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Ugly, Dirty and Bad¹: Working Class Aesthetics Reconsidered

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Abstract. This article, taking at its starting point the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini, tackles the aesthetic of the working class as an *objet d'art*: how is the aesthetic sense of those who do not belong to the working class, but claim a political interest in its destiny, engaged by the outward appearance of the working class? And, more specifically, has there been a shift from a sense of aesthetic appreciation to what this author perceives as revulsion towards Western working classes? Has our aesthetic gaze wandered off, in search of more distant objects? It is not our goal to answer these questions by means of a quantitative or qualitative sociological analysis, and to this extent, the answers have to be taken as given. The article argues that there is a displacement of our gaze towards the working classes in the developing world, resulting in yet another form of consumption (the campaigns for fair trade would not be so successful without the picture-perfect – and picture-perfect because so completely desolate and objectively poor – sweatshops and small children in the fields). This displacement is not at all innocent. The article will propose that there are legal consequences – by using, and subverting, Luhmann's remark on legal taste; political consequences, where displacement means invisibility and lack of voice; and social consequences, mirroring Pasolini's horror at the cultural genocide, and now looking at the desolate spaces it has left behind.

Keywords. Legal theory, aesthetics, Pier Paolo Pasolini

INTRODUCTION

I miss the real, poor people who fought to get rid of the master, without wanting to become that master. Because they were excluded from everything, nobody had colonised them.²

Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italian poet, film-maker, writer, and intellectual, wrote extensively about the influence of capitalism on the underclass, the embourgeoisement of the working class, and the cultural genocide of the traditional Italian peasant culture.³ Taking inspiration from his writings, this article focuses on the aesthetic

aspects of what he saw as the co-option of the sub-proletariat and the working class to bourgeois values, through consumerism and the developments of late capitalism.

It is important to state as a way of introduction what this article will *not* do: it is not this author's intention to engage with the issue of the supposed lack of an aesthetic sensibility in the working class, which is central to the topic of taste, and bourgeois taste in particular, in Pierre Bourdieu's masterful study.⁴ Equally, the article does not wish to discuss the related issue of cultural production in the context of agency, that is, the capacity of the working class of an independent cultural production, central to the writings of György Lukács.⁵ This lack of engagement with agency does not intend to do away with the intensely political approach Pasolini had towards the role of the sub-proletariat in the first instance and the *other* in general, about which more will be said in the concluding section.

The article intends to focus on the aesthetic of the working class as an *objet d'art*: how is the aesthetic sense of those who do not belong to the working class, but claim a political interest in its destiny, engaged by the outward appearance of the working class? And, more specifically, has there been a shift from a sense of aesthetic appreciation⁶ to what this author perceives as *revulsion* towards Western working classes? Has our aesthetic gaze wandered off, in search of more distant objects? It is not our goal to answer these questions by means of a quantitative or qualitative sociological analysis, and to this extent, the answers have to be taken as given. The article argues that there is a displacement of our gaze towards the working classes in the developing world, resulting in yet another form of consumption (the campaigns for fair trade would not be so successful without the picture-perfect – and picture-perfect because so completely desolate and objectively poor – sweatshops and small children in the fields). This displacement is not at all innocent.⁷ The article will propose that there are legal consequences – by using, and subverting, Luhmann's remark on *legal taste*; political consequences, where displacement means invisibility and lack of voice; and social consequences, mirroring Pasolini's horror at the cultural genocide, and now looking at the desolate spaces it has left behind.

PASOLINI'S WORLD

Death is not being unable to communicate, but not being understood anymore.⁸

Pasolini's political thought was influenced by the intellectual production of the Frankfurt School,⁹ what makes his late writing interesting, and worth revisiting almost 40 years after his death,¹⁰ is his role as a caring and engaged witness of the accelerated changes brought about by late capitalism in Italy, a country that had preserved pre-modern structures and cultures until the early 1960s. His engagement with the underclass, his love for them, remains a rare event in the hopelessly elitist Italian cultural landscape, and contributed to his sense of isolation even

within the Left.¹¹ Pasolini's critique of the consequences of consumerism on the Italian under- and working class is developed through the prism of aesthetics. In his *Lutheran Letters*,¹² he defended his aesthetic choice in the following terms:

My aestheticism is indivisible from my culture. Why deprive my culture of one of its elements even if it is spurious and perhaps even superfluous? It completes a whole. I have no scruples about saying so, because in these last few years I have become convinced that poverty and backwardness are not by any means the worst ill. [...] The point is this: my culture (with its aestheticism) makes me adopt a critical attitude towards modern 'things' understood as linguistic signs.

In his poem on the students' battle against the police at the Valle Giulia School of Architecture in Rome, Pasolini criticized the students for attacking the policemen, who belonged to the lower working class;¹³ in the heated debate that followed the publication of the poem, Pasolini said:

I do not care if my poem is misunderstood [...] in my poem, I say: you students are spoiled brats, and I hate you as I hate your fathers. Why do I say this? Until my generation, young working class people considered the bourgeoisie as an object, a separate world. We could observe the bourgeoisie objectively with the outlook of the one who is different: worker or peasant. For young people today, it is very difficult to look at the bourgeoisie as a different class. Why? Because the bourgeoisie is winning by co-opting workers and peasants. In short, through neo-capitalism, the bourgeoisie is becoming the whole society, coinciding with the history of the world.

This was the political background of his aesthetic judgment. Pasolini's criticism of the students playing the revolution game, pretending to be working class, mirrored his criticism of working class young people pretending to be bourgeois students, adopting the tastes and fashions and pretensions of the bourgeoisie. But the two phenomena are not comparable: students are leaving behind the privileged position to which they will return, working class youth are temporarily escaping their own situation of disadvantage to which they will be inevitably pushed back, because the terrain on which tastes and choices are made will shift under their feet.

