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A “desperate vitality”.

Tableaux vivants in the work of Pasolini and Ontani (1963-74)

I am a force of the Past.
Only tradition is my love.
I come from the ruins, the churches,
the altarpieces, the villages
abandoned on the Apennines, the Alpine foothills
where my brothers lived.
I rove the Tuscolana like a madman,
or the Appia like a dog without a master.
Or I look at the twilights, the mornings
over Rome, Ciociaria, the world,
like the first acts of post-history,
which I witness, thanks to my date of birth,
from the far edge of some
buried age...
And I, adult fetus,
more modern than all the moderns, roam
in search of brothers that are no more.
Pier Paolo Pasolini, “10 giugno 1962”, *Mamma Roma*¹

This essay focuses on four key works by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-75) and Luigi Ontani (b. 1943) that involve tableaux vivants after sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings held in Italian churches and museums: Pasolini’s short film *La ricotta* (1963), and Ontani’s video *Favola impropriata* (1970-71) and two photographic works – *La caduta dei ciechi d’après Brueghel* and *San Sebastiano nel bosco di Calvenzano (d’après Guido Reni)* – also from circa 1970. In the 1960s and 1970s, several other Italian filmmakers and artists referenced past art in their work. Indeed, quotations and allusions to past art are characteristic of an idiosyncratic strain of Italian cinema and art that ran throughout the twentieth century. Ontani, however, stands out for his commitment to referencing past art through performance and impersonation, and his tableaux vivants have their most important precedent in Pasolini.

Problematizing assumptions that reviving past art is regressive or perhaps escapist, this study addresses the fundamental question of what it may have meant for Pasolini and Ontani to engage with appropriation and citation in the form of performative renderings. Why were certain works recreated instead of others? What can the sociopolitical and cultural context tell us about their practice? Bringing together contemporaneous contributions from different fields, including literature and philosophy, this essay frames Pasolini’s and Ontani’s concern with the past in the specific context of Italy over the period from 1963 to 1974.² It proposes to interpret their practice as a meaningful way of coping with the disorienting and despairing reality of the present.

The works discussed here were produced at a time marked by profound changes and crises that permeated Italian society and culture, leaving the country forever changed. The extraordinarily swift transformation of the economy from predominantly agrarian to industrial, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the onset of internal terrorism in 1969 can be deemed the two most dramatic phenomena of postwar Italy. Industrialization led to burgeoning consumerism, bourgeoisification of the lower classes, cultural homogenization, and the progressive loss of local traditions. These changes prompted an identity crisis in Pasolini that was both ideological and existential, making him question his own social role as a committed intellectual. At the end of the 1960s a series of bombs plotted by neo-Fascist groups detonated in public spaces in Milan and Rome, inaugurating the darkest period of the country's postwar history, dubbed by the press *anni di piombo* or "leaden years" (1969-c. 1983). The wave of politically motivated violence that hit the country could only aggravate Pasolini's crisis. It resulted in anxiety, disillusionment, and alienation – in the sense of disconnectedness and uprootedness – that were widespread and did not spare Ontani either. Indeed Ontani's artistic career began under the weight of the *anni di piombo*. In the face of the deadlock generated by extremism from both the right and left, Ontani embraced the liberating impulse of impersonating other characters.

Central to the contextualization proposed here is the discourse that developed in Italy from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s around "Mannerism" and "mannerism" – the former referring to sixteenth-century *maniera*, or the *maniera moderna*, as Giorgio Vasari called it in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550, enlarged 1568), and the latter understood as a meta-historical category and allegory for sociopolitical and cultural crisis. The term Mannerism gained currency in German scholarship of the 1920s in reference to Italian art produced between 1520 and the end of the sixteenth century. Generally despised earlier, save for a brief moment during the Romantic period, Mannerism was appreciated again at the time of German Expressionism. It was interpreted as symptomatic of the sociopolitical, moral, and economic crisis that Italy was undergoing at the dawn of the Reformation. The meta-historical notion of mannerism is tied to this association with a remarkable crisis.³ Although the term Mannerism is a misnomer (the suffix "-ism" suggests an artistic movement, a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), it is adopted here as it was commonly used around the time that Pasolini and Ontani staged their tableaux vivants. Without claiming to attempt to redefine Mannerism or meta-historical mannerism, this study surveys significant contributions on these subjects. Texts by Giuliano Briganti, Arnold Hauser, Ludwig Binswanger, and others will be considered. Critical

contributions by Renato Barilli on Giorgio de Chirico’s post-Metaphysical work and by Gianni Vattimo on the mask in Nietzsche will also be discussed.

