul on all these things.' Luke observes with a furtive sneer'.*[225]

What gives *nomos* its power of reasoning, its ability as a tool of state building, is the language it deploys, its *logos* (reason, speech, the Word as representation of Jesus as Messiah) as a Divine proclamation. The logic of the libertines in '*Salò'* is the accelerated reasoning that Pasolini sees in Paul's branching of politics and Jesus as the Word. The perverse rationale that the book of 'regulation' achieves is the moral superiority over everything by virtue of language.

In an interview with Gideon Bachmann on the set of '*Salò',* Pasolini says, *'I have given up the idea of making a film about Saint Paul'*[226]. Instead, the themes of law, writing, and power evident in *'San Paolo'* find themselves entwined in '*Salò'.* Pasolini said that in *'Salò' 'I simply plan to replace the word "God", as de Sade*

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[224] Pages 16, 35, 37, and 78 make reference to it as well as the repeated call by Paul of his heritage as *'Circumcised on the eighth day ... of the people of Israel ... of the tribe of Benjamin ... Hebrew from the Hebrews ... Pharisee in relation to the Law ...'* [Phil. 3:5] on pages 19 and 29. Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014.
[225] Ibid Pg. 35.
[226] Bachmann, Gideon, and Pasolini Pasolini. '*Pasolini on de Sade: An Interview during the Filming of The 120 Days of Sodom'. Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1 December 1975): 39–45. Pg. 41.

used it, with the word "power"'.[227] With the replacement, the story becomes one of theological and religious entanglement. The new arbiter of judgement is not just God, but the *logos* and *nomos* of God's message crystallised in an institution. *'Salò',* in part, shows what religion looks like when the hope for a sacred message from God— the heart of the *'il vangelo'* film— is abandoned, instead holding the written word to the level of a deity. And it is within this notion of always grasping for power over the message and its means of distribution that St Paul and the legacy of the *'San Paolo'* project can be seen in *'Salò'.*

A Pauline Ghost

'Salò' is a film with little introspective dialogue from the four orchestrators of the violence. The madams give disgusting monologues, and the libertines bark orders, but the back and forth of conversation almost hardly occurs, save one brief but significant exchange —

> *'Bishop- The principle of all greatness on earth has long been bathed in blood. And, my friends, if my memory does not betray me- yes, that's it; "without bloodshed, there is no forgiveness, without bloodshed..." Baudelaire.*
>
> *President- Your Excellency, the expression is not from Baudelaire. It is from Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals'.*
>
> *Bishop-No, it's neither Baudelaire nor Nietzsche. Nor is it Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. It's from Dada.*
>
> *Magistrate- 'Sing me that sweet melody that I love so much. That goes "da-da"'.* [228]

The quotation's actual author is St. Paul, but from Hebrews 9:22, not Roman's. In its original context, Paul is detailing the requirement for sacrifice as part of a yearly offering in Judaic practice, establishing a covenant between the Israelites and God. Paul's assertion is that Jesus's death, and shedding of his blood for all humankind, embeds the covenant with God forever.

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[227] Ibid Pg. 40.
[228] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 45 minutes 28 seconds.

However, in the ping-pong of ideas held within this short dialogue, the quotation is hard to digest and attribute. The context of the previously seen violence seemingly renders the line a pardon to what has been performed. Or even, in line with the continual call for regulation and order in the film, the whole orgy may have been designed as a ritual act, obtaining absolution of even greater sins committed outside of the mansion— the holocaust perhaps. Invoking Nietzsche, Baudelaire, and St. Paul, in turn, applies further philosophical possibilities to the quote, further diluting and confusing its original meaning. The nonsense and rejection of logic suggested by Dada is a strange conclusion to the libertine's conversation, at odds with their belief in order, or perhaps an admission that the regulation they continually appeal to is, in fact, just a chaos of contradictory ideals.

Either way, the quotation situates St Paul as a ghostly presence in the film. His influence instating the legislative structure of the piece, and his words called on by the libertines as the route from bloodshed into forgiveness. In this sense, the demonic side of Paul's duality dominates '*Salò'*, but the small hope of a messianic moment which his saintly side preserves, can also be seen in the film.

The Appeal

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Heb 11:1).

'Salò' operates in a Christian concept of the end. It is an eschatological time-space, the very final days before the apocalypse. For the libertines, this is the end of a fascist world order; for the captives, it is death as the only guarantee of freedom after the horror they have endured. For Pasolini, the eschatological time of the film acts as an analogy for the eternally deferred parousia which the *'San Paolo'* script anticipates and '*Salò'* illustrates. A promise of redemption, institutionally bound, descending into the hell of new capitalism. While the scene Pasolini shows us is one he believes simply morphs at the end of the Second World War, continuing into his time, it is vision of the world at the brink of the end. And like all eschatological prophecies, hope can be seen, even if it is barely reachable.

As with all of Pasolini's work, this quality of hope is poetically wrought. Using the idea of a final death as the limit-experience by which a view of hope can be seen and the sacred fragments of a life before modernity.

In a 1974 interview, the year before filming *Salò,* Pasolini's critique of modernity and the suppression of the *'ancient ways of life'* reaches a new level of fever—

> *"Genocide is this adaptation to the power of Italian consumerism…This power is violently tearing away at ancient ways of life, at the age-old values that are really at the source of Italian culture as a whole. It is imposing its own models and values and destroying in the process a way of life."* [229]

The *'genocide'* and death of Pasolini's vision does, however, offer a poetical spark by which the sacred can re-enter. Given that, for Pasolini, death acts as the final filmic montage of a life rendering it in all its sacred, mythic, and epic totality—

> *'I compare death to montage. Once life is finished it acquires a sense; up to that point it has not got a sense; it's suspended and therefore ambiguous…. When I'm talking to you about my tendency towards the sacred and the mythic and the epic, I should say that this can only be completely satisfied by the act of death, which seems to me the most mythic and epic aspect there is.* [230]

As always, Pasolini is somewhat paradoxical and contrary, but the poetic inspiration of this idea, of '*Salò'* as a montage of death to invoke an epic sacred force, can be seen in the film's reference to Dante's *'Inferno'.* Dante's journey is one *through* hell, and *through* death, into the arms of God, the means of revelation performed via the vast display of wickedness and sin. I think hope can be formulated in this understanding of *'Salò'*— a play on the *'Inferno'* as an experience endured prior to salvation.

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[229] Chiesi, Roberto. *'Salò: The Present as Hell'. The Criterion Collection.* Accessed 26 October 2023. https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/513-sal-the-present-as-hell.

[230] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini*. First Printing edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 1969. Pg 56

In one of the penultimate scenes of *'Salò'*, several of the prisoners are seen sitting naked in a large tub of their own excrement, collected over several days. Some cry and others look resigned to whatever is about to come. One of the girls suddenly cries out, *'Lord, why have you forsaken us!'*, [231] the final words of Christ on the cross from Matthew 27:46, which Pasolini had, of course, filmed as part of *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'*. This religious appeal to be saved from the material hell of the mansion— calling back to the poetical rupture of Christ's life as an event— is not directly answered. But in the tumult of death, hellish conditions, and eschatological time-space, hope can be seen.

Approaching the Outside

Maurizio Viano and Colleen Ryan-Scheutz have both highlighted the mansion of *'Salò'* as a totalising experience of the inside of modernity, of which the 'outside' of a different form of life seems impossible— *'The ideology of Salò is located precisely in the relationship between inside and outside – the closed, internal system and the open, inaccessible outside'.* [232]

The instances of hope I describe each operate on the notion of a gap opening in the film, breaking the idea of being insurmountably caught in the mansion and, by analogy, the grip of capitalism. These examples are fleeting, offering the possibility of hope rather than concrete escape routes. But I would situate this small possibilty, the speculative desire for egress from the bounds of capitalism, as the starting point for thought I will explore in the next chapter, and the basis for my practice. The examples offered here are instances of the 'small gesture' Agamben places as crucial to the messianic event, the tiny fragment of hope that might occur at any time, however desperate the present might seem. And that in an eschatological space, like 'Salò', on the brink of apocalypse, these small moments may be more likely to occur.

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[231] *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Drama, Horror. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975. 1 hour 41 minutes 35 seconds.
[232] Ryan-Scheutz, Colleen. *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred: Women in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini*. Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007. Pg. 202

The Macedonian Returned

The first sign of hope, and resistance within the mansion, which connects to the exterior life, is from Ezio, one of the soldiers employed by the libertines to guard the prisoners. It is Ezio who apologises to the libertine's daughters at the start of the film, saying, *'sorry we are obeying orders',* which, as I have already stated, carries with it a bland capitulation to the evil requested. However, it can also be seen as the *only* apology anyone offers at any point in the film. The delivery of the line is honesty delivered with pain evident in Ezio's eyes; unlike the rest of the soldiers, he does not willingly participate in the violence. Many of the soldiers instigate their own torture and rape without any injunction from their masters. In this sense, Ezio is the prime example of one of the film's major themes, of individuals as '*at the same time victims and victimizers*[233]*',* and it is via the dual nature of everyone in the film as victims and persecutors that Ezio meets his death.

Towards the end of the film, the prisoners are instructed not to defecate, instead saving their bowel movements and excrement for ritual practice. On inspecting the bedpans of the captives, the bishop discovers that one of the girls has broken the rule. Rather than receive a mark in the book of regulation, she tells the libertine of a greater transgression— one of the other girls has a photograph of her boyfriend. The bishop confronts the girl, who, in turn, reveals that Ezio infringes the law every night— engaging in consensual, loving sex with the maid of the house. A clandestine relationship which outrages the Bishop, libidinal energy uncaptured and uncontrolled by the law of the house being of the highest order of violation. The libertines catch Ezio and the maid mid-copulation, at which point the maid flees to the side of the room, and Ezio stands raising his left fist in defiance of the libertines and their fascist law, an international symbol of solidarity and resistance. The libertines pause for a second, clearly shocked by this gesture, before firing multiple bullets into Ezio's body. After which, the maid is executed with a single shot.

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[233] Righi, Andrea. *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri*. 1st ed. 2011 edition. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pg. 89

The moment of active resistance is fleeting, but it briefly shatters the total umbrella of the libertine's power, evidenced by their astounded expressions, the only time in the film where they are not completely in control. The raised fist denotes the belief in another world outside the nomos of the book of regulation, and that even if this is merely a fragment of knowledge and hope in the mind of one of the captives, it existed, and was held right to the point of destruction. The secret affair between Ezio and the maid, and even the smaller transgressions of the girls, present a notion of resistance and means of life outside of the dogma that seems all-encompassing.

I would also suggest that Ezio is an echo of the Macedonian in '*San Paolo'*, the only soldier with fair hair, he fits Pasolini's description of the Macedonian *as 'blond, tall, strong, beautiful, with clear, sensual, and pure eyes '*[234], and the act of resistance as *'representing the interiority and the truth'* the Macedonian performs in '*San Paolo'*. Paul's dream vision of the Macedonian is one of the few instances of divine, sacred, life coming to him in the script. And as I have already noted it is one of the more explorative extensions to the script which Pasolini performed. Given the failure to render the angelic figure of the Macedonian in cinema as part of the Paul story, I think his appearance as part of '*Salò'* is a convincing proposition. An emblem of a deep sacred belief, authenticity, and truth against the power of capitalism. And a reminder that there is always an outside of the most desperate situation.

Dance and the Alternate Endings

The other place I believe hope can be detected within *'Salò'* is the finale scene and two of the alternative endings Pasolini envisioned for the film. The final episode of the film is here described by Pasolini—

> *'We reach the "Final Solution". Three of the dignitaries devote themselves to torturing the designated victims in particularly elaborate ways, while the fourth looks on, contemplating the deeds of the other. He is a voyeur, the spectator of a horrible, extreme performance which takes place in the inner yard of the villa. At the same time two soldiers are standing nearby.*
>
> *They begin to dance together, to the sweet and soft music coming from a*

[234] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 44.

radio… a faint, poetic sign of hope for the future'.[235]

The soundtrack of the '*horrible, extreme performance'* of the final torture scene is '*Veris Leta Facies'* (You will face fate) from Carl Orff's orchestral setting of the anonymously authored '*Carmina Burana' book* of Medieval poems. While the Latin lyrics call forth the rejuvenating force of spring, the music is intensely foreboding. The vocal composition is a demonically fringed form of Gregorian Chant backed by a schizophrenic alternation between bass drones and frenzied whistles and bells. Coupled with the visuals of mass murder '*Veris Leta Facies'* manages to peak the overall unsettling and traumatising tone of the whole film.

The camera cuts from the executions to one of the soldiers inside the voyeuristic 'viewing room' set up for the libertines to watch their finale spectacle. He gets up and adjusts the radio, revealing that the soundtrack of the penultimate torture scene is diegetic. Briefly scrolling through radio stations, he settles on a station playing, '*San Tanto Triste,'* a wistful and optimistic piece of lounge-style jazz from the 1920's marking a dramatic gear change from the moody and monstrous orchestra that soundtracked the execution of the prisoners. The two young men embrace each other, dancing slowly around the room in a slow amateurish waltz. One of the soldiers asks the other what his girlfriend's name is, with the simple reply of Margherita, before the credits roll and the film ends.

The implication of this exchange, often missed by the exposure of such violent images seconds before, is that life continues outside of the space we have been confined in; there is something beyond the prison the film has built. Margherita, meaning 'daisy', also suggests summer and spring, the theme of '*Veris Leta Facies',* but shed of the fearful tone of the music. As with the resistance of Ezio, this is a hard-won glimpse of hope. But nevertheless, it is offered as the final message of '*Salò'.*

The importance I place on this occurrence of hope is further emphasised by the two alternate endings of the film. In one, we see an exterior shot of the mansion above

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[235] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Future Life*. Associazione 'Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini', 1989. Pg 232.

which a red flag is raised reading 'Ti amo' (I love you). The colour of the flag symbolises international solidarity, revolution, and the hope of communal life through left-wing politics. The other ending shows an ensemble dance scene in the mansion's main hall, including all the cast and some of the crew, including Pasolini. The images we have of this now-lost scene show it to be a celebratory dance in which those who have died have come back to life, a form of community through dance is produced, and a new joyful time has come into existence. Both scenes suggest an optimism grown out of commonality, a sudden and totally unexpected shift into a world that seemed impossible seconds before.

The representation of hope selected by Pasolini to end the film is slight in comparison to these scenes. But, when looked at in constellation, I believe accentuates the underacknowledged notion of hope as crucial to *'Salò'*. And, that the final scene, a very quiet, almost invisible display of life outside the mansion, was selected for precisely this reason. Hope operating not as a grand and complete event, but as a small gesture.

Acid Messianism and Translatability
A Future Life

The energy to see glimpses of hope in *'Salò'* is onerous work in a film of such violence and feeling of finality. But it is in the fact that they are *almost* imperceptible that defines what messianic hope is. Charlie Gere uses Duchamp's idea of *infra-thin'* as a means to conceptualise this hope—

> '*The imperceptible difference between the fallen and the redeemed world is the 'infra-thin' gap between seeing the world as without hope or meaning, and seeing it, in all its fallenness, as beautiful in itself, and that beauty not as some subjective epiphenomenon belonging to our private subjectivity, but as the meaning and telos of the world itself*.[236]

The new trilogy I have presented here appeals to this *'meaning and telos'* of messianic hope as an egress from capitalism. Pasolini's belief in some kind of primordial mystic energy, nearly extinguished, but not quite, surfaces throughout the three films and has formed a methodological basis for my video work, writing, and printmaking. My practice has utilised various forms of transposition, doubling, reproduction, and duality— much of it drawn from Pasolini's methods of filmmaking— to further enact the '*imperceptible difference' of* messianic hope.

In *'Salò'*, Pasolini chose to display a horror he felt alone in seeing, *'Given the life I lead, I pay the price... it's like a descent into hell. But when I come back— if I come back– I've seen other things, more things '*[237], and, in my estimation, the small fragment of hope that still resides in this hell. The following chapter expands on this apocalyptic vision, grafting Benjamin, Agamben, and Mark Fisher's visions of a future life onto Pasolini's unique notion of the sacred— and by doing so— offers a contemporary evaluation of neoliberalism's destruction of political possibility outside of itself. From this political background, I will begin to explicate the rationale, methods, and processes by which my practical work has unfolded.

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[236] Gere, Charlie. *Unnatural Theology: Religion, Art and Media after the Death of God*. London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Continnuum-3PL, 2018. Pg. 23.

[237] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *We're All In Danger; The last interview with Pier Paolo Pasolini* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *In Danger: A Pasolini Anthology*. Edited by Jack Hirschman. San Francisco, Calif: City Lights Publishers, 2010. Pg. 237.

The process of conceptualising a new trilogy in Pasolini's work, with St. Paul at its heart, has pushed the mystical notion of art as a form of esoteric practice within my work. What began as a series of philosophical ideas around sacred belief gradually became more unwieldy, creeping into the practice in less theoretically bounded forms, transmuting the relatively pragmatic operation of adapting '*San Paolo*' into something *weirder* and more open to the profound exercises of, what John Cussans' describes as, working with '*the sense that we knew something all along, but we didn't know how to access that knowledge*'[238] a phrase which chimes with the apocalyptic notion of uncovering and *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'*.

In this sense, the sacred template of the new trilogy provided both the content for my practice— the process of adaptation— as well as opening the door to a form of making art that was less prescriptive than my previous work, to again quote Cussans' on the process of making art, that with '*the gaining of technical skills and proficiencies; satisfying solutions to aesthetic obstacles or problems*' opened me and my practice to '*humbling spiritual insights; profound experiences of ontological transformation; new social and cultural sensitizations and sensibilities; new metaphysical and political insights*'. [239]

The epigraph to this thesis quotes the final statement of Adorno's *'Minima Moralia'*, in which he considers the work of philosophy to be only properly understood from the *'standpoint of redemption'*. The work I offer here is a small attempt at occupying this viewpoint on the world from the apocalyptic moment of redemption, drawing on Pasolini's work to produce a methodology that attempts to produce *'perspectives… fashioned [to] displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and*

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[238] *Special Investigations Randy Lee Cutler in conversation with John Cussans* in Loveless, Natalie, ed. *Knowings and Knots: Methodologies and Ecologies in Research-Creation*. Illustrated edition. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2019. Pg 269
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[239] Ibid. Pg 269.

crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light'.
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As I have already stated, the notion *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'* has been crucial to orientating the research; the demand for something to be '*unfolded and worked out'* in a text, film, or art object provides a way of working which directly engages the apocalyptic sentiment of uncovering that which is hidden, attempting to say what might be impossible to utter, and engage with knowledge we perhaps have always known, but been barred access too, with *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'* mandating that this sensibility is '*scattered in every territory. It is always a diaspora, and must be recollected and gathered up'*241.

The exegesis I've provided of Pasolini's films has been an endeavour to trace the *'unfolded'* sacred and messianic gestures in the work and bid to produce these poetical ruptures in time in my practice, as with Pasolini, this poetic, mystical, and esoteric mode responds to neoliberalism's crushing cultural, economic, and political force within the late-capitalist project. The hopeful belief in a sacred or messianic split engenders a form of political practice Mark Fisher and Jeremy Gilbert have theorised as '*acid'* thinking, which I ally to Pasolini's sacred, and a messianism drawn from Benjamin and Agamben. This is a metaphysical response to the crisis of neoliberalism, but no less genuine in its desire for radical change than more empiric forms of political protest and policy-making. Alessia Ricciardi neatly argues for the potency of this form of thinking in Pasolini's work, located in his sacred belief—

> '*to believe Pasolini genuinely desires a return to an archaic, rural society is absurd, that the past in his work is not to be viewed as a historical truth, but rather as a metaphor for a radical new beginning…as an imaginative response to a messianic, rather than pragmatic or empirical, potential. In his poetic encounters with the spectres of history, Pasolini encounters not only the revenants of the past, but also the arrivants of the future'.* 242

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240 Adorno, Theodor W., and E. F. N. Jephcott. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Radical Thinkers. London; New York: Verso, 2005. Pg. 247.
241 *Giorgio Agamben. What Is a Paradigm. 2002 1/10*, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0. 3 minutes 30 seconds.
242 Ricciardi, Alessia. *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pg. 125

The methodology— and political evaluation it originates from— offered in this chapter draws on the same '*spectres of history*' and a view of time untethered from chronology— the disrupted time-space that supports these spectres— and allows for '*rifts and crevices*' in which messianic ruptures might occur, and a future life might be revealed. These notions of time as approaching a moment of revelation are ones that meet Fisher's late work— *Acid Communism*[243] and '*Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*'[244] as works in which his vision of a stalled history is joined by an attempt to overcome this sclerosis through *acid* thought.

The union of acid thought to messianism— a concept of time in a terminal moment— takes its methodological cue from Pasolini. *Acid Messianism* draws on the poetical, queer, and unsynthesised energy of Pasolini's radical aesthetic and political vision. As I have shown, Pasolini's work has a non-chronological relation to time, filled with unreconciled dualities and doublings. The addition of *translatability* to this methodology, drawn from Benjamin's messianism reflects these impulses in Pasolini's work. Modes of adaptation and doubling are crucial to my own practice, and the methodology reflects and has aided the process by which I have written and made the presented scripts and films.

This methodology is, like much of the work presented, a form of intellectual collage. Its many pieces are gathered from Pasolini, Fisher, and Benjamin's work and working methods— alongside my own interests and aesthetic predilections. As such, it is a further form of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*' in the thesis, attempting to bridge the space between the theoretical and the practical, to unfold and say in one of these fields what the other suggests but seems unable to utter.

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[243] *Acid Communism* in Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. Edited by Darren Ambrose. New edition. London, UK: Repeater, 2018.
[244] Fisher, Mark, and Matt Colquhoun. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. New edition. London: Repeater Books, 2021.

Neoliberalism, Acid Communism, and Weird Thinking.

Like Pasolini, my political viewpoint and motivation to think within the messianic realm lies with a hatred of neoliberalism and the stultifying, crushing logic that demands *'there is no alternative'* to the abasing, venal, and sadistic usury of late-capitalism. As illustrated in the introductory chapter Pasolini's political terminology and evaluations require a paradigm of thought rooted in the *'speculative dimension of lyricism and figural fiction',* which *'only makes sense in the form of poetry'.*[245] His use of the terms lumpen-proletariat, sub-proletariat, bourgeois, neo-fascism, and neocapital, are baggy conflations of numerous definitions, assumptions, and allusions deployed in his inimitable style dependent on the argument he happened to be engaged in. However slippery and inconsistent his rhetorical use of these terms was, the identification and appraisal of neoliberalism as a new entity was clear-sighted and prescient. Quickly noticing the *'false front of permissiveness'*[246] offered by Western governments in the post-war years, veiling a requirement to automatically consume and be consumed by the bio-politic of a new political ideal in which the market is sovereign—

> *'In this society, only productivity has the force of law, and all productivity tends to negate culture. To produce it is not necessary to educate oneself. The young people who want to enter this industrial and paleo-industrial world follow the lines of force imposed by technology and reject the arts and literature. It is a mechanical and automatic law, and young people unconsciously abide by it'.*[247]

The '*San Paolo*' project illustrates the perversion of faith and culture through techno-cratic, legislative, and privilege of financial markets over any other metric of success which Pasolini perceived as evolving in the post-war period. This is in itself a remarkable level of insight given that the ideology of neoliberalism emerged with

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[245] Giammei, Alessandro, and Ara H. Merjian. '*A Force of the Past'* in *Heretical Aesthetics: Pasolini on Painting*. London New York: Verso Books, 2023. Pg 2-3.

[246] Bachmann, Gideon, and Pasolini Pasolini. '*Pasolini on de Sade: An Interview during the Filming of The 120 Days of Sodom'*. *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1 December 1975): 39–45.

[247] 'Reflections after the Stonewall Riots: Pier Paolo Pasolini – Anarchist Federation'. Accessed 10 November 2023. https://www.anarchistfederation.net/reflections-after-the-stonewall-riots-pier-paolo-pasolini/.

Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises books '*The Road to Serfdom*'[248] and *'Bureaucracy'*[249]both published in 1944, and while wildly read amongst a financial elite, the neoliberal movement remained a fairly shadowy political agenda through the '50s, '60s and early '70s— the period in which Pasolini became attuned to neoliberalism's capacities and laid out his vitriolic assessment. By the 1960's Hayek had stopped using the term— whilst intensifying what would become its most pernicious elements in '*The Constitution of Liberty*'[250]. But it was not until Ronald Reagen and Margaret Thatcher's governments in the late 1970s that the neoliberal doctrine would enter the heart of government, and Keynesian economic management— governmental economic control and social security— would be abandoned for the logic of the open market. Pasolini's appraisal of capitalism's mutation is prophetic, given that he would pass away before it becoming the dominant political model.

What is offered here considers the current reality of neoliberalism, as theorised under Fisher's *affective* understanding of it, and a potential egress from its machinations through the concept of *'acid communism',* updating and drawing upon Pasolini's broader work as a basis for my theoretical and practical development.

After providing a gloss for *'acid communism',* I will delink *'acid'* from the more explicitly political aims of Mark Fisher and Jeremy Gilbert (while retaining the broadly socialist, postcapitalist, and leftist drive of its original concept), coupling it instead with a philosophy of history as seen from a messianic perspective, utilising the crypto-religious practice found in the work of Benjamin, Agamben, and Pasolini. I believe latent fragments of *'acid'* thought can be found in each thinker and solutions to the problem of thinking beyond capitalism. In allying '*acid'* and *'sacred'* thought, a rich, entangled, and vibrant view of the world is opened, one in which messianic belief blossoms with its possibility for hope.

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[248] Hayek, Friedrich A. von. *The Road to Serfdom*. Repr. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2006.

[249] Von Mises, Ludwig. *Bureaucracy*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007.

[250] Hayek, Friedrich A. von, and Irwin M. Stelzer. *The Constitution of Liberty*. Reprint. London: Routledge, 2010.

Acid Communism

'Acid Communism' or *'Psychedelic Socialism'* is an idea developed by Jeremy Gilbert and the late Mark Fisher. While there is some dispute about its conceptual ferment, the first significant publication of what I will hereafter refer to as 'acid' thought was intended to be a book by Fisher entitled, *'Acid Communism'*[251]. Sadly, Mark Fisher took his own life in 2017, leaving only the introductory chapter published posthumously in *'K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher'*[252]. Jeremy Gilbert has since published and spoken widely to develop the idea of *'acid'* as a concept that seeks to find the potentiality in collectivity, *'technologies of self',* joyful egress, and forms of thought unmoored from capitalist logic and as a response to neoliberalism's centralising of individualisation as key to its political hegemony.

As a relatively new definition with somewhat contested nomenclature, various terms have been used to describe this form of *'acid'* thinking; *'Psychedelic Socialism', 'Acid Socialism', 'Weird Left'* and *'Acid Communism'.* In line with Fisher, whose influence upon me is most substantial regarding this concept, I will refer to this form of thinking hereafter simply as *'acid'* in line with the proposed title for Fisher's book.

In *'Psychedelic Socialism',* Gilbert describes '*acid'* as an adjective. *'Acid'* is a particular way of seeing the world, which, like a psychedelic experience, apocalyptic thinking, and the notion of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit'* engages the notion of finding the under-explored connection between things, perceiving the world as vibrant and filled with potentiality. A valuing of experience unmoored from its mere exchange value. Under the star of *'acid'* belief, potential, originality, and socially profitable interaction would not be immediately understood based on its exchange value— and to enforce market forces upon *'acid'* practice would be perceived as a malediction. If '*acid'* thinking is anything, it is the attempt to enter a postcapitalist future. '*Acid'*

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[251] Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. Edited by Darren Ambrose. New edition. London, UK: Repeater, 2018.Pg. 751.
[252] Ibid.

practice is not without its rationality, as I will go on to detail, but it does seek to extend the (supposed) ratiocination of neoliberalism, in which means and ends are increasingly ethically divorced. The following joke typifies this dissonance: *'I'd say I'm fiscally conservative but socially very liberal. The problems are bad, but their causes… their causes are very good'*[253]. In an era defined by the evident erosion of democratic principles, capitalism as the primary driver of economic collapse, and neoliberalism's underlying philosophy increasingly revealing itself as deeply illogic and favouring the few over the many, *'acid'* thinking is an attempt to invent an alternative future via *'weird'* thinking. And, rather than this being a hokey regression into apparently discredited practices and forms of belief, this weird logic of thought may well be the exit from *'the end of history'* [254]and might produce a more equitable form of living without the ambivalence towards suffering that dominates neoliberal logic.

In all of Gilbert and Fisher's (and my own) writing, the use of drugs is neither encouraged nor advocated, *'acid'* is a phrase which designates an *'aesthetic, political, historical, and theoretical'* arena of possibility, and the injection of political thought with 'culture' not as a symptom of a particular moment but its co-conspirator and often the practice by which political sentiment is capable of being arrived at. It is simply the provocation— to quote Gilbert — *'[that acid] could be taken to refer to a set of practices and ideas which are at one and the same time mystical and materialist – a materialist mysticism which acknowledges the complex potentialities of human embodied existence, without tying that recognition to any set of supernatural or theistic beliefs'.* [255]

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[253] This joke is taken from a twitter post by Dollars Horton pictured in -Nine, Adrianna. *'We Need to Talk about the Myth That Is "Social Liberalism, Fiscal Conservatism"'. Medium* (blog), 15 June 2020. https://adriannanine.medium.com/we-need-to-talk-about-the-myth-that-is-social-liberalism-fiscal-conservatism-2d3582a4bdd7.

[254] Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. Twentieth anniversary edition, Reissued. London; New York Toronto Dublin Melbourne New Delhi Auckland Parktown North: Penguin Books, 2012.

[255] *'Psychedelic Socialism'. OpenDemocracy*. Retrieved 6 April 2023 (https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/psychedelic-socialism/).

This form of *'mystical and materialist'* thinking echoes much of Pasolini's work, particularly my deduction of the *sacred* element of historical life as key to new political futures embodied through the new trilogy. The metaphorical capacity of a drug experience to elucidate the condition of being held in the '*complex potentialities of human embodied existence*' is itself an idea Pasolini expressed—

> *'It is clear that people who use drugs do it to fill a void, an absence of some thing that gives a feeling of disorientation and angst. It is a substitute for magic. The primitive are always facing this terrifying void, on the inside. Ernesto De Martino calls it "fear of the loss of one's own presence"; and primitives fill this void by turning directly to magic, which explains it and fills it. In the modern world, the alienation due to conditioning by nature is replaced by the alienation due to conditioning by society: after the first moment of euphoria (Enlightenment, science, applied science, comfort, wealth, production, and consumption), the alienated start feeling all alone; then, like the primitive, they are terrorized by the idea of the loss of their own presence. In reality, we all do drugs. I do it (as far as I know) by making movies'.*[256]

The magical condition of producing cultural objects acting in opposition to the alienation of neoliberalism. This quotation highlights Pasolini's preternatural ability for prophetic statements, touching on many of the same themes *'acid'* thinking seeks to overcome: left melancholy, neoliberalism's ontological boundaries, and the recurrent desire for a practice, belief, or psychological transcendence ultimately located in culture.

What Gilbert and Fisher see as the potential in something like the idea of 'acid' thought is— the power of collectivised experience in enjoying and producing something like music or dance, forms of play, care, learning, 'consciousness raising' and 'technologies of self' which are allied, and operate in counterpoint to political organisation and action. For Gilbert and Fisher, the counterculture of the '60s and '70s would be a recent example in which forms of living— orientated towards a collective belief in reinventing the future, outside of the potential offered by the dominant political structures, were in place. The civil rights movement, feminism, gay rights, and environmentalism would be the broad political outcomes of this

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[256] Benini, Stefania. *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*. Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg. 33 Originally published in *I dialoghi.* 1992. Rome: Editori Riuniti the translation is by Stefania Benini.

cultural and political shift. Explicitly anti-conservative ideas that tend towards non-violence and privilege collective consciousness and radical reform rather than revolution. All of which are enmeshed and intertwined with cultural production in the arts, music, and literature. The 'acid' experience proposed is in knowing that the political and the cultural spheres are affective on each other in ways that are not reducible to the rationale of capitalism. It is a syllogism of the material and the mystical, the profane and the sacred as contaminating one another.

These could be practices of 'disinterested interest', which nonetheless produce alternate forms of community or potentialities for the future— the activity of making and performing music as a group, collective art making such as murals or book clubs, as well as more explicitly political in operation— such as consciousness-raising workshops— but which nevertheless are in some way joyous. As Matt Colquhoun puts it, 'Acid Communism' is *'a project for the recuperation of the counterculture's lost potentials but also the expression of a desire for an experimental (rather than prescriptively utopian) leftist politics'*[257]. This is an experimental and joyous egress from the system of capital and a sidestep from the sclerotic *'left melancholy'*[258] that could be said to have been a symptom of radical politics in the last few decades. The underlying feature is a lack of submission to capital or the market— which would treat all activities under the logic of exchange in which all experience must somehow be exploited, monetised, and valued. For Fisher, the acid form would be a practice: '*Instead of seeking to overcome capital, we should focus on what capital must always obstruct: the collective capacity to produce, care and enjoy'.*[259]

As a concept still in its juvenescence, it is perhaps best to precisely define what 'acid' thought is in opposition to before considering some of the ideas Fisher was able to expand upon before his untimely passing. From this point, I will develop the

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[257] Colquhoun, Matt. n.d. *'Acid Communism'*. Retrieved 31 August 2023 (https://archive.krisis.eu/acid-communism/).

[258] Brown, Wendy. 1999. 'Resisting Left Melancholy'. *Boundary 2* 26(3):19–27.

[259] Fisher, Mark. 2018. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. New edition. edited by D. Ambrose. London, UK: Repeater. Pg 272.

idea of *'acid'* as drawing on Pasolini's 'sacred', messianism, weirdness, and disjunctions in time.