Pasolini claimed his right to adopt aesthetics as the privileged viewpoint in his critique. However, one cannot avoid the unpleasant coincidence between his judgment and the revulsion that the dominant class normally feels towards proletarian and underclass attitudes and behaviors. His disdain towards the students, borne out of the recognition of their role as representatives of the ruling classes *playing at the revolution*, is accompanied by his criticism of the working classes' adoption of

middle class tastes and fashions. It is this second argument that opens itself up to criticism: is it right to chastise the working class for internalizing certain behaviors and tastes, when they are not in control of this process, but victims of it?¹⁴ The criticism that can be moved to Pasolini, of having an aesthetic appreciation of the working class only if it responds to certain criteria that have a sensual, and not only political appeal, can be repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, for the modern disquiet that we have in recognizing the working class as an object worthy of attention and aesthetic admiration. Pasolini used aestheticism instrumentally to uncover, through an analysis of hair styles, fashions, sexual behavior and lifestyle choices, the new power structures.¹⁵ We will see in the next section how Pasolini positioned himself as one of the *bourgeois witnesses*, yet his aesthetic rejection remains problematic, if the representatives of the culture he rejected suffered from the same conditions of powerlessness and subjection as before, only with more disposable goods.¹⁶ How fruitful is it to criticize the external manifestations of an objectively subaltern position? Is it only aesthetics, or is it the disillusionment with a working class that did not fulfill its role (did not come to ideological maturity, as Lukács would put it) and was co-opted by bourgeois values?

THE CULTURAL GENOCIDE

The light / of the future never ceases to wound us / for a moment.¹⁷

The previous section closed with an attempt to establish a link between the disquiet at Pasolini's dispassionate criticism expressed in aesthetic terms and our own *averting the gaze* from the modern working classes. Pasolini's saving grace rested in the sincerity of his cry of pain when confronted with what he defined as a *cultural genocide*;¹⁸ in his *Lutheran Letters*, in reference to his movie *Accattone* – which he had made in the early 1960s, before the genocide, or so he argued – he said:

In New York, Paris, London [...] unity, acculturation, centralization, took place in a very different way. Marx was a witness to their genocides more than a century ago. That such genocides are taking place today in Italy substantially changes their historical nature. Accattone and his friends went silently towards deportation and the final solution, perhaps even laughing at their warders. But what about us, the *bourgeois witnesses*?¹⁹

Pasolini's position with respect to the embourgeoisement of the working class is understandable, insofar as the working class had been co-opted, whatever value one attributes to its cultural production, and consumerism had created a new individual. Pasolini's position on the existence of an independent proletarian culture opens itself to charges of false-authenticity and populism or *inverted ethnocentrism*, as Bourdieu

put it.²⁰ However, his closeness to the young Roman underclass (*sottoproletariato*), not completely unrelated to a homosexuality lived at the margins of society,²¹ provided him with insights on how the underclass viewed itself. In his words:

The culture of the lower classes (almost) no longer exists; there exists only an economy of the lower classes [...] the atrocious unhappiness or criminal aggressiveness of the proletarian and sub-proletarian youth derives precisely from the mismatch between culture and economic conditions – from the impossibility of attaining (*except by imitating them*) [emphasis added] middle-class cultural models because of the persistent poverty which is masked by an illusory improvement in the standard of living.²²

The destruction of working class culture, the cultural genocide, resulted in a lack of dialectic between independent cultural forms, which in turn allowed the dominant class to colonize the imagination of the dominated class and to impose a model. But that model was a fake one, and by adopting it the dominated class made itself instantly recognizable as dominated, because incapable of attaining the *real article*. Adorno's writings on style and the role of the cultural industry provide an illuminating parallel:

Having ceased to be anything but style, it [the culture industry] reveals [style]'s secret: obedience to social hierarchy. Today aesthetic barbarity completes what has threatened the creations of the spirit since they were gathered together as culture and neutralized. To speak of culture was always contrary to culture. Culture as a common denominator already contains in embryo that schematization and process of cataloguing and classification which bring culture within the sphere of administration. And it is precisely the industrialized, the consequent subsumption which entirely accords with this notion of culture.²³

This lack of tension, which reflects a cultural void, can be read into the lack of class tension/struggle, and again is apparent in the aesthetics of the class, as interpreted through its behavioral patterns and gestures. If the worker had in his hands the instruments of work, those could also be the instruments of revolution and, as Pasolini wrote in his last, unfinished novel *Petrolio*:

it is the whole of reality that – while being derided – is reaccepted. Reality cannot be divided into a conformist society, following the evolution of capitalism, and those who oppose it, through class struggle: reality contains and integrates both parts, because reality

is not Manichaeic, it does not recognize interruption. Derision towards reality manages to reconcile integration, which is necessary for its ordering, and the most radical and revolutionary critique. What it reminds us of is the gesture of the worker, which is together an act organic to the production process, to which he orderly contributes, and a gesture pregnant with revolutionary menace: the ambivalence of this gesture contains the whole of reality. A bourgeois will never be capable of such gesture. But the bourgeois can perceive social reality as ‘nothingness’ and therefore identify life with the derision of reality. This derision is the equivalent of the worker’s gesture: it contains integration, while depriving it of any meaning.²⁴

Is it a consequence of late capitalism and the loss of power and influence of the working classes that this ambivalence has been lost, and with it the revolutionary power it contained? Instead, to quote Bourdieu, the working class is caught up in an *integrative and reproductive struggle*²⁵ in which the stakes are always too high and structurally unattainable: since it will never be possible to afford the aesthetics of the bourgeoisie, to own it, the end result is an inevitable condition of aesthetic alienation, which mirrors economic alienation. The interplay between the mimesis of the working class, imitating the bourgeois models, and the judgmental aesthetic gaze with which its attempts are observed masks the structural power struggles (or lack thereof). Pasolini’s analysis is right in this respect, the working class has been co-opted, consumerism has created a new individual; Bourdieu’s surveys seem to reflect a reality that was already being dissolved, with the poor restraining from buying and consuming what they could not afford in the first place (Bourdieu remarks several times about the *amor fati* of the dominated); Pasolini already saw beyond that, the inane desire of acquisition that has come to define our times,²⁶ and where restraint, paradoxically, becomes another form of conspicuous consumption (where, to make an obvious example, being thin is a sign of affluence and being overweight a sign of poverty).