Then and Now

Ontani commented that his work is “a form of mannerism” that helps him deal with everyday life.⁴ Around 1970 he began to pose as figures from past paintings, mostly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in life-size color photographs that he variously called *tableaux vivants*, *d’après*, and *quadri-non-quadri* (paintings-non-paintings). The works bring together performance, photography, and painting. “I thought of making painting by enlarging a photographic pose to life size”, as in a Renaissance altarpiece, he explained.⁵ When he started staging *tableaux vivants*, Italy had just plunged into the *anni di piombo*, having witnessed one of the major right-wing terrorist massacres, the infamous Strage di Piazza Fontana in Milan in December of 1969, and the founding, in early 1970, of the *Brigate Rosse*, which became the largest and strongest of the left-wing terrorist groups. There were nearly 600 groups of both left and right active over the course of this period.

One of Ontani’s earliest *tableaux vivants* is *La caduta dei ciechi d’après Brueghel* (1970-71) [fig. 1], which lends itself to an interpretation as a political allegory of the onset of the *anni di piombo*. For this work Ontani cast the shadow of his own body on a white background, mimicking the pose of each of the six figures in Brueghel’s *Parable of the Blind*, held in the collection of the Capodimonte Museum in Naples. Ontani conceived this tableau as a series of six poses, presented as both photographic prints and slide projections. He realized it in collaboration with photographer Cesare Bastelli at a small experimental theater in Bologna called Teatro Evento.⁶ At the time Bastelli was involved with theater; he later worked in cinema as a director of photography.

Brueghel’s *Parable of the Blind* depicts a story in the Gospel of Matthew that exemplifies the human tendency of blindly following leaders. The scene in the painting looks out of focus, as if seen by a visually impaired person. At the time the work was executed, in 1568, Catholics and Protestants used the biblical parable to accuse one another of spiritual blindness. In his impersonations of the figures in the painting, Ontani changed the orientation of their bodies relative to the picture plane so that their individual positions would appear clearly readable, either frontal (the first figure in the sequence) or in profile. Their rendering as black silhouettes accentuates their anonymity and grimness and reinforces the reading of the work as an allegory of the

opposing but equally blind forces dominating in the *anni di piombo*: terrorism and its counterpart, conformism.

At the end of that deeply troubled decade, at a symposium commemorating Pasolini that was organized by the Italian Institute of Culture in New York City and held at Yale University in October of 1980, art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva drew a parallel between “then” and “now”: on the one hand, the “religious, economic, scientific, and moral crises that marked the end of the Renaissance” and the beginning of Mannerism, and, on the other, “the crises that gnaw our contemporary society, put artists outside of all certainties, and make them adopt art as a means to affirm their own identity”.⁷ Pasolini, he continued, “like a historical Mannerist . . . yearns for the total artist of the Renaissance”.⁸ Thus a central correspondence between Pasolini and the sixteenth-century artists is their longing for a beloved, foregone past, as the passage “I Am a Force of the Past” conveys. Pasolini wrote it while at work on the screenplay of *La ricotta*. In an intense sequence of the film, he had his alter ego, the character of the film director, played by Orson Welles, recite it.

Bonito Oliva was drawing on characterizations, prevalent in Italian art historical scholarship, of Mannerism as a response to a climate of acute instability and Mannerist artists as eccentric, aloof individuals. Although he was speaking in the aftermath of the two most tragic events of the *anni di piombo* – the killing of former premier Aldo Moro in 1978 and the bombing of the Bologna train station in 1980 – his interest in Mannerism and his claim of its affinities with the present date back to the early 1970s. In a lecture presented at the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte in Rome in 1972, “La citazione deviata: L’ideologia”, he remarked that the rediscovery of Mannerism in the twentieth century was due to these affinities. It “has coincided”, he stated, “with a historical situation that parallels the contradictions and alienation of the sixteenth century, in which . . . artists adopted behaviors that anticipated the anguish and detachment of modern intellectuals”.⁹ Restlessness and disorientation, due to the loss of an identifiable social role for intellectuals and artists, he continued, characterize both centuries. Art, in Mannerism as in the present day, he concluded, “does not have a direct grip on the world, but only exists as possibility and *deviated citation* [italics added]”.¹⁰ The notion of “deviated” or oblique citation suits both Ontani’s and Pasolini’s performative renderings of past paintings, as they lack literal exactitude (*à la* Luchino Visconti). They feature an amateurish quality and often incorporate elements of contemporary popular culture, revealing the fiction of the *mise en scène*.