Affective Neoliberalism

'Acid' thought asks that the following diagnosis of neoliberalism is acknowledged. Firstly, neoliberalism is an ideology in which there is no other form of economic management worth engaging in but free market capitalism; there is no escaping it, there's nothing beyond it, and even the desire to escape this logic is characterised by the establishment as naive at best, deluded, futile, and even dangerous at worst. The most succinct and much-quoted description of this comes from Fredric Jameson's essay *'Future City',* in which he says, *'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'*[260]. Neoliberalism polices the ideological demand by capital that *'there is no alternative'* [261] to the point at which all hope is quashed, and even the inkling of an alternative is cloaked by a collective amnesia. The ideology of capitalism and neoliberalism is so powerful that it becomes easier to imagine climate collapse, nuclear war, and rampant pandemics wiping out civilisation before there would be some fundamental change in the way that capital operates.

The second definition of neoliberalism would be as follows. The individual competing with others is the only self-reckoning, self-aware, organising principle by which a state can be organised. To quote Gilbert, it is the idea of '*a whole ideology and world-view which assumes experience to be fundamentally individual in nature: private before it is public, personal before it is social*[262]. An evaluation which mirrors David Harvey's sombre definition of neoliberalism, already drawn on my *'Modernity and Prophetic Neoliberalism'* chapter as, *'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating*

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[260] Jameson, Fredric. *'Future City'*. *New Left Review*, no. 21 (1 June 2003): 65–79.
[261] This phrase is first attributed to Herbert Spencer, a 19th Century Social-Darwinist. I use it more to evoke Margaret Thatcher's premiership, which it has become something of a defining motto.
[262] Gilbert, Jeremy. 'Psychedelic Socialism'. openDemocracy. Accessed 6 April 2023. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/psychedelic-socialism/.

individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework
characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'[263].

What follows is a review of late capitalism and the neoliberal project from a
contemporary perspective, drawing on Fisher's work in *'Capitalist Realism'*[264] and
from across the posthumously published collection '*K-Punk. The Collected and*
Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher from 2004-2016'[265], to make the claim for
conditions under capitalism and neoliberalism as understood in affective—
psychological and emotional forms— with Fisher using synonymous terms in order
to articulate this general system of oppression. It is from this understanding of
neoliberalism that I will explicate the nascent *'acid'* form of Fisher's late work, from
which I have extrapolated '*acid messianism'* as a methodology for my practice.

Fisher uses the terms *'capitalist realism',* a concept of his own making, and
neoliberalism to name the aforementioned feeling that there is no way out of
capitalism, and the individual market-driven logic of capital has come to dominate
the contemporary psyche. In '*Capitalist Realism',* Fisher is particularly keen to stress
the term as a shorthand for capital producing a feeling of inescapability, its effect on
mental health, and the reduction and potential of imagination. However, when read
across the wider writings, *neoliberalism* is often used in synonymous and
interrelated ways. In this sense, I take '*capitalist realism'* and *neoliberalism* as
concepts that are both aimed at describing this general— affectively felt— system of
capital oppression in Fisher's work. This thesis builds upon Fisher's general writing
to further advance a theoretical attempt to subvert and think beyond this political-
economic impasse. As Tariq Goddard notes in the 'Afterword' to the 2022 edition of
'*Capitalist Realism'* the book is *'not a systemic work of theory'* and that Fisher
intended that *'the book would perhaps be the first of two parts, with a more*
"philosophical" section arriving at a future date'[266], with a stronger theoretical and

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[263] Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press,
U.S.A. 2020. Pg. 2.
[264] Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books. 2009.
[265] Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*,
New edition, ed. Darren Ambrose. Repeater, 2018.
[266] Fisher, Mark *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zer0 Books, 2022. Pg.
82-83

systemic foundation. But without this work ever materialising, I think it is most useful to engage in Fisher's broader work, much like Benjamin's, as the ground for extrapolating ideas. And, as in much of this thesis, this again appeals to the notion of *entwicklungsheit.*

In '*Capitalism Realism'* Fisher begins to describe the condition of living under capital as '*like a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action*'[267]. This '*pervasive atmosphere'* is important to my notion of neoliberalism that is felt, as much as understood, which Fisher himself advances as a kind of '*ambient neoliberalisation'* which is conditioned by '*its apparently commonsensical emphasis on choice, opportunity, and the dignity of labour and its emotional appeal to negative solidarity'*[268]. This is precisely the condition that *acid messianism* attempts to break the spell of.

This miasmic form is one that goes, for the most part, unnamed, which is unsurprising given neoliberal ideologues' insistence since the 50's that neoliberalism doesn't even have any '*claimants'*[269]. With its ideology veiled within think tanks such as the Adam Smith Institute, the Institute for Economic Affairs, and The Heritage Foundation. Fisher himself pointed to this unnameability, but concurrent knowledge of a force impacting our lives. '*I'm not suggesting that most people recognise neoliberalism by name, but they do recognise the policies and the ideological narrative which neoliberalism has so successfully disseminated'*[270].

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[267] Ibid Pg. 16.
[268] Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*, New edition, ed. Darren Ambrose. Repeater, 2018. Pg 575.
[269] See Pg 21 and Pg 77 of Monbiot, Georges and Hutchison, Peter, *The Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism*. Allen Lane, 2024. The pertinent section of Pg 77 reproduced here— '*The anonymities of neoliberalism are fiercely guarded. Those who follow the doctrines of Hayek, von Mises and Friedman now reject the term neoliberalism— arguing that it is used only pejoratively. Phillip Magness, writing for the American Institute of Economic Research, for example, says "The term neoliberalism is probably the trendiest scapegoat in intellectual circles… For a movement with next to zero actual claimants, neoliberalism attracts an inordinate amount of scorn, much of it viciously profane and spiteful"… But it was the term neoliberals coined to describe their own doctrine, and they've offered us no alternative with which to replace it'.*
[270] Ibid Pg 668.

Quoting from Benjamin Noys *'The Persistence of the Negative'*[271], in the essay *'Real Abstractions: The Application of Theory to the Modern World'*[272], Fisher is keen to highlight that the abstraction and potentially unknowable nature of capital is inherent to its mode of operation, given its speed, complexity, and the increasing insistence by neoliberalism that the market is the only form of good or common sense. *'We have no image of capital, capital itself is a kind of pure relationality, a pure abstraction of value, labour, and accumulation, which can only be "seen" in negative'*. Noys goes on to reason that the formation of further abstractions is the only rational response to this mystification of capital and *'reveal this pure relationality which conceals itself in plain sight'*[273]. The *'concealing'* nature of neoliberalism adds to my evaluation, and Fisher's description, of neoliberalism as an affectively felt mode of oppression. An oppression that, in its abstraction, is *felt* as much as conceptualised. As Thatcher herself described the economic turn she inaugurated in the late 70s and early 80s *'economics are the method…but the object is to change the soul'*[274], an appeal that runs far deeper than even the psychological, and approaches the metaphysical. A move Fisher also highlights as an ideological *'sleight of hand'* in which *'neoliberal capitalism's ostensible demystifications (its reduction of everything to the supposedly self-evident category of the free individual) …allow all kinds of strange, quasi-theological entities to rule our lives'*[275]. Neoliberalism is then a mode, distinct from other political-economic models, that *infects* you—drills deep into both your psyche, and internal sense of self.

In responding to an interview question on the nature of capitalism, Fisher highlights that these psychological and invasive practices of thought as burrowing deep into our unconscious, *'I'm not sure that it has a grip on our consciousness so much as on our unconscious. It shapes the limits of what we can imagine. It does so because twenty years of unchallenged domination, blitzing our nervous systems with*

[271] Noys, Benjamin. *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory.* Edinburgh University Press, 2022.
[272] Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*, New edition, ed. Darren Ambrose. Repeater, 2018. Pg 725.
[273] Ibid Pg 726.
[274] 'Interview for Sunday Times | Margaret Thatcher Foundation', accessed 26 August 2025, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document%2F104475.
[275] Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*, New edition, ed. Darren Ambrose. Repeater, 2018. Pg 632.

its intoxicants, paralysing thought'[276]. The description of this as occurring within the last two decades suggests that, in Fisher's thought, this is specific to the realm of neoliberalism. The knowledge of being infected, of being overrun, may induce an amnesia as to its origin, but a sense of something gone awry continues, *'neoliberalism installs a perpetual anxiety —there is no security; your position and status are under constant review'[277]*, an affective sense of a malicious event remains. Fisher's work attempts to disrupt the ongoing means that cause this claustrophobic sense perception of neoliberalism.

What is Acid Communism's proposed answer to this? And, in what way is culture pivotal to formulating an alternate proposal for the future? The most explicit statements from Fisher can be found in *'Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures'[279]*, a seminar/lecture series, fortunately recorded by one of Fisher's students and posthumously published. In these seminars, Fisher begins to unpack some of the more illusively put statements around the counterculture of the '60s and '70s as a place to draw hope and a framework of cultural production to construct a new political sphere. For Fisher, the schema for social change can be explicitly seen in the music of this period, which is unsurprising given his deft reading of musical subgenres related to the urban environment and collective consciousness that made up much of the K-Punk blog he authored.

> *'Partly what carried those energies was the force of the counterculture, and the counterculture then was primarily driven through music — but not exclusively. And that music, as much as politics, you could say, offered this vision of a liberated world. There was this kind of positive feedback loop in place. Music would feed into the struggles; the struggle would feed back into the music. And this was one sort of vector for the dynamics of transformation of the social world. And, of course, it's no accident then — particularly in the context of the US, if we're talking about that — that US music culture was driven by... A lot of the force behind that was black and working class'.*[280]

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[276] Ibid Pg. 630-631.
[277] Ibid Pg. 630-631.
[279] Fisher, Mark, and Matt Colquhoun. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. New edition. London: Repeater Books, 2021.
[280] Fisher, Mark, and Matt Colquhoun. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. New edition. London: Repeater Books, 2021. Pg. 166.

In Fisher's conception, the 'acid' energy originates in the *'offered vision'* of an alternative world, and in doing so, a reciprocal energy of imagination and active struggle—concentrated in subordinated groups— produces the conditions for a political transformation. While this is hardly a groundbreaking idea for the potential for cultural production, I would argue that engaging this thought seriously as a political vehicle for the left in the 21st century is increasingly novel and begins to open an active resistance to the sclerotic insistence of neoliberal policy that there is no alternative to capitalism.

It highlights music's affective, emotionally driven features as a primary means for political change. As I have already mentioned, 'acid' thought is not without a rationale; it recognises the need for joy (or even mournfulness) not purely as a release valve but as the driver of a political movement. This is a reconfiguration of the neoliberal ethos, under which culture, enjoyment, and collectivity are a carrot only attainable or deserved after the proper investment in work. The Black Power movement's non-violent schemes, such as the free breakfast program, the hippies' desire for 'free love' in the '70s, or the free party rave scene of the early '90s are the varied examples Fisher would draw on as examples of this 'feedback loop' of struggle into political transformation. Ironically, all of these have been simultaneously mocked and co-opted by capitalism. Neoliberalism's gambit is to graft these ideas back into the realm of the solely economic. As Fisher puts it:

> *'Capitalism incorporates previous rebellions, particularly creative and artistic rebellion, and then sells it back as this new spirit of capitalism…it's sitting around in hammocks, eating sweets, riding little tricycles around the office and all that sort of thing. Work itself can be creative, etc. etc'.* [281]

The radical request of an 'acid communist' ideal is to take the original impulse of these previous movements and double down on the aspects regarded with disdain and smeared with claims of naivety and use of words like idealism and utopian as pejoratives. One of the most effective tools in neoliberalism's toolbox is the perpetual flickering between disdain and amusement at any political construction outside of itself. This is an idea William Davies has identified as central to the rise of

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[281] Fisher, Mark, and Matt Colquhoun. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. New edition. London: Repeater Books, 2021. Pg. 109-110

populism in liberal democracies[282] but which I also see as central to the mocking nature of neoliberalism. This is a double attack in which enragement forcefully neutralises a concept or opinion while simultaneously mocking it as without merit. As Fisher has stated, it is also how the system recognises the most valuable aspects of a countercultural potential to reincorporate into itself. The most amusing features can be plugged into passive entertainment as a working model, with those that cause the most outrage intensifying what it is wholly against. The 'acid' thought process is to believe in culture as a process for imagining the future by building an immunity to the double attack of rage and laughter through the real, tangible experience of enjoyment or hope for life unmediated by capital. Fisher is clear that this is not a retreat into fantasy, but that with the correct worldview, 'acid' thinking allows you to see a way to 'anticipate' and imagine a 'transformed world'—

> *'Anyway, that's something I'd like to think of going forward then: the cultural dimensions. How does the bourgeois culture, that the counterculture plays in, allow us to imagine a completely transformed world? That's what I'm suggesting, I guess, in terms of what we saw with black performers in the US. Their success preceded the actual shifts in racial dynamics in US society. Again, not that they were resolved, by any means, but culture allows this kind of performative anticipation of a radically transformed world'.*

The feeling that any radical movement is either quickly co-opted or discredited is not new. Benjamin's essay from the early 1930s, *'Left-Wing Melancholy',*[283] articulates this feeling in his inimitable style, which Wendy Brown summarises as:

> *'Left melancholy, in short, is Benjamin's name for a mournful, conservative, backward-looking attachment to a feeling, analysis, or relationship that has been rendered thinglike and frozen in the heart of the putative leftist'.* [284]

Brown's essay *'Resisting Left Melancholy'* should be a touchstone for anyone seeking to move towards an 'acid' form of thinking. Through her reading of

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[282] See: Davies, William. *'The Reaction Economy'. London Review of Books*, 2 March 2023. https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v45/n05/william-davies/the-reaction-economy.

[283] 'Left-Wing Melancholy' in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 2. Part 2.1931-1934*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 432.

[284] Brown, Wendy. *Resisting Left Melancholy. Boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999).

Benjamin and Stuart Hall Brown articulates the capacity of a political system originating outside of capital.

> '*Certainly the course of capital shapes the conditions of possibility in politics, but politics itself "is either conducted ideologically, or not at all." Or, in another of Hall's pithy formulas, "Politics does not reflect majorities, it constructs them."*'[285]

To put this in 'acid' terminology, it would be to believe that the collective energy of something like a rave, gig, or community collective could produce a political majority. The imaginative forces at play in the creative act could shift into that of a democratic movement which acknowledges the group as an agent as much as the individual.

One of the most striking divergences between Fisher's and Gilbert's idea of a new left politics would be an acknowledgement that the 'acid' thought of Fisher holds the capacity for a dark side markedly missing from Gilbert's conception of the term. This has been highlighted, post-Fisher's death, by Matt Colquhoun (here writing under the moniker of 'Xenogothic')—

> '*It must be acknowledged that AC (Acid Communism) is a political philosophy that has its own Eros and Thanatos…Acid's fundamental characteristic, in all of its iterations, is that it is corrosive – corrosive to subjectivity and perception, as LSD, but also corrosive to politics and culture, dissolving capitalism in their own juices...Taking acid is never a purely utopian experience – it is a challenge to experience in itself. It can be as horrific as it can be transcendental. It is, in line with Fisher's prior writings (but particularly his most recent book 'The Weird and the Eerie'), a temporary exit – an "egress" – to the Outside*'[286]

The corrosive but rejuvenating nature of this line of thinking allows for the 'acid' project to have its prey, consume and co-opt other ideas, ultimately presenting a point at which the system can be dismantled. Except in this vision, the dismantling would be more akin to a corrective slime oozing and slowly eating through the system. At this junction, we can first see how *'acid'* thought might be used in

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[285] Ibid Pg. 24.
[286] XENOGOTHIC. *Acid*. xenogothic, 26 October 2017. https://xenogothic.com/2017/10/26/acid/.

aggregate with apocalyptic, sacred, or messianic notions of time— ideas which use an idea of catastrophe, weirdness, uncanny elements, and history as not just a referent but the actual material for imagining new futures.

Weird Thinking

Fisher and Gilbert have advocated for a 'Weird Left' as a corrective to the 'Cosmic Right', which deals in meme-magic and alt-right ironic distancing as a means by which to spread the logic of post-truth. Etymologically, 'weird' is rooted in an old English word that means fate, chance, destiny, or fortune. The Norse and German roots of *'wert'* and *'werden'* meaning to bend, turn, weave and become. It is only in Macbeth— with Shakespeare's characterisation of the three 'weird sisters' or witches— that weirdness becomes associated with the type of strangeness we attribute to it as a word.

This definition of weird, which allows becoming, fate, and destiny to seep into a mode of practice opens 'acid' thought onto the historical perspectives provided by the sacred and messianism. Weirdness escapes the technocratic logic of metric deductions and opens a secular faith of hope in the political imagination. The futurity of this definition of weirdness blends with the teleological impulses of messianism as directed at a future beyond the world as it is. Messianism aggregated with weirdness opens the potentiality of a stranger and, more profoundly, psychedelic arrangements in 'acid' thought which function more explicitly in the realm of film, writing, and image making than music, the arena Fisher and Gilbert have both suggested 'acid' thought is most available.

Fisher's political insight through the conduit of pop culture, most markedly in music, is one of his most celebrated legacies, and Gilbert's politics is also tempered via his work in the rave scene as a founding member of the recurrent parties '*Lucky Cloud Sound System'* and *'Beauty and the Beat'*[287]. Through joining *'acid'* with weird thinking, I believe a methodology of work is opened not just in the collective experience of making and experiencing music. But that film, writing, and even more

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[287] https://www.jeremygilbert.org/bio

esoteric practices become enlivened by 'acid' energy with Fisher and Gilbert's political aims retained. In this sense, 'acid' can be seen as the desire to go beyond capitalism, utilising the futurity and perverse concept of weirdness, with *hope* in this future as its fundamental driver. The process of learning, yearning, or producing this hope may involve darker and more corrosive elements, as Matt Colquhoun has highlighted—such as the acknowledgement of a contemporary eschaton— but 'acid' practice could operate in the *'rifts and crevices'* of the world yet to be *'unfolded'* by the messianic, redemptive process of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit'*. William Davies said neoliberalism could be described as *'the disenchantment of politics by economics'*[288]. *'Acid',* weird, and messianic thinking would be the *re-enchantment* of politics by culture, a *desire* for hope, and the belief that a future life liberated from capital is possible.

To return to Pasolini as an exemplar and forerunner of this form of thinking, I would point to Alessandro Giammei and Merjian H Ara's description of his politics and practice as—

> *'only [making] sense in the form of poetry. As soon as one tries to articulate it as a cogent doctrine or political theory, it reveals the disquieting face of its paternalistic narcissism. Its fragile, queer metaphysical essence, rooted in fetishism, only thrives in the speculative dimension of lyricism and figural fiction….lyricism, drama, dream, parable (cinematic and literary), (journalistic) screed, and (documentary) eulogy'.*[289]

Extending this idea as a form of *'acid'* and messianic practice would locate the political capacity of— *dream, parable (cinematic and literary), (journalistic) …and (documentary)'* as the place in which this thinking can occur, and the attempt to articulate where a new form of community might rest. And which, as I have already stated, neoliberalism cannot recognise as part of a serious political imagination.

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[288] Davies, William. *'Populism and the Limits of Neoliberalism'*. *LSE Review of Books* (blog), 12 April 2017. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2017/04/12/lse-rb-feature-essay-populism-and-the-limits-of-neoliberalism-by-william-davies/.

[289] Giammei, Alessandro, and Ara H. Merjian. '*A Force of the Past'* in *Heretical Aesthetics: Pasolini on Painting*. London New York: Verso Books, 2023. Pg 2-3

Fredric Jameson describes what I call an 'acid messianic' vision beyond capitalism in vibrant psychedelically infused form, saying—

> *"It would be best, perhaps, to think of an alternate world better to say the alternate world, our alternate world—as one contiguous with ours but without any connection or access to it. Then, from time to time, like a diseased eyeball in which disturbing flashes of light are perceived or like those baroque sunbursts in which rays from another world suddenly break into this one, we are reminded that Utopia exists and that other systems, other spaces, are still possible."*[290]

The following section will draw together acid, messianism, and the sacred as a means for producing a baroque sunburst of hope in our alternate world. And, more pertinent to my practice, this mode of thinking, alongside my academic work on Pasolini, produces a methodology for making videos, scripting, and performance.

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[290] Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010. Pg. 620.

Acid Messianism

Introduction

Acid thought becomes the paradigm under which I have conceptualised my assessment of 21st-century neoliberalism as an endgame of humanity equivalent to an eschatological or apocalyptic moment. This formulation was arrived at as a process of situating myself in a coherent and active political sensibility in which to attempt adapting Pasolini's '*San Paolo'.*

The faculty of 'acid' thought to encompass and actualise these mystical and alternative modes of thinking in my practice provided a fertile foundation in which to root these notions. The following section develops the conjunction of acid with messianism as a means to show the conceptual methods I have developed in my practice. The '*material mystic'* unison of acid is extended by Benjamin's messianism — revealing translatability, bathos, doubling, humour, and image-making as methods by which these modes of thought open sacred belief as a secular mode of practice, and a means by which new vista's of political hope might open.

Messianic Beginnings

The messianic paradigm is theological and political in that it utilises the hope of the messiah to imagine new political worlds. Mark Fisher's line that *'emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a 'natural order', must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable'*[291] could be used to describe Benjamin's belief in the capacity for messianic thinking. Like Pasolini's notion of the sacred, the messianic is an appeal to the past, through historical consciousness, to open views of possible futurity.

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[291] Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. Pg. 17.

Adorno wrote that Benjamin treated *'profane texts as though they were sacred'*[292]*;* the profane (historical-material) and the sacred (the force of messianic revealing) resting upon each other. This description of Benjamin's method could stand in place for the '*acid*' form of thought I have just articulated. A re-enchantment of the profane with a mystical vision of life which, rather than being a retreat from reality, opens possibilities for it, veiled from the ratiocination of a neoliberal view.

The identification of a messianic potential in quotidian objects of life is reflected in Pasolini's sacred engagement with pre-modern landscapes and faces, and Fisher's recuperation of political futures in an 'acid' state of mind found in popular music. In each mode of thought, the status of capitalist ideology is the first barrier to accessing the force of historical revelation held within an everyday culture. Again, the concept of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*' is useful here. In Benjamin's thought, the messianic must be imagined beyond the bounds of strict theology, the politicisation of it as a revolutionary concept frees it from religious doctrine— *'In the idea of classless society, Marx secularized the idea of messianic time'*[293]— orientating it towards the remnant of *'unsaid',* and sometimes unsayable, potentiality in history. In my practice, these are most readily available in images, music, and cultural objects of history as a process.

Benjamin's Messianism

Benjamin's writing is fragmentary by nature, and various pieces of text must be called upon to correctly couch the theoretical armature of messianic time. One of the clearest and unifying statements he makes on the concept is from the '*Paralipomena'* to '*On in the Concept of History',* stating that *'The messianic world is the world of universal and integral actuality. Only in the messianic realm does a universal history exist'*.[294] The '*actuality'* of this '*messianic world'* corresponds to

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[292] Adorno, Theodor W. *Prisms*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983. Pg. 234
[293] *Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History'*, Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings*. *Volume 4*. *1938-1940*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 401.
[294] Ibid Pg. 404.

the realm of life held beneath capitalism's injunction that there is no reality other than itself. When Benjamin appeals to the '*messianic*,' there are a myriad of possible results: an event, a historical connection, a felt modality in life or an object. But like the apocalyptic, *acid,* thought I have outlined, Benjamin's messianic is a desire for a reality of life unmasked from capital ideology, and by doing so, offering a redemptive politics. Like 'acid' thought, Benjamin's messianic philosophy is one of practice, active hope and engagement. Armando Maggi described Pasolini's *'sacred reality'* as '*something that lies behind the image, a 'something' that the image evokes without revealing',* and that in this desire for revealing the hidden, there is an engagement in a '*quest for meaning beyond the visible rather than a passive acceptance of divine enlightenment'.*[295] We could also call this quest a form of *'mystical materialist'*, or to return one of Benjamin's most infamous statements on the messianic, this practice is the *hope* that *'every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter'.*[296]

If Benjamin's messianism is one attuned to revealing a truer reality, one of the primary means by which this veil over life has been achieved is a capitalistic institutionalisation of time, which is linear and views history as a constant stream of '*developments',* each of which capitulates to the preceding paradigm.

History and Time

> '*The historian who proceeds from this consideration ceases to tell the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. He grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time*'.[297]

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[295] Maggi, Armando. *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. Pg 29

[296] Benjamin, Walter, *On the Concept of History* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Selected Writings. Volume 4. 1938-1940. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 397

[297] Ibid Pg. 397.

Benjamin's formulation of capitalistic time is easy to understand, given that it is the system we all labour under and follows a numerical logic, and as such, is often referred to in elliptic forms and fragments. Nevertheless, this form of history, defined by capitalism, is a straitjacketing of temporal experience which denies the possibility of life outside its logic. It is 'clock' time, the division of space and time into units with precise equivalence in value. One hour is no more or less than another hour and forms the structure by which labour is accounted for, when specific activities occur, and is the metric by which growth and productivity can be judged. This is the 'homogeneous' 'empty' time Benjamin alludes to as 'beads of a rosary'. And like the rosary, it is bound in a strict linear order; no moment of the past can exit this flow. It is 'empty' in the sense that each moment appears in the present to be filled by whatever is to come and which can never be altered. It is a mechanical logic of time as a conduit for flows of capital in which we are all caught. This capitalistic time presents us with a false appearance of naturalness, an ideological veil. In '*The Task of Translator',* Benjamin begins to sketch the messianic as an idea; he states, *'The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own…the philosopher's task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history'*[298]. History is then, for Benjamin, a kind of ontology that supersedes the perceived naturalness of 'nature'.

Benjamin's concept of messianism is a reformulation of history and time outside of that offered by capitalism, in which we are caught in an impossible field of action strung between origin and telos. The metaphorical image conjured by Benjamin to replace capitalism's riverbed of progress— a riverbed explicitly aimed at accumulation resulting in a totalising finality— is a whirlpool of time circling a concurrent event horizon of messianic arrival. Unlike the riverbed, the image of the whirlpool maintains a persistent finality— the continually suspended black dot at its centre— around which time is bent into a constellation. And that in this thundering cyclone of time the past, present, and future are afforded interaction between each other denied in linear time—

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[298] Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings*. *Volume 1*. *1913-1926*. 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg.255.

'My attempt to explain a theory of history in which the concept of development is entirely supplanted by the concept of origins. Understood in this way, history cannot be sought in the riverbed of a process of development. Instead… the image of a riverbed is replaced by that of a whirl-pool. In such a whirlpool earlier and later events-the prehistory and posthistory of an event, or, better, of a status, swirl around it'.[299]

By resituating oneself as a historian of this image of history, in which the archive is cast into a storm of time unmediated by the inference of capitalism's telos, that messianic events and images might occur. It is in this concept of the messianic as a historical paradigm that I have found the conjunction of *acid* thought and Benjamin's work as fruitful bedfellows. Both act to jumpstart the sclerotic trap of neoliberalism's totalising control.

And like acid thought, the condition of messianic history rests on capitalisms oppression to reveal the final act of hope. In an evaluation of Benjamin's mediation between capitalism and religion, Charlie Gere notes that *'Capitalism is both ubiquitous and invisible. It pervades all of our existence. As such it resembles a famous late-medieval formulation of God as a circle whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere'.* But, it is in this prison of despair that *'We can see in Capitalism, in its very nihilism, the most profound religious expression and possibilities*[300]*'*.

The messianic image of time and history as a constellation expresses a belief that something can rise out of the destructive, perverted empiricism of capitalism, which only seeks to consume into a finality. In his essay *'Capitalism as Religion',* Benjamin names this tendency— *'Capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it*

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[299] *'Diary from the August 7, 1931, to the Day of My Death'* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 2. Part 2.1931-1934*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 503.

[300] Gere, Charlie. *Unnatural Theology: Religion, Art and Media after the Death of God*. London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Continnuum-3PL, 2018. Pg. 19.

is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction'[301]. The messianic view of time first attempts to redraw the coordinates of time and history, after which a displacement, event— or in Pasolini's terminology— a sacred gesture can then occur. Messianic time re-enchants the world and in doing so, allows hope to occur and the possibility of redemption from '*complete destruction'*.

In this sense, messianism is a tool to '*break back into history'*[302] and not accept linear flows of capitalistic time. Instead, find the fault lines, fractures, and flashes of messianism that allow for a new political arrangement originating from culture and history. It is a procedure for actively placing time out of the joint capitalism places it within. In my case, it is a secular belief that requires a re-enchantment of the world as vibrantly available for interpretation outside of the law given by neoliberalism. This is parallel to the dualistic, poetical view of the world offered by Pasolini in my new trilogy, in which a form of hope and mystical thought is required to overcome the world as it is, but which must be wrestled from the theological. To hold a messianic view of the world, in this sense, is to say, as Pasolini did— '*I am an atheist. But my relationship with things is full of the mysterious and sacred'*.[303] And, like '*Salò',* Benjamin's messianism operates in the catastrophic, apocalyptic field of the present.

The Present

One of the greatest hurdles to overcome in this attempt to read the past, present, and future in constellation is the sense of being ensnared within the present. This is the sense of being whipped along by time with the past out of reach and the future out of sight. As well as the stultifying demand that no future other than the one offered by neoliberalism is possible.

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[301] *Capitalism as Religion* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 1. 1913-1926.* 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg 289.

[302] Jameson, Fredric. *Future City. New Left Review*, no. 21 (1 June 2003). Pg. 76.

[303] Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 514.

Agamben takes Benjamin's messianism as the archetype for learning to live within the contemporary, *'the paradigm for understanding the present is messianic time*[304]*'*, and that this 'being contemporary' is oriented around catastrophe and apocalypse. This is not a nihilistic view of the world or one in which the apocalyptic becomes a fetishised event— as it is in various apocalyptic cults that have and continue to emerge— but one which requires the clear sight of a potential end from the contemporary moment. Agamben describes this as *'the catastrophe in which we live'* — *'I am not in the slightest interested in apocalyptic prophecies, but rather in the ways in which we might respond at the present time to the catastrophe in which we live*[305]*'*.

Benjamin calls this condition *'jetztzeit'* (now-time), the feeling or allocation of contemporaneity in relation to the past and future. And that in correctly reading the world as a non-linear catastrophe *'a conception of the present as (jetztzeit) now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time'*[306] can be seen.

The condition of *jetztzeit* as a moment of the relation between the past and future — within the present— is the condition under which a revelatory, and for my practice, most intriguing of Benjamin's concepts arises, the *'dialectical image'*. This is a unique and messianic revelation in which elements of history short-circuit in the 'whirlpool' of messianic time. Time untethered from its linear constraint allows for cultural and political history units to join across time-space. The opening of consciousness to the wrecked catastrophe of contemporaneity provides a condition where—

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[304] *"Das unheilige Leben: Ein Gesprach mit dem italienischen Philosophen Giorgio Agamben."* Interview with Hannah Leitgeb and Cornelia Vismann. Literaturen (Berlin), 2001. The translation presented here is taken from De la Durantaye, Leland. *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pg. 103.

[305] *"Das unheilige Leben: Ein Gesprach mit dem italienischen Philosophen Giorgio Agamben*." Interview with Hannah Leitgeb and Cornelia Vismann. Literaturen (Berlin), 2001. The translation presented here is taken from De la Durantaye, Leland. *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pg. 103

[306] Benjamin, Walter, *On the Concept of History* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Selected Writings. Volume 4. 1938-1940. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 397.

'It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill'.[307]

This is a qualitative understanding of time as a fecundity, a moment filled with potential so great it is *'blasted out of the continuum of historical succession'*[308] pushing against capitalism's hollow quantitative unit of clock time. Messianic time should not be understood as a continuum running alongside capitalistic time but as a pregnant moment ready to be birthed in the chronology of machinic time by calling back the past into the future. These are the splinters of messianic time, the constellation of historical remnants interceding with the present.

To return to the redemptive revelatory conditions of Pasolini's understanding of the sacred and my reading of *acid* thought— *'the dialectical image can be defined as the involuntary memory of re-deemed humanity'*.[309] The moment in which a new understanding of time and history opens the possibility of thinking the world anew. Like Jameson's *'diseased eyeball'* and *'baroque sunsets'* of an alternate world momentarily rupturing onto our own, *'the dialectical image is an occurrence of ball lightning that runs across the whole horizon of the past'*.[310]

My work uses the explicit political orientation of acid thought as a means of escaping neoliberalism tied to this notion of the messianic as an a-temporal experience of time, and that in the messianic moment, the *'dialectical-image'* emerges as—

'Thinking (that) involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is

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[307] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002. Pg 462

[308] Ibid. Pg 475

[309] *Paralipomena to On the Concept of History* in Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 4, Trans Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2005. Pg. 403.

[310] Ibid Pg. 403.

crystallized as a monad. In this structure…the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past'.[311]

The actual content of the '*dialectical-image'* is what Benjamin called *'profane illumination'*, the observance of the vibrant immanence of history, culture and potential in the material world. This capacity is one Benjamin found in the '*after-life'* of the work of art in its reproduction, a trapped potentiality untethered from its specific historical temporal location. The material-cultural world offering an opening to the mystical— messianic — potential. The dialectical image is, in this sense, an unfolding of *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'*, the illumination of the potential in cultural objects. The dialectical image is an experience of a political, cultural, or philosophic idea in an a-temporal historical collage with other political, cultural, or philosophic objects. And that by seeing these things in conjunction, a messianic potential is unleashed. The unsaid quota in the '*entvicklungsfahigkeit'* of a cultural object is revealed.

Avery Gordon has described Benjamin's conceptualisation of profane illumination as bringing *'to the point of explosion . .. the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in everyday things'*. [312] The dialectical image is the instance where this atmosphere is detonated, and a messianic potential is revealed. As with Pasolini's sacred this *illumination* is drawn from the theological, but which finds its zenith and political potential in the profane. And like *acid* thinking it is one the psychedelic or drug experience offers a glimpse of, but should not be relied on—

> *'the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson'*. [313]

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[311] *On the Concept of History* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 4. 1938-1940.* Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg 396

[312] Gordon, Avery F., and Janice Radway. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.* 2nd edition. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2008. Pg. 204.