Whatever value one attributes to cultural production, the gap remains and it is a structural economic gap that takes an aesthetic form, that is visible aesthetically and not economically anymore, or better, that need not be defined economically because it is aesthetically visible. Pasolini reminds us that “when the exploiters (by means of the exploited) produce goods, in reality they produce human beings (social relations)” and that these social relations, as created by consumerism, “are not subject to modification.”²⁷ The fixity of this relationship results in the lack of alterity lamented by Pasolini, to which we now turn.

ALTERITY AND DIALECTICS

Between these two worlds, the truce, in which we are/not.²⁸

In his *Lutheran Letters*, Pasolini commented on the lack of *alterity* that is a consequence of the disappearance of the working class as a cultural and political subject. In describing the city of Bologna, which was at the time under a communist administration, Pasolini said:

What an Italian city has become, for good or ill, is here accepted, assimilated, and codified. In being both a developed and communist city, [Bologna] is not only a city where there is no alternative, but also a city where there is no alterity.²⁹

The new exemplar of consumer/human being is forced to live: “in a state of what one might call weightlessness: a state which allows them to accord to consumption and the satisfaction of its hedonistic demands the privilege of being the only possible existential act.”³⁰ The similarities with Žižek’s criticism of “frictionless capitalism” are obvious,³¹ it is undoubtedly the lack of alterity, and therefore the lack of dialectics, that has to be picked up as the problematic element, from the point of view of class definition and struggle. Pasolini referred to this in the following terms:

the possibility of alterity does not exist only in class-consciousness and in revolutionary Marxist struggle. It also exists of its own accord in capitalist entropy. There it enjoys its concrete expression, its factual nature. What is, and that “other” which is contained in what is, are two cultural data. Between two such data there exists a relationship based on prevarication [. . .] to transform their relationship into a dialectical relationship is the function [. . .] of Marxism: a dialectical relationship between the culture of class that rules and the class that is ruled. Such a dialectical relationship would therefore no longer be possible where the culture of the class that is ruled had disappeared, been eliminated [. . .] so one must fight for the conservation of all forms of culture, whether alternate or subaltern [. . .].³²

With this, we have travelled quite beyond reflections on aesthetics and cultural production, and close to issues of political agency of the working class and the possibility of a dialectical synthesis. Pasolini himself, as we shall see, was quite skeptical about the feasibility of a dialectical overcoming of this opposition, at least in the post-genocide era he argued we had entered (in the “After-History” he mentioned in the poem quoted in the penultimate section). In this regard, the displacement of his aesthetic gaze to the Third World can be read as an attempt to salvage the possibility of resistance against capitalist colonization. In the next section, we will refocus our attention on aesthetics as it was framed in the introduction, opening with a small disclaimer.

PURE GAZE AND FUNCTIONAL GAZE: REFLEXIVE AESTHETICS

Stupendous and miserable city [. . .].³³

It might seem a minor point, in this conjuncture, to argue for the need for an aesthetics of the working class as the problematic absence in modern day discussions on class. In order to justify its relevance, it is necessary to take a step back, or better, sideways, to consider how aesthetics can help in unfolding, or overcoming, the fissure between form and function that, we argued, could be at the basis of the current aesthetic revulsion towards the Western working classes. In his book on taste, Bourdieu outlined the distinction between the *pure gaze* of the bourgeoisie and the *functional gaze* of the working class; what distinguished the two was the primacy of form over function for the first and of function over form for the second; this categorization was always to be taken in relation of a *third*, the object as artistic object. As Bourdieu noted:

It must never be forgotten that the working class “aesthetic” is a dominated “aesthetic,” which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working class, who can neither ignore high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own “aesthetic,” nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way.³⁴

Both aesthetics define themselves in opposition to each other, because each assigns a different value to the two elements of the binary opposition form/function. Where for the bourgeois aesthetic form prevails over function, and function acquires aesthetic value only insofar as is read as form (therefore an everyday object can be an object of art if it is seen formally, not functionally), for the working class aesthetic function determines artistic value, which substantiates itself in a form that has to be the accepted form for artistic purposes (the *objet d’art* has to be formally beautiful, and the working class representative typically will not recognize the formal beauty of a functional object). Bourdieu’s observation that the pure gaze of the bourgeois or intellectual recognizes artistic value in form rather than function can be employed fruitfully in our own observation about the aesthetic value of the working class *qua* object. If we transfer this dichotomy (form/function) to our field of inquiry, what can we say of the aesthetic appreciation of the working class as a functional object seen in its formal qualities? Is the lamented lack of appreciation due to a degradation of the form or a loss of function? Arguably the two are connected, as was posited at the beginning of this article. If form is dependent on function, a loss of function carries a degradation of the form. Bourdieu claimed that the working class aesthetic is “based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function,”³⁵ against a Kantian

aesthetics which is disinterested and therefore detached.³⁶ Terry Eagleton noted the social function of aesthetics in Kant in creating a community of shared feelings, a sort of “intimate *Gemeinschaft*”;³⁷ amongst other considerations, the ease of transfer between this aesthetic community of feelings and a sense of shared morality is not to be dismissed, if only formally. It is against this disinterested appreciation that Marx juxtaposes his telic use of aesthetic judgment; Eagleton goes as far as to claim that Marx adopts an anti-aesthetic aesthetics, in the sense of an aesthetic that eschews all pretensions of disinterestedness and grounds aesthetic appreciation in the utility of the objects (so in their function).³⁸

The dichotomy between form and function brings us back to agency. The aesthetic appreciation for the working class cannot easily be divorced from an almost messianic faith in its redemptive historical role; its function in bringing about revolutionary change cloaked it in formal beauty. Pasolini mercilessly pierces the veil and exposes the hypocrisy of an intellectual class lost in an “aesthetic fog” that ultimately divided the deserving from the undeserving poor on the basis of their ethics of work as an agent for change. The main character in Accattone exemplifies this disdain towards “work” that horrified the orthodox left.³⁹ Pasolini’s reminder that, in the name of the dialectic of struggle, we ought to preserve subaltern cultures invites us not to avert the gaze from a working class that has disappointed our expectations of its redemptive function and therefore “uglified itself.”⁴⁰ How far this is from that sense of beauty that emanated from the working classes before the “cultural genocide.” There is a sense of wistful love in this poem by Sandro Penna⁴¹ that Pasolini would surely have recognized:

Here are the workers on the green grass,
Eating their lunch: aren’t they beautiful?
Cars rush around them,
People go by, carrying newspapers.
But aren’t the workers beautiful?⁴²

And in turn, one is reminded of Marx’s aesthetic appreciation of the French working men, in the following passage:

When communists workmen gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc. But at the same time they acquire a new need – a need for society – and what appears as a means has become an end. This practical development can be most strikingly observed in the gatherings of French socialist workers. Smoking, eating and drinking, etc., are no longer means of creating links

between people. Company, association, conversation, which in its turn has society as its goal, is enough for them. The brotherhood of man is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their work-worn figures.⁴³

But, truth to be told, Pasolini's aesthetic journey from the Roman underclass to the Indian poor seems to exemplify the same aesthetic revulsion that was mentioned at the beginning; in order to rescue Pasolini's position from this criticism we have to consider its political meaning.⁴⁴ But before that, a brief digression into the role of aesthetics in law is in order, as a reminder of the uphill battle against aesthetic inertia.

LEGAL TASTE AND AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

in the waste of the world, a new/world is born: new laws are born/
where there is no law left.⁴⁵

The relationship between law and aesthetics has been explored before and would take us beyond the scope of this article.⁴⁶ It is, frustratingly, both incredibly narrow and focused in scope, and vague and fluctuating in meaning, so that any attempt to employ this relationship fruitfully runs the risk of dissolving into generalities or collapsing into self-referentiality. This has partially to do with what one intends for aesthetics. For our purpose, it is neither a generic reference to the perception of the world through the senses (as opposed to intellectual or moral cognition), nor an instrument for evaluating law as an artifact in its formal aspects. Instead, law itself is seen here to provide a sense of measure, as mediating between ourselves and the world in a way that is particular and specific to it. To this effect, a crucial distinction is necessary as to the terms of this relationship along functional lines, or, differently put, what acts on what. Much has been said on law's aesthetic quality, both as literature and as image.⁴⁷ This is evident from the very first legislative artifacts produced, which display both a sophisticated use of imagery and iconography and an aesthetic use of the law as signifier of the ideal society.⁴⁸ In this sense, law is the passive object of aesthetic observation and the active producer of aesthetic markers that confer upon it a certain image and linguistic identity. The aesthetics of authority, well recognizable in our own representation of "the Law" (including in its performative function), combines with the aesthetics of reason that legal language wishes to convey. Here there is both overlap (architectural and artistic symmetry in our traditional representation of the law and linguistic symmetry in proportionality and balance as archetypal legal metaphors) and slippage (from aesthetics to reason, where the beautiful and the just seep into each other).⁴⁹ In this relationship, where aesthetics acts upon law, aesthetics helps to naturalize law and therefore contributes to overcome the well-known legal paradox of a self-sustaining system without foundation (where the classical foundations of many legal buildings obscure the foundationless structure of the

law they house).⁵⁰ And further, by this aestheticization of the law, a process of internalization is accomplished by which we “spontaneously” turn towards what is moral and lawful in the pursuit of what is agreeable and good.⁵¹

Not all are willing participants in this process of internalization, through aesthetics, of morality and law. At the borders, as reminders, as excess, as excluded, there remains a whole lot of humanity. And law can also use aesthetics, and more specifically, aesthetic judgment, when adjudicating upon their misdeeds. We have already mentioned proportionality as a way in which the law adjudicates and apportions rights and restrictions on rights. The very language of the law employs a characteristic anti-aesthetic aesthetics of neutrality that is highly discriminating. We as observers can assess the aesthetic, artistic, and ultimately political value of such a stark choice of style before substance. But the law itself employs aesthetic judgment when it observes its environment. This is more obvious where at stake there are matters where aesthetic judgment is intrinsically part of the legal judgment – planning law,⁵² or obscenity law⁵³ – but more interestingly, when this is not the case. In his *Law as a Social System*, Niklas Luhmann only too briefly referred to *legal taste* in the context of human rights, in the following terms:

It may appear cynical today, but if one considers Kant’s theory and his critique of sound judgement in the context of his three critiques, one could also appeal to the effectiveness of sound judgement in relation to “legal taste,” in order to make it clear that this is neither a merely cognitive issue nor one of the application of practical postulates in the form of moral law.⁵⁴

The implications of aesthetic discourse for the rights of the working class, and their diminishing value (and we refer here to labor rights, including the right to strike, for example) are here self-evident; Luhmann’s comment seems to point in that direction, albeit indirectly and indeed in a positive way. If an educated legal taste allows us to recognize the evidence of human rights violations (as Luhmann put it: “In view of all sorts of horrific scenes, no further discussion is necessary”), one could argue that conversely, an *uneducated* legal taste could blind us, and the law, to human rights violations when these do not conform to certain aesthetic criteria. It is essential to note the presence of this blind spot, this aesthetic inertia I referred to earlier, as it is thanks to this that aesthetic judgment predetermines and undermines legal judgment.

If the connection is made between legal taste and aesthetic judgment, then a negative aesthetic judgment could prevent the recognition of violations of rights that are already routinely dismissed as unnecessary, such as labor rights and economic rights. There is an overlap here between the aesthetics of suffering and the aesthetics of legal judgment; additionally, and at a higher level of generalization, it

can be argued that aesthetics is the way in which the legal order looks at the world, indeed the only way. As Eagleton noted:

That “lawfulness without law” which Kant will identify in the aesthetic is first of all a question of the social *Lebenswelt*, which seems to work with all the rigorous encodement of a rational law but where such law is never quite abstractable from the sensuously particular conduct which instantiates it. The bourgeoisie has won certain historic victories within the political state; but the problem with such conflicts is that, in rendering the Law perceptible as a discourse, they threaten to denaturalize it. Once the Law is objectified by political struggle, it becomes itself an object of contestation. Legal, political and economic transformations must therefore be translated into new kinds of spontaneous social practice, which in a kind of creative repression or amnesia can afford to forget the very laws they obey. *Structures of power must become structures of feeling and the name for this mediation from property to propriety is the aesthetic.*⁵⁵

The crucial point to be noted here is in the reflexive character of the aesthetic moment, whereby it is through aesthetic cognition⁵⁶ that we apprehend the world and its power structures, including its legal order (in hegemonic manner, in Gramscian terms), but equally, the legal order distinguishes and categorizes according to aesthetic criteria.