Tableaux Vivants of Mannerist Paintings

Already in 1959 the writer and literary critic Pietro Citati called Pasolini “a superbly mannerist artist” in reference to his literary work.¹¹ Besides noting direct references to Mannerism in Pasolini’s work, Citati stressed similarities in terms of taste and style, adducing, for example, artifice and pastiche. Over forty years later, film scholar Antonio Costa characterized Pasolini’s recourse to painting citations in film as a “mostly mannerist whim” (*capriccio manieristico*).¹² Pasolini himself declared his love of Mannerism on several occasions. The poem “La Guinea,” which he wrote in 1962 and included in the collection *Poesia in forma di rosa*, published in 1964, hails “the taste/ for sweet and great Mannerism/ that touches with its sweetly robust whim/ the roots of living live”.¹³ It was with *La ricotta* that the writer and filmmaker thematized his concern with Mannerism.

La ricotta is Pasolini’s third film, after *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962). Pasolini wrote and filmed it between the spring of 1962, while still at work on *Mamma Roma*, and early 1963. It is one of four films in a collection titled *RoGoPaG*, after the names of the contributing directors: Rossellini, Godard, Pasolini, and Gregoretti. Thirty-five minutes long and low-budget, *La ricotta* portrays the production of a blockbuster film on the Passion of Christ. It was shot on the outskirts of Rome, on the hilly ridge near the Acqua Santa spring, between the Via Appia Nuova and the Via Appia Antica, where pimps and other subproletarian folks lived (the tableaux vivants were filmed in a theater of Cinecittà). In the film, the director, played by Welles, imparts orders to his crew for the staging of two elaborate tableaux vivants of Mannerist paintings, as he remains comfortably seated in his director’s chair. Meanwhile, a subproletarian extra named Stracci (Italian for “rags”) runs around in search of food, desperately hungry after having donated his worker’s lunch to his family. In a tragi-comic turn of events, he steals a little dog belonging to the main actress, sells it to a journalist, and buys a large wheel of ricotta with the proceeds, stuffing himself with the cheese and everything else the crew now throws at him. He then dies of indigestion on the cross during shooting, in front of the film producer and other representatives of the Establishment, who have come to celebrate the end of the filming and, in the final scene of *La ricotta*, witness the death of Stracci from behind a long table overflowing with food that was set in their honor. The worlds of the intellectual bourgeois (represented by the film director) and the subproletarian (Stracci) are dramatically irreconcilable.

La ricotta was censored before it was even released and was completely banned a few days after it was shown in movie theaters. Pasolini was given a four-month suspended sentence for vilification of the state religion, and the film was subject to further censorship, which entailed cuts and modifications,

before it was released again.¹⁴ As the public prosecutor's argument in the trial's proceedings reveals, what was most vehemently under attack were the two tableaux vivants, for their mingling of sacred and profane.

Highly aestheticized but also, at moments, irresistibly comical, the tableaux vivants recreate two famous altarpiece paintings by Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo that depict the subject of the Deposition [[fig. 2](#); [fig. 3](#)], although the ambiguity of the spatial arrangement in the latter is such that it has also been referred to as a Pietà or Entombment.¹⁵ Among the best-known Mannerist works, Rosso's *Deposition* dates from 1521 and is held in the collection of the Pinacoteca comunale of Volterra; Pontormo's dates from 1526-28 and still adorns the Capponi chapel, for which it was commissioned, in the Church of Santa Felicita in Florence. Both are vertical in format, requiring Pasolini to adapt their verticality to the horizontal filmic frame, which he did by imagining lateral extensions with additional elements and characters. In the tableau vivant of Rosso's painting, two Moors in profile flank the main group – one holds a spear, another a basket of fruit. They are unusual characters for the subject, but not for Rosso, who painted “Moors, gypsies, and the strangest things in the world”, as Vasari puts it.¹⁶ Moors and gypsies were the destitute people of the time and their prominent inclusion in some of Rosso's works must have struck a consonant chord in Pasolini, who was keenly interested in social marginality for its potential to disrupt the sociopolitical bourgeois order. More literally Pontormoesque are the additional figures and the dog in Pontormo's tableau, as they recall specific characters from other paintings by the Florentine artist.¹⁷