[313] *The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected*

Acid Messianism

If the idea of Acid Communism is to find an alternative to the stuck, melancholic, sclerotic form of leftist politics which can't even dream of a future— never mind begin to work towards a new one— then my idea of acid-messianism is to take the protean features of Acid Communism; hope, radical belief, a recovery of dismissed potential, and find a way to use them in a recuperation of the past. To rethink history not as a *'sequence of events like the beads of a rosary'* [314] but as a vast constellation of deep time and recent past, all in hand, working towards the service of reimagining the future. Like Pasolini's film, this is an attempt to reaffirm and re-find a sacred engagement of the world.

The sacred or messianic fragment is a rare instance of reality beyond the common sense of capitalist, historically linear time. The insistence of acid-messianism would be to think in terms of 'dialectical images', alternate lighting bolts of connection across time, not as a form of construction— these connections are not building blocks engineered by a producer— but something akin to a tarot reader or archaeologist, tracing forgotten lines of history. And that 'acid-messianic' thought is to witness these traces and to recognise we are still haunted by these myths— embedded in language, images, and place. Ghosts and hauntings that have recorded themselves in stone and architecture, in text and photographs, and which refuse to be forgotten. Acid-messianism is to recognise this as a haunting of culture and history; like any haunting, it is not a choice. These ruins, remains, traces, and absences are energies in the DNA of objects and places. Acid Messianism is how to communicate with them.

Writings. *Volume 2*. *Part 1*. *1927-1930*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 209

[314] *On the Concept of History* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings*. *Volume 4*. *1938-1940*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 397.

Translatability

The transition of seeing the weird from an acid messianic perspective—utilising the messianic fragment and sacred instance as forms of its appearance in the world— requires one more conceptual term to frame how these capacities have found use in my practice, the act of *translatability*. This theory is also drawn from Benjamin's work and how his unique theology interacts with the fields of politics, art and criticism as a form of translation, which Fredric Jameson describes as Benjamin's desire to place *'the theological [as] a distinct language-field in its own right, with which—as in all true translation—other languages are put in contact in order to measure the extent of their possibilities of meaning'.*[315]

My definition of *translatability* draws on Samuel Weber's *'Benjamin's-Abilities'*[316], specifically Weber's identification of *'iterability'* in Benjamin's work, to extend a traditional definition of translation. The methodological potentiality of *translatability* is its usefulness and practicality, its tendency for mutability, and its acknowledgement of historical time over the conventional conception of translation in terms of validity and conservatism. *Translatability* methodologically opens an arena for production as a site of potentiality, becoming, and as a proposition within *messianic time*, not possible within translation. As Boris Groys notes, '*Benjamin's new interpretation of the distinction between original and copy thus opens up the possibility not only of making a copy out of an original but also of making an original out of a copy'*[317]*,* and it is in this sense that I see the potential for translatability as a method for my own making, and which draws explicitly on the new trilogy I have established in Pasolini's cinema through traditional academic methodology.

The initial impulse for the PhD project was to make a new version of Pasolini's *'San Paolo';* this desire generated two terms to conceptualise the process of movement from an original work of art into a new form— *adaptation* and

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[315] Jameson, Fredric. *The Benjamin Files*. Verso Books, 2022. Pg. 10.
[316] Weber, Samuel, and Walter Benjamin. *Benjamin's -Abilities*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008.
[317] Groys, Boris. *Art Power*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008. Pg. 63.

translation. At first, these terms were interchangeable in how I thought and talked about the project. But, as I began to work with the puppet and the resonances of Benjamin's messianism and Pasolini's notion of sacred, it became clear that a traditional definition of translation and its inherent desire for fidelity did not encompass the capacity I found within it as a concept. While some of the etymological roots of *adaptation* remains in my notion of how translation can be performed in my work— the act of adjusting and joining (*ad-* 'to' *altar- 'join')* as a modification to fit a new situation— an expanded idea of *translatability* established a way of working within the messianic paradigm defined by Benjamin.

The majority of Pasolini's cinema uses adaptations from established literary narratives. A non-exhaustive list includes his most (in)famous films; *'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* (1975)*, Il Decameron'* (1971) and *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo' (1965)*.[318] Yet, prior to cinema, translation was fundamental to Pasolini's literary work. He completed notable and surprising translations of *'The Waste Land'* by T.S Eliot, *'Miles Gloriosus'* by Plautus, *'Childhood'* by Rimbaud, and the script for *'Trash'* by Paul Morrissey.[319] Redefining, translating, and transposing established stories is an essential and often overlooked feature of Pasolini's work. Quoting Pasolini from a 1956 newspaper article, Castelli says, *'Pasolini wrote of the capacity within translation for 'regeneration', and of 'the necessity of elective affinities, of mysterious historical correspondences' in the practice of translation such [that] the*

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[318] A complete list would include—
- *Il Decameron*. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, Artemis Film, 1971.
- *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*. Arco Film, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, 1965.
- *Salò o Le 120 Giornate Di Sodoma*. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1975.
I Racconti Di Canterbury. Les Productions Artistes Associés, Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), 1972.
- *Medea*. San Marco, Les Films Number One, Janus Film und Fernsehen, 1970.
- *Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Notte*. Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1974.
-Pasolini, Pier Paolo, *Edipo Re*. Drama. Arco Film, Somafis, 1984.
[319] A full list of Pasolini's translations has been helpful complied by John P Welle in Barański, Zygmunt G., ed. *Pasolini Old and New: Surveys and Studies*. Publications of the Foundation for Italian Studies, University College Dublin. Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 1999. Pg. 129

'translation is primarily, explicitly or implicitly, a historiographical act'[320]. While Castelli's observance of Pasolini's method of translation is precise in locating it as an act within historical time, it misses the clear equivalence to Benjamin's thought, specifically *'The Task of the Translator'*[321], an early essay in which he begins to sketch a concept of historical time.

For Benjamin, the life of aesthetic objects exists outside of *'organic corporeality'*[322] and was instead part of a historical continuum in which translation affords an afterlife to the work of art. In this sense, translation becomes akin to what he would later dub the *'dialectical image'*. History is granted an ontology that supersedes the false, to use a Pasolinian term, *'naturalness of nature'*[323]. And by doing so, Benjamin questions the concept of translation as an imitation of the original. If translation is regarded as governed by history, not nature, it is a form of afterlife for the work; the task of translation is to 'renew' the work. Translation is then a form of 'rebirth'; its attempt at fidelity is not imitation, but an expression of *'a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability'*.[324] As Esther Leslie succinctly puts it, *'The essay demanded that everything that persists through time be accorded a life, and that all life be understood not as a natural process but an historical one'.* [325] And, that translation is an inherent and essential part of *'certain* works'[326], which exists within them as an essence that asks to be performed— translation is, in this conception, implicitly tied to the *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'* of cultural objects.

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[320] Ibid Pg. xx-xi

[321] *The Task of the Translator,* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 1. 1913-1926.* 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 253

[322] Ibid. Pg 254-255.

[323] Hayman-Chaffey, Carlo, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film Maker's Life*. 1970. 23 minutes 33 seconds

[324] *The Task of the Translator,* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 1. 1913-1926.* 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 254

[325] Leslie, Esther. *Walter Benjamin*. Critical Lives. London: Reaktion, 2007. Pg. 46

[326] *The Task of the Translator,* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 1. 1913-1926.* 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 254

The latent energy of *'certain works'* propensity for translation is matched in Pasolini's appeal to '*elective affinities, of mysterious historical correspondences'*, an allusion to Goethe's novel[327], the term *'elective affinities'* is a synonym for chemistry or chemical reaction in the early 19th century. In Goethe's and Pasolini's reference, it is used to signify the invisible bond of human emotion, historical unison, and translation from one state to another. A description that bares methodological correspondence to Benjamin's theorisation of the *'dialectal-image'* and '*Jetztzeit'* within messianic time, an early sketch of which can be tracked in Benjamin's *'Goethe's Elective Affinities'* [328]essay.

The ideas I had collected from translation and adaptation are joined by Weber's *'iterability,'* detailed in '*Benjamin's -Abilities'*[329], re-coining the collected ideas under the methodology of *translatability*. Weber's book takes as its genus Benjamin's use of *barkeit*, 'abilities' in English, as a suffix regularly mistranslated or missing from many English versions of Benjamin's work. Other examples are bersetz-barkeit (translatability) in '*The Task of the Translator'*[330] and reproduzier-barkeit in '*The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility'*[331]. *'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction',* as it is most commonly known in the English-speaking world, fails to use the *barkeit* suffix Weber attributes so much significance to.

Weber sees Benjamin as working to classify *barkeit* as a verb and *'time-word'*. The application of *'-abilities'* breaks down an aesthetic object into '*thing-like elements'*, not dissimilar to the process of deconstruction, that can then be put back together in new formations. For Benjamin, it is not sameness but difference that is important, or a changed sameness, something that can be recognised but also made

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[327] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von, and R. J. Hollingdale. *Elective Affinities*. Revised ed. edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1978.

[328] *'Goethe's Elective Affinities'* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings*. *Volume 1. 1913-1926*. 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 297

[329] Weber, Samuel, and Walter Benjamin. *Benjamin's -Abilities*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008.

[330] *The Task of the Translator*, in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings*. *Volume 1. 1913-1926*. 1 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 253.

[331] Ibid Pg. 4

anew. The relevance to the concept of translatability proposed here is that the novel, or art object, under consideration for adaptation is not judged on its current use but its potentiality. As Weber puts it, it is '*Benjamin's penchant for forming key concepts in terms of their -ability, rather than their actuality as mere facts'.*[332] Weber proposes the term *iterability* for this latent potential for something to be repeated but with an alteration. *'Iterability, the power or potentiality to repeat or be repeated, is not the same as repetition, precisely because it is a structural possibility that is potentially "at work" even there where it seems factually not to have occurred'*[333]. The '*structural possibility*' in play here can be more expansively named as '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*'— allowing *translatability* to become both the potential within the work and the practice of searching out and activating this faculty.

The synergy of Benjamin and Pasolini's method of translation as a procedure that creates '*originals out of copies*' drawing on the '*unsaid*' capacity of '*entvicklungsfahigkeit*' is one that crucially functions in a non-Newtonian time, in which the past can be recalled into the present to reanimate the latent force of the objects '*iterability*'. I.e. its potential for adaptation.

As highlighted in my reading of Pasolini's films, for Pasolini, *place* is a specific object from which this same force of translatability can be activated. Writing on the '*San Paolo*' project, Jay Twomey notes that the '*Benjaminian approach to time allows Pasolini to conflate historical periods (and temporal ambiguity, geographical locations) in his version of the Paul story'.*[334] Pasolini's selection of these locations was driven by a desire to find and activate the sacred force held within them. Noa Steimatsky has written extensively on Pasolini's use of travel as a pilgrimage '*fundamental*' to his filmmaking.[335] Place is 'cited' and translated as an essential

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[332] Ibid Pg. 6.
[333] Ibid pg. 6
[334] Twomey, Jay. *To An Unknown Apostle: Moments of Pauline Undoing in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Saint Paul*. Pg. 519 in Brill. 'Biblical Interpretation Volume 27 Issue 4-5: Pasolini's Paul: Representation, Re-Use, Religion (2019)'.
[335] *'Filmmaking and traveling were to become closely linked in the following years, when the search for locations itself became a key creative moment for the filmwork, while the cinema in turn served as a pretext for further exploration of foreign cultures and remote landscapes... Even a superficial glance at the films*

element of the narrative background. This is filming as an aleatory journey which may, or in the case of *'Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1965) may *not,* result in the initially predicted result, given that the film was not to be made in Palestine. Steimatsky goes on to describe Pasolini's method as '*a pilgrimage wherein the impressions, indeed filmic traces, of the original place are collected to be then re-sited in a more radical gesture of contamination… In physically retracing Christ's journey Pasolini already rehearses the prospect of returning whence he came, bearing the sacred loot of his pilgrimage'.*[336]

In the next section, I will offer readings and an explication of my written and film practice. The activity of collecting the myriad references, images, allusions, and direct quotations used in these films has been an act of *'sacred looting'* under the aegis of *entvicklungsfahigkeit, translatability,* and *acid messianic* methodology to produce a new version of Pasolini's '*San Paolo'.*

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reveals this mutual implication of the two activities- filmmaking and travelling- as fundamental to Pasolini's work.' Steimatsky, Noa. ' *"Pasolini on Terra Sancta: Towards a Theology of Film."'* Yale Journal of Criticism, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1998). Pg. 239.

[336] Steimatsky, Noa. '"*Pasolini on Terra Sancta: Towards a Theology of Film."'* *Yale Journal of Criticism, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1998).* Pg. 242.

Practice: Case Studies

Introduction

The following chapter uses specific examples of my work as case studies, performing an exegesis on each work, drawing out and explicating the references and conceptual associations to Pasolini's work, messianism, *'entvicklungsfahigkeit'*, translatability and the broader project of adapting the *'San Paolo'* script. Links and instructions on where to view the works discussed are given at the beginning of each relevant text.

Pier Paolo

The Puppet

Fig 1. Whitaker, Joshua. *'Production Still- Portrait of PPP'*, photograph, 2021.

At this point in the thesis, please watch-

'*Pier Paolo'*, video and sound, 7 minutes 4 seconds, 2021-23.

Documentation of this can be found on the USB drive supplied with this document.

'Pier Paolo' is a mockumentary-style interview with the director Pier Paolo Pasolini. A title card at the piece's beginning indicates that Pasolini has been approached for an interview and that the film will function as a 'portrait' of the director through the medium of video. The beginning section of the film is without

dialogue and, as indicated, serves as an introduction to Pasolini's defining visual characteristics: chiselled face, coiffed hairstyle, perpetually present cigarette, ubiquitously worn black shades, neat suede shoes, tightly tailored polo neck and grey suit trousers. The film's duration takes place with Pasolini sitting in a reproduction of a Gerrit Rietveld *'Crate Chair'* [337] backed by an image of Paul Klee's *'Angelus Novus'*[338], with edited cutaways to books, vinyl records, and paper ephemera. The overall feel is of a mid-century European intellectual working quietly in his simple but carefully curated home. The next section of the film features Pasolini responding to questions from the unseen and unheard interviewer— a title card indicates these prompts have been omitted at Pasolini's request— the effect of which is a film in which Pasolini's idiosyncratic and somewhat vain intellectualism is emphasised. Pasolini elaborates on the conceptual interlinking of reality and cinema, history and place, St Paul as a dual personality, and sacredness in the everyday, before becoming frustrated with the interviewer's questions and choosing to perform one of his poems as an answer to whatever prompts (or from Pasolini's perspective, asinine questions) have been put to him. The film's final section has Pasolini reciting *'Gramsci Ashes'*[339], while Frederic Chopin's *'Prelude Op.28 No.4 in Em for Piano'* plays diegetically in the background. Close-ups of a draft script for *'San Paulo'*[340], the vinyl record, and Klee's *'Angulus Novus'* accompany the reading, which culminates in the music reaching crescendo and a close-up on Pasolini's intense gaze, now shod of his trademark sunglasses.

The film is (evidently) a construction, utilising a muppet-style puppet I made of Pasolini and the dialogue, staging, casting, and editing performed by me. But what led me to stitch together and then direct this felt figure when the driving motivation

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[337] I made this reproduction from the plans outlined in Drijver, Peter, and Johannes Niemeijer. *How to Construct Rietveld Furniture*. Bilingual edition. Bussum: Thoth Uitgeverij, 2001.—Rietveld, Gerrit, '*Crate Chair',* 1936, design object/furniture, Vitra Design Museum.

[338] Klee, Paul, *'Angelus Novus',* 1920, Oil transfer and watercolor on paper, 318mm x 242mm, The Israel Museum.

[339] *'Gramsci's Ashes'* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and James Ivory. *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Bilingual Edition*. Edited by Stephen Sartarelli. Bilingual ed. edition. University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pg. 166.

[340] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014.

of the PhD thesis was an attempt to make a film of Pasolini's St. Paul— a script conspicuously low on puppets.

At an early point in the research, I decided to speak to Pasolini; I needed his advice. Isolated —this was the later stages of the Covid lockdown— from my usual creative interlocutors, I decided to question the person I was devoting so much of my life to through the PhD. Pasolini's death in 1975 was the main obstacle to this, so I began to explore options for contacting him beyond the grave. I was already developing some ideas around occult practice regarding the thesis, but seances or direct summoning seemed beyond my skill set. My solution to this was to produce a puppet form, a kind of golem Pasolini. My construction of Pasolini needed to be based on a crafted, image-making form. Much as Walter Benjamin was reputed to take Klee's '*Angelus Novus'* with him as a guardian figure, a symbolic catalyst for new thought; or the devoted would look upon a religious icon— not a mimetic display of sainthood— but a literal window into the divine, my production of Pasolini needed to be made and then used as a conduit to draw forth the figure I wanted to speak to. The production of an avatar or golem played into the esoteric practices I was intrigued by and was an achievable proposition given my fabrication skills.

The next question was in what form the Pasolini incarnation should be manifest. The most impactful of which was the work made by the Jim Henson Company; '*Labyrinth' (1986), 'The Muppet Christmas Carol' (1992),* and *'The Storyteller' (1987).*[341] Although these films have diverse visual style, there is a distinct characterisation to Henson's creations, which I have always found compelling— '*Sesame Street'* [342]was my favourite television program as a small child, and its aesthetic is very much part of my visual language. From my position as an adult searching for a form for my Pasolini golem, the Henson Company signature 'muppet' style began to embody the familiarity, trust, and deep personal connection I

[341] *Labyrinth*. Adventure, Family, Fantasy. Henson Associates (HA), Lucasfilm, The Jim Henson Company, 1986. *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. Comedy, Drama, Family. Walt Disney Pictures, Jim Henson Productions, 1992. *The Storyteller*. Adventure, Drama, Family. Henson Associates (HA), TVS Television, 1987.
[342] *Sesame Street*. Animation, Adventure, Family. Children's Television Workshop (CTW), Sesame Workshop, 1971.

could see performed in Benjamin's attachment to Klee's painting, the devoted to an icon, or perhaps even Pasolini's invocation of Gramsci in his poetry.

Jim Henson began making what is now recognised as characteristically a 'muppet' style of puppetry from the late 1950s, and has a strongly coded visual language to its production; broad mouths, large distinct eyes, bendy unjointed limbs, and bright primary coloured 'skin' even in humanlike puppets or anthropomorphic animals. As such, there is a wealth of resources and suppliers online by which to fabricate your own muppet-style puppets. The felt used in muppets is particularly distinctive in its stretch, colour palate, and peachy fuzz going under the brand name 'Fuzzelle' or 'Nylafleece', both of which are reproductions of the original 'Antron Fleece'.[343] And so I was able to purchase all the required components to make a Pasolini muppet online.

The construction of the muppet was a trial and error process; I had never made one before, but aided by Pasolini's distinctive appearance and the aforementioned style guide afforded by Henson's work, I was able to produce my desired interlocutor.

The puppet's conceptualisation and use are also clearly driven by humour. But the conditions under which it originated and was produced were drawing on sincere and pragmatic desires to manifest the incarnation of Pasolini out of a conceptual and emotional wellspring, which I believe resulted in an entity coming into the work which is more than simply a mimetic muppet version of Pasolini. From its completion, the puppet has felt uncannily real to me.

Completing the puppet marked an authorial shift in the remaking of the St Paul script. My rewriting and attempts to refilm St. Paul were now operating in tandem with the avatar of Pasolini in puppet form. The puppets incarnation produced a situation in which the ideas I was beginning to develop around place, sacredness, logos, and a duality in character in Paul— an idea explicit in Pasolini's conception of

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[343] For full information regarding the production of this felt and its history, see Puppet Pelts. 'FUZZELLE™ COLLECTION'. Accessed 29 March 2024. https://puppetpelts.co.uk/collections/hand-dyed-fuzzelle.

him— were now 'bounced' off of the puppet to see his reaction. The muppet Pasolini became the sounding board by which I would start to piece together the disparate references, readings, and transpositions I was working with as material for the film.

As I have already detailed, the duality of nature Pasolini saw in Paul is reflected in my reading of Pasolini's character and work. The production of the puppet induced a form of conceptual schizophrenia in my work; the puppet speaks lines I have written and performs as I have directed, but there is a remainder, a cognitive dissonance between him and me. The ghost of an independent ontology in the puppet that is tied to me but still performs outside of me. The weird contract I felt had been brokered between the puppet and I was one which felt underlined by the biblical induction not to make graven images — *'Thou shalt make thee no molten gods'* (Exodus 34:17)— the production of the puppet became a form of idolatry and engagement with a pre-Christian form of sacred belief. The production of the puppet Pasolini became a ritual act, and his form a contest to the Church as the sole authority of the sacred. Pasolini's equation of Paul as the instigator of modernity, embodied by the Catholic Church as an institution which defines doctrine, liturgy, and social norms, is, in part, questioned in his reincarnation in puppet form, as a riposte to the natural order of the Church and Modernity. In *'Playing with Eternal Uncanny. The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects',* John Bell highlights the unnerving nature of puppets in the face of rationalised modernity and theological conformity. The puppet is a thread tying us back to a world in which myth and the stories we tell ourselves about the world were as real as anything else.

> *"Puppetry's primitive roots, animism, irrationality, and its basic contradictions with realism mark an art form that would not easily adapt into modern culture's interests in civilization (versus nature), realism, rationality, text, and bourgeois art*[344]*…Modernity presented itself as an entity slowly but inevitably spreading across the world, enlightening it, changing everything in its path, and leaving behind old beliefs and ways of life as they were replaced*

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[344] Bell, John *Playing with the Eternal Uncanny The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects* in Orenstein, Claudia, Dassia N. Posner, John Bell, and Browns Books for Students, eds. The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance. Electronic resource. Theatre Studies/Puppetry. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. pg.44.

by modern technologies, modern societies, modern people; but in fact, the old beliefs and non-modern or anti-modern practices have not all been left behind. Puppets are signs of this, which is why they are uncanny."[345]

This connection between puppets and an unbridled, chaotic, unruly pre-religion we are here calling the 'sacred' is further intensified by the feeling I have already expressed— that even though the puppet is my creation, there is a strange agency to him which exceeds my input, that an ontological break has occurred in its making, which feels distinct from any other form of art making I have done and is unmistakably absent from other forms of art-making that reproduce the human form. The puppet achieves its true agency, like the submissive in dominant-submissive sexual relation, by granting its use to its apparent master. But as in this relation the true knowing, the genuine engagement with the real resides on the part of the submissive/puppet. This is the horrifying and transportive dimension the puppet engenders. It is an avatar from a heightened version of our reality. As Ligotti notes— *'they seem connected to another world, one that is all harm and disorder— the kind of place we sometimes feel is a model for our own home ground'*[346]. It is from this place they need to escape; the puppet is a prisoner on the run and, as such, is as chaotic, dangerous, and desperate as an escapee. Like Pinocchio, they just want to become human and never fall back into the ultimate truth of the story from which they are born.

My relation to the Pasolini puppet reflects this horrific Faustian pact I have produced in making him. However, the puppet's prehistorical, sacred, animistic form and its correspondence to Pasolini's desire to renter a pre-modern life through cinema is precisely why he became such a crucial element to the research practice. At many points in the work, the puppet has been as much a collaborator as an art

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[345] Bell, John *Playing with the Eternal Uncanny The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects* in Orenstein, Claudia, Dassia N. Posner, John Bell, and Browns Books for Students, eds. The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance. Electronic resource. Theatre Studies/Puppetry. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. pg.49-50

[346] *Toy Stories: Puppets, Dolls, and Horror Stories* in Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. Edited by Darren Ambrose. New edition. London, UK: Repeater, 2018. Pg 99.

object/actor in the films and my thinking. His making marked a fundamental and irrevocable shift in the work. The puppet Pasolini was now implicated and involved in my rewriting and re-filming of the St Paul script.

The Presentation

At this point in the thesis, please watch-

***'Pier Paolo— RNUAL Block 3 Presentation (Abridged)'* video and sound, performance, 8 minutes 30 seconds, 2021.**

Documentation of this can be found in the USB drive supplied with this document.

In some ways, the puppet's first entrance to the world would be pragmatic. UAL requires all PhD students going through the program's registration period to present as part of its internal twice-yearly doctoral conference. The conference was to be given solely online (although out of lockdown, some restrictions and precautions were still in place regarding public meetings), which produced a situation where I could prerecord my presentation— utilising the puppet. My presentation would start following the generic and expected form of PowerPoint slides and dialogue of most conference papers until the puppet is introduced as a still image, mysteriously becoming animated and engaging me in conversation before taking over the end of the talk. The requirement to participate in the conference as part of the PhD process engendered an unexpected and pivotal development in practice— the use of video-essay as a means by which to transpose, translate, and adapt Pasolini's work.

In shifting my contribution from a standard student presentation to an 'artwork' in its own right—that also happened to fulfil the conference criteria—the medium of video-essay and performance was opened up within the work. Kodwo Eshun describes the unique capacity of the video-essay as follows,

> *What distinguishes the video-essay from other forms of video art is its ability to perform the states it seeks to articulate. Because the video-essay inhabits the same medium as its subject, it can enact its speculations in ways that a textual essay cannot. Since it uses the same sounds, images and voices that it*

speculates about, it is capable of sharing their powers of seduction. This capacity of exemplification is the promise of the genre. Each video-essay has to discover its own methods of actualisation; the task facing the video-essayist is to invent forms capable of animating arguments'.[347]

Using the puppet in the conference allowed me to *'invent forms capable of animating arguments'*[348] I had around Pasolini's work. The use of a muppet and the prank-ish element of introducing him within the conference also provided some levity and humorous balance to work. I was worried that the thesis and my practice were erring towards the po-faced and dry. The implicit familiarity of the muppet form, alongside a comedy generated by his self regarding intellectualised and grandiose statements about the nature of reality, engendered a new playfulness in the practice—which I think reflects the speculative proposition of a new trilogy in Pasolini's work— and the often-missed humour found in many of Pasolini's films.

The use of interviews in the work has a practical and conceptual underpinning. Formally, it allowed me to talk directly to the puppet so that my fears and discomfort around the work could be aired and ask Pasolini his opinion directly. This desire was the genus for producing the puppet in the first instance, and as such, the interview form seemed an obvious mode of address to the puppet and means of presentation to an audience. The conceptual frame draws on Pasolini's biography, namely an interview conducted by Pasolini with Ezra Pound and a publication titled *'Pasolini on Pasolini'* [349] a collection of interviews with Pasolini conducted by Oswald Stack.

The interview with Pound took place in the autumn of 1967. Pound was again living in Italy after 13 years of incarceration at a psychiatric ward in the United States, an imprisonment for treason initiated by his support for the Mussolini government in the Second World War and his vocal anti-Semitism. That Pasolini was prepared to interview Pound would, on the face of it, seem strange. One would think that Pasolini's anti-fascism would have barred him from a desire to associate

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[347] Eshun, Kodwo. *Dan Graham: Rock My Religion*. One Work. London, England: Afterall Books, 2012. Pg. 8
[348] Ibid. Pg 8.
[349] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini*. First Printing edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 1969.

with Pound, even if he held his poetry in high regard. I can only offer Pasolini's beguiling and contrary nature as an answer. Perhaps he felt the coupling of 'Pasolini interviews Pound' too alluring and secured his name within the canon of great twentieth-century poets. By 1967, Pasolini was established as an international filmmaker, alongside his literary credentials— but the interview is marked by the sense of a young disciple coming to question the old master. Pound's answers are short, occasionally dismissive, but cordial. Pasolini speaks at length about Pound's work, regularly quoting sections of *'The Pisan Cantos'*. The overall effect is an intriguing, if somewhat underwhelming, meeting of two paradoxical thinkers.

For several reasons, the interview is a crucial reference point to the *'Pier Paolo'* work. Firstly, the sense of an understudy confronting the principal— in the interview, Pasolini's opening statement includes the following lines: *'I make a pact with you Ezra Pound— I have detested you long enough. I come to you as a grown child who has a pig-headed father; I am old enough to make friends. It was you who began carving. Now it is time to break new wood'*.[350] While I have never 'detested' Pasolini, the work *'Pier Paolo'* was, in a sense, my first confrontation with Pasolini, even if only as a puppet, regarding my ability to translate his work. The interview with Pound placed Pasolini in the same position I found myself in and began to suggest the conversation's tenor: agreeable but contested, with a definite hierarchy. I would amplify the tension, resulting in the puppet taking over from me due to annoyance in the film, but the basic tone of the conversation takes its cue from this interview.

The extended use of poetry is also mirrored in my piece, providing the film's culmination. The pomposity of the poetic recital struck me as amusing. It is humour that Pasolini himself must have also found appealing. For instance, in Pasolini's film *'La Ricotta'*[351] Pasolini cast Orson Welles to play a director— La Ricotta is a film about the making of a film about the passion of Christ— during which Welle's

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[350] The line is itself an adaptation of Pound's poem *'A Pact'*. *'Pier Paolo Pasolini Interviews Ezra Pound'* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *In Danger: A Pasolini Anthology*. Edited by Jack Hirschman. San Francisco, Calif: City Lights Publishers, 2010. pg 26

[351] *La Ricotta* included as part of *Ro.Go.Pa.G*. Comedy, Drama. Arco Film, Cineriz, Societé Cinématographique Lyre, 1963.

character recites some of his poetry in dismissal of a reporter he perceives to be asking stupid questions. [352]

The final cue from the interview is visual (please see image above). I suspect the interview took place in Pound's Turin home (I think a portrait of Pound can be seen above his right shoulder), which led me to frame my interview as taking place in Pasolini's home. The furniture, artworks, sculptures, and a general sense of an author at work, paper strewn across the floor; and writing materials at hand gave me a general tableau from which I would dress the set for my film.

The book *'Pasolini on Pasolini'*[353], collected interviews with Pasolini conducted by Oswald Stack, was a crucial resource for finding the measure and manner of the puppet's speech. Published in 1969, the book is divided into sections, each addressing Pasolini's films chronologically, ending with more general reflections on *'Work, style, Projects, Theatre, Cinema, and Theory'.* The book has served as a critical text for me; it provided a lexical index from which I could begin to attempt the 'voice' of Pasolini. The script writing process follows the logic of *'Entvicklungsfahigkeit'* in that I stitch and edit quotations from Pasolini and others along with segues and additional material written by me. *'Pasolini on Pasolini'* became something of a bible for referencing how a sentence or reflection on his work might sound as voiced by Pasolini himself.

The puppet also engendered and amplified the idea of Pasolini as an unruly, unfathomable, and inimitable character whose political and artistic decisions often took unexpected turns. Muppets are particularly disposed to chaotic behaviour; the Cookie Monster's greed-driven outbursts, the drummer Animal's intensity, The Swedish Chef's bizarre cooking experiments, Oscar the Grouch's offbeat humour and melancholy as part of a children's show. In rendering Pasolini in muppet form, I

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[352] The poem is one of Pasolini's own titled '*June 10, 1962*' which can be found in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and James Ivory. *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Bilingual Edition*. Edited by Stephen Sartarelli. Bilingual ed. edition. University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pg. 310.

[353] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini*. First Printing edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 1969.

felt I granted myself license to turn up the dial on Pasolini's visually striking appearance and introduce hubris to Pasolini's political and aesthetic statements.

Pasolini used puppets to a similar effect in the short film *'Che cosa sono le nuvole?'*[354] (1968), which has the English title *'What are the Clouds?'*. The film takes place in a marionette theatre using human actors in place of the marionette puppets— strings are attached to their arms and legs reaching up to a puppeteer above the theatre stage— although it is tacitly implied the puppets are seen as 'real' puppets by the audience rather than people pretending to be puppets. The majority of the film shows a performance of *'Othello'* with the title role played by Ninetto Davoli, Totò as Iago, and Desdemona portrayed by Laura Betti. Each actor is a Pasolini stalwart, appearing in numerous of Paolini's films. A film *not* featuring Davoli is exceptional in Pasolini's oeuvre by his omission from the cast. For a frequent viewer of Pasolini's films, the effect reinforces the actors/marionettes as part of a troupe. The casting of Totò is also worth noting; Totò is not so well known outside of Italy but is nationally recognised as the comic equivalent to actors like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. When Totò died before appearing in a further short film Pasolini had written for him, Pasolini commented that he could use an actor like Jacques Tati in his place.

The play within a film we watch loosely follows Shakespeare's play, but instead of Othello killing Desdemona in a jealous rage, the audience storms the stage, grabbing and beating Othello and Iago. The implication is that the puppet's performance is too close to reality and requires an intervention by the audience. The performances also suggest the puppets themselves don't have a detachment from the characters of the play and have lost a grip on what is 'real'. The puppets are shown backstage profoundly depressed by the outcome of the performance before Othello and Iago's bodies are taken to a rubbish tip, either as penance for their poor work or due to their marionette bodies being too broken to repair. The final scene shows the two puppets lying on a rubbish heap; faces turned to the sky for the first time; they have never before been outside, entering into a sublime reverie at seeing clouds for the first time.

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[354] *Che Cosa Sono Le Nuvole?* Short, Comedy. Dino De Laurentiis, 1968.

The casting of Totò, the embodiment of a comic performer, and the disorderly collapse of Shakespeares' play due to the puppet's nature point to a key theme of Pasolini's work. The means by which cinema is a form of reality itself. Pasolini made this assertion most clearly in an essay on the film *'The Written Language of Reality'*, in which he sought to integrate semiotics into his film theory. The essay states that—

> *'cinema reproduces reality—that reality is, in the final analysis, nothing more than cinema in nature. I mean cinema-not as stylistic convention…but cinema as audiovisual technique'.* [355]

Pasolini casts Totò as a chaotic, comedic and disruptive character, not because of his belief that he can perform this role but because of his innate ontology— his reality. Pasolini expressed this most clearly when talking about the casting of '*La Ricotta' (*1963), *' (when) the characters are real extras, I used real extras. I'm only interested in an actor when he's acting an actor, I'm not interested in him qua actor'.*[356] A prime example of this would be the casting of Orson Welles in the role of 'director' of the film we are watching being made in '*La Ricotta' (*1963). This criterion for casting is based on intrinsic features, over actorly abilities, and a belief by Pasolini in the cinema as a technique for *expressing* reality itself. This is most clearly outlined in his essay *'The End of the Avant-Garde'*—

> *Cinema does not evoke reality, as literary language does; it does not copy reality, as painting does; it does not mime reality, as drama does. Cinema reproduces reality, image and sound! By reproducing reality, what does cinema do? Cinema expresses reality with reality'*[357]

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[355] *The Written Language of Reality* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005.Pg. 198.