And with this we come back to Pasolini, who had the distinction of being the most prosecuted artist in Italy, with more than 30 trials to his name for obscenity and contempt of religion. These trials, which involved testimony from some of the most important Italian intellectuals of the time, can be seen both as a form of political trial that uses aesthetic judgment (it is his worth as an artist that is put on trial amongst other things) and as in itself a form of artistic performance by Pasolini; in the trial for his movie *La Ricotta*, two of his poems were quoted by the defense counsel to clarify his position with respect to the Catholic Church: so poetic language becomes court evidence.

MIMESIS AND POLITICS

The problem of the destruction of the class that is governed, seen as the elimination of a dialectical and therefore threatening alterity, is a problem that concerns the majority.⁵⁷

We have come to the point where the screen of aesthetic distancing is working against any attempt of political action.⁵⁸ Pasolini himself claimed his aesthetic choice, as we have seen, and yet at the same time overcame its alienating risks by,

in a Hegelian move, dialectically engaging with the object/subject he was observing.⁵⁹ This *being within the subject and outside of it* he would have claimed as the position of the true intellectual, if the possibility of political alterity was to remain real. In his collection of essays *Heretical Empiricism*, Pasolini wrote:

The most detestable and intolerable thing, even in the most innocent of bourgeois, is the inability to acknowledge experiences of life that are different from their own, which means conceiving all other experiences as substantially analogous to their own. [...] These bourgeois writers, no matter how virtuous and dignified, who cannot recognize the extreme psychological difference of another human being from their own, take the first step towards forms of discrimination that are essentially racist; in this sense they are not free, but they belong deterministically to their own class: fundamentally, there is no difference between them and a head of the police or an executioner in a concentration camp.⁶⁰

Vighi noted the overlap between Pasolini's total mimesis with the excluded and Žižek's comment on the political force contained in the act of "identifying universality with the point of exclusion."⁶¹ Pasolini himself elaborated on the dangers of eschewing this mimesis, again in his *Lutheran Letters*:

There are intellectuals, engaged intellectuals, who consider it their own and other people's duty to make known to lovable people, who do not know it, that they have rights;⁶² to incite lovable people not to renounce rights they know they possess; to compel everyone to feel the historical impulse to fight for the rights of others; and finally, to consider it to be incontrovertible and absolute, as between exploiters and exploited, that the exploited are the unhappy ones.

[...] It is now time to mention that the rights I have been talking about are "civil rights" [...] what does the extremist who teaches others to have rights actually teach? He teaches that he who serves has the same rights as the one who commands. What does the extremist who teaches others to fight to obtain their own rights, in fact teach? He teaches that one must exploit the same rights as the bosses do. What does the extremist who teaches that those who are exploited by the exploiters are unhappy, teach? He teaches that one must lay claim to the same kind of happiness as the exploiters. The result eventually reached in this way is therefore an *identification* [emphasis added], that is to say, in the best of cases, democratization in the bourgeois sense. The tragedy of the extremists consists

therefore in turning a struggle, which they define verbally as Marxist–Leninist and revolutionary, into a regressive civil war as old as the bourgeoisie and essential to their very existence. The attainment of one’s own rights merely promotes the person who gains them to the rank of the bourgeoisie.⁶³

Pasolini’s insistence on the universality of the excluded and the necessity of identification with *their* reality⁶⁴ neatly mirrors his revulsion with this “upwardly mobile” identification with the included that the intellectuals, even innocently, propose as the solution.⁶⁵ In this context, our criticism of aesthetic revulsion Pasolini felt for a co-opted working class loses some of its force, because it fails to recognize a “tipping point” that Pasolini identified. His identification with the excluded is significant to the extent that he recognized the value of exclusion as the only place where political action became possible; his averting the gaze, from the Roman sub-proletariat to the transnational excluded was first and foremost a political act, in fact, the only political act that defied co-option.⁶⁶ The totalizing nature of Pasolini’s political choice of refusal⁶⁷ encompasses the physical, the sexual, the geographical, and the chronological. His *being outside* is beautifully expressed in this poem:

I am a force of the past.
 Tradition is my only love.
 I come from the ruins, the churches,
 the altarpieces, the abandoned
 villages on the Apennines or the Prealps,
 where the brothers lived.
 I wander on the Tuscolana like a madman,
 on the Appia like a stray dog.
 Or I watch the twilights, the mornings
 of Rome, of Ciociaria, of the world,
 the first acts of this After-History,
 of which I am the witness, by chronological privilege,
 from the very end of some buried

age. Only a monster can be born
 from the womb of a dead woman.
 And I, adult foetus, wander around,
 more modern than any modern,
 searching for brothers that are no more.⁶⁸

One should not be too optimistic about Pasolini's choice of exclusion as the only possible position, to the extent that it revealed a negative stance, an acknowledgment of the (near) impossibility of revolution after the successful capitalist revolution.⁶⁹

CONCLUSIONS

Will you ask of me, dead man, unadorned,/ that I abandon this hopeless passion to be in the world?⁷⁰

This article moved uneasily between acceptance and rejection of Pasolini's aesthetic judgment. The idea for this study was born out of the observation of the role of aesthetic judgment in modern discourses about class. Bourdieu defined one of the strongest social sentiments, snobbery, in the following fashion: "Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes; class endogamy is evidence of this."⁷¹ And Pasolini, in *Petrolio*, referred to the relationship between the protagonist Carlo⁷² and the working class Carmelo in the following terms:

The bourgeois Carlo – who was not by any means the most despicable of bourgeois – [...], was therefore confronted with this problem: was his inability to love Carmelo at the origin of his inability to love his world, or was his inability to love the popular world preventing him from loving Carmelo?⁷³

At the basis of this aesthetic judgment there is necessarily a form of distancing.⁷⁴ To bridge this aesthetic gap is a political gesture; one either overcomes it in the name of politics or in the name of love. Pasolini's "*fundamentalist* identification with the constitutional other of the hegemonic bourgeois order"⁷⁵ is both a declaration of love *and* a political act, and consciously so. This "walk to the streets of the poor, where you must be wretched and strong, brothers to the dogs" exemplifies Pasolini's attitude towards the underclass: it is his openness to it, his desire to learn

it, internalize it, make it his, that allows that aesthetic gap bridging that we have pursued in this work.