Pasolini constructed the two tableaux specularly. Both unfold through juxtapositions of still-camera shots – long shots, close-ups, and, in Rosso's tableau, medium shots – that are predominantly frontal, without camera movements or zooming. Each scene begins with a wide shot of the stage on which the tableau is being set. The actors playing the biblical figures, dressed in brightly colored draperies, take their positions, while a member of the crew, in gray, contemporary clothes helps with final touchups. The voiceover of the director's assistant loudly directs the crew member to leave the stage and music is played. But, on both occasions, it is the wrong music – pop rather than classical – and the voice of the assistant exploding in angry screams invades the stage. These are just some examples of the extraneous elements that populate both scenes and highlight the fictional nature of the reconstructions, producing a distancing effect, or *Verfremdungseffekt*, to borrow Bertolt Brecht's famous expression. It is through these elements, which the public prosecutor found most offensive about the film, that viewers of *La ricotta* realize they are looking at actors who are attempting to stage

tableaux vivants from past paintings. And it is clear that the actors are failing in the process, repeatedly and comically.

The humor that permeates the *mises en scène* should not be interpreted as an act of irreverence and disrespect toward the original works (or toward their popularization through the broad circulation of color reproductions, as discussed later). Together with the use of cheap props, as the cardboard dagger of the military figure in Pontormo’s tableau, and the employment of amateurs along with professional actors, the comical moments seem to parody Hollywood epics by revealing the banality and vulgarity of what goes into their artful reconstructions. Humor, cheap props, and amateur actors also contrast with the aestheticized aspects of the recreations – from the composed still-camera shots to the vibrant colors and classical draperies of the costumes. The title of the film is another citation from Pontormo, who wrote in his *Diary* that he ate far too much ricotta (“troppo e maxime della ricotta”),¹⁸ a humble food that is at odds, again, comically, with the grandeur of his Santa Felicita altarpiece, as well as with the riches of the world of cinema.

The distinguishing features of a tableau vivant are silence and immobility, as a “living picture” mimics the frozen image of a painting. In fact, a tableau vivant can be defined as a “silent and motionless theatrical scene in which one or more actors, usually amateur, recreate a figurative masterpiece or a historical, imaginary, or allegorical scene through their body position and facial expression”.¹⁹ A strain of the tableau vivant tradition, reaching back to the Middle Ages, has survived in Italy in the form of reconstructions of scenes from the Gospel for edifying and recreational purposes on the occasion of particular religious celebrations, as in the *presepe vivente* (living Nativity scene), during the Christmas season, and the *teatro della Passione* (theater of the Passion), during Easter week. The public prosecutor probably had these in mind when he attacked Pasolini’s tableaux as blasphemous.

The defining characteristics of a tableau vivant are at once endorsed and transgressed in *La ricotta*. In the film within the film, the director conceives the tableaux as predominantly still and without dialogue, although with some intended movement and sound. Additional movement and sound result from the unintended failures and whims of the characters impersonating the figures in the Depositions. They generate great amusement for the viewers of *La ricotta*, as well as for the characters on stage. The mistaken LPs are but one example. Additionally, in the tableau of Rosso, one of the Moors suddenly peeks from behind the main group and is immediately sent back to his position. Later, the elderly, white-bearded character atop the cross is caught picking his nose and is candidly rebuked: “Amorosi, stop picking your nose!” In the tableau of Pontormo, the film director scolds the actress playing the bare-

headed woman, probably Mary Magdalene, for moving her arms: “Stop agitating those biceps. . . . Hold still, still! You are the figure of an altarpiece – got it? Hold still!” Then one of the two youths who are holding the actor impersonating Christ loses his grip, and the entire cast bursts into vigorous laughter when the three men fall to the floor.

In a similarly comical sequence of trials and errors, Ontani imitated a portrait head by the Mannerist painter Arcimboldo for his forty-minute color video *Favola impropriata* [fig. 4], which was one of the first color videos made by an artist in Europe. A distinctive quality of Ontani’s tableaux vivants in general is their striking simplicity of means, which echoes the spareness of Pasolini’s tableaux as well as his intentionally rudimentary film technique. *Favola impropriata* is no exception. Shot with a fixed camera from beginning to end, it unfolds in a series of uncomplicated, apparently unrehearsed actions that Ontani performs using a host of everyday objects. Neat arrangements of the objects are systematically disrupted by Ontani’s actions, alternating making and unmaking, order and disorder, reminiscent of Alighiero Boetti’s work. The stage for the improvisations is the floor, a navy blue porous surface that the artist diligently attempts to clean, as if it were a school blackboard, after each action.