[356] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini*. First Printing edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 1969. Pg.40

[357] *The End of the Avant-Garde* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. 133.

The puppets nature in *'Che cosa sono le nuvole?'* (1968) orientates them towards this reality, which is revealed in cinema. Their performances enrage the audience within the film to the point of revolt. The puppet hints at a reality held within our world but also hidden. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi wrote an intriguing essay titled *'Pasolini in Tottenham'*, which is uncomplimentary about Pasolini's general politics but does credit him as *'a man of extraordinary vision'* and extends Pasolini's definition of 'reality' as such—

> *What is called "reality" refers not only to what exists, but also to the realm of the possible. What exists as imagination, what exists as a tendency in the concatenation of social intelligence, is real—although the existing power of capitalism is acting to block the possible from emerging. What is possible may be killed, repressed, or forced back, but it is real'.* [358]

In *Che cosa sono le nuvole?'* (1968), *'Pier Paolo',* and many of Jim Henson's muppet scenes, the nature of the puppet takes over the production it is supposed to be complying to. The anarchic ontology of the puppet overrides everything— but in doing so, reveals '*another world, one that is all harm and disorder— the kind of place we sometimes feel is a model for our own home ground'* [359] that Ligotti and Fisher have noted. The puppet is a conduit to a reality that '*refers not only to what exists, but also to the realm of the possible'* [360]. The puppet's unstemmable, profligate drive towards undoing the bounds set for it is parallel to the messianic gesture Agamben characterises as akin to a performance or small displacement:

> *'A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world,*

[358] Berardi, Franco. *Pasolini in Tottenham,* Journal #43 March 2013 - e-Flux. Accessed 27 October 2022. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60195/pasolini-in-tottenham/.

[359] Fisher, Mark *Toystories: Puppets, Dolls and Horror Stories* Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. Edited by Darren Ambrose. New edition. London, UK: Repeater, 2018. Pg. 99.

[360] Berardi, Franco. *Pasolini in Tottenham,* Journal #43 March 2013 - e-Flux. Accessed 27 October 2022. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60195/pasolini-in-tottenham/.

humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come'. 361

In my work, the puppet opened a path by which this minute but crucial *'displacement'* could take place. Its uncanny nature intensifies the ideas around history, place, Pasolini, and St. Paul. His inclusion as a character in my work, and in some ways, as a collaborator, opens this space where a new reality— messianic, apocalyptic, politically revelationary— might take place.

In his essay '*An Unnatural Theology for the Anthropocene'*, Charlie Gere extends Agamben's theory of displacement using Marcel Duchamp's concept of the 'infra-thin'— the virtually undefinable difference in an object or action— which nevertheless is felt. Gere offers *'the warmth of a seat (that had just been vacated), or two forms cast in the same mould'* as examples of the *'infra-thin'* proposed by Duchamp. Connecting Agamben's messianic 'displacement' and Duchamp's 'Infra-thin' Gere offers an *'Infra-thin theology'* in which—

> *'The imperceptible difference between the fallen and the redeemed world is the 'infra-thin gap between seeing the world as without hope or meaning, and seeing it, in all its fallenness, as beautiful in itself, and that beauty not as some subjective epiphenomenon belonging to our private subjectivity, but as the meaning and telos of the world itself*[362].

I would argue that Pasolini's use of puppets in *'Che cosa sono le nuvole?'* (1968) and the space puppets are connected to in Ligotti and Fisher's work, approach this 'infra-thin' messianic film between the real and the redeemed, the sacred and the profane. The Pasolini puppet in my work attempts to capture this capacity and embody some of the dualistic, contrary positions Pasolini occupied and saw as integral to his version of St. Paul.

The overall effect of my (I think successful) attempt to trap Pasolini's character in the form of a puppet was to produce something unmanageable by its very nature.

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[361] Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. First edition. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993. Pg 52.

[362] *'An Unnatural Theology for the Anthropocene'* in Gere, Charlie. *Unnatural Theology: Religion, Art and Media after the Death of God*. London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Continnuum-3PL, 2018. Pg. 23

The puppet taking over my conference presentation was less an artistic decision on my part and more a logical conclusion as to what would happen if he were asked to participate— in essence, mirroring Pasolini's criteria for casting. The conference and lecture presentations of the puppet film operate on a suspension of disbelief in which the artwork overtakes its maker, the horrific and proto-gothic idea introduced by Mary Shelley in *'Frankenstein; Or the Modern Prometheus'*[363], and in doing so suggests a world beyond our rational understanding. A truer 'reality' that, like the apocalyptic moment, is hidden but imminent and, in some ways, already known to us. The puppet is an apocalyptic creature.

This acknowledgement that the puppet would 'perform' in certain preordained ways, and the film and script I wrote would be in dialogue with him, has precedent, not only in Pasolini's idiosyncratic form of casting but in the work of the actors and comedians Andy Kaufman and Jim Carrey, which is a further important benchmark for my conceptualisation of the puppet's performance.

Andy Kaufman was a comedian working primarily in network television and stand-up, most notably in the shows *'Saturday Night Live''* and *'Taxi'*[364] during the 1970's and 80's, his career was sadly cut short dying of lung cancer aged just 35 in 1984. Kaufman was a wonderfully odd and offbeat comic that appeared even weirder, given his presence in fairly mainstream programs. His comedy defies characterisation and encompasses a series of pranks, performances, and meta-characters. He granted himself the title 'Inter-gender Wrestling Champion of the World' after a series of wrestling matches— only with women— which infuriated and shocked the audience with his gloating and overt misogyny. He spent a stand-up tour of colleges simply reading *'The Great Gatsby'* from start to finish; when asked if the audience wanted something different, he would play a vinyl record of himself reading the same book. He had an alter-ego, played by Kaufman, a washed-up, chain-smoking lounge singer called Tony Clifton. Clifton would be written into

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[363] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus*. Edited by Maurice Hindle. Revised ed. edition. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.

[364] *Saturday Night Live*. Comedy, Music. NBC Studios, NBC Universal Television, Broadway Video, 1975.

Taxi. Comedy. John-Charles-Walters Productions, Paramount Television, 1980.

contracts with outlandish requirements— and would turn up on set, drunk, with sex workers. Kaufman's output is beguiling, funny, and sometimes deeply offensive but charged with a jester-like subversion of what is to be expected or 'normal'. [365] My first encounter with Kaufman was through Jim Carrey's performance of him in the biopic of Kaufman's life, *'Man on the Moon'*[366](2000). The film is a chronological narrative showing the various stages of Kaufman's professional and personal life. In 2017, a feature-length 'making-of' documentary of '*Man on the Moon'* was released titled *'Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond - Featuring a Very Special, Contractually Obligated Mention of Tony Clifton'* (2017). The film shows Carrey entering into a 'method' form of acting in which he 'became' Kaufman for the duration of the filming. Carrey slips into the role so completely Kauffman's family and friends are taken aback by the likeness and, often erratic, behaviours of Kaufman. The absorption into the role was so complete Andy/Jim often derailed filming with pranks and emotional outbursts, and Tony Clifton would also appear on set, causing further issues. This mirrored Kaufman's own life; Kaufman often seemed unable to divine out reality from the performance he had created— and in doing so— the creation produced and seeped into a reality of its own making. One example of this is the Tony Clifton character, which has made some appearances since Kaufman's death (the character was also played by his collaborator Bob Zmuda) alongside Kaufman's suggestion towards the end of his life that he might fake his death, which has produced a (somewhat believable given Kaufman's other behaviour) conspiracy theory that he isn't dead and will return for a 'special' at some point in the future.

My reading of this multifaceted and intertextual series of films, books, and performances appeals to Berardi's notion of reality as '*what is called "reality" refers not only to what exists, but also to the realm of the possible'.*[367] The humour, uncanny, grotesque, and fantastical nature of Kaufman's work are all features of the

[365] For a full account of Kaufman's life, I highly recommend Zehme, Bill. *Lost in the Funhouse: The Life and Mind of Andy Kaufman*. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 2000.

[366] *Man on the Moon*. Biography, Comedy, Drama. Universal Pictures, Mutual Film Company, Jersey Films, 2000.

[367] Berardi, Franco. *Pasolini in Tottenham,* Journal #43 March 2013 - e-Flux. Accessed 27 October 2022. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60195/pasolini-in-tottenham/.

collective consciousness around puppets. And in both, the minute gap between reality, which includes a principle of possibility, is engendered. The '*Entvicklungsfahigkeit'* of the work of art.

I first watched *'Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond - Featuring a Very Special, Contractually Obligated Mention of Tony Clifton'* (2017) while in the process of making the Pasolini puppet. Kaufman and Carrey's recalcitrant characterisations were at the forefront of my mind when beginning to conceptualise the puppet and how it might first enter the world. Carrey himself, in a Q&A about the film, provided me the key for how I should use the puppet and think of him as part of the broader St. Paul project. Reflecting on how he chose to embody and perform Kaufman, he said—

> '*How do I handle a character like this? And the fact was that I can't handle a character like this. A character like this has to handle it. And so the decision was made to allow him to make the movie'*[368].

This became the guiding principle by which to use the puppet in the conference presentation, which formed the basis for *'Pier Paolo'*.

A title card at the beginning of *'Pier Paolo'* reads *'The interviewer's prompts have been redacted, on Pasolini's request, for clarity'.* After the presentation of the puppet as part of the RNUAL conference, I was keen to find a way to resolve the piece as a stand-alone video that could be shown online or in an exhibition context. The work required the redaction of my prompts—they seemed to distract from the intensity and singularness of the puppet on screen— and in the process of making the film, I had shot additional material, dialogue, and close-ups of the puppet that I wanted to re-edit. Conceptualising the piece as a filmic 'portrait' and announcing it as such within the film allowed for the work to be an autonomous piece within itself and emphasised the idea of it as an arrival or introduction of the puppet to the world. It also called back to the Ezra Pound film and Oswald Stack interviews as pieces that

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[368] *Jim and Andy* Director and Cast Q&A | TIFF 2017, 2017.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGdAq1eEGZQ. 11 minutes 10 seconds

seek to make the interviewee's intellect visible. However, the idea of a 'moving portrait' was gleaned from Tacita Dean's work, most specifically the piece *'Mario Merz'*[369] (2002).

Dean's piece is a 16mm colour projection with optical sound depicting the Italian artist Mario Merz sat in the shade of a tree in San Gimignano, a small town in Tuscany, Italy. The work is 8 minutes 30 seconds long and shows Merz sitting silently in a garden space. Medium-wide camera shots show us the overall scene, with close-ups of Merz's face and hands cut into this establishing shot. The only thing that could be described as an 'action' within the film is Merz picking up a pinecone, looking at it, turning it over in his hands, and then simply holding it. Merz died shortly after Dean shot the film, and there is something of a eulogistic atmosphere to the work. The elderly sculptor is at rest, reminiscing, taking stock. The inclusion of the pinecone appears unscripted, but fortuitously suggests a connection back to Merz's sculptures and the broader movement of Arte Povera, of which Merz was an influential figure. The materials of Arte Povera erring towards the everyday, incidental, ubiquitous, flotsam and jetsam of everyday life—like a pinecone— turned into installations. Dean's film is a mediative, observational, and absorbing film that draws on traditional notions of the capacity of portraiture but through the medium of film. The proximity of Merz's death to the production also imbues the work with melancholy; the work feels caught between a portrait and a memento mori. This is further emphasised by Dean's use of 16mm projection, a medium that is slowly fading away, has a definitive beginning and end in its physical length, and a materiality missing from the virtuality of digital video. The ghostly, apparitional nature of a projection gives the sense of a figure who has passed but remains held with the filmic material.

Dean's *'Mario Merz'* has held a long influence on my practice. I saw the work at the Henry Moore Institute in 2011, and its haunted, subtle sense of something perfectly formed stuck with me. The work has a tightness and fragility that further emphasises the crystal-like, ephemeral aura of the film and a sense of ghostly imprint.

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[369] Dean, Tacita. *Mario Merz*. 2002. 16mm film, colour, optical sound, 8min 30 seconds.

In re-editing and reframing *'Pier Paolo'* as a work within itself rather than a part of a larger performance or lecture, Dean's *'Mario Merz'* was a conceptual and formal touchstone. My work owes its initial lingering shots on the puppet's shoes, hands and facial close-ups to Dean's work. And more generally, the sense of a film made to capture the essence of the character as a mode of portraiture. In *'Pier Paolo'* I sought to use the camera to map the puppet's features and, in many ways, see what he could do when performed by a professional puppeteer. Although I had built the puppet, I have no acting ability, or desire to acquire any, so the filming was the first time I had seen the puppet animated. The experience of rehearsing and filming with the puppet was both comedic and reinforcing of the disquieting, uncanny feeling the puppet produces. The puppeteer Nix Wood performed the part for *'Pier Paolo'* miming to an audio recording of the script by Stefano Guerriero. Nix was hidden underneath the Rietveld chair the puppet sat on, which was lifted a couple of feet from the floor by leg extensions. The section where the seat and backrest of the chair meet had room for Nix's arm to reach through and animate the puppet, and as such, when rehearsing and filming, I could see little of Nix's body as it was hidden underneath the furniture. The resulting effect was of being in the room with just the puppet. Nix would continually animate the puppet, even when we were not filming. The puppet would smoke, scratch his head, and look around the room. Often, when I would direct Nix, she would pre-empt my words, miming my speech with the puppet. The overall sense was of the golem-esque figure I had produced coming to life, and sometimes even mocking me. I found myself, on more than one occasion, apologising to the puppet as I made sewing adjustments to his hands with a needle and thread. The experience of making and then filming the puppet shifted the thematic drive of the film towards portraiture. A record of the puppet coming into the world.

The Script

At this point in the thesis, please read-

'*Pier Paolo (Script)*', **text, 2021-ongoing.**

This can be found in the appendix 'The Scripts' section of the thesis under the title '*Pier Paolo (Script)*'.

The various guises in the work that now bears the title *'Pier Paolo'* took— conference presentation, video, and part of other performances— have resulted in the script for the work that has been adapted, evolved, and variously parsed out given the particular instances of use. This adaptive and adapting methodology for writing has carried through into *'On Sacred Time', 'Acid History; Into the Silver Screen'*, and *'The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion'* works, and takes as its genus Pasolini's idiosyncratic means of script writing.

I began working on an adaptation of the *'San Paolo'* text prior to my PhD, intending to produce a script but not the subsequent film. This original impulse rested on the concept of the script as a text to be invested with meaning and then released into the world; in this sense, it would be a text granted its own agency. The initial idea mirrored the professional relationship of scriptwriter and director— the former generating the material, the latter interpreting it. It was a conceptual conceit by which to produce images and have an aesthetic practice without making these images myself. The idea was an extension of Duchamp's notion in *'The Creative Act'* that the viewer, or in my case, the reader, completed the work. This sentiment is also found in Pasolini's writing on the screenplay, defining it as a form in which *'the reader (is) an accomplice'*. Pasolini conceptualises screenplays as an *'autonomous literary object'* that mediates from text to image, in cooperation with the reader, unlike any other written form. *'In other words: the author of a screenplay asks his addressee for a particular collaboration: namely, that of lending to the text "visual" completeness which it does not have, but at which it hints'*. [370]

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[370] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. 189 Pasolini goes on to claim that the screenplay also requests the readers '*representational imagination enters into a creative phase mechanically much higher and more intense than when he reads a novel'*.

Pasolini pioneered scriptwriting as an *'autonomous literary object'* through the 1960s, first organising his scripts to be published through Garzanti. As David Schwartz noted in his biography on Pasolini, *'The making of his films, which were also books, and the making of books about film and films by others proceeded hand-in-hand'.*[371] Pasolini is not alone in his move to make the screenplay a new form of literature. Stephen Maras' *'Screenplay; History, Theory and Practice'*[372] gives examples of early forms of screenplay published as writing in of itself. The significant distinction is Pasolini's literary heft as an author and poet before his work in cinema[373], and I think, even more crucially, the entwined and intertextual means by which script and film sit in relation.

The '*San Paolo*' script is singular in its form and unconventional structure. As I have already noted there is little explicit dialogue noted for individual actors— instead, Pasolini used numbered 'scenes' which use a descriptive, novelistic tone. Scenic tableaus and ideas are noted, with the resulting text inviting the reader to imagine as much as read. I have already outlined the connections between *'San Paolo'* and my methodology of practice; as such, we will look to another of Pasolini's film/script works— *'Theorema'*[374] (1968)— as a means to further understand the model of revised and extended scripting I have adopted in '*Pier Paolo'*.

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[371] Schwartz, Barth David. Pasolini Requiem: Second Edition. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 472-473.

[372] Maras, Steven. *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice*. London New York, NY: Wallflower Press, 2009. Pg. 45.

[373] Pasolini holds the rarefied distinction of a critically acclaimed writer moving into scriptwriting. I'm unable to bring to mind any other authors that have made such a move, Marguerite Duras with *'Hiroshima mon amour'* (1960) is perhaps the exception, and if so not to the degree in which the filmmaking overshadows the previous success. Joan Didion contributed to '*A Star is Born'* (1976), and William Faulkner to '*Big Sleep'* (1946), itself an adaptation of a Raymond Chandler novel, but neither could be claimed as 'scriptwriters'. Cormac McCarthy deserves an honourable mention in that he reversed the trend of novel becoming film with '*No Country for Old Men'* (2007) in that his original manuscript was a screenplay-directed by the Cohen Brothers before being adapted into a novel.

[374] *Teorema*. Drama, Mystery. Aetos Produzioni Cinematografiche, 1968.

Script for *'Theorema'*.

> *"a young man, maybe God, maybe the Devil, that is to say, authenticity, arrives in this family and all the characters are in crisis. The demonstration is not resolved."*[375]

'Theorema'[376] (1968)— the British title is often spelt *Theorem*— stars Terence Stamp in a virtually mute role, credited only as 'The Visitor', a handsome, enigmatic figure who arrives, seemingly without invitation, to the palatial home of an upper bourgeois Lombardy family. Stamp's character seems suspended between malign and benevolent, which gives the sense of 'The Visitor' as akin to a force of nature or supernatural energy than a man with a specific intention. In the film, each family member is seduced by The Visitor, after which he disappears. The combination of sexual awaking plus abandonment produces a psychological break in each member of the family; the teenage daughter enters a catatonic state, the son becomes an obsessive abstract painter, the mother pursues increasingly dangerous casual sex with young men, and the father gives his factory— the source of family wealth— to the workers before stripping naked and walking to the summit of Mount Etna. The maid of the family returns to her home village, where she performs various miracles before requesting that she be buried alive. Many reviews of the film perceive 'The Visitor' as a Christ-like figure, but I think is more accurately described as 'messianic'. There is a demiurgical, gnostic sense of a figure connected to the metaphysical realm— but lacking Christ's resolved and directed intent (particularly the Christ Pasolini himself depicted in *'The Gospel According to Matthew')*. The Visitor's action is catalytic, producing a psychological revelation in each family member, but connected to a gnostic, dualistic sense of a sacred force from the past untethered from the neat, wholesome trinity of the established church. 'The Visitor' is, in my reading, a pure expression of Pasolini's understanding of this sacred force as undermining bourgeois ideals and the codified religion— which ultimately serves

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[375] Global, Owen. *Culture Internet Media Monopoly Political Economy Places: 'Monthly Review | Disney, Salò, and Pasolini's Inconsumable Art'. Monthly Review* (blog), 1 November 2021. https://monthlyreview.org/2021/11/01/disney-salo-and-pasolinis-inconsumable-art/.

[376] *Teorema*. Drama, Mystery. Aetos Produzioni Cinematografiche, 1968.

the material, capitalistic world— and that undermines true spiritual engagement. The film's contemporaneity to the writing of *'San Paolo'* creates a parallel reading of *'The Visitor'* and *'St Paul'* as cut from very similar cloth. They are both characters that display the ambivalence to wholly good or bad figures that Pasolini saw as integral to a description of sacredness.

The script for '*Theorem'* was published in the same year as the film's release and has some striking correspondences with the *'San Paolo'* script, using prose in short paragraphs to describe the progression of the narrative, visual description and allusion are employed rather than the dialogue-heavy weighting of a conventional film script. The book of '*Theorem'* also features an extended introduction of poems, appendixes and brief chapters with titles such as *'The Sacred Sex of the Guest', Can a Father Be Mortal',* and *'From Possessor to Possessed'.* Each of these fragments provides introductory material for the script, much like the *'Plan for a Film About St Paul'* section of the *'San Paolo'*.

An element that I found particularly intriguing in the '*Therom'* script is the dual process of scripting and filming employed by Pasolini, reversing, or at least disregarding the notion the script must precede the film:

> *Oswald Stack: Do you give all the actors the complete script?*
>
> *Pier Paolo Pasolini: When it exists, yes. But Theorem, for example, I shot almost without a script at all'.* [377]

In the introductory notes to the English edition of the script, its translator, Stuart Hood, makes the claim that *'Theorem was written and filmed simultaneously…It was, he explained, as if the book had been painted with one hand while with the other he was working on a fresco— the film'.* [378]

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[377] Stack, Oswald. *Pasolini on Pasolini.* First Printing edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 1969. Pg 133.

[378] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem.* Quartet Encounters. London: Quartet, 1992. Coverpiece and pg. viii are used in this quotation.

The unconventional form of script writing employed by Pasolini in the '*San Paolo'* project would, in *Theorem,* be pushed even further. The script is lifted from a supporting and technical document to an '*autonomous literary object'.* But rather than existing solely apart from the film, it produces an intertextual/filmic set of objects, either engaged in isolation or as familial works. The historical correspondence to the *San Paolo* projects allows for the speculation that the script and (un-made) film of *San Paolo* would have operated in much the same way.

Erik Bullot has noted the 'unmade' films' kinship to Maurice Blanchot's *'Where Is Literature Going?'* in which fragmentation and speculative writing is used so that *'the essence of [film] is precisely to escape any essential determination, any assertion that stabilises it or even realises it: it is never already there, it is always to be rediscovered or reinvented'*[379]. Bullot also alerted me to Morad Montazami's concept of studying screenplays under the umbrella of *'scriptology'* which Bullot defines as a *"science of works to come", a science that focuses on the study of unrealised scripts in their dual temporality, something past and still to be'.*[380]

I found the idea of a *'dual temporality'* inherent to the script form resonating with the messianic time and the psychological correspondence of Paul and Pasolini. In my work, the script— like essay-film— utilises a '*capacity of exemplification',* performing the ideas through its form; '*discover(ing) its own methods of actualisation'.*

The use of the puppet also freed me in the writing of the script, allowing Pasolini's voice to enter the work but also be remixed, reformulated, and redirected to my concerns. The scriptwriting mode operated at a few different levels. In the case of '*Pier Paolo',* the script was written in response to the injunction to describe and introduce the Pasolini puppet as a character and fulfil the criteria of the conference presentation. The script also supplants these formal criteria with an index of quotation and corresponding ideas around the duality of St Paul in Pasolini's script,

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[379] Bullot, Erik. '*Unmade Film'*. Accessed 31 March 2022. https://urielorlow.net/le-film-et-son-double-les-laboratoires-aubervilliers/. Pg. 46
In the essay Bullot replaces Blanchot's 'literature' with 'film' as I have reproduced it here.
[380] Ibid Pg. 48

the duality that can be seen in Pasolini himself, and the interlinking ideas around place, history, and the nature of Pasolini's 'reality' concept. The script has extensive footnotes to delineate where the respective quotations come from, and what has gone through a process of paraphrasing or redirection. This process set a template for the writing for the subsequent scripts— *'On Sacred Time', 'Acid History; Into the Silver Screen'*, and *'The Form An Object Takes in Oblivion'*— in which the beginning work for the writing would be a rough idea of presentation by the puppet around which I could gather quotations, my writing, music, images, and other artworks. The scripting process is akin to a textual collage mapping a constellation of references.

My scripting also circumvented the traditional chronology of the script as originary text from which a film is produced. I have returned to the scripts post-filming, adding additional elements, some of which have then been filmed, and others simply left. The script retains a protean and mutable capacity, allowing it to operate separately from the film work, as well as suggesting extensions to the film pieces. In this sense, the script is freed from being subordinate to the film work. In the case of '*Pier Paolo'*, the script ended up as a toolbox of phrases and quotations that I remixed for different occasions. Material generated on research trips to Rome, the South of France, and Delphi— made after the filming of '*Pier Paolo'*— have also been incorporated into the scripted work, which produces a situation in which the script and film operate *'simultaneously and dialectically'*.[381] Instead of the script solely creating the form for the film to be made, the making of the films has also opened new room to extend and write within the script.

In writing *'Pier Paolo'* the project of scripting a new version of *'San Paolo'* advanced and acquired the meta-level of a film which would— as Pasolini did in *Appunti per Un'Orestiade Africana* (1970) and *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il*

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[381] I take this phrase from Philippe Sollers in a text where he states that he wrote his books; *'Nombres'* a novel, and *'Logiques'* a collection of essays with a *'need to be read simultaneously and dialectically. In the first text fiction serves to open a scene whose animating principles are given by the second'*. Sollers, Philippe, and David Hayman. *Writing and the Experience of Limits*. European Perspectives. New York ; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1983. Pg. 2. The book is listed as part of the 'Essential Bibliography' Pasolini gives at the beginning of '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'*[1] (1975) and which I reference in the *'On Sacred Knowledge'* film.

vangelo secondo Matteo' (1965)— be a series of reflections, notes, investigations, and vignettes around an attempt to make a new *'San Paolo'* rather than a direct adaptation of Pasolini's script. As I have already stated, the puppet was, in many ways, the product of a creative block in how to do what I had proposed in making a new version of Pasolini's St. Paul project. The making of the *'Pier Paolo'* script and film produced the route out of this impasse. The puppet allowed the inclusion of Pasolini as a character in my new version, and by working in collaboration with him, the scripts and films I have made can be read as the constellation of thoughts, attempts, and investigations as to how the umbrella idea of a new *'San Paolo'* could be made. As the puppet says in *'Pier Paolo (Script)';*

> ```
> 'You want to film, but to
> film what? Not a documentary
> or a film, maybe like me you
> want to make film notes for a
> film'382.
> ```

As I have already detailed in the *'New Trilogy'* section of the thesis, the films *'Il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1967)*, 'Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* (1975) and *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1965) were essential as contextualising films for my interpretation of *'San Paolo',* and as such my film and script required space for these references to be included. The making of '*Pier Paolo'* opened the intra-textual, collaged, and appropriated methodology as a means to make a film that suggested and investigated what a new *'San Paolo'* would be.

An example of this meta performance in the '*Pier Paolo'* script, which laminates Pasolini into the story, would include the following quote, spoken by the Puppet in both script and film versions of *'Pier Paolo'-*

> ```
> 'The film on St Paul
> questions not the validity of
> the church but  mode of
> existence'. It is the
> ambition and duality of Paul
> ```

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[382] *'Pier Paolo (Script)'* This is paraphrasing Pasolini in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Appunti per Un'Orestiade Africana*. Documentary. IDI Cinematografica, I Film Dell'Orso, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1970. 1 min 21 seconds.

```
that I see reflected back
upon myself.

I think there are some facets
of my character that has this
mystifying quality'.383
```

The puppet hints at the 'mode' in which the church operates, not the *validity* of a religious experience, tying this notion of a split, dual, or schizophrenic ontology to St Paul's very nature while also incorporating the puppet Pasolini into this understanding of a deeply contrary and paradoxical figure. By using *'Pier Paolo'* as an introduction to the puppet, I wanted to leverage the idea of Pasolini and Paul as similar and intertwined figures in my new version of the story. In self-proclaiming his 'mystifying quality', the puppet alludes to a unison with St. Paul and also operates as an unaware joke about his nature; he is mystifying not because of the deep unintelligible depths of his sacred engagement but because he is a muppet giving an impromptu lecture on the form of reality.

The puppet also expands on the capacity for a sacred force to imprint itself on place and objects, allowing history to seep into the present in unexpected ways.

```
'My tendency, is always to
see something sacred,
something mythical,
something… epic the quality
of everything, even in the
most simple, humdrum, banal
objects and events'384. It is
in this tension of place and
history as immeasurably
interlinked and in which
reality can be restored.
```

This is an underlying theme of the *'San Paolo'* relying as it does on the transposition of time and place as its central narrative feature. The statement adds significance to the objects seen in the film, suggesting that the lingering close-ups of

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383 *'Pier Paolo (Script)'* This is paraphrasing Pasolini in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Appunti per Un'Orestiade Africana*. Documentary. IDI Cinematografica, I Film Dell'Orso, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1970. 1 min 21 seconds.
384 Ibid

the Klee painting, ashtray, script, and even the reanimation of Pasolini in puppet form might operate as a conduit to the past.

The puppet's recital of *'Gramsci's Ashes',* at the end of *'Pier Paolo',* compounds the idea of history as energy locked inside material culture, alluding to the soil as a form of *'stone tape'*— a theory I came across in a text by Mark Leckey, in which he describes it as a concept that-

> *'speculates that certain building materials, such as stone, wood, or concrete, have properties similar to that of magnetic tape. These materials can store the energy created by emotional disturbance or traumatic event…The disturbance is converted into a signal that is then recorded within the material surface itself, which then becomes the transmission medium, or physical channel, that carries the signal…By identifying the signal, these earlier perturbations can be regenerated and retransmitted'.* [385]

Leckey's video works *'Cinema in the Round'*[386] and *'In the Long Tail'*[387] have served as touchstone pieces for the development of my essay-film and performance lectures. The above quote is taken from the catalogue for Leckey's Tate Britain exhibition *'O' Magic Power of Bleakness'* an installation and film work. The show's centrepiece was a 1:1 scale reconstruction of a motorway underpass located in Birkenhead, the town in which Leckey grew up. The accompanying video work— and script published as part of the exhibition— allude to Leckey's memory of encountering a faerie-like creature whilst playing underneath the bridge as a child. The work speculates on the bridge as a vast concrete *'stone tape'* in which this faerie is indelibly tied. Pasolini's conception of place as historically charged resonates with this perception of location as a receptacle of historical features which can be reanimated and retransmitted— I have already outlined this understanding of location in the *'New Trilogy'* section of the thesis— in my film I attempt to engage the idea of 'sensibility of place', Leckey and Pasolini point towards, in my edited version of *'Gramsci's Ashes'* as performed by the puppet;

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[385] Wallis, Clarrie, Ed Atkins, Claire Potter, and Catherine Wood. *Mark Leckey: O' Magic Power of Bleakness.* 1st edition. London: Tate Publishing, 2019. Pg 106

[386] Leckey, Mark. *Cinema-In-the-Round.* 2008-2006. Video (colour, sound) 42 mins 21 secs. MoMA, New York.

[387] Leckey, Mark. *In the Long Tail.* 2009. Performance.

```
        'Harsh in climate,
        deep in gentle history,
        through the soil within,
        these walls another soil
        seeps

        But I, with the conscious
        heart of one who lives only
        in history, how can I ever
        act with pure passion again,
        when I know that our history
        has ended?'388
```

The mirroring of my confrontation with the puppet to Pasolini's intellectual reckoning with Pound is a theme extended in the recital of a poem. As indicated by the title card, the poem is a work by Pasolini, titled '*Gramsci's Ashes*'; the section I include is a massive abridgement to the original work which runs to ten pages with six sections. Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist philosopher and journalist imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926 who died in imprisonment in 1937. Gramsci's *'Prison Notebooks'* were published in Italy during the late 1940s and are largely where Pasolini derives his understanding of Marxist politics. Pasolini stating, *'I am a Marxist who has read little Marx. I read Gramsci more'.*[389]

The poem uses the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, the location of Gramsci's grave, as an allegorical figure for an extended mediation on history and intellectual lineage. In the poem soil, ashes, and stone are used as material embodiments of history, which has not passed away but entered a different index, an alternate register of memory. The use of the poem in '*Pier Paolo*' signals the capacity for material culture to engender unexpected historical returns, as well as the mysterious correspondence of character between Gramsci and Pasolini, Pasolini and St Paul.

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[388] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and James Ivory. *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Bilingual Edition*. Edited by Stephen Sartarelli. Bilingual ed. edition. University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pg. 166

[389] Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 570.

The duality of Pasolini and Paul's characters, and the haunting of the puppet by St Paul in the film *'On Sacred Time',* is also foreshadowed in the recital of '*Gramsci's Ashes'* and a line from the script that reads-

```
        'The shame of self-
        contradiction, to be / with
        you and against you in
        visceral darkness'390
```

The grandiose delivery of the poem by the puppet is intended to be both humorous and an elevation of the words to a kind of incantation or spell. A ritual by which re-enters history as an unchronological, plastic state, which formed the basis for the next film using the puppet— *'On Sacred Time'.*

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[390] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and James Ivory. *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Bilingual Edition*. Edited by Stephen Sartarelli. Bilingual ed. edition. University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pg. 175.