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1. This is the English translation of the movie title *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi*, by Italian director Ettore Scola, winner of the Best Director Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1976.
2. Furio Colombo, "Siamo tutti in pericolo," *Tuttolibri* (November 8, 1975).
3. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "8 luglio 1974. Limitatezza della storia e immensità del mondo contadino," in *Scritti corsari* (Milan: Garzanti, 1990), 52.
4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction — A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Routledge: London, 1984).
5. György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1967).
6. In Italy, neo-realism in cinema and literature reflected the aesthetic choice that accompanied political engagement.
7. Pasolini himself shifted his attention and his aesthetic gaze to the Third World; Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Scent of India*, trans. David Price (St Albans: Verulam, 1984). Certainly he would be horrified that also this has become a product.
8. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Una disperata vitalità," in *Poesia in forma di rosa*, in *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), 1182 (author's translation).
9. Pasolini makes an explicit reference to this in his poem 'Dutschke' (dedicated to the German leader of the student movement in 1968), where he writes, "In Frankfurt there's hope. In Heidelberg, people study, in the general boredom"; Pasolini, *Scent of India*, 32.
10. Pasolini died on the night of November 2, 1975, officially killed by a *ragazzo di vita* (rent boy) on the beach of Ostia, near Rome.
11. His relationship with the orthodox Left in Italy is well known, from his expulsion from the Communist Party in 1949 to the criticisms that followed the publication of his first novel, *Ragazzi di vita* (1956); the official literary critic of the party accused the book of "lacking an adequate ideological basis" and him of "choosing the Roman *lumpenproletariat* as its topic as an excuse, while the real focus is his morbid taste for everything dirty, abject, disjointed and dark"; Pasolini, "Una disperata vitalità," XCV.
12. Pasolini, "Our Impotence in the Face of the Pedagogic Language of Things," in *Lutheran Letters*, trans. Stuart Hood (New York, NY: Carcanet, 1987), 32.
13. When yesterday, at Valle Giulia, you fought/ with the police/ I was rooting for the police!/ Because they come from poor families./ They come from poor dwellings, in the country or in the city./ They are twenty years old/ your age, my dears./ And so yesterday, at Valle Giulia/ we had an episode of class struggle:/ and you, my friends (even if on the right side)/ were the rich/ and the police (who were on the wrong side)/ were the poor.
14. "What the relation to 'mass' (and a fortiori 'elite') cultural products reproduces, reactivates and reinforces is not the monotony of the production line or office but the social relation which underlies working-class experience of the world, whereby his labour and the product of his labour [. . .] present themselves to the worker as [. . .] 'alienated' labour. Dispossession is never more totally misrecognized, and therefore tacitly recognized, than when, with the progress of automation, economic dispossession is combined with the cultural dispossession which provides the best apparent justification for economic dispossession"; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 386.
15. Pasolini's reflections on power are not too far from Michel Foucault's. In his *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 600, Pasolini writes: "the progressive struggle for the democratization of expression and sexual liberation has been brutally overcome and annulled by the consumerist power's decision to grant a wide (and false) tolerance. [. . .] the 'reality' of innocent bodies has been equally violated, manipulated and damaged by the same power: in fact, this violence against the body is the most blatant fact of the new epoch of humanity." For an interesting parallel, see Ward

Blanton, "Reappearance of Paul, 'Sick': Foucault's Biopolitics and the Political Significance of Pasolini's Apostle," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11 (1) (2010): 52–77. Blanton quotes Pasolini's script for his unrealized movie on St Paul, to the effect that "in a peaceful world that is 'dominated' by this type of 'power,' 'one must protest by refusing to exist,' a strangely creative act of abstraction from the abstractions of neo-capitalist economies of Life" (71). We do not know if Pasolini ever read Foucault, but we know that Foucault knew and read Pasolini (in 1977 he reviewed Pasolini's movie *Comizi d'amore* and in the review cited Pasolini's *Scritti corsari*; the review was reprinted on the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on April 27, 2010).

16. "I look at the crowd and ask myself: Where is this anthropological revolution I write so much about for people consumed by the art of not knowing? And I answer myself: There they are. In fact the crowd around me, instead of being the plebeian and dialect-speaking crowd of ten years ago, a wholly popular one, is a crowd of the most middle-class kind, happy to be that way. Ten years ago I loved this crowd; today it disgusts me"; *Lutheran Letters*, trans. Stuart Hood (New York: Carcanet Press, 1987), 63.
17. "Il pianto della scavatrice," Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 833.
18. And in his "unflinching declaration of love," as he put it, for the excluded Roman underclass before its co-option and resulting cultural genocide; and yet he also had to move farther away in order to find an object for his love.
19. "My 'Accattone' on TV after the genocide"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 104 (added emphasis). For an interesting analysis of the movie that contextualizes and stresses the intensely political approach Pasolini took towards the figure of the subaltern subject (when this position was unpopular even within the left and yet untaken by intellectuals), see Fabio Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion. Žižek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-proletariat," *Theory, Culture and Society* 20, no. 5 (2003): 99–121. The article does not contextualize Pasolini's attitude towards the excluded "post-Accattone," which can be summarized as a displacement towards the Third World.
20. "It is truly the experience that an intellectual can obtain of the working-class world by putting himself provisionally and deliberately into the working-class condition, and it may become less and less improbable if, as is beginning to happen, an increasing number of individuals are thrown into

the working-class condition without having the habitus that is the product of the conditionings 'normally' imposed on those who are condemned to this condition. Populism is never anything than inverted ethnocentrism, and if descriptions of the industrial working class and the peasantry almost always vacillate between miserabilism and millenarian exaltation, this is because they leave out the relation to class condition which is part of the complete definition of that condition, and because it is less easy to state the actual relation to the condition one is describing (without necessarily being able to feel it) than to put one's own relation to it into a description — if only because this spurious identification and the indignation it inspires have all the appearances of legitimacy to support them"; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 373; "Those who believe in the existence of a 'popular culture,' a paradoxical notion which imposes [...] the dominant definition of culture, must expect to find [...] only the scattered fragments of an old erudite culture (such as folk medicine), selected and reinterpreted in terms of the fundamental principles of the class habitus and integrated into the unitary world view it engenders, and not the counter-culture they call for, a culture truly raised in opposition to the dominant culture and consciously claimed as a symbol of status or a declaration of separate existence"; *ibid.*, 395.