Following one of these cleaning rituals, Ontani gets ready for his impersonation. First, he carefully places fruit on the floor in this order: a red apple, a pear, a bunch of dark red grapes, a banana next to the apple, and then another red apple on the other side of the banana, making the fruit look like an upside-down face with a distinctive nose (banana), eyes (apples), and wisp of hair (grapes). Next he removes each piece of fruit one by one, lies down supine with his head occupying a large portion of the screen, and places the apples on his eyes. Then he attempts to put the pear in his mouth, but it falls out. He tries again and, for a moment, manages to stabilize the fruit atop his face and pose motionless in his tableau. At this point the tableau is interrupted again. Keeping the apples and pear pressed against his face with one hand, Ontani reaches out with the other to retrieve the bunch of grapes from offstage and places it on his forehead. As soon as he accomplishes this task, one of the apples falls on the floor, rolling out of the screen frame. Again pressing the other fruit against his face with one hand, he turns to the side and, after a few attempts, finally recovers the lost apple. For another short moment he poses again motionless in a tableau vivant reminiscent of Arcimboldo’s composite heads. *Favola impropriata* includes another reference to Mannerism as well. Later in the video, Ontani arranges postcard reproductions of artworks; prominently featured near the center of the video frame is Rosso Fiorentino’s *Musical Cherub* (1521), a widely published image of

a lost-altarpiece fragment in the collection of the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence.

A “Desperate Vitality”: From Longhi to Briganti to Pasolini

It has been said that the pictorial tradition of Italy recurs in Pasolini’s films as part of his way of “seeing”.²⁰ Pasolini always insisted that his background was in art history, rather than literature or cinema, and he dedicated *Mamma Roma*, his second film, to Roberto Longhi and his greatly inspiring teachings.²¹ One of the most prominent Italian art historians of the twentieth century, Longhi was Pasolini’s professor at the University of Bologna in the early 1940s.²² In a study on painting citations in Pasolini’s cinema, Alberto Marchesini remarks that the absence of camera movements and zooming in the filming of the tableaux vivants in *La ricotta* is tied to Longhi and the standards he set on how to use the camera when filming artworks with his 1947 documentary on Vittore Carpaccio.²³

While shooting *Mamma Roma* and writing the screenplay of *La ricotta*, Pasolini penned a note on the importance of the Italian painting tradition – from Giotto to Pontormo – in relation to his work as a filmmaker:

My cinematographic taste does not originate in cinema but the visual arts. What I have in mind as a vision, as a visual field, are the frescoes of Masaccio, of Giotto – the painters I love the most, together with certain Mannerists (for example, Pontormo). I cannot conceive images, landscapes, or compositions of figures outside of my initial passion for fourteenth-century painting where man was the center of all perspective. . . I always conceive the background as the background of a painting . . . and therefore I always attack it frontally.²⁴

In a later film inspired by Boccaccio’s mid-fourteenth-century book of tales, *Il Decameron* (1971), Pasolini staged a colossal tableau vivant with over a hundred actors that recreates, with emphasized frontality, Giotto’s *Last Judgment* in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. In this portion of the film, Pasolini played the role of Giotto’s best pupil. To Giotto he associated not only himself (and his stylistic choices as a filmmaker) but also Stracci. In a poem in the collection *Poesia in forma di rosa*, he wrote that Stracci has “the antique flat face/ that Giotto saw against the tuffs and ruins of a military camp” and also “the round hips that Masaccio rendered in chiaroscuro”.²⁵

As Marchesini suggests, Pasolini’s fascination with Masaccio’s chiaroscuro owes much to the high-contrast black-and-white slides of Masaccio’s frescoes that Longhi showed in his lectures in Bologna.²⁶ It informed not only Pasolini’s first films, *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*, but also *La ricotta*, which was shot in

black and white, except for the opening sequence and the tableaux vivants of Rosso and Pontormo. Filmed in Technicolor, these were the first color scenes in Pasolini's cinema. The contrast between color and black and white is one of the most striking aspects of *La ricotta*. The publication of a book on Mannerism illustrated with full-page color illustrations certainly contributed to the color choice. Written by Giuliano Briganti and entitled *La maniera italiana* (1961), the book was one of the first with color illustrations to be published in Italy. It was part of a series edited by Longhi and dedicated to Italian painting. A stage-set photograph of the reconstruction of Pontormo's *Deposition* features Briganti's book in the foreground, opened at the pages that reproduce the painting and an enlarged detail, echoed in a close-up of the film sequence [fig. 5; fig. 6]. According to the costume designer, Danilo Donati, Pasolini was so obsessed with recreating the rutilant colors of Rosso's and Pontormo's paintings that it took two months of painstaking attempts to produce fabrics that satisfactorily matched the colors in the paintings.²⁷