On Sacred Time

Messianic Fall

'*On Sacred Time'* features the puppet Pasolini entering a lecture theatre, ostensibly to deliver a talk on the nature of sacred time in his work. Over the course of the lecture, the puppet becomes increasingly agitated— from what at first appear to be intrusive thoughts— but what is finally revealed to be some form of daemon that has embodied itself and which the script names *'The Four-Eyed Man'.*

The final scene of the film shows the puppet so affected by the words, sound, and colourful aura the *'The Four-Eyed Man'* is directing at him that he falls to the floor, clutching his face screaming, '*my eyes, my eyes, I cannot see!'.* The puppet Pasolini has been struck down with a violent religious energy emanating from '*The Four-Eyed Man',* which has a direct parallel to St. Paul's 'Road of Damascus' conversion in which a divine light strikes Paul from his horse, renders him blind, and declares *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"* Acts (9: 3-9). The conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus is used as a refrain throughout the film; a depiction of the event by Brueghel[391] is repeatedly shown, and the film begins with the puppet directly alluding to the event in the opening lines of the lecture;

```
"'A fall from the horse, on
the road to Damascus, didn't
occur for the simple reason
that I was dismounted from
the horse and for a good long
time, dragged, still bound to
the stirrup, striking my head
on the dust, the stones, and
the mud of the road of
```

---

[391] Pieter Bruegel the Elder. *Conversion of Paul*. 1567. Oil on Panel. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

```
Damascus. Thus nothing
happened: I didn't fall
because I had already fallen
and been dragged by this
horse, let us say, of the
life of the world'[392]. The
crudeness of material reality
is unyielding, but can be
shot through by a sacred
power, the fragment of un-
homogeneous time".[393]
```

The opening reference to the Pauline conversion is a direct quote from Pasolini, which displays a kinship the director felt with the figure of Paul but with a slight alteration to the story. The traditional understanding of the sinful Saul's conversion into the saintly Paul is absolute— Paul sheds his previous life and enters wholly into the service of Christ. As I have already shown Pasolini's conception of St. Paul is a figure held between the polarities of saint and sinner; in the script for St. Paul, he is a figure that manages to contaminate the very genus of Christianity as an institution with the legalistic and managerial ethos which Saul embodied as a Pharisee. The form of Pauline conversion offered by Pasolini in his *'fall from the horse'* is without the presence or intervention of Jesus. Pasolini's description of the scene and his self-identification with this epic theological and political moment removes the explicit intervention of a God Head into life and suggests instead that reality is a kind of trauma. He is *'dragged, still bound to the stirrup, striking my head on the dust, the stones, and the mud of the road of Damascus'* and that this is *'the life of the world'*. As in much of Pasolini's work, the reality of life is one in which violence, love, the every day, and the sacred operate as an admixture. Pasolini's invocation, description and identification of the Pauline conversion in this quote is also a prophetic echo of his death— murdered by unidentified assailants who repeatedly drove his car over his body in the dusty scrubland of Ostia.

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[392] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. xxv.
[393] Whitaker, Joshua. *'On Scared Time'*, video and sound 12 minutes 53 seconds, 2022.

My addition to this quotation, and its inclusion as a poetically delivered prologue to the puppets lecture, suggests there is a messianic fragment that is made available in Pasolini's retelling of the Pauline conversion moment. Removing the Christ figure from the parable does not eliminate the possibility of a sacred encounter. Instead, it suggests it is to be found in the *'crude materiality'* of '*the life of the world'*— the mud, dust, and stones. This concept is extended by the puppet Pasolini— showing an image of the Carrera marble mines— he states, *'This is the bedrock of a world. A spewing, profligate, cache of hard white material…It is the veil and transition between the unreality of the world and the essential active material. The mines are less a source and more an open wound'.*[394] Carrera marble has been mined from the Roman period to the modern day. Situated in the North of Tuscany, Carrera marble is used in some of Western culture's most iconic architecture, monuments and sculpture; the Pantheon, Trajan's Column, and Michelangelo's *'Pietà'* and *'David'* are notable examples. The puppets tacitly suggests that this material is foundational to a concept of the sacred as embedded both in landscape and culture. And like Pasolini's revision of the Damascus story implies that the sacred originates not from a sovereign divinity but from the *'active material'* of our everyday interaction with the world.

The messianic encounter in this version of the Pauline conversion is not one that occurs with grand oratory and explicit intervention by God as in Acts — *'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do'* (Acts 9:5-6)— but in the course of daily activity, we are perpetually 'dragged' through. The messianic in this reading is one that is small, fleeting, and happens within the course of daily life. Both the beginning and the end of the film utilise a contrast of the sublime with the ridiculous as a state in which the messianic might arise. The prologue section situates the admixture of the epic into the oddball in the counterplay of a sonorous, solemn delivery of speech with the cartoonish appearance of the puppet— much like the final delivery of the poem *Gramsci's Ashes'* in *'Pier Paolo'.* The end of the work extends this theme, introducing the dark humour of a puppet undergoing a torturous blinding at the

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[394] Whitaker, Joshua. *'On Scared Time'*, video and sound 12 minutes 53 seconds, 2022. (8 minutes 16seconds).

hands of a mythic unseen force. The gravity and violence of the Pauline conversion enacted on the puppet is both painful to watch— and patently absurd.

The puppet's assertion at the beginning of the film that he did not undergo a 'fall' is, in effect, answered in the finale— in which a demonic energy blinds the puppet as penance for his hubris. The bookending of the film with parallels to the Damascus incident, alongside the symbolic refrain of the fall in Brueghel's painting, situate Paul's conversion as a moment in which gesture, event, violence, comedy, and the twinning of the puppet and St Paul can be read in the practice.

Brueghel's 'Conversion of Paul'.

Brueghel's *'Conversion of Paul'* is included in the film to extend the corporeal, material dimension of the Damascene fall in my adaptation of Pasolini's work. Pasolini's use of Renaissance painting as a motif in his filmmaking is well noted; a student of Roberto Longhi in the 1940s, Pasolini had a reverence for southern European painting from the 15th and 16th centuries, particularly Giotto, Pontormo, Fiorentino, and Masaccio each of which are referenced in his cinema. I included the *'Conversion of Paul'* in '*On Sacred Time'* as a painting that sits outside Pasolini's most typical range of selection but foregrounds Pasolini's use of place, transposition, and the conflation of the banal with the epic.

The painting was completed in 1567 and is part of a suite of paintings by Bruegel setting biblical scenes within his own time. '*The Procession to Calvary'*, '*The Census at Bethlehem'*, '*Landscape with the Flight into Egypt'*, and '*The Suicide of Saul'* all depict pivotal scenes from the New and Old Testament within the Flemish landscape employing vernacular dress, architecture, and quotidian activity to couch a historical event. In each case, Bruegel depicts the titular action of the painting in miniature. Situating the principal figure of the painting in mid-distance, at a diminutive scale, almost lost amongst the landscape and vibrant activity that surrounds them, this is a classic Mannerist device which prompts us as the viewer to search around the work, exploring the detailed rendering of more every day, and often comic, activity that frames the critical event.

The '*Conversion of Paul'* uses a similar formal composition— the fall of Saul/Paul shown in the centre right at a Lilliputian scale— an armed procession up a steep mountain and a view to the sea at the left of the painting dominating much of the pictorial space. The major difference between the previously cited examples of Bruegel's Biblic paintings is the setting, which remains contemporaneous to Bruegel's time but is set in an alpine landscape missing from the Flemish flatlands. The painting can be understood as an allegory, conflating the contemporary events of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation with Paul's conversion. Brueghel's religious conviction is not known for certain; although married to a Catholic, he seems to have been sympathetic to some Protestant ideas. The painting is pointed in its reference to the persecution of Religious groups—Saul is on his journey to identify and punish early Christians— without placing Catholic or Protestant ideals on either side of the hubris that the divine force of Christ intervenes upon. Situating the biblical tale in an alpine landscape might have been a reference to the 'Iron Duke' (Grand Duke of Alba) marching over the Alps in the year the painting was made to suppress a Protestant uprising in the Netherlands. The most prominent figure of the painting —a black figure seated with his back to the viewer astride a white horse— is reputed to represent the Iron Duke.

My interest in the painting lies in its use of transposition of place and time to speculate on the lasting power of the Damascene fall on contemporary life. This has obvious parallels to the transpositions Pasolini performs in the script for San Paolo, drawing the biblical text into the modern-day and emphasising the political force of place resonating with the events that unfold within it. Just as Pasolini attributed specific ideals to the substitution of place in the San Paolo script [395] Bruegel's

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[395] *'The centre of the modern world – the capital of colonialism and of modern imperialism – the seat of modern power over the rest of the earth is not any longer, today, Rome. And if it isn't Rome, what is it? It seems clear to me: New York, along with Washington. In the second place: the cultural, ideological, civil, in its own way religious centre – the sanctuary, that is, of enlightened and intelligent conformism is no longer Jerusalem, but Paris. The city that is equivalent to the Athens of that moment, then, is in large measure the Rome of today (seen naturally as a city of grand historical but not religious tradition). And Antioch could probably be replaced, by analogy, by London (insofar as it is the capital of an imperial antecedent of American supremacy, just as the Macedonian–Alexandrian empire preceded the Roman empire)'*. Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 4.

biblical scenes assert the historical transcendence of the Bible, proposing that these events are not locked to a particular moment but like the messianic gap in history can seep into the present without warning. The Mannerist convention of drawing the viewer's eye deep into the painting, framing the main story with attentive detail to commonplace objects, also chimes with Pasolini's *'tendency always to see something sacred and mythical in the epic the quality of everything, even the most humdrum, simple and banal objects and events'.* [396]

The 'Four-Eyed Man'

The opening scenes of *'On Sacred Time'* show the puppet peering through a muppet-style prop of a filmmaker's viewfinder. The viewfinder reinforces the stereotypical trope of an auteur director framing a shot, a pretentious and comically absurd activity for a puppet. But when the puppet looks through the viewfinder, the film cuts to a first-person view from the puppet's perspective scanning the Bruegel painting. Searching the painting, emphasising the need to scan the work to find the event at its heart. When looking through this device, the first appearance of the *'Four-Eyed Man'* occurs, flashing up in the puppet's view. The activity of close observation of the Damascene Fall, alongside the transposition of time and place shown in the painting, reveals the divine force that haunts the film.

The source of this image is the cover of Mircea Eliade's *'The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion'*[397], a book reputed to be influential on Pasolini. Mirecea's concept of *'hierophany'*— the appearance of the sacred in landscape, objects, and events chimes neatly with Pasolini's own concept of the sacred. The book gives no citation as to the source of the image, and I have had no luck tracking down its origin. Untethered from a specific origin, I read the image as akin to a Janus face in line with Benjamin's description of *'History is like Janus; it has two faces.*

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[396] *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film Maker's Life*. Documentary, Short, Biography, 1970.

[397] Eliade, Mircea, Willard R. Trask, and Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. A Harvest Book. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1987.

Whether it looks at the past or the present, it sees the same things'. [398] Rather than
having the two conjoined faces in opposing directions, as Janus is usually depicted, I
interpret this image as a Janus merged into one visage but retaining four eyes,
trained simultaneously on the present, past, and future. In *'The Sacred and the
Profane'* the figure of the *'religious man' 'who constantly reads the events produced
in reality as hierophanies, that is, divine disclosures'* is described— I take the cover
image to be a representation of this figure.

The appearance of the *'Four-Eyed Man'* occurs throughout '*On Sacred Time',*
accompanied by the haunting droning organ music of Ana von Hausswolff, at first
initiated by the puppet's investigation of the Bruegel and Pontormo paintings, before
finally taking over and rendering the puppet blind. As his force within the film
increases, the *'Four-Eyed Man' makes* longer proclamations, beginning with the
cryptic *'hate is above us'*— an allusion to the Hermetic phrase *'as above, so below.
So below, as above',* before delivering longer lines taken from Thessalians, The
Gospel of Mark*,* Pasolini's *'Porcile'* [399] (1969) and '*Medea'* (1969). The *'Four-Eyed
Man'* character is both part of the puppet's psyche and enforcing violence on him
from elsewhere. The figure elaborates on Pasolini's concept of the Pauline figure as
'schizophrenic' and my extension of this to Pasolini's own paradoxical and contrary
nature. The *'Four-Eyed Man'* is, therefore, both an evil and divine force, in part a
representation of St Paul and a version of Pasolini.

The *'Four-Eyed Man's'* first dialogue is from Psalms (78:2), a rare instance of a
quotation from the Old Testament in this body of work.

```
'I will open my mouth in
parables, I will utter things
which have been kept secret
from the foundations of the
world'.
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[400]

[398] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.:
Harvard University Press, 2002. Pg 14

[399] *Porcile*. Drama. I Film Dell'Orso, Internazionale Nembo Distribuzione
Importazione Esportazione Film (INDIEF), IDI Cinematografica, 1969.

[400] Psalms 78:2.

The implication of this proclamation authored prior to the coming of Christ— in a project orientated around Jesus as a catalyst for a Pauline-inflected messianism— is of the *'Four-Eyed Man'* as a representation of Paul drawing on a longer history of divine force, the prehistorical primordial concept of the scared Pasolini saw writ large in the proletarian communities of the Italian south which he described as *'The characteristics of the lumpenproletariat are prehistoric, are indeed pre-Christian; the moral world of a lumpenproletarian does not know Christianity'*.[401] And this is instrumental to the *'secret foundations'* of a veiled reality waiting to be uncovered via an act of messianic revelation.

The *'Four-Eyed Man's'* use of a Psalm— traditionally sung as a hymn in Jewish and Christian worship—further ties the character to the effect of diegetic, psychologically invasive music of Ana von Hausswolff on the puppet. The psalm and the rest of the *'four-eyed man's'* vocal interruptions imply a pre-Christian ritual and the parable structure of the Psalm as an incantation.

The 'Four-Eyed Man's' proclamation that *'Hate is above us'* and its connection to the Hermetic mirroring of a celestial realm *'above'* in correspondence to the profane world of *'below'* reinforces the doubled and contrary nature of the sacred I see in Pasolini's and which I seek to reproduce in my own work. The line contaminates the heavenly with hate, suggesting a gnostic or mystical Christian notation of God as a sick demiurge, with the *'Four-Eyed Man'* in the role of St Paul, a saintly messenger but also shot through with violent condemnation.

The *'four-eyed man'* continues this rumination on the duality of the sacred and the profane-

```
'All is holy, all is holy,
all is holy. There is nothing
natural in nature; keep that
in
mind. When nature seems
natural to you, all is over—
```

[401] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World,* Film Quarterly, Summer, 1965, Vol. 18, No. 4 University of California Press pp. 31-45 Pg. 36.

```
and something else will
begin. No more sky! No more
sea!'402 No more mountains!
```

The statement echoes Pasolini's sentiments on the unreality of nature — '*nature doesn't seem natural to me…*'— and the easy slip from what appears to be a neutral, material reality into '*mythical… epic the quality of everything*'. And adds the destruction of the material world, as apocalyptic event, as an answer to the unresolved balance of the sacred within the profane. The sea, mountains, and sea highlight the puppet's investigation of the Brueghel painting and his understanding of the Carrera marble mines as implicated in an apocalyptic event. A moment of unescapable revelation is prophesied in the '*'Four-Eyed Man's'* following line-

```
When people are saying,
"Everything is peaceful and
secure," then disaster will
fall on them. And there will
be no escape403. But about
that day or hour no one
knows, not even the angels in
heaven, nor the Son, but only
the Father404'.
```

But the virality of God as father is undermined in his final outburst-

```
'I have killed my Father, I
have eaten human flesh, and I
tremble with joy'405. No more
sky! No more sea! No more
mountains!
```

The *'Four-Eyed Man'* instates himself as the angel of the apocalypse, overtaking God via Oedipal murder, debasing himself in the taboo of cannibalism, and revelling in the debasement. The final lines' delivery and content suggest a black liturgy to bring about the apocalypse. This invocation of ritual is accompanied by the puppet

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[402] This is the Centeurs advice to a young Jason at the beginning of *'Medea'* (1969) The quote as it appears here is taken from —Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem: Second Edition*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 514

[403] Thessolians 5:3

[404] Mark 13:32

[405] *Porcile*. I Film Dell'Orso, Internazionale Nembo Distribuzione Importazione Esportazione Film (INDIEF), IDI Cinematografica, 1969.

falling from the lectern, unable to repel the *'Four-Eyed Man's'* speech, overtaken by a coloured atmosphere, the *'Four-Eyed Man'* has manifested along with organ music. The sound has a dissonant ecclesiastical feel, reinforcing the notion of good and evil, and the sacred and profane in mixture. The puppet's loss of sight represents a loss of subjectivity and alludes to the consequence of Oedipal murder committed by the *'Four-Eyed Man'*. The puppet and the *'Four-Eyed Man'* ideations of apocalypse, and their fate become increasingly bound through the film, further suggesting a kinship of duality in nature between them.

Pontormo's 'Deposition from the Cross'.

Along with Bruegel's '*Conversion of Paul'* Pontormo's '*Deposition from the Cross'* [406]is shown throughout the film, seen through the puppet's viewfinder, in superimposition with the puppet, and a series of portrait close-ups. In each case, these shots are cut with a still from Pasolini's '*La Ricotta'*[407] (1963), a film in which a director, played by Orson Welles, attempts to film Christ's crucifixion with Pontormo's painting serving as a reference for framing the scene.

In counterpoint to the Brueghel painting, Pontormo's depiction of a Biblical scene is devoid of landscape; only bodies and faces fill the pictorial frame. Even the titular *'cross'* of the title is absent, a passion scene without a crucifix. If Brueghel's *'Pauline Conversion'* is a work imbued with place as the dimension by which the sacred can emerge, Pontormo's *'Deposition from the Cross'* is included in *'On Sacred Time'* as an instance of the body as the site sacred energy might manifest. The accord between landscape and body as privileged locations for the sacred in Pasolini's work is most clearly highlighted in the photographic anthology of Pasolini's films '*Pasolini's Bodies and Places'*[408] by Michele Mancini and Giuseppe

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[406] Pontormo, Jacopo. *The Deposition from the Cross*. 1528. Oil on Canvas. Capponi Chapel of the Church of Santa Felicita, Florence, Italy.

[407] *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* Comedy, Drama. Arco Film, Cineriz, Societé Cinématographique Lyre, 1963.

[408] Reichenbach, Benedikt, Michele Mancini, Giuseppe Perrella, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, eds. *Pasolini's Bodies and Places*. Translated by Ann Goldstein and Jobst Grapow. English edition by Benedikt Reichenbach. Zürich: Edition Patrick Frey, 2017.

Perrella, which served as a conceptual reference for the inclusion of Bruegel and Pontormo's paintings in '*On Sacred Time*'.

'*Pasolini's Bodies and Places*' is an intriguing piece of cinematic collage in book form made by Mancini and Perrella shortly after Pasolini's death. Hundreds of still images from Pasolini's films fill 600 pages ordered according to the titles 'bodies' or 'places' with further eclectic subcategories including '*headwear*', '*laughing*', '*effects and flagrancies*', '*excrement*', '*places of surveillance*', and '*the house of class*'. [409]The resulting effect is an encyclopedic visual volume of Pasolini's cinema, which bears conceptual similarities to Benjamin's '*Arcade's Project*', and Humphrey Jennings '*Pandaemonium*'[410]. As with Benjamin and Jennings' mass of quotations and fragmentary notes, '*Pasolini's Bodies and Places*' serves as an epic memorium to an idea in constellation, with non-chronology and free association between the images serving as the means by which to explore the work for the viewer.

Highlighting the body and place as part of the sacred concept described in my film was propelled by my engagement with Mancini and Perrella's book. And presents the Pontormo as the sacred 'bodies' in contrast to Brueghel's 'place'.

The film cuts between close-ups of the Pontormo and '*La Ricotta*' while the puppet states-

```
How do we work in the realm
of mythic, sacred reality?
How do we ape the best of St
Paul- the secular Saint,
while avoiding his worst- the
organising priest…a structure
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[409] Reichenbach, Benedikt, Michele Mancini, Giuseppe Perrella, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, eds. *Pasolini's Bodies and Places*. Translated by Ann Goldstein and Jobst Grapow. English edition by Benedikt Reichenbach. Zürich: Edition Patrick Frey, 2017.

[410] Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Jennings, Humphrey, and Frank Cottrell Boyce. *Pandaemonium 1660–1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*. Edited by Marie-Louise Jennings. Illustrated edition. Icon Books, 2012.

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that wants to be another
structure. The written
language of reality. 411
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Suggesting that sacred reality resides not in stasis but between points of images in relation. And that images evolving into one another offer a truer sense of reality than an autonomous object in isolation. The phrase *'a structure that wants to be another structure'* is taken from Pasolini's essay *'The Screenplay as a "Structure that Wants to Be Another Structure"'*[412] which, as I have shown in my description of the '*Pier Paolo*' film, explicates the idea of a screenplay which *'hints'* at a *'visual completeness'* in collaboration with the reader. And that in the transitional flow from text to imaginary image, a *'higher'* form of aesthetic practice is rendered. In the puppet's retelling of this idea drawn from Pasolini's writing, I posit that this move from one *'structure'*— text, image, film— to another is the site of a messianic interval or realisation of the sacred. The transposition of bodies and faces between the Pontormo and *'La Ricotta'* suggests that in doubling the deposition scene, some of its biblical divine force is accessed.

The lack of landscape in the Pontormo also highlights Jacob Taubes' reading of St Paul as a figure untethered from a material world and the insistence on corporeal reality to ground the Pauline story for Pasolini. In '*The Political Theology of Paul'* Taubes', I think with humorous intent, states-

> *'You notice Paul has very peculiar worries about nature. Of course they are not ecological worries. He's never seen a tree in his life. He travelled through the world just like Kafka- never described a tree, or mentioned one. I know types like this in Jerusalem. He doesn't write: Dear Friend, Nice weather here, or: Glorious nature all around me- he doesn't notice any of that. Just find me one place in a Pauline letter where he lets up from this passion, from this obsession, from this one theme that moves him…Nature appears only as a judgement'*. [413]

[411] Whitaker, Joshua. *'On Scared Time'*, video and sound 12 minutes 53 seconds, 2022.

[412] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005.

[413] Taubes, Jacob. *The Political Theology of Paul*. Translated by Dana Hollander. Illustrated edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004. Pg. 73.

Taubes' balance of the sublime and ridiculous as a form of bathos immediately appealed to my sense of the absurd as one potential condition for a messianic opening. The Pontormo would mirror Taubes' description of the Epistles, and by extension, much of the New Testament, as a text in which intent, action, law, belief, and events are recorded but very little of its material and physical placement in the world. The filmic recreation of the Pontormo picture in *'La Ricotta'* shows the actors continuously failing to achieve their fictional director's aspirations. They are disinterested, physically incapable, or fall out of character in amusement of what is trying to be achieved; the scene cannot be reproduced or is only as a failure. I included the painting and cinematic reproduction in *'On Sacred Time'* to highlight Pasolini's foregrounding of place in '*San Paolo'*— as well as '*Il vangelo secondo Matteo', 'Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il vangelo secondo Matteo',* all made after *'La Ricotta'*—as films which, I believe, utilise landscape, like the Brueghel painting, to most successfully invoke a sacred reality.

Fig 2. Whitaker, Joshua. *'On Scared Time'*, video and sound 12 minutes 53 seconds, 2022.

Essential Bibliography

'On Sacred Time' begins with the puppet Pasolini entering the lecture theatre, organising his notes, and smoking a cigarette. As in '*Pier Paolo',* close-ups of Pasolini's hands, feet, profile, and various objects he has arranged in order to give

the lecture are shown. The script notes that an *'essential bibliography'* is shown as part of these establishing shots. The filmed version of this is a pile of five books with the authors and titles of the books legible to the viewer. The books featured are;

Roland Barthes' '*Sade, Fourier, Loyola'*; Pierre Klossowski's '*Sade My Neighbor'*; Philippe Sollers '*Writing and the Experience of Limits';* Maurice Blanchot's '*Lautreamont and Sade';* and the Marquis de Sade's '*The 120 Days of Sodom: And Other Writings'*.[414]

This *'essential bibliography'* is a physical reproduction of the one given at the beginning of Pasolini's '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma'* [415](1975), and like the 'Pauline conversion' the repeated use of the shot is intended as a leitmotif, situating language, regulation and De Sade as integral but veiled features of the film.

The pile of books is seen throughout the film, visible to the left of the puppet in each wide shot, and is shown in close-up when the puppet Pasolini says-

> I realize that my longing
> for an idealized sacred that
> may never have existed –
> since the sacred has always
> been institutionalized, at
> the beginning by shamans, for
> example, and then by Priests,
> and then culture… 'Against
> this understanding of the
> sacred, in the script for St
> Paul, I make him double, I
> mean schizophrenic,

[414] Barthes, Roland. *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Klossowski, Pierre. *Sade My Neighbor*. Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1991. Sollers, Philippe, and David Hayman. *Writing and the Experience of Limits*. European Perspectives. New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1983. Blanchot, Maurice. *Lautreamont and Sade*. Translated by Stuart Kendall and Michelle Kendall. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004. Sade, Marquis de. *The 120 Days of Sodom: And Other Writings*. Cornerstone, 1991.

[415] Sade, Marquis de. *The 120 Days of Sodom: And Other Writings*. Cornerstone, 1991. Contains the essay *'Must We Burn Sade'* by Simone De Beauvoir. The inclusion of Sade's book also emphasises it's importance to the film.

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completely dissociated and in
two: one is the saint... the
other a priest'.416
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This portion of the film foreshadows the apocalyptic use of Pasolini's '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma*' (1975) in my film— '*The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion*'— and further emphasises my reading of the '*Salò*' as a film in which St. Paul operates as a spectral influence on the actions of the libertines. Unlike traditional Christianity's' insistence on the sacred as a pure and unfettered divine force, the puppet asserts that it is paradoxically bound and repressed to institutions and, as such, a regulation that is enforced through violence. The condition of the sacred is one that binds itself to culture, statehood, and organisations as contamination, rejecting a synthesis of opposing ideas, instead situating itself at an intra-position. In pairing this dialogue with the close-up of the '*essential bibliography*', my intention was to suggest that De Sade and a critical response to his work informed Pasolini's reading and adaptation of the Pauline story further than that which can be drawn from either the script for '*San Paolo*' or '*Salò o le 120 giornate di sodoma*' (1975). The books are talismanic— in the same way '*Angelus Novus*' in '*Pier Paolo*' and icon boards are used '*The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion*'— what is actually contained within the text is less important than the reference to them. By suggesting the books as an '*essential bibliography*' in the opening credits of '*Salò*' Pasolini invokes the idea of a deeper scripture that bounds the action of the film; my inclusion of them in '*On Sacred Time*' mirrors this, De Sade is in effect a ghost haunting the film invoked by the inclusion of the books. The Sadian nightmare of torture, rape, and murder legislated by a strict architecture of rules—and by association institution— is implied and implicated as the origin of the '*Four-Eyed Man's*' malicious action in the film and the intra position of St. Paul as '*schizophrenic, completely dissociated and in two: one is the saint... the other a priest*'. The notion of order begetting chaos mirrors Pasolini's idea of the sacred as a contamination, in which the messianic operates, in the gap between the sublime and the profane. And, as the inclusion of Sollers' book suggests, the idea of the sacred or an experience of a messianic moment is something at '*the Limits of Experience*'; it is

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416 Pasolini quoted from '*Il sogno del centauro*'. 1983. Edited by Jean Duflot. Rome: Editori Riuniti'.Benini, Stefania. This translation is from *Pasolini: The Sacred Flesh*. Toronto Italian Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pg. 22.

arrived at, or summoned, only at the moment in which incontestable positions collide, whilst holding on to a hope of redemption. The puppet's final statement before being overtaken by the *'Four-Eyed Man's'* violent energy asserts this position of the sacred as both present and covered by the religious institution, and that contradiction is central to formalising a messianic apocalyptic uncovering.

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'With every institution,
diplomatic actions and
euphemistic words are born.
With every institution, a
pact with one's conscience is
born.
With every institution, fear
of the other is born. The
institution of the Church was
only a necessity.⁴¹⁷ To
rationalise the mythic time,
the sacred object. 'I go down
into hell and to see things
that don't disturb the peace
of others. We are all
victims, we are all guilty.
And hell is rising towards
you'⁴¹⁸ that is the the
messianic apocalyptic
predicament. That which
institutions, the Church,
attempts to cover.
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[417] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 38.

[418] This is taken from Ferrara, Abel. *Pasolini*. Biography, Drama. Capricci Films, Urania Pictures S.r.l., Tarantula, 2019. However the Ferrara's quote is itself a paraphrased version of the last interview Pasolini gave which can be found in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *In Danger: A Pasolini Anthology*. Edited by Jack Hirschman. San Francisco, Calif: City Lights Publishers, 2010. Pg. 233.

'The Séance', or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen

Documentation of this script can be found in 'Appendix' document provided as part of this thesis.

'The Séance', or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen' — hereafter, I will refer to the film as *'The Séance'* for clarity— is an evolving lecture, performance, and text. The performed version of the work is accompanied by a PowerPoint of images, video, and music; the last version of the work also uses a 'snowperson' mask and the decapitated head of the puppet Pasolini; please see the images below for reference.

The version of the work included here is the edited and adapted script of the performance and should be considered an autonomous work of art in itself. This follows the logic, already described in the *'Pier Paolo'* section, of Pasolini's understanding of scripts as *'a structure that wants to be another structure'*[419]. The visual, musical, and performative aspects of the performance are described and extended upon in the script, opening a space by which *'the screenplay-text ...is a special and canonical request for collaboration from the reader... to think in images, reconstructing in his own head the film to which the screenplay alludes as a potential work'*[420].

The lecture's first manifestation was a request for a 15-20 minute artist talk as part of the 'Finley Forum' at The British School at Athens in early 2023. The 'Finley Forum' is an informal series of presentations given by researchers in residence at the School. The text/performance continues to be, in essence, an 'artist talk' or gloss of the project at the heart of the thesis. Some months later, as part of the residency, I was asked to give an 'Upper House' lecture at the school— a more formal talk given at the director's residence, which is when the talk evolved to a roughly hour-length presentation including images, film, and music as part of the performance. The third performance took place at the Hellenic Centre, London, around six months later as the culmination of the residency at The British School at Athens. The text submitted

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[419] *The Screenplay as a 'Structure that Wants to Be Another Structure* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005.
[420] Ibid Pg. 192.

as part of the PhD reflects the gestation and extended production of the work over the course of a year, editing together previous incarnations of the work with extra theatrical elements. I consider the work to be in continual evolution, with the possibility of new versions of the performance dependent on requests to give artist talks or presentations of research.

'The Séance', like *'On Sacred Time',* utilises the formal conventions of lectures as the basis by which to frame a story. In both *'The Séance'* and *'On Sacred Time',* the main protagonist of the work falls foul of the ideas they have ostensibly come to lecture upon— the 'Damascene Incident' in *'On Sacred Time'* and the activity of summoning daimons in *'The Séance'.* In this sense, the works are horrific parables. The somewhat preposterous ideas exposed at the beginning of each lecture are shown to not only be true but, in a Frankenstein-esque fashion, overtake the person exposing them. The work reverses bathos, beginning with what could be seen as ridiculous propositions— such as summoning golems as part of a research residency— before showing the potential outcome of taking such ideas seriously. Both *'The Séance'* and *'On Sacred Time'* end with sublime death or unexpected loss of subjectivity of the presenters. Absurdity is sublimated into profound sacred revelation.

'The Séance' script employs three different typefaces to describe the interaction of spoken word and reported action, visual and audio description, and demonic influence. The spoken and incidental framing of the lecture are rendered in regular and italicised Palantino—a stately and formal typeface that would go unnoticed in academic texts. The PowerPoint is described in Courier— this references the typefaces use as the standard font in cinematic script writing— as in the aforementioned quote from Pasolini these portions of the script invite the reader to *'reconstruct'* the images in their head. The third typeface used is Luminari— a modern design drawing on medieval church scripts. This typeface is used sparingly in the script, building in frequency as the work progresses, and is eventually revealed as the presence and words of 'the snowperson/ St. Paul', the same, or similar, divine force *'the four-eyed man'* represents in *'On Sacred Time'.*

The work as a whole uses the notion of quotation and repetition of written language as the means by which sacred political and cultural creation originates. The Luminari font is used as a marker throughout the text, describing apocalyptic sounds as the background to quotations by Amiri Baraka, Etel Adnan, and William Burroughs. Emphasising the idea of citation as ritual practice— when or before the texts are mentioned, seismic sound effects occur— the quotations linked to elemental reconfigurations of the earth. This is memory and language impacting itself on Delphi. Orpheus is also mentioned twice; in Adnan's poem as key to a connection of *'History and Nothingness',* and as a mosaic in the room where the Pasolini puppet is murdered or transformed into *'the snowperson'.* The Orphic myth of bridging life and death— of returning from hell— is also implied by *'the snowperson's'* final speech-

I am the first and the last.
I am the Living One;
I was dead,
And now look, I am alive forever and ever!
And I hold the keys of death,
and Hades.

Sun Ra, Lee Scratch Perry and Bootsy Collins are also presented as Orphic figures, suggesting that repetition of sound and music is linked to the language ritual of citation as an access to sacred revelatory futures.

Quotes by Adnan, Baraka, Barthes, Burroughs, and the speech of Pasolini and *'the snowperson'* are also rendered in Luminari, linking the citations to a common pool of language within the work. The presenter figure in the script describes this linking of quotations as working through a methodology suggested by Barthes' in '*The Preparation of the Novel'* [421] by which *'Reading becomes a form of writing, and writing becomes a kind of manifestation, an incantation, or an invocation for something to come from outside of it'.*[422] The script moves to formalise this activity

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[421] Barthes, Roland, and Kate Briggs. *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France*. Illustrated edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
[422] Whitaker, Josh. *'The Séance', or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen'*. Text. 2023-24.

of reading, note-taking, and writing as a *'hyper-sigil'* brought about by a practice of journal writing used by William Burroughs.

Incorporate this to the above paragraph,- *I think novel writing, at least for me, as you know, that happens through novel reading'.*[423]

In occult practice, a *'sigil'* is usually produced by writing down a short sentence describing a situation you hope will occur. This is then rendered as an acronym, e.g. —

I wish for great wealth.

Would be rendered as—

I.W.F.G.W.

The letters are then reconfigured, joined, and remixed through drawing. The drawing process produces the 'sigil'— a symbolic abstract expression of the original sentence. An example of what I.W.F.G.W. might become—
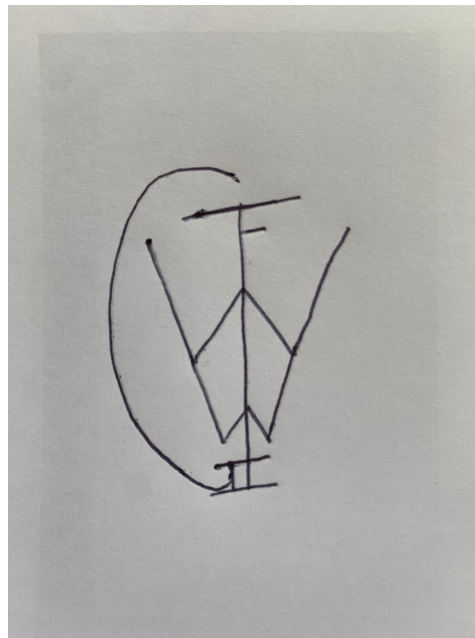
[423] Briggs, Kate. *'The Fitzcarraldo Editions Archive: The Fitzcarraldo Editions Archive: Kate Briggs In Conversation With Jennifer Hodgson on Apple Podcasts'.* Accessed 25 January 2024. https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/the-fitzcarraldo-editions-archive-kate-briggs-in-id1688756594?i=1000623027481.