21. "I work all day like a monk/ and at night I wander about like an alley cat/ looking for love [...] I'll propose/ to the Church that I be made a saint"; Pasolini, *Roman Poems*, trans. Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valente (San Francisco, CA: City Light, 1986/2005), 87.
22. "My proposals for schools and televisions"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 113.
23. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1972), 130–1.
24. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Petrolio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 396–7 (author's translation).
25. "Competitive struggle is the form of class struggle which the dominated classes allow to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes. It is an integrative struggle and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a reproductive struggle, since those who enter this chase, in which they are beaten before they start, as the constancy of these gaps testifies, implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the goals pursued by those whom they pursue, by the mere fact of taking part"; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 164.

26. "The 'mode of production' has changed — enormous quantities, superfluous goods, a hedonistic function. But it is not only goods that are produced; it makes social relationships as well — human beings. The 'new mode of production' has therefore produced a new kind of human being, that is to say, a 'new culture' which changes man anthropologically: in this case the Italian"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 118.
27. *Ibid.*, 124.
28. *Ibid.*, 815.
29. "Bologna, a Consumerist and Communist City"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 39.
30. "Pannella and dissent"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 54.
31. Slavoj Žižek, "Nobody has to be Vile," *London Review of Books* (April 6, 2006).
32. "Intervention at the Radical Party Congress"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 124.
33. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Il pianto della scavatrice*. This poem is central to Pasolini's aesthetic of the excluded, exemplified in a series of oxymoronic couplings, of which the above verse is the clearest example. The poem goes on to remark how this *stupendous and miserable city* [of course, Rome] taught him "that few knew the passions/ in which I've lived; that they are/ not brotherly to me, and yet they are/ my brothers because they have/ passions of men/ who joyous, unknowing, whole, live experiences/ unknown to me [. . .]"; Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 833.
34. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 41.
35. *Ibid.*, 4.
36. "It is no accident that [. . .] the popular 'aesthetic' appears as the negative opposite of the Kantian aesthetic, and that the popular ethos implicitly answers each proposition of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' with a thesis contradicting it. [. . .]. This 'aesthetic,' which subordinates the form and the very existence of the image to its function, is necessarily pluralistic and conditional [. . .]"; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 41.
37. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 75.
38. *Ibid.*, 205.
39. Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion," 108. When the movie was presented at the Venice Film Festival in 1961, Pasolini was accused of being only moved by his "aesthetic passion," as remembered by the critic Adelio Ferrero; quoted in Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, CII.
40. It has done so by returning to us a vulgarized and cheaper image of our own bourgeois selves. Bourdieu's comments on the reality of representation and the representation of reality seem apposite here: "One only has to bear in mind that goods are converted into distinctive signs, which may be signs of distinctions but also of vulgarity, as soon as they are perceived rationally, to see that the representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties is an integral part of social reality. A class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*, by its consumption — which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic — as much as by its position in the relations of production (even if it is true that the latter governs the former)"; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 483.
41. Little known outside of Italy, but beloved by Pasolini, who wrote to him and of him that he was "the greatest and most joyous of Italian poets"; "Letter to Sandro Penna," in Pasolini Archive, http://www.pasolini.net/saggistica_PPP-a-SandroPenna.htm/.
42. Sandro Penna, *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Garzanti, 1977), 46 (author's translation).
43. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 365, as quoted in Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 204.
44. Antonio Negri's reconsideration of the role of poverty and the poor as the immeasurable, in the sense of what is "outside measure" and therefore resistant, is put by him in the following terms: "The beautiful is lived as joy of the multitude; it is imagination and expression of all wealth in that absolutely singular moment when the poor lean over the edge of time. Aesthetic delight lies always in the perception of the immeasurable and there is no artistic creation that is not (or that could not be) delight of the poor as multitude. Consequently the monuments erected by the Powerful to the divinity of measure must be destroyed, just as the museums, veritable temples fashioned by the measure of Power, must be deserted. What is beautiful is the generation of subjectivity"; Antonio Negri, "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitude," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 22, no. 1 (2000): 289–301. The original Italian was published as *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitude. Nove lezioni impartite a me stesso* (Rome: Manifesto Libri, 2000).
45. "'Sesso, consolazione della miseria! La religione del mio tempo,'" in Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 925.
46. A comprehensive attempt is given by Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead, ed., *Law and Image: The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999). A very critical review of this edited collection is by Ann Barron, "Spectacular Jurisprudence," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 20, no. 2 (2000): 301–315.