The influence of Briganti's book on Pasolini was not limited to reproductions. The interpretation of Mannerism that Pasolini identified with was that proposed by Briganti, who discussed Rosso and Pontormo together in *La maniera italiana*, dedicating ample space to the paintings staged in *La ricotta*. According to Briganti, a common and distinctive quality in the work of Rosso and Pontormo is the ability to express "the tragic imposition of their times in a perturbed and contradictory art, in which the classical world is distorted with irrational, willful and subjective effects".²⁸ For Briganti the Mannerists were inevitably affected by the context in which they lived. Their works expressed "the desperate vitality of a crisis which was one of the longest and most acute in the history of Italian art".²⁹ His essay opens with a dreadful portrait of Italy, devastated by "violent and tragic episodes as the Sack of Rome and the siege of Florence". The country, he wrote, was also shaken by "the moral upheaval produced by the Reformation" and weighed down by the ensuing "curtailment of spiritual liberty". Further aggravating the situation were "the loss of economic stability as a result of the change in trade-routes, the growing menace of Turkish shipping, and the financial crisis of the mid-century".³⁰ As the certainties of the Renaissance gave way to an age of disquiet, nature was no longer imitated but rather "transposed in a sort of pictorial metaphor".³¹

La ricotta is permeated with visual metaphors and allegories of controversial aspects of contemporary society. In a recent study on Pasolini's literary and film work, Marco Antonio Bazzocchi suggests the following: the table overflowing with foods may allude to an opulent society founded on waste and exhibitionism, like the world of cinema; physical starvation may stand for starvation of culture; the death of Stracci may signify the annihilation of a

culture of the people, as well as the end of a historical cycle and the illusions associated with Communism.³² Pasolini indicated that the character of the film director played by Welles – the first of many authorial characters in Pasolini’s cinema – was a “caricature” of himself as a Marxist intellectual turned cynical and elitist, no longer able to represent the world of the subproletariat from within, as he had attempted in his previous films.³³ Through Welles, he expressed his despair for the people and scorn for the bourgeoisie of Italy (“il popolo più analfabeta, la borghesia più ignorante d’Europa”).

Besides metaphor and allegory, another rhetorical device featured in *La ricotta* is oxymoron. One may say that the entire film is constructed around juxtapositions of contrasting aspects (black and white versus color, fictional versus real, profane versus sacred). All the more interesting is the reversal of signification of these contrasting aspects. It amplifies the *mise en abyme* implicit in the film-within-the-film structure, which has an immediate precedent in Federico Fellini’s *8½* (1963), and it renders explicit what Borges claims is one of the most fascinating and disturbing aspects of the *mise en abyme*: the play of mirrors between fiction and reality.³⁴ A similar effect is generated by the works of Ontani in which he holds a photographic reproduction of the painting he is reenacting [fig. 7]. In these photographic tableaux, which Ontani typically produced as unique prints, like the other tableaux, the small photographic reproduction of the artwork – a “copy” – looks less “real” than its imitation. In *La ricotta* the “reality” of the film set is rendered in black and white, while the “fiction” of the film within the film is in color. Similarly, the sacred representations of the Depositions become absolutely profane and lighthearted, whereas the everyday vicissitudes of Stracci acquire a distinct connotation of sacredness and solemnity. The adoption of a double, antithetical structure is a stylistic device recurrent in Pasolini’s later work, both in film and literature, as in the short *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (1967) and in the unfinished *Petrolio*, begun in 1972. In *La ricotta*, the continuous inversion between “reality” and “fiction” indicates that the question of representation is at the heart of the film.

Pasolini identified with the Mannerists as the first *artistes maudits* in the history of Italian art. According to Briganti, the Mannerists “found themselves at odds with a society which had neither the moral strength to guide their difficult, unconfessed longings into other directions, nor the awareness to free them fully”.³⁵ He describes them as artists affected by great “spiritual malaise,” “inner disquiet,” and “a sort of lucid madness.” He uses the adjectives “eccentric,” “melancholic,” and “solitary”.³⁶ There is little doubt that Pasolini would have seen these attributes in himself as well. In a long poem titled “Una disperata vitalità” (“A desperate vitality”) after the expression that Briganti, and before him, Longhi, adopted in reference to the