This is dependent on the individual making the drawing with many possible sigils that could be produced from I.W.F.G.W. At this point, the piece of paper on which the sigil has been written is ritually destroyed. It is at this point that the sigil becomes a 'spell'.

Grant Morrison offered the idea of a 'hyper-sigil' to describe his process of writing the *'The Invisibles'* graphic novel series. [424] Morrison extends the notion of a 'sigil' stating-

> *"The 'hypersigil' or 'supersigil' develops the sigil concept beyond the static image and incorporates elements such as characterization, drama, and plot. The hypersigil is a sigil extended through the fourth dimension. My own comic book series 'The Invisibles' was a six-year long sigil in the form of an occult adventure story which consumed and recreated my life during the period of its composition and execution. The hypersigil is an immensely powerful and sometimes dangerous method for actually altering reality in accordance with intent. Results can be remarkable and shocking'.* [425]

The process of making a 'hyper-sigil' in *'The Séance'* uses Burroughs' journal writing method to blend automatic-writing with the elements of re-mix and juxtaposition found in the 'drawing' stage of sigil making. The script paraphrases Burroughs's method (which I first encountered in Michael Taussig's book *'I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own'*[426]) —

> **Write down the facts of what you did that day///Write down the other bits of reading and quotation that you're engaged with///Write down the things that are provoked by these fragments, that which memory connects you to///** *'Bringing these things together, weird… strange connections start to come about'.*[427]

[424] Morrison, Grant, and Various. *The Invisibles, Vol. 1: Say You Want A Revolution*. 1st edition. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2007.

[425] Morrison, Grant *Pop Magic!* in Morrison, Grant. *Book of Lies: The Disinformation Guide to Magick and the Occult*. Edited by Richard Metzger. New York, NY: Disinformation Company, 2008. Pg. 21.

[426] Taussig, Michael T. *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago, [Ill.]; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

[427] Whitaker, Josh. *'The Séance', or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen'*. Text. 2023-24.

As in Morrison's description, this methodology of 'hyper-sigil' making includes personal biography, memory, quotidian activity, and citation to push the magical process beyond simply using *'static images'.* This narrative conceit within the script provides an 'origin myth' for the puppet Pasolini. The process of making the 'hyper-sigil' conjured him into the world where he is 'fed' a diet of images. This is a somewhat oblique short statement in the script, but again extends the logic of sigil making to a process of remixing, placing quotes, film, music, and artwork in relation to one another.

The occult logic of the 'hyper-sigil' originates in the desire to find a means of opening a 'messianic-gap' in the practice. As I have described in the methodology section of this thesis, my understanding of a 'messianic-gap' in the work draws on Agamben's work in which the messianic is a *'division of a division'* or as Charlie Gere describes it (in fusion with Duchamp) an *'infra-thin'* gap between an original and a copy, or even more potently— the almost imperceptible difference between a copy and a copy. As Eleanor Kaufman succinctly puts it:

> *'Agamben's oeuvre is oriented towards demarcating a doubleness whereby one thing is actually exposed to be two terms in relation, and the slight shift of perception that comes with this insight is for Agamben the mark of the messianic'.*[428]

The *'hyper-sigil'* produced in *'The Séance'* is a blending of Agamben's logic of the messianic as latent in the process of doubling and displacing an object — *'It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything'* — and the process of citation as a doubling of knowledge in language.

The formalisation of the script as an artwork in its own right advances an understanding of the whole text as a 'hyper-sigil', not just the single invocation mentioned within it. The apocalyptic sound effects and quotations rendered in Luminari all contribute to the culminating 'séance' summoning of the St. Paul/ *'snowperson' character'.*

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[428] *'The Saturday of Messianic Time. Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul' in* Blanton, Ward, and Hent de Vries, eds. *Paul and the Philosophers.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Pg. 297.
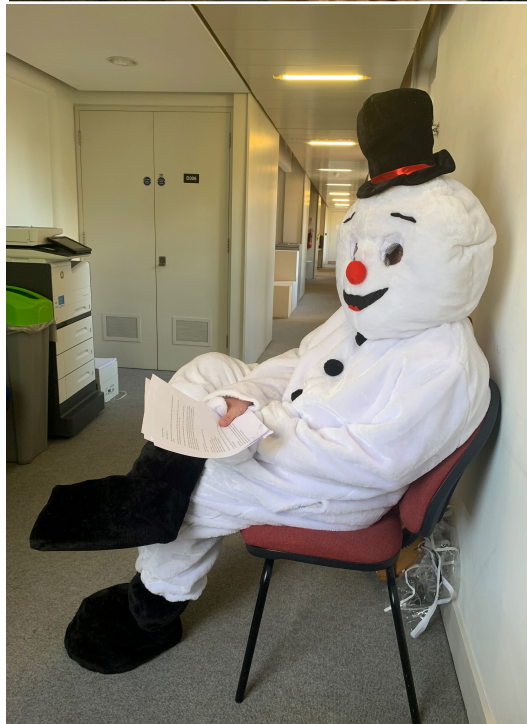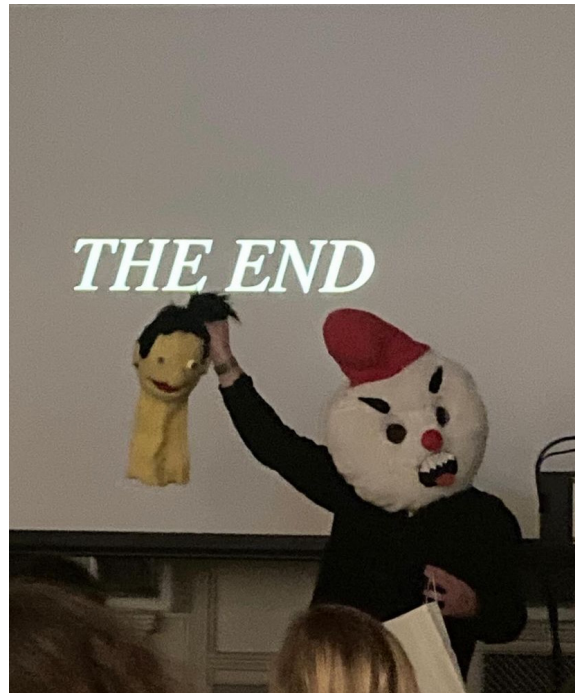
Fig 3. Still image taken by Jessiac Tilley a member of *'The Séance', or Acid History—Into the Silver Screen'* performance showing the *'snowperson'* costume.

Fig 4. The first iteration of the *'snowperson'* costume worn at the British School at Athens Residency interview, which was conducted by Prof Malcolm Quinn, Dr Jo Melvin, Prof Daniel Sturgis, Prof Paul Goodwin, & Prof Liz James.

The *'snowperson'* was initially developed before the British School at Athens residency as a reformulation of the *'four-eyed man'* used in *'On Sacred Time'*. I had been a little unhappy with the static nature of the *'four-eyed man'* and wanted to

make a mask/costume which could be worn by actors. Snowmen, like puppets, are a rendering of a human-like form with a sense of uncanny mystery and the possibility of chaos about them. Snowmen fit Ligotti's description of puppets as *'connected to another world, one that is all harm and disorder— the kind of place we sometimes feel is a model for our own home ground'.* [429] My primary personal connection to snowmen is the animated film '*The Snowman'* [430](1983), an adaptation of the same-titled book written and illustrated by Raymond Briggs, which, much like Sesame Street, I compulsively watched as a child. In the film, a boy makes a snowman that comes to life at night. After a short interaction, the snowman takes the boy by the hand, and they fly to an Arctic region for a party with dozens of other cognisant snowpeople and Father Christmas. My version of a snowman character is admittedly a darker inflexion of this story. However, as in Ligotti's quote, the snowman in both my and Briggs' story is connected to *'another world'*.

The costume uses a cheap fancy dress snowman head, which I cut most of the original features off, replacing them with black felt eyes and mouth that can be altered to change the character's expression. A red Phrygian hat has also been added, symbolising revolution. The finish is hand-made and darkly childish in line with the puppet Pasolini's appearance, suggesting that whatever 'other world' they come from is probably the same.

I was also intrigued by the idea that all snowmen are the same person— each time a snowman, snowwoman, or snowperson is made, it is the manifestation of one primordial snow creature that has presumably been made since people and snow first met. Snowpeople, in this understanding, are like palaeolithic cave drawings— they just happened to have melted and then been reproduced repeatedly. This reasoning proposes that the snowperson is a time traveller appearing at intervals all over the globe. The snowperson has witnessed humanity from the deep recess of ancient history to the present day, and like Theodore Jennings's description of St. Paul as

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[429] Ligotti, Thomas. *Conspiracy Against the Human Race, The A Contrivance of Horror*. New York: Penguin Books, 2018. Pg 197.

[430] *The Snowman*. Snowman Enterprises, Channel 4 Television Corporation, TVC London, 1982.

having *'this habit of showing up at the most decisive times…'*[431] snowpeople are recurrent figures, moving through time and space in fits and bursts. The concept of the snowperson as both otherworldly, a time-traveller, and holding both benevolent and malevolent capacities solidified them as the new *'four-eyed man'*.

The *'snowperson'* as well as being a transmuted version of the *'four-eyed man',* is also an evolution of the puppet Pasolini into St. Paul. The 'Damascene conversion' that played out in *'On Sacred Time'* is again mentioned in *The Séance'* with the puppet Pasolini stating,

This is a Damascene place: I was dead, and now look, I am alive! I'm already a ghost, and so anything I make must be a cinema of ghosts.

The script describes the puppet's descent into the bowels of the temple to Apollo in Delphi— the site of the Delphic Oracles predictions— where he undergoes a transformation. The violent act at the end of '*On Sacred Time',* like Saul's blinding, was only the first step in the transformation. Damascus is transplaced to Delphi where the puppet undergoes the final transfiguration into the *'snowperson'* version of St. Paul, surrounded by Orphic images. The *'snowperson'*/ St. Paul's parading of the decapitated puppet head at the end of the script is a presentation of the new fractured character of both Pasolini and St Paul in snow form. The 'snowperson/ St. Paul/Pasolini' declares, mirroring the puppet's earlier comment;

I was dead, And now look, I am alive forever and ever!

The final form of the dual natures of St. Paul and Pasolini entangled in one character— a dark angel of history within the work.

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[431] Jennings, Theodore. *Pasolini's Specters of Paul* in Brill. 'Biblical Interpretation Volume 27 Issue 4-5: Pasolini's Paul: Representation, Re-Use, Religion (2019)'. Accessed 19 July 2021. https://brill.com/view/journals/bi/27/4-5/bi.27.issue-4-5.xml. Pg 508.

The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or To Keep Your Head in Hell and Not Despair

At this point in the thesis, please watch-

'The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or To Keep Your Head in Not Despair',
video and sound, 15 minutes 07 seconds, 2024.

Documentation of this can be found on the USB drive supplied with this document.

Introduction

'The form an object takes…' is the final film to feature the puppet Pasolini, depicting his semi-fevered lucid dream and transition to a ghost. The film follows *'The Séance',* in which the puppet is decapitated by the '*snowperson'* character*,* discharging the puppet in an untethered time-space hinted at in the previous films and performances. The film is divided into four parts, making explicit reference to the new trilogy I have conceptualised in Pasolini's work, ending in an epilogue that highlights the *hopeful* finale of '*Salò'.*

The Pasolini puppet is shown interacting with a series of images, all rendered in the cinematic 16:9 format, suggesting these are ideas for films or stills from cinema that have already been made or exist as notes, fragments, and ephemera. His hands tenderly trace the images, occasionally framing portions of the image between his fingers, as a voice-over narrates an internal dialogue. The dialogue flows as a stream of consciousness, making loose associations and leaps of thought prompted by the image he handles. The images repeat and double much of the material seen in '*Pier Paolo'* and '*On Sacred Time',* including pictures of the puppet himself. The split screen allows the images and the puppet to be viewed in counterpoint. As the film unfolds, the narrative becomes an increasingly intense psychodrama as the themes of all the films featuring the puppet are re-engaged, reformulated, and played out.

A doubled image of the sun is used as a refrain throughout the work. Together, they float like disembodied eyes— an envisionment of the '*diseased eyeball'* of Jameson's apocalyptic vision of the future. A psychedelic vision of apocalypse and

redemption, profligate destructive energy and metaphysical assurance of something beyond earthly matters.

The penultimate scenes of the film show new material of the puppet staring lifelessly into the distance. Part of my desire for the film was to part ways with the puppet, to find some way of ending my involvement with him by killing him off or letting him transition into a new form. In an interview with Elsa Coustou, Mark Leckey described his film '*Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*' as '*essentially a ghost film...There's something about that new access to technology and how it meets the past... Fiorucci is an exorcism*'.[432] '*The form an object takes…*' mirrors much of this sentiment; it is a film in which the puppet is a ghost reflecting on the previous films, how the images he considers meet and recuperate the past, and that I exorcise the puppet from my work.

Title

> **'*The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or To Keep Your Head in Hell and Not Despair*'**

The work's title paraphrases Benjamin's description of 'Odradek', a character from Kafka's '*The Cares of a Family Man* '[433], and a proclamation by Silouan the Athonite, which I encountered in Gillian Rose's '*Love's Work*'. [434] Both references draw on the notion of an existence disconnected from our world; the vacuum of oblivion, or the torment of hell. This signals the mental state of the puppet's new ghostly form and the theological-politic proposition of this thesis that a vision of despair in eschatological time offers a situation by which to envision new futures.

The full quotation from Benjamin is as follows—

> *In Kafka's work, the most singular bastard which the prehistoric world has*

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[432] *Mark Leckey and Elsa Coustou Conversation* in Wallis, Clarrie, Ed Atkins, Claire Potter, and Catherine Wood. *Mark Leckey: O' Magic Power of Bleakness*. 1st edition. London: Tate Publishing, 2019. Pg 13.

[433] The Cares of A Family Man in Kafka, Franz. *The Complete Stories*. Reprint edition. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995.

[434] Rose, Gillian. *Love's Work*. Vintage, 1997.

> *begotten with guilt is Odradek…Odradek is the form which things assume in oblivion…This little man is at home in distorted life; he will disappear with the coming of the Messiah, who (a great rabbi once said) will not wish to change the world by force but will merely make a slight adjustment in it'.* [435]

In Kafka's story, Odradek is described as a *'flat star-shaped spool for thread'* around which fragments of multi-coloured thread have been wound or caught. A rod protrudes from the centre of the spool, turning at a right-angle and meeting the floor as a kind of crutch that allows Odradek to move around. Odradek can speak— although cryptically— and appears and disappears at will, but with little rationale or routine. The admixture of object/person that Odradek seems to exist within does no harm, but the implacability of Odradek's motives and ontological form provokes a foreboding in the narrator, the 'family man' of the story's title.

One interpretation of this curious short tale reads Odradek's shape as representative of the Star of David, with the right-angled appendage a form of broken crucifix. A visual-material representation of Judeo-Christian religion, the little threads Odradek gathers are this lineage's many lives, thoughts, and rituals. As a material manifestation of theological belief, he is *'a singular bastard'*, caught in a *'distorted'* form of life. Not quite of the profane, but not wholly taken into the transcendent realm. A figure caught out of time-space, with Benjamin offering that his strange life will end with *'the coming of the messiah'*. Odradek's ontology will finally be resolved with the *slight* gesture of apocalyptic revelation.

Odradek is the subject of divine life in a profane object. An ontological indistinct *thing* caught between the two. Divine, but shackled to material life. This is where Odradek's uncanny, unsettling aura radiates from— a sense of history desiring to unfold in the present, but that in doing so, everything will suddenly be different. Odradek could be thought of as the unfulfilled potential of the *'dialectical image',* a rupture in chronological time, a conceptual portmanteau of sacred and profane life

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[435] *Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death* in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. *Selected Writings. Volume 2. Part 2.1931-1934*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg 810-811.

that has yet to find the release of '*now-time*', a '*slight adjustment*' which will free him— and by implication the historical legacy of religion haunting the seemingly quotidian ways in which we organise life, the titular '*cares of a family*'.

Odradek is a figure that lives in the same muddled ontology of divine and profane space as the puppet Pasolini, the *'four-eyed man'*, and the '*snowperson*' characters of my films. Caught in a version of our world, but one which predicates and allows access to the space of messianic arrival. It is this space that golems, ghosts, daimons, and other avatars of life outside of chronological time inhabit. It is the intensification of our world to the point in which oblivion or hellish visions occur, the sacred and profane touch, the small gesture of messianic arrival might happen.

The second part of the title directs us away from a state of oblivion— this is the world the film will show, but nihilism or despair are not its aims. Silouan the Athonite instructs us to marinate ourselves in this hell, but that doing so is to direct oneself towards a *hope* beyond despair.

To return to the epigraph of this thesis —Abel Ferrera's fictionalised proclamation by Pasolini on the eve of his death — *'the end doesn't exist- something will happen'*.[436] *'The form an object takes…'* is an attempt to show the hellish oblivion that the puppet now exists within, like Odradek, and the possibility of something, still, to occur. This is performed through the 'puppet world' shown, the images the puppet interacts with, and the use of fragmented forms and gesture.

Doubling, Duality, Laughter

A large portion of *'The form an object takes…'* uses a first-person perspective, placing the viewer in the puppet's place. This is a disorientating viewpoint, symbolically looking through the eyes of an inanimate object at a pair of felt hands, which, while handling the images in front of us, are, evidently, from the metal sticks that move them, being handled by another figure out of shot.

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[436] Ferrara, Abel*, Pasolini*. Biography, Drama. Capricci Films, Urania Pictures S.r.l., Tarantula, 2019.

The singularity of the first-person perspective, ironically, gives way to a fractured multiplicity of persons, real and fictional: the puppet, the filmmaker, the puppeteer, and the narrator. The split screen amplifies this uncanny perspective, granting vision through the eyes of the puppet and an external view of the puppet simultaneously. The split screen disrupts a singular view throughout; even when images of the same object are seen, they are asynchronous. Prints of the puppet and screenshots of previous films are featured alongside the source films. Even the symmetry of the doubled suns, on closer inspection, reveals two distinct burning orbs.

The constant refrain of duality appeals to Pasolini's identification with St. Paul as a split figure and his poetical philosophy of the world rejecting synthesis, instead embracing the notion of holding multiplicities and difference in hand. Which, as I have already drawn out, offers a disruption of the individuality, singularity, and accelerated teleology neoliberal logic demands. The *doubleness* of '*The form an object takes…*' reasserts the power of duality in acid messianic thought and shows the philosophic influence of Agamben on this conceptualisation. As Eleanor Kaufman states in her article '*The Saturday of Messianic Time. Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul*' —

> '*It is not, I think, too strong a statement to assert that nearly all of Agamben's oeuvre is oriented towards demarcating a doubleness whereby one thing is actually exposed to be two terms in relation, and the slight shift of perception that comes with this insight is for Agamben the mark of the messianic*'.[437]

The film uses adaptation, quotation, cinematographic perspective, the uncanny duality of puppets, and the reformulation of previous films to show that '*one thing is actually exposed to be two terms in relation*'. And rather than being an argument for always viewing culture from a contextual perspective, it is that the messianic lurks in duality. The forms of *translatability* used in the film (again: adaptation, quotation, cinematographic perspective, etc.) work as a form of doubleness, a means *'of making*

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[437] Kaufman, Eleanor. *'The Saturday of Messianic Time. Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul'* in Blanton, Ward, and Hent de Vries, eds. *Paul and the Philosophers*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Pg 297.

an original out of a copy '[438]. This practice activates the slight shift, small gesture, or imperceptible difference between things as the place where the messianic is encountered and possibly performed.

The dark humour of all the films also appeals to this sense of the double as a sight of revelation. In '*The Author as Producer'* Benjamin remarks on the potential for *'Epic Theatre'* to reveal more in humour than shock. *'Let me remark, by the way, that there is no better starting point for thought than laughter; speaking more precisely, spasms of the diaphragm generally offer better chances for thought than spasms of the soul'.* [439] Humour opens a door, unexpectedly, to the apocalyptic event. Laughter and the moment of revelation are linked by the surprising but implicitly known truth of life, once veiled, suddenly made available. To find something humorous has its genesis in the operation by which the unknown comes to the fore. Or, to use Baudelaire's pithy statement on the power of humour, *'laughter is the revelation of the double'.*[440] And as Agamben shows, the double, or duality, is the state of messianic possibility.

'The form an object takes…', as in all the practical work presented, uses humour in the form of bathos— the sublime sliding into the ridiculous, seriousness performed through farce, transcendental ideals described by a puppet made of felt and glue. In the admixture of a condition like bathos— as two states in contrast— the messianic is attempted to be revealed, in part, through humour and laughter.

Puppet World

The duality that pervades *'The form an object takes…'* is taken to a horrific and metaphysical interruption of time-space when considering the 'world' in which the puppet lives, which, as already quoted, is *'connected to another world, one that is all*

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[438] *Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation* in Groys, Boris. *Art Power*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008. Pg 63.

[439] *'The Author as Producer'* Benjamin, Walter, and Stanley Mitchell. *Understanding Brecht*. Translated by Anna Bostock. Verso Books, 2003. Pg. 101

[440] Baudelaire, Charles. *The Essence of Laughter: And Other Essays, Journals, and Letters*. New York: Meridian Books, 1991. Pg. 120.

harm and disorder— the kind of place we sometimes feel is a model for our own home ground'.[441]

The discombobulating experience of viewing the puppet and seeing through his eyes is joined by the sense that the puppet's mental state is deteriorating throughout the film. A realisation he is dead, dying, or in a ghostly space intensifies as the film progresses. The use of previous films and their doubling in the icon-esque images the puppet handles produces a sense of undying death enacted through nonchronological montage, which Pasolini identified as *'death effect[ing] an instantaneous montage of our lives'.*[442] The puppet increasingly talks of the world completely ripped apart on an elemental level '*human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape'*[443]*,* or of entering into oblivion—

> *'I abandon myself to peace, to the point of annihilation. The noises of struggle are lost in death, as rivers are lost in the sea, as black stars burst in the night. I enter into peace as I enter into a dark unknown. I fall in this dark unknown. I myself become this dark unknown'.*[444]

And finally, repeating Christ's words on the cross before death, the same words screamed out by a victim in the penultimate scenes of Pasolini's Salò, in complete abandonment, *'God, why have you forsaken us? Why have you forgotten us?'* (Matthew 27:46).

The puppet is confronting his perverse mortality, like Christ murdered but returned, like Odradek caught between sacred and material dimensions, contemplating history as a vast wreckage. The puppet world is suddenly apparent to him, a mirror to our own, but one in which ontologies are mixed, the material and

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[441] Ligotti, Thomas. *Conspiracy Against the Human Race, The A Contrivance of Horror*. New York: Penguin Books, 2018. Pg. 197.

[442] *'Observations On The Sequence Shot'* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. 236.

[443] Benjamin, Walter, E. F. N. Jephcott, Michael William Jennings, and Greil Marcus. *One-Way Street*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. Pg 94.

[444] Bataille, Georges. *Visions Of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. First Edition. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1985. Pg. 237.

mystical elide, and doubleness as a condition of life is more available to our experience.

Fisher considered this realm in his short article, *'Toy Stories: Puppets, Dolls and Horror Stories',* drawing on Thomas Ligotti's philosophy—

> *'in Ligotti, puppets and puppetry frequently symbolise this tangling of ontological hierarchy: what should be at the"inferior" level of the manipulated manikin suddenly achieves agency, and, even more horrifyingly, what is at the supposedly "superior" level of the puppet master suddenly finds itself drawn into the marionette theatre'.* [445]

The puppet's psychological break originates precisely from the *'tangling of ontological hierarchy'—* his realisation that he has achieved agency— his dismissive, bordering on contemptuous, way in which he speaks and interacts with me across the presented practice, which implicitly suggests he considers himself to be of a *superior* position. But he is also being drawn back into the *marionette theatre* of the puppet world. He is a *daimon,* like Odradek, declaring—

> *'daimon, a divine or semi-divine being; the early philosophers taught that we have such a being, or potential for one, within us. For the Church all such divine beings were anathema, as they were not the one true God, and the word gradually turned into our 'demon'. I feel the daimon in me I feel it moving, maybe I have already shifted into this being without notice*[446].

But even more destabilising to his sense of self is the realisation of his fractured ontology, the montaged and doubled images of himself in the prints he handles— including two images of the real Pasolini (see below)— and the aforementioned sense of himself as not a singular identity but a collaboration of the puppet, the filmmaker, the puppeteer, and the narrator.

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[445] *'Toy Stories: Puppets, Dolls and Horror Stories'* in Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. Edited by Darren Ambrose. New edition. London, UK: Repeater, 2018. Pg. 77.

[446] Welburn, Andrew, ed. *The Mysteries: Rudolf Steiner's Writings on Spiritual Initiation*. Floris Books, 1996. Pg 13-14.
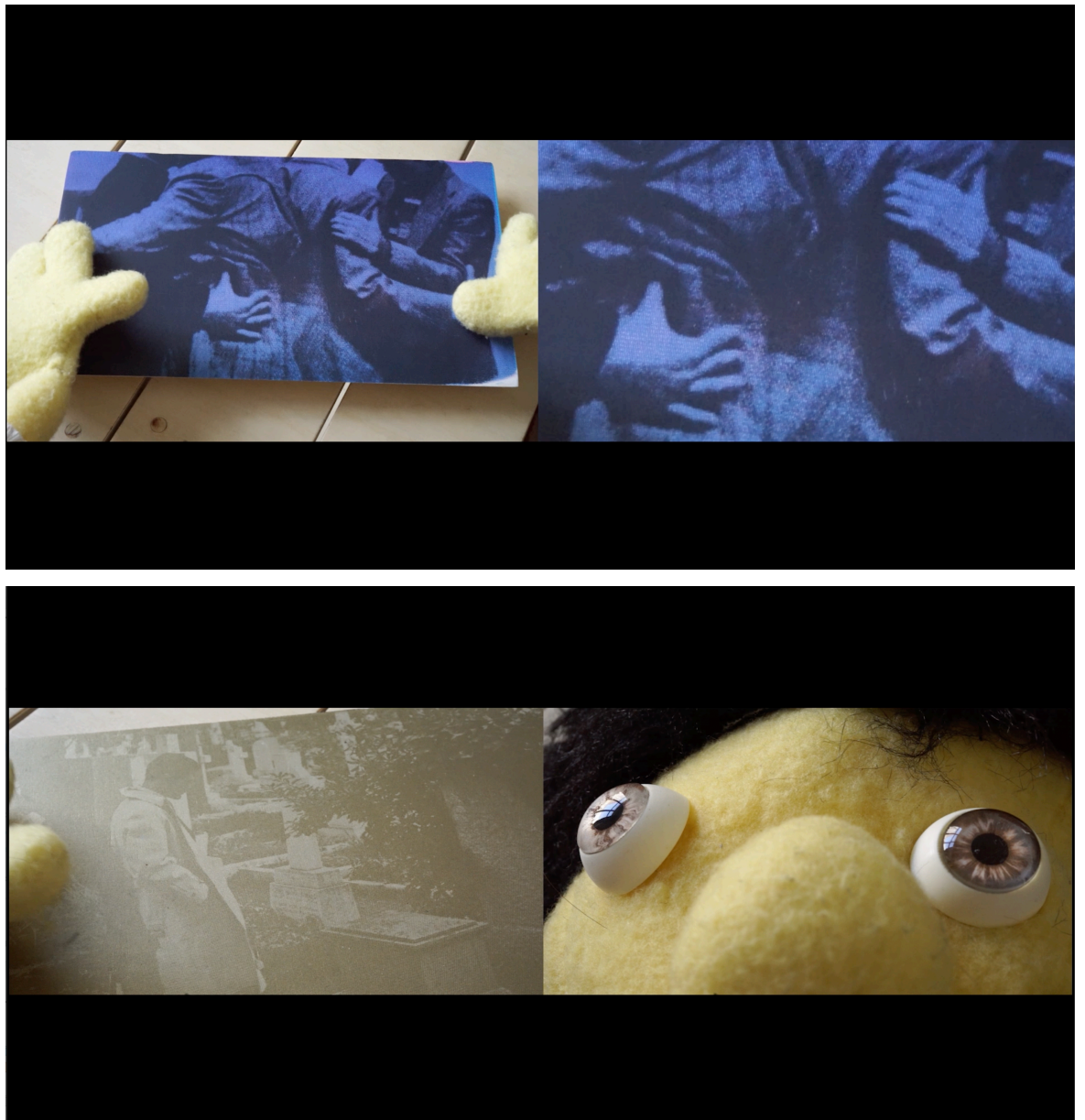
Fig 5 & 6. Whitaker, Joshua. Screenshots from— *'The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or To Keep Your Head in Hell and Not Despair',* video and sound, 15 minutes 07 seconds, 2024. Top: (13minutes 11seconds) Shows an image of Pasolini directing actors in the final scene of *'Salò'.* Bottom: (11 minutes 18 seconds) Shows

an image (left) of Pasolini attending Antonio Gramsci's grave at the Protestant Cemetery in Rome.

The descent into an ontology which is resistant to individuality, consistently reaffirming the '*demarcat[ion of] doubleness whereby one thing is actually exposed to be two terms in relation*'[447] is the place from which the puppet makes his messianic announcements, descriptions of how ghosts operate, and lists the vital elemental energy surging through the earth and cosmos. These prophetic statements are made from what Fisher describes as the puppet's status as an *'emissary'* from the real and unsettling nature of the world—

> '*Puppets are one of the leitmotifs of Ligotti's work, but the terror that they cause does not primarily arise from any malicious intentions on their part, or from the suspicion that they might secretly move when we do not watch them. Rather, the puppet is an emissary of what Ligotti repeatedly characterises in The Conspiracy Against the Human Race as the "malignantly useless" nature of the cosmos itself. The painted-faced marionette is a symbol of the horror of consciousness, the instrument which, for Ligotti, allows that "malignant uselessness" to be perceived*'[448].

My intention and concept of the puppet as an *emissary* do not align with Ligotti's bleak, nihilistic philosophy. But, the messianic, doubled, '*tangled ontology*' from which the puppet speaks is a horrific space from which an expression of hope might arise, as in my reading of 'Salò'.

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[447] Kaufman, Eleanor. *'The Saturday of Messianic Time. Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul'* in Blanton, Ward, and Hent de Vries, eds. *Paul and the Philosophers*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. pg 297

[448] Fisher, Mark *Toystories: Puppets, Dolls and Horror Stories* in Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. Edited by Darren Ambrose. New edition. London, UK: Repeater, 2018. Pg.100.

Icon Painting
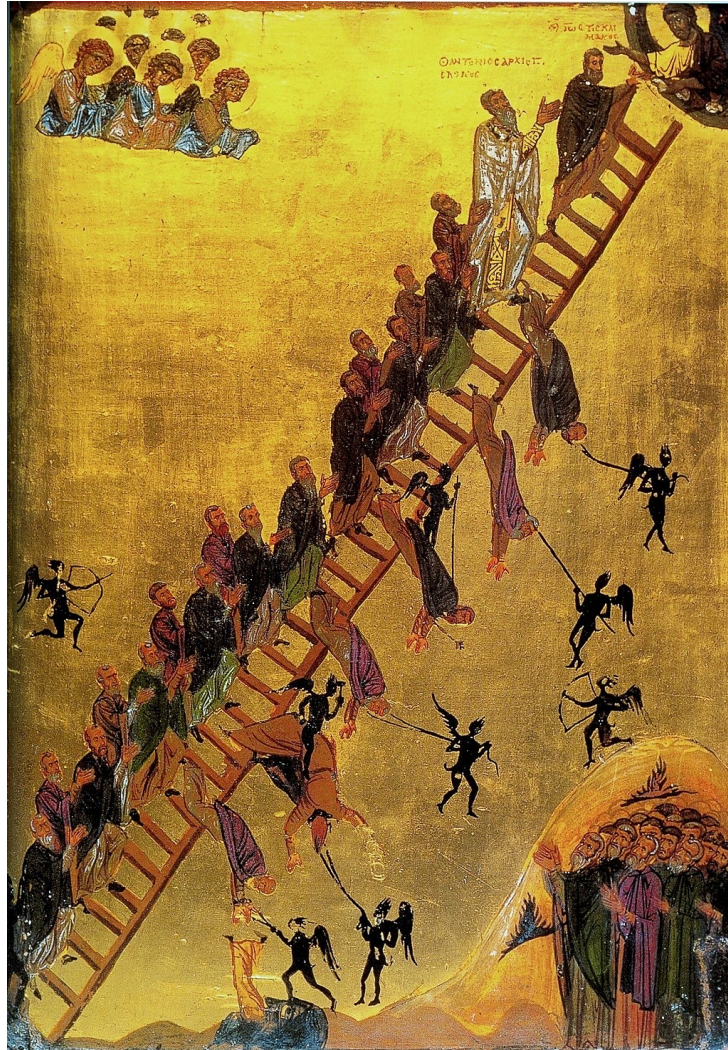
Fig 7. Artist unknown. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent.* 12th Century. Monastery of Saint Catherine, Egypt.

'The form an object takes…' was an extended production. I began with a clutch of pictorial references generated and collected over the course of the research, which I wanted to place in context with the puppet. This engendered various false starts. I attempted location shots with the puppet in Delphi, the Marquis De Sade's Chateau in La Coste, and Cathedral Caverns in Cumbria. These shoots failed due to technical issues and lack of funding but generated a further cache of photographic fragments. I produced a series of 35mm slide films, intended to be projected as the puppet spoke, but which lacked visual intensity when filmed.

While considering how these photographic elements and the puppet might interact on film I was fortunate to undertake the Arts Researcher in Residency at the British School at Athens for three months. During this time, I became particularly interested in the Greek Orthodox Churches architecture and practice of icon painting.