47. Including the dichotomy of “law in literature” and “law as literature.” See also Guyora Binder, “Aesthetic Judgment and Legal Justification,” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society, Special Issue: Law and Literature Reconsidered*, ed. Austin Sarat 57 (2012): 79–112.
48. Codes of law such as the Hammurabi Code were inscribed on stele of monumental quality; more importantly, the codes of law constituted paradigms of justice and wisdom rather than applicable laws (as we know from contemporary documents), giving aesthetic form to the ideal of the king as dispenser of justice (keeping in mind also the traditional image of the king as protector of the weak, such as widows and orphans, and his role in relieving the poor from debt servitude); Mario Liverani, *Antico Oriente. Storia, società, economia* (Bari: Laterza 1988), 412–13.
49. The *καλοὶ κ’ ἀγαθοὶ* of Athenian memory were indeed the upper classes, but they were to be distinguished by their beauty as well as their “goodness.”
50. Niklas Luhmann, *Law as a Social System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
51. Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, ch. 1, with additional references.
52. Even when used *e contrario*, aesthetic reasonings reaffirm the influence that aesthetic considerations exert over certain areas of law, in that form of non-aesthetic aesthetics referred to above. In *City of Youngstown v. Kahn Bros. Bldg. Co.*, 112 Ohio St. 654, 148 N.E. 842 (1925), the US Supreme Court gave the classic articulation of this view (the subjectivity argument), when it stated: “It is commendable and desirable, but not essential to the public need, that our aesthetic desires be gratified. Moreover, authorities in general agree as to the essentials of a public health program, while the public view as to what is necessary for aesthetic progress greatly varies. Certain Legislatures might consider that it was more important to cultivate a taste for jazz than for Beethoven, for posters than for Rembrandt, and for limericks than for Keats. Successive city councils might never agree as to what the public needs from an aesthetic standpoint, and this fact makes the aesthetic standard impractical as a standard for use restriction upon property. The world would be at continual seesaw if aesthetic considerations were permitted to govern the use of the police power. We are therefore remitted to the proposition that the police power is based upon public necessity, and that the public health, morals, or safety, and not merely aesthetic interest, must be in danger in order to justify its use.” A different approach was taken in *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 26 (1954), where the Supreme Court pointed out that: “The concept of the public welfare is broad and inclusive. [citation omitted] The values it represents are spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as monetary. It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community should be beautiful as well as healthy, spacious as well as clean, well balanced as well as carefully patrolled.” See also “Beyond the Eye of the Beholder: Aesthetics and Objectivity,” *Michigan Law Review* 71, no. 7 (1973): 1438.
53. Eugene F. Kaelin, “The Pornographic and the Obscene in Legal and Aesthetic Contexts,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 4, no. 3 (1970): 69–84. This would be of course the terrain for the battles conducted by Pasolini against the Italian State and the Catholic Church, of which more below.
54. Luhmann, *Law as a Social System*, 484, n. 50.
55. Terry Eagleton, “The Ideology of the Aesthetic,” in *The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric*, ed. Paul Hernadi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 75–86 (added emphasis).
56. In its original sense derived from the Greek *αἰσθητικός*, perception, from the verb *αἰσθάνομαι*, to perceive through the senses.
57. Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 124.
58. It is argued here that aesthetics is disembodied and therefore “disembodying”: the same medium that allows us to experience reality is a screen that separates us from it.
59. Pasolini himself argued that Hegelian dialectics was no longer possible, and declared: “I am against Hegel [. . .] my dialectic is no longer ternary but binary. There are only oppositions”; Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Ancora il linguaggio della realtà,” *Filmcritica* 214 (1971).
60. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 1995), 89–90 (the translation is given in Vighi, “Pasolini and Exclusion,” 102).
61. And its Lacanian undertones; Vighi, “Pasolini and Exclusion,” 102–3.
62. Pasolini wrote this letter, with an eye, it seems, to Wittgenstein, in apodictic mode, starting with the first postulate, that “The most lovable people are those who do not know they have rights.”
63. Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 120.
64. As the only reality that is not in the system yet. It is crucial to stress that this is the opposite of sympathy. One could imagine Pasolini argue that it is the excluded who should have sympathy for the included. In his poem *Blue-eyed Ali*, Pasolini prefigures the arrival of immigrants from the African

- continent ("dressed in Asian rags and American shirts," an image now so familiar to us from the news of yet another migrant boat arriving in Sicily or Southern Spain, but an image he did not live to see), and writes that they will come "to teach the workers the joy of life — to teach the bourgeois the joy of freedom [. . .]"; Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 1287.
65. "At a time of a justified euphoria on the Left I foresee [. . .] the worst danger that awaits us intellectuals [. . .] a new *trahison des clercs*, a new acceptance, a new adhesion, a new surrender to the *fait accompli*, a new régime even if it is only in the form of a new culture and a new quality of life. [. . .] The more fanatically an intellectual is convinced of the value of his contribution to the attainment of civil rights, the more he accepts the social-democratic function which power imposes on him, thus abrogating any real alternative [. . .]"; Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 126.
66. "Rather than playing the game of the endless, contingent re-signification of the liberal democratic context, by then pervasively controlled by late-capitalist ideology, Pasolini assumed the impossible and yet properly political risk of forcing a radical break with that context, opening up the space for a new historical configuration"; Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion," 104.
67. As he put it in his script for a movie on Paul, "one must protest by refusing to exist"; quoted in Blanton, "Reappearance of Paul, 'Sick,'" 71.
68. From the movie *La ricotta* (1963); in the movie, Orson Welles reads the poem.
69. It is "the infinite nature of desire" successfully harnessed by capitalism to bring about this impossibility; Walter Siti, "Pasolini's Second Victory," in *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 58.
70. Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 815.
71. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 56.
72. The protagonist takes on different personifications in the novel, including his transformation into a woman; it is as a woman that Carlo has a sexual relationship with Carmelo.
73. Pasolini, *Petrolio*, 317 (author's translation).
74. The argument is here against moral sympathy and the aesthetic of suffering, in other words, the recognition of the suffering of others. Even then, there is a distancing movement, which is the disavowal of any responsibility for that suffering. Dostoevsky lets Ivan Karamazov, in the chapter aptly titled "Rebellion," clearly articulate the impossibility of compassion; the monologue is worth quoting at length: "I never could understand how it's possible to love one's neighbours. In my opinion, it is precisely one's neighbours that one cannot possibly love. [. . .] Let's say that I, for example, am capable of profound suffering, but another man will never be able to know the degree of my suffering, because he is another and not me, and besides, a man is rarely willing to acknowledge someone else as a sufferer (as if it were a kind of distinction). And why won't he acknowledge it, do you think? Because I, for example, have a bad smell, or a foolish face, or once stepped on his foot. Besides, there is suffering and suffering: some benefactor of mine may still allow a humiliating suffering, which humiliates me — hunger, for example; but a slightly higher suffering — for an idea, for example — no, that he will not allow, save perhaps on rare occasions, because he will look at me and suddenly see that my face is not at all the kind of face that, he fancies, a man should have who suffers, for example, for such and such an idea. [. . .] It's still possible to love one's neighbour abstractly, and even occasionally from a distance, but hardly ever up close. If it were all as it is on stage, in a ballet, where beggars, when they appear, come in silken rags and tattered lace and ask for alms dancing gracefully, well, then it would still be possible to admire them. To admire, but still not love"; Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), 236–7.
75. Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion," 102.

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