maniera artists,³⁷ Pasolini voiced his frustration and discouragement over being misunderstood. Published in the collection *Poesia in forma di rosa*, the poem stages an interview with a naive, myopic journalist, much like the foolish journalist in *La ricotta* to whom the film director declares his contempt for the Italian bourgeoisie. Pasolini tells the journalist he is “in a state of confusion,” “a chaos of contradictions”.³⁸ Death is the recurring theme of the poem and is associated with isolation due to lack of understanding from others (“Death is not/ in being unable to communicate/ but in being no longer able to be/ understood”),³⁹ hence the parallel between Pasolini and Stracci. *La ricotta* ends with the film director acknowledging the invisibility of Stracci: “Poor Stracci, dropping dead – this was his only way of reminding us that he, too, was alive”, and needed to eat. It is with an image of death that the poem also reaches closure: “Like a partisan/ dead before May 1945,/ I will slowly decompose/ . . . / a forgotten poet and citizen”.⁴⁰ In the final lines the journalist asks Pasolini what, then, is left to him. With the trembling voice of a sick young man, he responds: “a desperate vitality”.⁴¹

Meta-Historical Mannerism

In the early to mid-1960s, studies on Mannerism were flourishing in Europe. In 1964, Hauser’s *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* was published, becoming a popular reading in Italy a year later when its Italian translation was put out. Hauser characterizes Mannerist art as “tormented,” “impregnated with the mentality of crisis, and so much denounced and decried for insincerity and artificiality”.⁴² In truth, he claims, it was more sincere than the ostentatiously harmonious and beautiful art of the Renaissance, as the history of the West – and of Italy in particular – is a history of crises with short “intervals of euphoria.” “One of the fictions of the Renaissance”, he states, “was that mind and body, man’s moral demands and the demands of his senses, formed a harmonious unity”, and the “crisis of the Renaissance began with the doubt whether it were possible to reconcile the spiritual with the physical, the pursuit of salvation with the pursuit of terrestrial happiness”.⁴³ Indeed, the dichotomy between body and mind has long been one of the main tenets of the Roman Catholic Church. Greatly enforced since the Counter-Reformation, it has been enormously influential on Italian culture. A keen awareness of the problems that this split entails can be traced in the work of both Pasolini and Ontani.

The third and last section of Hauser’s book is dedicated to modern incarnations, in literature and the visual arts, of what he terms “the mannerist trend”. For Hauser “mannerist trends have repeatedly appeared since the baroque and the rococo. . . and they are most manifest in times of stylistic

revolutions associated with spiritual crises”.⁴⁴ After leading “a subterranean life since the end of the Cinquecento”, they reemerged with strength in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the late Romantics, the Symbolists, the Surrealists, and “the two most important writers of the current age, Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka”.⁴⁵ Mannerism, for Hauser, is inscribed in the very fabric of modernity.

Another author that was particularly influential in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s was the Swiss Ludwig Binswanger. A student of Carl Jung, Binswanger was the first to apply Martin Heidegger’s existential analysis and Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology to psychiatry and psychology, giving birth to an anthropological approach to human behaviors that traditional psychiatry identified as pathologies of the individual, unrelated to any larger socio-historical context. He termed this approach *Daseinanalyse*. His *Drei Formen missglückten Daseins: Verstiegtheit, Verschrobenheit, Manieriertheit* was published in 1956 at a time when German-speaking historians of literature and art, such as Ernst Robert Curtius and Gustav René Hocke, were contributing articles and books on the parallels between historical Mannerism and the twentieth century. It appeared in Italian translation in 1964. In the book Binswanger offers an understanding of mannerism and the specific set of behaviors that clinical psychiatry associates with it as expressions of a person’s *Dasein*, or being-in-the-world. As such, mannerism for Binswanger “is possible in every epoch”.⁴⁶ It is a way of coping with the anguish derived from the loss or failing of meaning in a given historical period. Its main characteristics are the use of citation, the pose, and the mask – all of which pertain to Ontani’s performative recreations of past artworks. The “mask” of the mannerists, Binswanger explains, is not the common mask that covers and hides. It rather involves full identification – i.e., existing *as mask*, not behind it. Binswanger’s ideas started to circulate in Italy primarily thanks to the art critic and aesthetician Gillo Dorfles, a physician and psychiatrist by training, who was attentive to Ontani’s work from its beginnings.⁴⁷

Hauser and Binswanger were the main references for an essay that Gianni Contessi wrote on contemporary art, film, and architecture that, in his view, constituted “a real mannerist ‘outbreak’”, their common denominator being the adoption of “quotations within quotes”, Pasolini and Ontani are featured among the artists discussed. A discursive, at times convoluted account of recent works, the essay appeared in 1974 in the art magazine *Data* (edited by Tommaso Trini and published throughout the 1970s), with the title “Nuovo manierismo/ New Mannerism”. In his closing remarks, Contessi problematizes the view that considers this kind of art “regressive, like a right turn in politics”. In the wake of the failure of the 1968 revolution, all hope that art could have a strong impact on society seems to have waned, giving way to disillusionment.