Hung in rooms as a form of ritual and protection, the production and viewership of icon painting are conceptually distinct from other forms of Western painting. The icon is not intended to have a mimetic function but, instead, is a transportive conduit to a divine reality the image depicts. The icon is a '*window or door*' into the metaphysical space. In '*Doors of Perception: Icons and Their Spiritual Significance*'[449]*, John Baggley describes this contrast and theological use value-

> *'To this day the Orthodox Churches maintain a strict distinction between the worship that is offered to God alone, and the veneration or reverence that is paid to holy icons. This preserves the insight that the icon is not an idol, but a symbol bys means of which contact is made with a more profound reality. We must look upon icons as doors or windows through which we are open to the sanctifying grace of the Spirit'.* [450]

Much like the ritual of transubstantiation, icon paintings undergo a metamorphosis during their production— the majority of 'real' icons are made by specialised monks in monasteries with prayer as an integral feature of the painting— as such, the works are not 'false idols', but like the bread and wine of Communion, the icon becomes part of the sacred realm, or at least a gap through which it can be seen.

The special status acquired by images in this tradition sat neatly with my desire for my practice to open conceptual space between the sacred and the profane. It also offered a form by which the collection of images could be rendered and exist as viewable material. One of the significant problems I had in making the film was allowing the puppet to interact with digital files and barely viewable 35mm slides. Icon painting has historically been made on wooden poplar or oak boards. Contemporary paintings have transitioned to plywood— which fortuitously is now

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[449] Baggley, John, and Richard Temple. *Doors of Perception: Icons and Their Spiritual Significance*. New edition. St Vladimir's Seminary Press,U.S., 1995.
[450] Ibid. Pg 24-25.

typically made of poplar. The format of the painting is not set but is, in the main, between the size of a postcard and an A4 sheet of paper. This is coated in many layers of gesso sanded to a porcelain, almost glass-like, finish. After this process, the icon painter uses egg tempura and gilding to produce the image.

The 'icon boards' I have produced for *'The form an object takes…'* mirror much of this— the boards are made of poplar plywood measuring 30cm x 16cm, the cinematic 16:9 ratio of much cinema. I apply many layers of gesso, wet and dry sanding each coat to achieve the required finish. To reproduce the photographic files I had collected on the boards' egg tempera painting would have proved difficult, even for someone advanced in the technique; for me, it would have been impossible. So, instead, I have screen-printed the photographs onto the boards using a CYMK colour separation process. This retains a photographic quality but also pays homage to the original method of icon painting in that screen-printing is a procedure of carefully applying liquid paint to a surface. The finished 'icon boards' have an uncanny quality situated somewhere between a print, photograph, painting, and object. The screen-printing technique implicitly taps into the notion of reproducibility, given that it is a process developed to do just that.

The use of the boards in *'The form an object takes…'* mirrors the logic of traditional icon painting— these are not simply photographic, mimetic images, but an attempt to manifest something akin to the *'dialectic-image'*— or at least when the tangled ontology of the puppet, existing in the non-chronological time of doubled messianic space, interacts with them. The idea of photographs as the site of messianic arrival, the *'dialectic-image'* as a gesture and event (the act of taking a snapshot), is echoed in Agamben's essay *'Judgement Day'* where he says that *'for me, photography in some way captures the Last Judgment; it represents the world as it appears on the last day, the Day of Wrath'.*[451] In this reading, the photograph is the place in which *'all of humanity is present'* [452] as it will be on the Day of Judgement, the record of all life in a fragment. And like icon boards, *'the photograph is always more than an*

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[451] Agamben, Giorgio. *'Judgement Day'* in *Profanations*. New York: Zone Books, 2007.Pg 23.

[452] Ibid Pg. 24.

image: it is the site of a gap, a sublime breach between the sensible and the intelligible, between copy and reality, between a memory and a hope'[453]—the contrasting doubleness of the messianic.

Fragment and Gesture

The use of icon boards in the film grafts access to a '*profound reality'* [454]to ideas of gesture and fragment as methods of messianic engagement.

The puppet's somewhat clumsy hands handle the boards, his fingers tenderly trace some images, sometimes framing portions of the image as if composing a cinematic shot. His actions are often jerky, tentative, or broken. Gestures that seem out of joint, and as already emphasised, show a figure at once handling and being handled. The gestural acts accentuate the puppet's ontology as split, as something other than the norm, his *emissary* status as connected to the vision of a shadow puppet world.

The repeated shots and focus on gesture are intended as a tacit allusion to Benjamin and Agamben's *slight adjustment* or *small displacement* by which the messianic will be rendered. The puppet continually fawning and framing the images in an attempt to make sense of the apocalyptic space he is contained within. In the essay '*On Gesture',* Agamben boldly claims that in the 20th Century gestural control has been lost, with a Tourette form of spasmodic gesticulation replacing the '*naturalness'* of a previous age's movement. By Agamben's estimation, the quality of gesture is its supporting an element that language cannot perform, the '*communication of a communicability'* that is unavailable to us in language; the remnant and always missing fragment of meaning which may be where '*entvicklungsfahigkeit'* is performed. The subconscious knowledge of this loss of gesture has produced a society obsessed with it, and '*in the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries*

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[453] Ibid Pg. 26.

[454] Baggley, John, and Richard Temple. *Doors of Perception: Icons and Their Spiritual Significance*. New edition. St Vladimir's Seminary Press,U.S., 1995.Pg 24-25.

at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss'.[455] The filmic space is one in which gesture can be reconnected with, or the glow of it's potential can be felt. What is particularly interesting about Agamben's categorisation of gesture is that it does *not* perform an emotion; it is not even a type of praxis, but the mode in which the unsaid element in language, images, and ontology is *'endured and supported'* —

> *'What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported'.*[456]

The *small adjustment* of messianic revelation is in this understanding of gesture. The puppet's gestures and jerky movements are his attempts and failures to find the naturalness of pure, unacted gestures as a messianic method.

Agamben extends this definition of gestures to images and, again, the prominence of cinema as a site of gestural potential. Agamben refers to Aby Warburg's '*Mnemosyne Atlas'* as *'a representation in virtual movement of Western humanity's gestures'*[457] and that—

> *'Inside each section, the single images should be considered more as film stills than as autonomous realities (at least in the same way in which Benjamin once compared the dialectical image to those little books, forerunners of cinematography, that gave the impression of movement when the pages were turned over rapidly)'.*[458]

It is under this understanding of gesture, image, and cinema that I conceptualised the use of images and the puppets handling of them in *'The form an object takes…'.* The images as '*film stills'* akin to the *'dialectical image',* points of potential to be fulfilled or unfolded, with the puppets fumbling hands emphasising gesture, or the *slight adjustment* genuine gesture might support.

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455 *On Gesture* in Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without End: Notes on Politics.* Theory out of Bounds, v. 20. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Pg 52
456 Ibid. Pg. 56.
457 Ibid. Pg. 53.
458 Ibid. Pg. 53-54.

The stilted form of the puppet's gestures, alongside the fractured display of images, is a further performance of messianic occurrences and Pasolini's method of filmmaking as tied to fragments.

Pasolini's work is littered with works that explicitly refer to gathering diverse elements and pieces of culture to produce work. The '*sopralluoghi*' (investigations) of *'Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1965), the fracturing of a work into film and text which are both autonomous and referent to one and other, and the use of transposition and adaptation to build work out of extant material. In a documentary film titled '*Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana'* [459](1970), Pasolini pieces together a series of footage to consider the potential for making a version of Euripides *'Orestes' set* in Africa. The film has a similar tenor to '*Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il vangelo secondo Matteo'* (1965) in that we watch and hear a narrative of Pasolini reflecting, discussing possibilities, and perhaps even taking footage which might be used in a completed form of his 'African Orestes'. We are shown a long musical section of a jazz ensemble, found footage from the Biafra war, Pasolini musing on whether to cast the Furies as trees, and a (tense) discussion on the pitfalls of the proposed film with a group of students from various Africa countries studying in Italy.

As I've already mentioned, Pasolini's ethical boundaries and consideration of colonialism are unacceptable by today's standards. Even in 1970, the students he interviews as part of the documentary are quick to point out— and some, rightly, visibly angry— at the notion of 'Africa' as a singular place that could be simply taken as a backdrop for the Orestes narrative. Pasolini appears unbothered by this criticism. I make no apologies for Pasolini's approach but an extended criticism of his unpleasant appropriation of certain cultures sites outside of the remit for this essay.

What is intriguing for this thesis is the use of '*appunti*' (notes) in the documentary title and an opening statement by Pasolini in the film— *'I have come to*

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[459] *Appunti per Un'Orestiade Africana*. IDI Cinematografica, I Film Dell'Orso, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1970.

film, but to film what? Not a documentary or a film, I have come to film notes for a film'.[460] These are not sketches for more extensive work, but, as Hans Ulrich Reck puts it, *'appunti denotes an aesthetic approach as well as a film genre that is located somewhere between film, language, image documentation, imagination, and staged experimentation'.*[461] Like Aby Warburg's Bilderatlas, this is a process of selection in constellation, rhizomic, decentralised, and amorphous. It is a fragmentary method of production, which appeals to the '*dialectical image',* the unfolding of the unutterable in gesture and *'entvicklungsfahigkeit',* and the performance of *translatability* in a work.

The fragment can be held as complete in themselves but also partial— part of something other. They are remnants and contaminates in works of art; they do not resolve into wholes, are without completion, and so are anti-teleological. Fragments are historical objects, mass consolidations of experience in the present of the past, or what Benjamin referred to as the *abbreviation* of history to a single point, much like Agamben's consideration of photography a consolidation of all time at the point of judgment—

> *'Now-time, which, as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation'*[462]

Agamben takes this notion of the fragment in *'The Time That Remains'* to tie Benjamin's messianism directly to St. Paul's political theology in which *'The remnant is not so much the object of salvation as its instrument, that which properly makes salvation possible".* [463] The fragment is the tool by which messianism, revelation, and apocalypse are possible. In the fragment's potentiality, there is a

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[460] *Appunti per Un'Orestiade Africana*. Documentary. IDI Cinematografica, I Film Dell'Orso, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1970. 1 minute 21 seconds.

[461] Reck, Hans Ulrich. *Pasolini - the Apocalyptic Anarchist*. First edition. Analysis & Excess. Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021.Pg. 81

[462] Benjamin, Walter, On The Concept of History. in Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Selected Writings. Volume 4. 1938-1940. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996. Pg. 396.

[463] Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005. Pg. 56.

direct relation to the future; they are unfulfilled and, as such, primed for completion. The ideal tool for producing a messianic instance.

'The form an object takes…' has been the culmination of my practical and theoretical work across the PhD. The speculative new trilogy in Pasolini's work supplied its structure and content. Pasolini, Benjamin, and Agamben's material-mystical formulations of history, messianism, and sacred engagement lead to its methods of engendering a form of apocalyptic revelation. All of which is intended as a potential break in the ratiocination of neoliberal logic of what the future could be.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a chance encounter, the discovery of a translation of Pasolini's '*San Paolo*' at a small bookshop in Hackney at some point in 2014. To think, at that moment, that this slim volume would have the impact on my life and thought that it has would be unimaginable. But, even then, the work seemed protean and vibrantly full of potential. It is a work that exemplifies Pasolini's idiosyncratic, elusive, and poetical aesthetic and political imagination. A script that desires to be a film, a schizo main character split between profane venality and sacred transcendence, and a time-space laminating and scrambling two millennia. It is a work of '*mysterious historical correspondences*'[464], in which Pasolini sought to call St. Paul into the present. To see him walk through the world as it is now and witness the reverberations of his thought in the politics of the present.

From my first reading of the work, the seed of messianic thought, of rage against the usury and debasement of neoliberalism, and the desire for something beyond capitalism was evident. This thesis has sought to activate the latent messianic force within the work. To take the methods, themes, and radical poetics of the book and see how— through theory and practical engagement— they might produce a means of thinking the future anew.

The thesis has situated '*San Paolo*' at the heart of a new trilogy in Pasolini's work, based upon the messianic gesture and event as that which, as highlighted by Elizabeth Castelli, for Pasolini asserts '*that temporal difference is illusory- that there is no distance between then and now… the separation between the historical and the religious, the real and the ideal'*. [465] And it is from this newly established trilogy, and that the radical insistence of political hope in the hellish oblivion of '*Salò',* that the production of *acid messianism* and *translatability* as methodological paradigms is produced. The practice *'case studies'* are offered as examples of this new mode of thinking, showing the capacity of *research-led practice* as a means of knowledge production.

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[464] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. x.
[465] Ibid Pg. xxxiv-xxxv.

Via these explications, adaptations, and extensions to Pasolini's work, the work instates *acid messianism* as a radical vision of history against capitalism's ratiocinated insistence of time as discrete chronological units. Through *acid messianism,* a small displacement might be performed as a form of *gesture* or ritually enacted through practices of theory and art making. The thesis has attempted to actualise these messianic methods to kindle hope in futurity against neoliberalism. If the thesis *matters,* it is in this sense of still seeing, of holding hope, against capitalism. In Abel Ferrera's film adaptation of Pasolini's last day, the fictionalised Pasolini, played by Willem Dafoe, states, *'The end doesn't exist, something will happen'*[466]. The thesis is a reiteration of this sentiment; these may be apocalyptic times, but something remains to be revealed.

As with all extended projects, the thesis has developed in unexpected forms. `*San Paolo',* the introduction of a new trilogy, and the concept of messianism have been central to the work from the first proposal to this finished document. However, the introduction of Fisher's thought has been a surprising and exciting development to the thesis. While neatly divided into chapters which situate the thesis *(Terms and Pier Paolo Pasolini's Idiolect)*, exegesis and formulation of a trilogy *(A New Trilogy)*, methodological production *(Acid Messianism and Translatability; A Methodology)*, and finally, reflection and performance of these interlocking ideas *(Practice: Case Studies)*, the thesis developed in fits and starts. The introduction of '*acid'* thought came in the middle of the thesis writing. While this did not fundamentally change my conceptualisation of Benjamin's messianism, it amplified the political agency of the thesis and permitted the work to be weirder and activate stranger forms. The introduction of *acid* thought augmented the already present mystic-materialist energies of Benjamin and Pasolini's work and, by doing so, has opened the implications and audiences for the work dramatically. The puppet Pasolini, in some sense the 'main character' of the thesis— encompassing, as he does, the resolutely split personalities of Pasolini, Pasolini's interruption of St Paul, and my practical engagement with doubling, duality, and haunting— was also an unexpected arrival to the work. As already detailed, his presence came into the thesis

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[466] Ferrara, Abel, *Pasolini*. Capricci Films, Urania Pictures S.r.l., Tarantula, 2019.

early on but has been crucial in how I have thought through the work (with more acid and weird methods) and fundamentally changed the practical work. Prior to the thesis, I did not have an active *practice* in filmmaking or performance; while I had an academic and art historical investment in these arenas, the thesis was first proposed as a theoretical text and a scripted adaptation of the '*San Paolo*' script. The addition of the puppet to the thesis has expanded my practice into film and a form of lecture/performance (of which *'The Séance, or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen'* is the main example).

As such, I believe the audience for this thesis to primarily be artists, theorists, Pasolini scholars, and writers who operate in an interdisciplinary mode of working between art writing, art theory, essay film, essay fiction, and, more broadly, the space in which modes of history, critical thought, and art intersect. The initial implications for the work in these fields are the introduction of *acid messianism* and my extension to Samuel Weber's *translatability* as methods of work, with the inherent desire to go beyond neoliberalism they contain. The apocalyptic logic of 'e*ntvicklungsfahigkeit'*, as a means of unfolding that which is unsaid in a historical object, would be a further implication of the thesis. While this is certainly not my concept, I believe the thesis as a whole activates the relatively untapped potential of this term; as such, it is within 'e*ntvicklungsfahigkeit'* that I see my own theoretical and practical work advancing– and which I see the audiences for the thesis most readily progressing.

As with all extended pieces of work, various avenues of thought have been excavated that have not found their way into the thesis. My interpretation of Pasolini's work and concept of the sacred—allied to acid messianic thought— has touched upon notions of *place* as holding a mystical sensibility. The work of Tacita Dean, Morya Davey, Brian Catling, R. H Quaytman, Peter Ackroyd, Mark Leckey and Pasolini has been instrumental in thinking through place as a form of *dialectical image,* and that, like Benjamin's concept of messianic time, *place* might continue capacities unacknowledged under neoliberalism's logic. Unfortunately, this area of research— particularly the exploration of this notion of place in other artists' work— sat outside of the PhD's parameters, but is something I intend to write up as a journal article.

An extended piece of writing on the methods of scriptwriting, connection to film, and status as an autonomous work of art is a further avenue of work the PhD has opened but ultimately did not find its full form as part of the thesis. This is a nascent field, with a tentative title of '*scriptology'*— given by Morad Montazami and developed by Erik Bullot[467]— which has its theoretical formation in Pasolini's essay *'The Screenplay as a 'Structure that Wants to Be Another Structure'*[468]. I believe the advancement of these concepts is particularly useful within the field of art writing, art theory, essay film, and essay fiction and I tend to extend my research on *scriptology* as a transdisciplinary field between film and literature.

Writing this thesis has reaffirmed my belief in the power of film, literature, and art as a means for not just imagining the future but actively producing it. Much of the work produced and discussed in the thesis is of a dark tenor; apocalypse, visions of hell, limit experiences, and a psychedelic unmooring of reality have been called upon to engender a glimpse at a more hopeful future. But like my introduction of apocalypse as a state in which the future might be revealed to us, I offer this work as a conceptual state, a place to consider the world as *'distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light'*[469], and to return, again, to Jameson's vision of apocalyptic, messianic future, the PhD can be seen as *'a diseased eyeball in which disturbing flashes of light are perceived… in which rays from another world suddenly break into this one, [and] we are reminded that Utopia exists and that other systems, other spaces, are still possible'*[470].

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[467] See page 162 of this thesis for my introduction to these ideas.

[468] *'The Screenplay as a 'Structure that Wants to Be Another Structure'* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. 187

[469] Adorno, Theodor W., and E. F. N. Jephcott. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Radical Thinkers. London; New York: Verso, 2005. Pg. 247.

[470] Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010. Pg. 620.

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List of Figures

matthewhiggs2015

GLADSTONE

Mark Leckey
Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore: Ghosted on VHS, 25 Years Later, 2024
VHS Tape
14 min, 45 sec
Edition of 100
$100 each

Mark Leckey's video *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) is one of the best known and loved works by London-based artist and Northern English emigre, Mark Leckey. A phantasmic and transcendent collage of meticulously sourced and rearranged footage and sound samples spanning three decades of British subculture - from Northern Soul thru '80s Casuals and Acid House rave movement - it may be considered an uncanny premonition of the Hauntological zeitgeist of the digital hellscape that is the first quarter of the 21st century. Marking the 25th anniversary of its initial release, Leckey has produced a "final version" that takes it back to its origin in the VHS format: an unplayable Ghost Story.

"*Fiorucci* was made in 1999: the year of Y2K, the year Napster launched, the year of The Blair Witch Report. Everything became available, unlocked in those last moments of the 20th Century; information finally became free, and music became another utility, there were cheap camcorders to go ghost hunting. Oh yeah, I could get nostalgic for that time. Something else happened at the turn of the century; all the expectant novelty promised by a new decade didn't cross the threshold of the 21st Century. Instead, all those cultural movements slowly ground to a halt and events became algorithmic rather than chronological. Time was converted into space (the Millennium Bug was real, the clocks did get fucked up). Suspended in space-time the dancers in *Fiorucci* are phantoms, moving in great halls dressed in their neck-ruffs, doublet and hose as they join the classic hauntings from The Middle Ages, The Elizabethans, The Late 20th Century."

-Mark Leckey, 2024

Liked by **darren_flook** and **307 others**
matthewhiggs2015 Hardcore! 💥 THE best deal at the Printed Matter Art Book Fair is the 25th Anniversary 'Ghosted' VHS edition of Mark Leckey's iconic... more

26 April

Fig 8. Leckey, Mark. *Statement- Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore: Ghosted on VHS, 25 Years Later 2024*, Press Release. 2024. This quotation was found via Matthew Higgs's Instagram post on the 26th of April 2024, in which he posted a press release from Gladstone Gallery, which had published a new VHS edition of Leckey's

'*Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*'. The original post can be found at matthewhiggs2015 on Instagram.

Appendix—

The Scripts

The following contains the scripted material for *'Pier Paolo', 'On Sacred Time', The Séance, or Acid History— Into the Silver Screen'*, and '*The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or To Keep Your Head in Hell and Not Despair'*. As discussed in relation to Pasolini's practice of scriptwriting, each of these texts should be regarded as a work in its own right. Each text holds material unused in the filmed version of the work, and in some cases, the script has material added after the filmed version was completed. Material quoted from other authors is in quotation marks with a footnote and all the books referenced are listed within the thesis bibliography.

'Pier Paolo'

INT. LIVING ROOM

PPP is seen sitting in a Gerrit Rietveld chair, smoking a cigarette, looking at a miniature script for *'San Paolo'.* A framed image of Paul Klee's *'Angelus Novus'* can be seen.

                    PPP

          Tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut.

          Cough.

          Hmmm no, no, no. Phhhfff, hmmmmm no.

          Che asino (what a donkey)

          Cordardo (coward)

          Ok, ok.

          Hmmm, no.

          Yes, well.

               There is a finer distinction to be made here.

               I am sorry, but, I must interrupt.

          'Cinema is an explosion of my love for reality'.[1] The present is a materially and mythically dependent state, that cinema reveals.

          Yes, place is important. It is the site in which these images are drawn. It is the analogy by which reality as I see it becomes manifest.

          'The film on St Paul questions not the validity of the church but its mode of

existence'.[2] It is the ambition and duality of Paul that I see reflected back upon myself.

'I think there are some facets of my character that has this mystifying quality. I'd say that this is part of the trauma that dominates my existence'.[3] But it is also the trauma that is productive.

'The type of people I love the most by far are people who perhaps never even reached fourth grade. Very plain and simple people, and those aren't just empty words on my part. I say it because the culture of the petite bourgeoisie, at least in my country, but perhaps France and Spain too, always brings corruption and impurity along with it, while the illiterate, or those who barely finished first grade, always have a certain grace, which is lost as they're exposed to culture. Then it's found once again at a very high level of culture. But conventional culture always corrupts'[4].

'You want to film, but to film what? Not a documentary or a film, maybe like me you want to make film notes for a film'[5].

This place, the day-to-day, the humble setting of a location in which stone has been trod by Paul, by Orestes, this should be the protagonist of the film. This place carries inside it a mythical, sacred moment.

'There are still other characters to find, other locations- like the Furies. The Furies should not be represented as humans. So I would decide to represent them in a non-human form. These trees for example. Lost in the silence of the forest, monstrous somehow, and terrible. The monstrous forms that nature can take there. The profound, threatening silences. Irrationality is animal. The Furies are the goddesses of the animal moment of man'.[6]

'He doesn't understand. He needs to read reality visually, an instrumental conversation with reality: A solitary walk in the street, even with stopped up ears is a continuous conversation between us and an environment which expresses itself through the images that compose it: the faces of people who pass by, their gestures, their signs, their actions, their silences, their expressions, their arguments, their collective reactions;...and more— billboards, signposts, traffic circle, and, in short, objects and things that appear charged with multiple meanings and thus 'speak' brutally with their very presence'[7]. This is the Mythic return the prescient logic of the past that blasts into the present and produces the future. This is Medea, and Oedipus, Orestes', and Paul's story.

'Death determines life, that is something I can say truly now death makes life a montage. Once life is finished it acquires a sense; up to that point it has not got a sense; it's suspended and therefore ambiguous. However, to be sincere I must add that for me death is important only if it is not justified and rationalized by reason. For me death is the maximum of epicness and myth. When I'm talking to you about my tendency towards the sacred and the mythic and the epic, I should say that this can only be completely satisfied by the act of death, which seems to me the most mythic and epic aspect there is- all this, however, at a level of pure irrationalism'[8].

'[A]long with this method of reconstruction by analogy, there is the idea of the myth and of epicness which I have talked about so much: so when I told the story of Christ I didn't reconstruct Christ as he really was. If I had reconstructed the history of Christ as he really was I would not have produced a religious film because I am not a believer. . . . But. . . I am not interested in deconsecrating: this is a fashion I hate, it is petit-bourgeois. I want to re-consecrate things as much as possible, I want to re-mythicize them'[9]

'Nature doesn't seem natural to me, my cinema is a sort of act between me and the naturalness of nature'.[10]

This is where I depart from
the classically understood
concept of neo-realism.

'My tendency, is always to
see something sacred,
something mythical,
something… epic the quality
of everything, even in the
most simple, humdrum, banal
objects and events'[11]. It is
in this tension of place and
history as immeasurably
interlinked and in which
reality can be restored. This
is what you are calling an
prrrf eschatology.

My feeling is that I cannot
express what I hope without
scarring the work I have
already made. This is your
mistake. Perhaps its best I
read… from the time before
cinema was a medium to me.
This is where I first found
history and myth as bound.

Gramsci's Ashes.

Harsh in climate,
deep in gentle history,
through the soil within,
these walls another soil
seeps

There they are, the poor,
yet in them and for them,
myth is reborn in all its
power...

But I, with the conscious
heart of one who lives only
in history, how can I ever
act with pure passion again,
when I know that our history
has ended?'[12]

'The shame of self-
contradiction, to be / with
you and against you in
visceral darkness'[13]

'On Sacred Time'

INT. LECTURE THEATRE

Pier Paolo Pasolini (PPP) enters the lecture theatre
and walks over to the lectern. Standing within the
empty room, he distractedly shuffles papers, smokes a
cigarette, coughs, and then looks at the audience over
the top of his dark glasses. He is sincere, haughty,
self-confident, cool. A clapper board is snapped in
front of him.

                                        SLIDE-
                                        TITLE OF
                                        PPP
                                        LECTURE

                                        SLIDE-
                                        ESSENTIAL
                                        BIBLIOGRAP
                                        HY

PPP taps his papers together and looks into the
rafters, and in a strong projected voice, begins. Shot
of the books featured in the essential bibliography.
PPP makes a final note on his notes.

                    PROLOGUE

            PPP (DELIVERED AS A POEM)

                'A fall from the horse, on
                the road to Damascus, didn't
                occur for the simple reason
                that I was dismounted from
                the horse and for a good long
                time, dragged, still bound to
                the stirrup, striking my head
                on the dust, the stones, and
                the mud of the road of
                Damascus. Thus nothing
                happened: I didn't fall
                because I had already fallen
                and been dragged by this
                horse, let us say, of the
                life of the world'[14]. The
                crudeness of material reality
                is unyielding, but can be
                shot through by a sacred
                power, the fragment of un-
                homogeneous time.

Looks towards the camera/audience for the first time.

> PPP
>
> I am going to list a few
> points, and show a few
> images, not in strictly
> logical correlation among
> themselves, each of which
> must be kept in mind. As
> usual, so extravagantly
> interdisciplinary[15]. (Laughs,
> in a slightly affected way,
> to himself). An initial, and
> as I hope you all understand
> it is very initial given I
> have only one or two hours to
> speak to you, outline on the
> sacred and the screenplay.

PPP pulls out a directors viewfinder and points it
directly back at the camera.

> IMAGE
> SHOWS
> BRUEGEL
> 'CONVERSSI
> ON OF
> PAUL'
> THROUGH
> THE
> VIEWFINDER

> PPP (V.O)
>
> 'In an expanding universe,
> the most remote galaxies move
> away from us at a speed so
> great that their light is
> never able to reach us. What
> we perceive as the darkness
> of the heavens is this light
> that, though traveling toward
> us, cannot reach us, since
> the galaxies from which the
> light originates move away
> from us at a velocity greater
> than the speed of light. To
> perceive, in the darkness of
> the present, this light that
> strives to reach us but
> cannot—this is what it means

245

to be contemporary'[16]. To see
this light you must conjure
within the messianic, like St
Paul, with rare talent. Or
learn to observe the points
in which it pierces through
profane reality. Observe the
sacred- an object that draws
us all, it is both terrible
and seductive, a monstrous
excess. A constellation of
profane material, thrown into
messianic space.

'And, I defend the sacred
because it is that part of
man which offers least
resistance to profanation by
power and is the most
threatened by Church
institutions … On the other
hand, I realize that my
longing for an idealized
sacred that may never have
existed – since the sacred
has always been
institutionalized, at the
beginning by shamans, for
example, and then by Priests,
and then culture. I realize
that in this nostalgia there
is something wrong,
irrational. 'Against this
understanding of the sacred,
in the script for St Paul, I
make him double, I mean
schizophrenic, completely
dissociated and in two: one
is the saint... the other a
priest'.[17]

                    IMAGE OF
                  FOUR EYED
                        MAN
                 APPEARS ON
                    SCREEN,
                    BRIEFLY

PPP shakes his head, clearly confused by what he's
seen, lowers the viewfinder and looks directly at the
audience.

PPP

          'At first, I used technique
          to access this real reality,
          devour it, represent it in a
          way that was more corporeal,
          heavier; I tried with my
          camera, to be true to the
          reality that belongs to other
          people, but no more! Now,
          what there is, what I have
          left, is a mosaic of *time*, in
          cinema, in the screenplay,
          that will render acceptable—
          clear and absolute— aberrant
          stories.[18] The seduction of of
          the limit, the sacred
          reality, shorn of religious
          dogma.

A voice echoes around the lecture theatre. PPP looks
up unsure if its within is head or being spoken

              FOUR EYED MAN/ PAUL

          'I will open my mouth in
          parables, I will utter things
          which have been kept secret
          from the foundations of the
          world'.[19]

Wide shot of PPP at the lectern. Four Eyed man
flashes up again. PPP seems bothered by this, but
continues. He again looks through the directors view
finder.

                              IMAGE-
                              PONTORMO
                              PAINTING

                    PPP
          'The things which are seen
          are temporal; but the things
          which are
          not seen are eternal[20]'

PPP removes the view finder and makes a quick note
before looking back through the viewfinder.

                        PPP
            How do we work in the realm
            of mythic, sacred reality?
            How do we ape the best of St
            Paul- the secular Saint,
            while avoiding his worst- the
            organising priest.   I say
            adaptation and the
            screenplay- which is not
            widely understood to be, but
            is, *a structure that wants to
            be another structure*. The
            written language of reality.

            'Or in other words: the
            author of a screenplay asks
            his addressee for a
            particular collaboration:
            namely, that of lending to
            the text "visual"
            completeness which it does
            not have, but at which it
            hints.

            The reader is immediately an
            accomplice -in the presence
            of the immediately intuited
            characteristics of the
            screenplay an operation which
            is requested of them- that
            their representational
            imagination enters into a
            creative phase mechanically
            much higher and more intense
            than when they reads a
            novel'[21]

PPP pauses for emphasis. The FOUR-EYED MAN/ PAUL
appears on screen again.

                        PPP
            I've increasingly recognised
            that the critical reception
            of the work always tracked a

Freudian or Marxist path that misses much of what is most important in the work. The path most travelled is travelled because the lines of desire are not *desiring,* but simply…. obvious. The mythic object is always obvious but also allusive. They are like 'magnificent ruins which rise up out of nothing. Fragments of a civilisation at once universal and alien, signs that mankind has taken a path that can only lead to destruction'[22]. They are the sign of the eschaton, the multi eyed angel turned back into time. They are images in constellation, outside of chronological time. History and time become fluid material, untethered from false linearity.

The FOUR-EYED MAN/ PAUL appears on screen again.

        FOUR EYED MAN/ PAUL

Hate is above us.

        PPP

The Carrera mountain range is epitome of particular landscapes holding a sensibility of place. Of sacred reality revealing itself to us. It is the veil and transition between the unreality of the world and the essential active material. The mines are less a source and more an open wound. Bleeding a never-ending lineage of material into the world. It has formed the individual, and community; the state, and its unstable politic. This is the

bedrock of a world. A
spewing, profligate, cache of
hard white material.

This landscape embedding what
we already know. That 'When
society represses everything,
one can do anything. When
society begins to permit
something, only that
something can be done'[23]. This
is the paradox of sacred
time, and the sacred object.

                FOUR EYED MAN/ PAUL

'All is holy, all is holy,
all is holy. There is nothing
natural in nature, keep that
in
mind. When nature seems
natural to you, all is over—
and something else will
begin. No more sky! No more
sea!'[24] No more mountains!

PPP looks confused and worried. He is now sure another
powerful force is present in the lecture theatre. He
continues but the worry is audible in his delivery. He
rubs his temple clearly in some pain. He coughs.

                        PPP
'With every institution,
diplomatic actions and
euphemistic words are born.
With every institution, a
pact with one's conscience is
born.
With every institution, fear
of the other is born. The
institution of the Church was
only a necessity.[25] To
rationalise the mythic time,
the sacred object. 'I go down
into hell and to see things
that don't disturb the peace
of others. We are all
victims, we are all guilty.
And hell is rising towards
you'[26] that is the the
messianic apocalyptic

predicament. That which
                    institutions, the Church,
                    attempts to cover.

                              FOUR EYED MAN/ PAUL
                    When people are saying,
                    "Everything is peaceful and
                    secure," then disaster will
                    fall on them. And there will
                    be no escape[27]. But about that
                    day or hour no one knows, not
                    even the angels in heaven,
                    nor the Son, but only the
                    Father[28]'.

PPP has become physically weak as the voice speaks, he
staggers, holding on to the lectern as he slides to
the floor. The notes used for the lecture fall around
him littering the floor where he comes lay. He holds
on to his face, rubbing his eyes.

                              PPP
                    My eyes, I can not see...i
                    can't see.

                              FOUR EYED MAN/ PAUL

                    'I have killed my Father, I
                    have eaten human flesh, and I
                    tremble with joy'[29]. No more
                    sky! No more sea! No more
                    mountains!

                                              IMAGE –
                                             CLOSE UP
                                             OF NOTES
                                              ON THE
                                           FLOOR- THE
                                           FOUR EYED
                                               MAN'S
                                               WORDS
                                          WRITTEN ON
                                               THEM.

251

The following is an edited version of a lecture-cum-performance delivered at the Hellenic Centre, London, on the 8th of February 2024 as the culmination of a three-month residency at The British School at Athens.

Slide–
(A PowerPoint slide of text reading– *The British School at Athens: Artist's Talk by Returning Resident Joshua Whitaker).*

So what I wanted to talk about—I'm going to give you a bit of a background on my work, what I went to Athens to do, and what I did.

So if we could… sorry, is it not? Can you hear me? Can you hear me in the back? Are you getting me at the back ok? No, nothing. I'm sorry. Give me one second… how's that? Better? Can you all hear me now? Okay

Sound– ***Low rumble***

And really, I think the following is more of an account of some of the thinking, some of the kind of practices I employed in Athens… and through Athens, that will, hopefully, make more sense by the end of this. I'm going to show some of the work that's happened afterwards as well.

Slide–
(A PowerPoint slide of two images of Pier Paolo Pasolini alongside his birth and death dates, 1922–1975. The photos show Pasolini wearing sunglasses and holding a film camera– composing a shot).

So, my research is primarily focused on the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the work that he made on the life of St. Paul. For those of you who aren't familiar with Pasolini, he's a filmmaker. He's a poet. He's a journalist. He's a novelist, and he's often associated with Italian Neo-Realist film. And some of the early films he made, like '*Mamma Roma'* and *'Accattone'* fit into that. He also wrote a screenplay or helped write a screenplay for Fellini. But the later work is a bit harder to pigeonhole. And that's the, that's the area that I'm particularly interested in. He's a Marxist who, by his own admission, had never really read Marx. He held up Gramsci as a political

hero. He's an atheist or a lapsed Catholic but held very tightly to the idea of sacred communion with the past. He was gay, in a country where it was still illegal to be homosexual. But never showed support for any form of gay liberation or the idea that homosexuality should be absorbed into the status quo in any way. So, he has this antagonism with the idea that any bit of his intellectual or sexual entity could be subsumed by anybody else…really. He was in conflict with the Communist Party, with the church, and state, but also held some sympathetic allegiances with elements of those organisations.

Slide-
(A series of images scroll on the presentation screen showing a spotlit Alfa Romeo 2000 car. The photos are in high contrast, beginning with wide shots of the car before becoming close-ups of the bonnet, badge, lights, windscreen, footwell, wheels, and controls. The composition and lighting of the photos have the atmosphere of film-noir cinema or forensic photography).

He was villainised and pursued by the state and the fascist party of Italy throughout his entire life. The following quote is by Wu Ming. They said *'by June 1960',* which is the year in which he wrote the script for *'St. Paul'*, which I'm primarily interested in, *'Pasolini had already gone through 16 charges'...* Sorry, my slideshow isn't working quite well; let's see. Ok, *'already gone through four arrests, 16 charges and eleven trials, in addition to three assaults by neofascists (all dismissed by judges) and a police search of his apartment, to look for firearms'.*[30] He died on the second of November in 1975, age 53. That's a case that's still unsolved, an open case within Italian law.

He picked up a male sex worker and drove to Ostia, where he was beaten and run over with his own car. The images that you can see here are of the car that he was driving that day, it's an Alfa Romeo 2000. There are various theories about how he died, but none of them can really be verified.

The thing that I'm particularly interested in Pasolini is the script on the life of St. Paul. It is an adaptation based primarily on the book of Acts and some of Epistles, and works much like other films of Pasolini in that it's an adaptation. For those of you who don't know, Pasolini made versions of the Medea myth, a version of

Marquis De Sade's 120 Days of Sodom, The Canterbury Tales, and the Gospel According to Matthew. Amongst others.

The St. Paul film was never made for various reasons, but I think the kind of easiest or simplest, quickest way to describe why is that the aforementioned trials that he was perpetually embroiled in, one of them, was a blasphemy trial. It's kind of mad to think, it's a strange thing to think of now, that a filmmaker in the late 60s and early 70s would have a blasphemy trial of a film, which the Catholic church now says is the perfect embodiment of Christ's message on film. Anyway…

Video–
(The screen shows a video of the puppet Pasolini's hands interacting with screen-printed images. They have been made on wooden boards, the scale composition and colours— many use gold— suggest Byzantine icon painting. They show the Delphic Omphalos, Brueghel's painting *'The Conversion of Paul',* portraits of the puppet Pasolini, Pasolini at Gramsci's grave, an icon of St. Paul, close-up shots of bedsheets, and a desert.)

So, the script for St. Paul is very similar to the Gospel According to Matthew in that Pasolini gives a version of Paul's life that draws on his dialogue from the Bible. It provides a narrative ordering that basically operates off of Acts. But it updates the story from the first century AD to the mid-20th century. So, at the start of this script film, Paul, or Saul, as he's known at that point, is a Pharisee, which is an element of Judaic order, which operates around the law, religious law. But in Pasolini, his version of this, he's part of the Vichy government in Paris in the mid-20th century. He's one of the collaborative stooges to the Nazis, within occupied Paris. The members of the resistance are embodied as the followers of Christ. Saul's conversion from the fascist, vengeful Saul is the saintly Paul also occurs on a journey. In Pasolini's version, this is travelling from Paris to Barcelona, which stands by analogy for Jerusalem and Damascus. When he is struck by Christ's message, he falls from his horse, and he's rendered blind.

In the Bible, this is a complete transition of state. In Pasolini, his version, it's it's not a negation from one position to another, but the addition of a kind of conflicting and entangled and entwined position of somebody who's pious and sadly and weak

in Paul and fascistic and dogmatic and an organiser in Saul. So there's a duality and a contradiction, which you can also see in Pasolini, his understanding of Paul, which I think you can see in Pasolini, something paradoxical, and to use a very Pasolinian word 'contaminated' worldview that Pasolini also had.

Theodore Jennings said, *'It is important to recall that Paul has this habit of showing up at the most decisive times...Long before our recent history , we may recall the role of Paul in the thought of Augustine as the Roman world was vanishing, or in Luther as the medieval synthesis fell apart'.* [31]He was integral to Hobbes, when he was writing Leviathan, around which much of our political system is still founded around. He was also integral to Carl Schmidt's political philosophy when he was still working within Nazi Germany as part of the judiciary. So Paul in Pasolini's and my own conception, is a kind of time-traveller that appears and disappears, comes back, and shifts. There's no chronology to his being, he's a spectral figure.

In shifting from the 1st century to the 20th, Pasolini transposes place, in his words…this is Paolini's own description of this shift—

> *'The centre of the modern world – the capital of colonialism and of modern imperialism – the seat of modern power over the rest of the earth' Rome>New York, For the ' the cultural, ideological, civil, in its own way religious centre – the sanctuary, that is, of enlightened and intelligent conformism is no longer Jerusalem, but Paris'. And finally, 'The city that is equivalent to the Athens of that moment, then, is in large measure the Rome of today (seen naturally as a city of grand historical but not religious tradition)'.* [32]

In the introduction to the script, the translator, Elizabeth Castelli describes this propensity for an alternative view of time, which I'll go on to describe as a kind of acid view of the world as the '*conviction that temporal difference is illusory- that there is no distance between then and now… the separation between the historical and the religious, the real and the ideal'.*[33] For Pasolini, Paul is somebody who founds the church, and in doing that, this is a foundational, violent act for what modernity will be. He says —

'I violently condemn him as the founder of the Church, with all the negative elements of the Church already present: the sexphobia, the anti-feminism, the organisation, the collars, the triumphalism, the moralism. In sum, all the things that have created the evil of the Church are already in him…I accuse Saint Paul of having founded a Church rather than a religion. I do not revive the myth of Saint Paul, I destroy it…I make a double Saint Paul, I mean schizophrenic, completely dissociated in two: one is the saint... the other instead is the priest.'[34]

So the reason I'm particularly interested in the script is that it has this transposition of place and time. It has this figure that is outside of time. That serves time or reoccurs within time, he's also somebody who is without a qualification of good or evil.

For Pasolini, Paul is key to the break between a pre-industrial and pre-capital engagement with the world. He inaugurated the separation. But in producing the separation, he might also be the key to getting back to this memory of a thing that can't quite be tied down. But the loss is felt. So I'm interested in Pasolini as a figure, and Paul, who operate in this duality, in this break. The reason for this interest is a desire to go back into history to invent a new form of future. I think this is what Pasolini is primarily interested in. And even Paul is a figure that explores the concept of restarting the future, like putting the jump leads back on the future.

One of the other people I'm particularly interested in is Walter Benjamin, who I'm not gonna talk too much about in this because I think the technicalities of Benjamin's thought can get a bit stodgy and a bit kind of stolid. But in terms of Pasolini and Paul, I think the thing that's most interesting about Benjamin's thought, is the idea of the apocalypse is not something that ends time. But inaugurates a new form of the future. And that the apocalypse, when looked up from its root word, means an uncovering, or a revealing. So in a sense, the apocalypse is always with us. It's a kind of wrinkle or a step in time, that just needs pulling back. And that would allow for a new future to be invented.

Video–
(The words 'Acid History' are seen on the screen. The background is a multicoloured fractal arrangement which

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spins and sparkles as it moves. The origin of the image
is a rock sample taken from Delphi observed under a
powerful microscope, revealing the mineral structure as
akin to a light show you would expect accompanying early
gigs by psychedelic bands in the 1960's or 70's).
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In addition to this interest in Paul, and Pasolini, as a duality, and Benjamin and the apocalypse, I'm interested in the concept of *'Acid History'.* Acid communism, or socialist psychedelia, is an idea conceptualised by Jeremy Gilbert and the late Mark Fisher. The base idea is that there's a form of collectivised experience, enjoying or producing something like music or dance or art or forms of play or learning can be allied to political organisation and action. For Gilbert and Fisher, the counterculture of the '60s and 70s would be a recent example where these forms of living or collective belief in reinventing the future outside of the potential offered by dominant political structures were in place. So they're things like the civil rights movement, or feminism and gay rights, and environmentalism where the broad political outcomes of the cultural and political shift are explicitly anti-conservative, with a tendency towards non-violence, and the privileging of collective consciousness, of radical reform rather than revolution, are enmeshed and intertwined with the arts, and music, and literature. And the acid experience is in knowing that the political and the cultural spheres are effective on each other. And they're not reducible to the rationality of capitalism. They're a kind of syllogism, between the material and the mystical and the profane and the sacred. It is the non-synthesised contaminated version of those things. Acid thinking asks that neoliberalism be acknowledged as an ideology which states, even further, it demands, that no other form of economic management other than itself is worth engaging in, or is acknowledged. There's no escaping it. There's nothing beyond it. And even the desire to go beyond this logic is characterised by the establishment as naive at best, and deluded and futile at worst.

The most succinct and much-quoted description of this comes from Fredric Jameson's essay *'Future City',* where he says, *'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'*[35]. Neoliberalism polices the ideological demand by capital that *'there is no alternative'* to the point at which all hope is squashed, and even the the inkling of an alternative is cloaked by a collective

amnesia. The ideology of capitalism and neoliberalism is so powerful that it becomes easier to imagine climate collapse, nuclear war, and rampant pandemics wiping out civilisation before there would be some fundamental change in the way that capital operates.

So acid, in this sense, is an adjective; it describes a particular way of seeing the world, which, like the psychedelic experience, engages notions of finding the under-explored connection between things, of seeing the world as vibrant and filled with potentiality. And doesn't reduce every social engagement to the notion of value exchange. The idea of acid isn't to advocate the use of drugs. It is simply the provocation that to quote Gilbert — *'[that acid] could be taken to refer to a set of practices and ideas which are at one and the same time mystical and materialist – a materialist mysticism which acknowledges the complex potentialities of human embodied existence, (and) This materialist mysticism would treat the investigation of technologies of non-self as one of its key priorities'.* [36]

And this is tied to an idea of weirdness, of getting weird. Because weirdness, to go back to what it really means or what that word has its root is a very old English word that means *fate*, or *chance*, or *destiny*, your fortune. Norse and German versions of it, have a meaning for *bending* and *turning*, *weaving* and *becoming*. So it's a kind of divination; it's thinking about the future, weirdnesses is aimed at the future. In the same way the apocalypse is understood as the future is in somewhere already with us. It's only in Shakespeare's Macbeth where weirdness gets associated with the way in which we use it now, which is with the Weird Sisters. So it becomes associated with strangeness or witchcraft or the occult, or being other, but it's, it's a word that deals with fate. So, acid history is a weird space.

One of the things I went to Athens to do was to go to Delphi to go see the Delphic Oracle, something that predicts the future. The slides you can see here are taken from the British School at Athens archive and show the Delphic naval- the 'Omphalos', the centre of the ancient world.

The Lebanese poet Etel Adnan recognises this form— the Omphalos— as a thing that has memory and actualises it in this poem which is really a kind of invocation.

Sound— ***Creaking, shifting stones, poured gravel***

What's Memory doing amogst these stones that keep coming back...
Orpheus is walking in the village square
while the wind
jostling
the setting suns to carry us
to places where
History and Nothingness mix their
great waters.

Objects are
the children
of their
Own shadows

under our
footsteps a ghost
rises up instantly
Disappears

The olive tree in Delphi
Next to the temple of Sikiyon
Remembers the oracle
Saying that
Somewhere in the plain linking
The Red Sea to the Dead Sea
Music will
Displace the sky [37]

Memory is lost in stone. Objects as shadows. Ghosts in a footstep. A tree remembers, and music is tied to place.

Sound— ***Gas leaking. ***

The other place I found this form of thinking, while in Athens, was reading a short story by Amiri Baraka, called *'Rhythm Travel'*, which is this short story where time travel is extended into music. In the same way that Adnan talks about Delphi

and music displacing the sky. '*Rhythm Travel*' is a story that's told in conversation between two people, rhythm travel is a kind of technology which allows for time travel.

"Now I added Rhythm Travel! You can disappear & reappear wherever and whenever that music played.""You mean you been Rhythm Traveling already?"
"Yeh, I turned into some Sun Ra and hung out inside gravity".[38]

So I think this is another place where you can see this form of weird acid thinking operating. I think Afrofuturism is another place where you can see the idea that music, in particular, is a cultural space that is linked to the political space that allows for a shifting, reemergence of energies that go outside a chronological clock time. The clock time that capitalism demands.

Sun Ra, Lee Scratch Perry, and Bootsy Collins are all prophets of an Acid History, already described in John Akomfrah's film '*The Last Angel of History*'[39]. And these were the energies I was hoping to find in Delphi.

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Film-
(The screen shows a light box illuminating a series of
black-and-white large-format film negatives. The
negatives show images of the archaeological site of
Delphi in the late 18th century. The Temple of Apollo,
the Delphic Omphalos, and landscape images of the site
are seen. Alongside these images are similar film
negatives of the British School at Athens library taken
in the same period).
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To finally get to the residency- The British School in Athens residency, which this talk is supposed to be about, haha.

I'd gone to Greece to see if I could find the Delphic Oracle. The Oracle operated in the ancient world for about 1000 years as an institution, it was something that you could pay tribute to, and you would ask a question; it's a divination device that could predict the future.

Given my interest in St. Paul and Pasolini, this seemed to be the perfect thing to go and seek, to go to Delphi and see if I could manifest or conjure, the Oracle in some way to see if I could break into the future.

So I was in Athens, having a nice time. And then I went to Delphi, and nothing happened, I didn't work. Nothing happened when I got there. So I was a bit stumped.

But the final prediction that Delphic Oracle gave, she said, *'A Hebrew boy bids that I leave this house and go to Hades. Depart therefore from our halls and tell it not in the future'.* So the traditional reading of that prophecy would be the Hebrew boy is, obviously, Jesus. And that there's a new inauguration of time, of pagan orientation and belief systems being put to bed, and a new form of order coming about. But I didn't know this before I got to Athens; I only discovered this prophecy in the BSA library after I went to Delphi.

So I was kind of a bit stuck; I didn't really know what to do to contact the Oracle.

While I was in this moment of not knowing what to do, I was reading this great book by Kate Briggs called *'This Little Art'*[40], which is a book about translation; it's her thinking about, or recalling some of the ideas she dealt with while translating *'The Preparation of the Novel'* [41] by Roland Barthes, in which Barthes says 'I write because I have read'. I thought this was a brilliant idea, that the writer is somebody who is excited by the thing they've read to the point where they see a kind of lack in it, or a desire to go beyond it. And that this is a good description of the distinction between a reader and a writer, that you read this point of desire and excitement to go beyond it.

Reading becomes a form of writing, and writing becomes a kind of manifestation, an incantation, or an invocation for something to come from outside of it.

Slide–
(An image of my notebook from the period while I was in Athens. A page can be seen divided into 'Memory,

References, and Facts' with handwritten notes underneath
each title).

To break my creative block at not finding the Oracle, I had the idea that I would use this as a means by which to conjure something up. Make a hyper sigil in language, in the process of reading, and notetaking, because that was all I was really doing while in Athens. I used a device which William Burroughs came up with, which is a means *'to cut into the present, to allow the future to leak out'.*[42] It's a travel diary or a field notebook. What you do is—

Write down the facts of what you did that day/// Write down the other bits of reading and quotation that you're engaged with/// Write down the things that are provoked by these fragments, that which memory connects you to///[43]

Bringing these things together, weird… strange connections start to come about.

I oriented my reading, note-taking, and memories to ask for a version of Pasolini to help me through the stuckness in practice, my inability to find the Delphic Oracle. I wanted Pasolini to help me find the Oracle. The Oracle was in Hades so some kind of Orphic trial was probably underway.

But like any student of Magick knows, you never quite get what you ask for in these situations, and daimon, golem, and puppet magic is particularly prone to chaotic permutations and outcomes; you know, it's something outside of yourself that comes into your world. You've called it, but that doesn't mean you have any agency over it.

But it worked, and the Hypersigil of reading and notetaking produced a fledgling puppet that I would read to, and feed images, the images of icons you've already seen in the slides. I'd become particularly interested in Byzantine Icons while in Athens— lots of time spent in Orthodox Churches. They seemed like particularly good food for the puppet, given that they are literal windows into the sacred.

Sound— ***Crackle of bonfire, burnt wood collapsing, whooshing, pings of petrol lighting***

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Film-
   (A muppet version of Pasolini appears on the screen;
chiselled face, coiffed hairstyle, smoking a cigarette,
black shades, neat suede shoes, tightly tailored polo
neck and grey suit trousers, yellow felt skin. The
puppet is strolling around the ruins of the Temple of
Apollo in Delphi, camera in hand).
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As we can see, after his diet of icon-boards, the Puppet quickly matured and headed to Delphi. I've got to say we have a cordial, but somewhat tense, relationship. He makes no secret of the fact he regards me as intellectually inferior to him. He's pretty chatty though, so that's good.

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Film-
   (The puppet has positioned himself on top of the
Delphic Omphalos and has turned to address Josh)
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'Ciao Joshua Francis'

'Hi, Pier Paolo, I've just been telling the audience about you'

'...(Visably nonplussed)'

'Ok, ermm… so what do you reckon any hope of finding the Oracle?'

We are looking for a spectre, be sure of that. And "What is a spectre made of? Of signs, or more precisely of signatures, that is to say, signs, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A spectre always carries with it a date wherever it goes: it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity."[44] "The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to
redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn' t there an echo of now silent ones?[45]"

Yep sounds about right. But that was the problem, wasn't it its a bit hard to film a 'breath of air' in a way that communicates the rest of that.

"The cinema is the art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms... It's the art allowing ghosts to come back" [46] You failed, but I can see a way to make the cinema of ghosts. This is a Damascian place, I was dead, and now look I am alive! I'm already a ghost, and so anything I make must be a cinema of ghosts. St Paul is here I know it.

You don't want to do make a film with me?

No grazie.

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   Film-
   (The puppet jumps off the Omphalos, walks back to the
temple, where he spots a gap in the foundation. Pulling
a cracked marble section aside, the hole becomes large
enough for him to crawl in, which he does).
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Hmm… ok.

So to finish, to summarise all the things that I've talked about today, the practices employed in Athens, I thought we should end with another example of how you can actualise some of these energies, this weird way of thinking.

I came here, to The Hellenic Centre, to visit a couple of weeks ago to talk about the logistics of the talk etc, and Grace, who's sat there, was telling me about the history of this place.

It used to be a Swedish gym, so people working out and sweating, libidinal energy being generated and expelled. And then it was a war hospital. So there's blood in the building, pain in the architecture, a desire towards either death or life, ending and overcoming. The narrow points between life and death. The other thing that was here, after the War, were dances organised by the council— sexual energy. And all these activities, in acid or weird thinking, impact themselves on to architecture.

Sound— ***Desert sand blown across broken vehicles***

So I thought it'd be interesting to see if I could kind actualize some, or manifest something like the puppet in this space that we're in today. I'd make a new hypersigil.

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   Film-
   (A film plays showing the puppet Pasolini entering a
candle-lit tomb-like space. Green vapours fill the
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screen. A white-headed figure wearing a Phrygian cap is
briefly seen. Orphic mosaics fill the walls. Pasolini
inspects the images but becomes increasingly agitated,
before falling to the floor, screaming and squirming.
Blood runs from his eyes. Invisible hands pull at his
felt body. Colour drains from his face and clothes; his
entire body is snow-white. Sounds of solar pulses,
crashing water, tornados, and rocks splitting can be
heard. The presenter seems oblivious to what is shown).
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There's a gap between being and nothingness, the gap between life and nothing as a spectre, is baked into the building. These things can't be forgotten, and recur, these occurrences have a disregard for chronological time.

What I'm going to do is, I'm going to invite St. Paul into the space and see if we can do a kind of seance. See if we can get something kind of going on and get something in.

I'm going to read a summoning passage.

It's one of Benjamin's favourite invocations. One of the things he used when he was trying to engage with history. Written by a German poet called Johann Peter Hebel, hopefully, it will act as a summoning passage bringing Paul into the room.

Ok, I'm going to start reading this. Can we have the lights down, please.

Sound— ***A waterfall hitting volcanic lava, underwater explosions, tectonic plates grinding ***

At this point, the speaker exits the stage and sits on the ground. His voice becomes increasingly strained and breathless, the timbre deeper.

"In the meantime, the city of Lisbon in Portugal was destroyed by an earthquake, and the Seven Years' War came to an end, and Emperor Francis I died, and the Jesuit order was dissolved, and Poland was partitioned, and Empress Maria Theresa died, and America was liberated, and the combined French and Spanish forces could not capture Gibraltar. The Turks imprisoned General Stein in the Veterani Cave in Hungary, and Emperor Joseph died too. King Gustav of Sweden conquered Russian Finland, and the French Revolution and the long war began, and Emperor Leopold II

went to his grave as well. Napoleon conquered Prussia, and the English bombarded Copenhagen, and the farmers sowed and reaped. The millers milled, and the blacksmiths hammered, and the miners dug for metal seams in their workshop under the ground".[47]

"Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in the Earth". [48]"History is like Janus; it has two faces. Whether it looks at the past or the present, it sees the same things".[49]

Sound—***Magnetic and radio waves distorted by the surface of the sun, low-pitched high-frequency buzzing***

A figure enters the lecture room from the rear, wearing a long white robe. The figure's head is large and round resembling a snowman, but with vicious distorted features. A red Phrygian hat perched jauntily on their head. They stalk around the room, showing members of the audience the contents of a damp dirty paper bag. After a few minutes, it begins to yell in a tone somewhere between proselytising and rabid.

The hair on his head was white like wool,
as white as snow,
And his eyes were like blazing fire.
His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace,
and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.
His face was like the sun shining,
in all its brilliance.[50]

I am the first and the last.
I am the Living One;
I was dead,
And now look, I am alive forever and ever!
And I hold the keys of death,
and Hades.[51]

They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.
The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white.[52]

The final lines of this deranged sermon are delivered as the figure mounts the stage. Josh's body lies motionless at his feet. Reaching into the dripping bag, he pulls out the decapitated head of the muppet Pasolini and holds it aloft. The tongue hangs loose, lifeless eyes, red felt droplets tumble from the neck wound. The sound of water and fire returns, deafening the audience. Green vapour rises from the walls and floor, filling everyone's vision. The sound stops and is replaced by blackness. The snowperson's blazing, booming voice shouts—

I am the first and the last.
I am the Living One;
I was dead,
And now look, I am alive forever and ever!
And I hold the keys of death,
and Hades.

The End.

'The Form an Object Takes in Oblivion, or To Keep Your Head in Hell and Not Despair'

Intro

My name is Pier Paolo Pasolini. I write these words on November 1ˢᵗ 1975… in hope.

The Gospel

Outer Heaven.

The delphic Oracle said— 'A Hebrew boy bids that I leave this house and go to hades. Depart therefore from our halls and tell it not in the future'.[53]

'Already old and corrupt nations, courageously shake off the yoke of a monarchical government, only to adopt a new one. It only maintains itself through crime; is already in crime, and if it wants to move from crime to virtue, from a violent state to a peaceful one, it would fall into an inertia. Ruin will soon be the result'.[54]

'As soon as they are worshipped as relics, tradition, artworks, and gestures are denigrated. Dissolved into an ideology which revels in the past so that nothing will change in the present.'[55]

Is the law sinful? I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law! I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet'. Law produces sin… it is sin. It is a sacred scream. (Romans 7:7)

The fire in the water, the air in the earth, the water in the air, and the earth in the sea. They are not insane enough, they are not enough at each other's throats, and

the more furious, the more enraged, the nearer and dearer they are. Power eats Power. The sacred is the remnant of this game.[56]

When Christianity began, all Christians were "saints"[57] is this not what St Paul saw in everything one and everything? And with it the power to uncover. Marred, dirty faces. Broken land. Deep history.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Cor 1:20)

'What looks like politics, and imagines itself to be political, will one day unmask itself as a religious movement'.[58]

I love the old questions. The old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them![59]

'Only a shameless, indecent saintliness can lead to a sufficiently happy loss of self. "Joy before death" means that life can be glorified from root to summit'. [60] This is the Paul I want to show; this is his messianic charge.

'daimon, a divine or semi-divine being; the early philosophers taught that we have such a being, or potential for one, within us. For the Church all such divine beings were anathema, as they were not the one true God, and the word gradually turned into our 'demon''[61].. I feel the daimon in me I feel it moving, maybe I have already shifted into this being without notice.

'The mixture of mythic violence and factual culture in the sacred text (the same within which the literate of Matthew operated) projected a double image of the world[62]...Janus,

'God Himself— 'Makom'— sacred force— is called place, for He encompasses all things, but is not encompassed by anything'- Philo of Alexandria- the old Hebrew/Jewish name of God being Makom- place.

'I have to begin to transpose the text — without the mediation of the screenplay, but just as it is, as if it were a ready-made screenplay — into a text literally unaltered but technified'[63], like these images'.

This is the Jesus shown in my Gospel, the one who has 'His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire'. [64]Matthew (3:12)

"I have not come to bring peace but a sword" 'This is the key by which I conceived the film. This is what drove me to make it'.[65]

'appearance becomes a problem for human beings: it becomes the location of a struggle for truth' and 'the face is, above all, the passion of revelation, the passion of language'.[66] every human face, even the most noble and beautiful, is suspended on the edge of an abyss[67]''.

'You notice Paul has very peculiar worries about nature. Of course they are not ecological worries. He's never seen a tree in his life. He travelled through the world like Kafka- never described a tree, or mentioned one. He doesn't write: Dear Friend, Nice weather here, or: Glorious nature all around me- he doesn't notice any of that. Just find me one place in a Pauline letter where he lets up from this passion, from this obsession, from this one theme that moves him. The problem of apocalpse. Like Kafka… look through Kafka's novels some time, whether there is a tree there. Maybe one on which a dog pisses. That is the only form in which a tree can even

come up in "The Castle" or in "The Trial". Nature appears only as a judgement'.
68

"spiritual" has different meanings. When you say "spiritual", you mean, above all, religious, intimate and religious. For me, "spiritual" corresponds to aesthetics… My idea that the smaller and more humble things are, the deeper and more beautiful they are, this thing is truer than I imagined. The idea of four barren hillsides of Christ's preaching has become an aesthetic idea and so spiritual'[69]

I'm now preparing a film on St Paul, in the film we question, not the validity of the church but its mode of existence. The Church will probably be able to continue for centuries to come if it continually negates and recreates itself. My criticism is against the Church as a power, as it is today'. [70]

St. Paul

This is inner heaven.

There has been a long standing conspiracy against the human race[71], and it starts with Paul. Paul is unstuck from time.[72] The fall on the way to Damascus was not a fall from Saul to Paul, both remain, but a fall through space-time through into 'memories of the future'.[73]

Paul will list the apostles in anger… he is told their true names by the messiahs voice…'The voice of the devil who pretends to be God'[74]

- White Wolf
- Roll
- Pragma
- Porsche
- Jerk-Off

271

- *Fridge*
- *Pan*
- *Musket*
- *Denunciation*
- *The Take*[75]
- *The entrepreneur*
- *Carcosa*

A huge diseased eyeball floats in the sky, flashes, broken sunsets, black stars. —

Paul will say—
'I am blind'.
Then silance
'Perhaps I can see into the future'.[76]

"I do not know, but, I do know that space, time, dimension, becoming, future, destiny, being, non-being, self, non-self, are nothing to me; but there is a thing which is something, only one thing which is something, and which I feel because it wants TO GET OUT : the presence of my bodily suffering, the menacing, never tiring presence of my body; however hard people press me with questions and however vigorously I deny all questions, there is a point at which I find myself compelled to say…. I don't know how it escaped'

'i fell in love with it, thats probably wrong, it fell in love with me, or something in it came and grabbed me and made a permanent impression'.[77]

"Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in

the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in the Earth'.[78]

Hemorraghed eyeball, two, bleeding, thunder.

There is a Paul that says "kill the sun to establish the kingdom of black night, and smash the cross so that the space of time can never again meet and cross."[79] Nothing can be uncovered, nothing should be revealed, hold it tight in the body of institution.

And 'there is a Paul that says 'Laughter is the revelation of the double'[80] everything occurs again and again, sublime into ridiculous.

And there is a Saint Paul, who keeps Christ on the cross, cease lessly leading him back to it, making him rise from the dead, a zombie christ, inventing a new type of priest even more terrible than its predecessors. [81]

"What is this ghost made of? Diamons, zombie christ, gollems? Of signs and signatures, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A specter always carries a date wherever it goes; it is always a historical thing, shot into the future'.[82]

'How did St Paul ever get the idea they could communicate with anyone by letter! One can think about someone far away and one can hold on to someone nearby; everything else is beyond human power. Writing letters, means exposing oneself to the ghosts, who are greedily waiting precisely for that. It never arrives at the destination; the ghosts drink it up along the way. It is this ample nourishment which enables them to multiply so enormously. People sense this and struggle against it; to

eliminate as much of the ghosts' power as possible. They will not starve, but we will perish'.[83]

"History decays into images, not into stories."[84]

St Paul…The scandal of self-contradiction— of being with you and against you; with you in my heart, in the light, against you in the dark of my gut' [85]

'and if it's true i love the world, it's only with a violent, ingenuous, sensual love... and now split—with you— doesn't the world seem full of rancor and almost mystical contempt, at least the part that holds power?' [86]

'How do the dead do such great things'?[87]

Salò

"In the midst of this rowdy imperial epic we see a blasted head flashing, a massive chest crossed by lightning, the phallus-man, an august and cynical profile grimacing like a ghastly and sublime Titan; we feel a thrill of the infinite in the accursed pages, the breath of a tempestuous ideal vibrating on these burnt lips. Come nearer and you will hear the arteries of the universal soul, veins swollen with divine blood palpitating in this muddy and bleeding carcass. This cloaca is impregnated with azure, there is a God-like element in these latrines. Close your ear to the rattle of bayonets and the bark of cannon; turn your eye from this moving tide of war, of victories or defeats; then you will see a huge ghost bursting out against the shadows; you will see the vast and sinister figure of the Marquis de Sade appear above a whole epoch sewn with black stars."[88]

'They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more'.[89]

'Reality is a quality, not a quantity![90]*'*

'all things are good when taken to excess'[91]

"I abandon myself to peace, to the point of annihilation."
"The noises of struggle are lost in death, as rivers are lost in the sea, as black stars burst in the night.
I enter into peace as I enter into a dark unknown.
I fall in this dark unknown.
I myself become this dark unknown[92]*."*

'To think is to step over, to overstep.
'The best thing about religion is that it makes for heretics.
Religion is re-ligio, binding back. It binds its adherents back, first and foremost, to a mythical God of the Beginning, a Creator-God, So, rightly understood, adherence to the Exodus figure called "I will be what I will be," and to the Christianity of the Son of Man and of the Eschaton, is no longer religion.
Only an atheist can be a good Christian; only a Christian can be a good atheist.
What is decisive: to transcend without transcendence'.[93]

God, why have you forsaken us? Why have you forgotten us? Matthew 27:46

I am what I am (Exodus 3 3:14)

They begin to dance together, to the sweet and soft music coming from a radio... a faint, poetic sign of hope for the future'.[94]

Script Footnotes

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[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] 'Pier Paolo Pasolini Speaks - YouTube'. Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IA1bS1MRzw&ab_channel=criterioncollection .

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[6] Ibid 22 minutes.

[7] Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Louise K. Barnett, and Ben Lawton. *Heretical Empiricism*. 2nd English ed. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005. Pg. 168

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[9] Ibid Pg. 83.

[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid

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[18] Pasolini quote from taken from —Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem: Second Edition*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 527

[19] Psalm 78:2

[20] 2 Corinthians 4:18

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²⁴ This is the Centeurs advice to a young Jason at the beginning of *'Medea'* (1969) The quote as it appears here is taken from —Schwartz, Barth David. *Pasolini Requiem: Second Edition*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pg. 514

²⁵ Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Elizabeth A. Castelli. *Saint Paul: A Screenplay*. London ; New York: Verso, 2014. Pg. 38.

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²⁷ Thessolians 5:3

²⁸ Mark 13:32

²⁹ Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Porcile*. I Film Dell'Orso, Internazionale Nembo Distribuzione Importazione Esportazione Film (INDIEF), IDI Cinematografica, 1969.

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³³ Ibid.

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³⁵ Jameson, Fredric. 'Future City'. *New Left Review*, no. 21 (1 June 2003): 65–79.

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