What may initially appear as “an art of evasion”, concludes Contessi, may actually stem from an awareness of art’s “‘operative’ limits”.⁴⁸

The *italiano medio*

Well before the failure of the 1968 revolution, disillusionment had caught up with Pasolini, as *La ricotta* evidences. The film constituted a clear break from Pasolini’s previous production. As film scholar Tomaso Subini puts it, *La ricotta* “is first of all a film on its author and his identity crisis”.⁴⁹ Pasolini’s earlier work was predicated on the Gramscian ideal of a national-popular project of reconciliation between the worlds of the intellectual and of the peasant and the subproletarian cultures that could constitute an alternative to bourgeois culture. This was the ideal of the “organic intellectual”, or the intellectual as a catalyst and bridge. The adoption of local dialects and free indirect discourse in his literary and film production was part of this project. But by the early 1960s, Pasolini’s doubts about the viability of a national-popular project were increasing, as was his bitter awareness that the age of revolutionary hopes that had animated the Resistance had come to an end, leaving behind a “terrible existential void,” as he wrote in a letter to a reader of his column in the left-wing weekly magazine *Vie nuove* in 1961.⁵⁰ It was the uncertainty and confusion of this “‘zero’ historical moment”,⁵¹ as Pasolini called it, that led to what the critic and cultural historian Gian Carlo Ferretti termed “the explosion of a profound crisis”.⁵² Both ideological and existential, Pasolini’s crisis reached a point of no return around 1965. Although produced at a time when Pasolini’s Gramscian beliefs were collapsing, *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* were still in dialogue with the tradition of cinematic neorealism. It has been suggested that these films were Pasolini’s last attempt at a poetics that had been already problematized in his literary work since *Le ceneri di Gramsci*, published in 1957.⁵³ In *La ricotta* the subproletarian is still the hero – “the saint is Stracci”, wrote Pasolini⁵⁴ – but he is a doomed hero – “you are always starving”, a fellow actor in the film tells Stracci, “and are on the side of the capitalists who make you starve”. The character of Stracci parallels a contemporaneous literary character, also always starving and quite naive: Marcovaldo, the protagonist of Italo Calvino’s homonymous collection of short stories, published in 1963 and written in the 1950s and early 1960s, over the course of the transformation of Italy from an agrarian to an industrial country. Pasolini later came to acknowledge that the cultural homogenization of consumer society and neocapitalism had produced a bourgeoisification (*imborghesimento*) of the cultures he once deemed alternative to the bourgeoisie. At the root of Pasolini’s crisis, then, were the profound changes that Italian society had been undergoing.

In a speech aired on the television network RAI on February 7, 1974, as well as in a series of articles that appeared the following summer in popular daily newspapers such as *Il Corriere della Sera*, Pasolini looked back at the previous decade and analyzed the process of “cultural homogenization” (*omologazione culturale*), or bourgeoisification, that consumerism and American influence brought about.⁵⁵ He termed the deep transformation affecting all social classes, together with their systems of values and beliefs, an “anthropological mutation” (*mutazione antropologica*) of the Italians. This transformation, which television largely hastened, involved an elimination of distinctions between the people (*popolo*) and the bourgeoisie. The results were “conformism” and “neurosis”, to use Pasolini’s terms, which, combined, gave way to extremism. Thus, for Pasolini, both the terrorist and the *italiano medio*, or average Italian, were products of the radical changes brought about by the Italian “economic miracle” (1956-63), which, merely a century after the birth of Italy as a unified nation in 1861, made it one of the major industrial countries of the West. Industrial development was accompanied by a national political project of unification and centralization. In order to counter the persistence of local dialects, Italian language started being taught on television, becoming a mass phenomenon in the early 1960s,⁵⁶ and a highway connecting the north with the south – the Autostrada del Sole – was built between 1956 and 1964. Pasolini’s preoccupation with the past and the particular, local traditions of Italy was tied to an indictment of capitalism and consumerism, which, for him, embodied “a ‘total’ kind of fascism”, as they succeeded in engendering what historical fascism aspired but failed to achieve, namely, homogenization.⁵⁷ As he explained in an open letter to Calvino published in a Roman newspaper in 1974, his was nostalgia for a “pre-national and pre-industrial peasant world”.⁵⁸

Ontani’s position vis-à-vis capitalism and consumerism was never as explicit and articulated as Pasolini’s. However, his frustration with cultural homogenization is clearly evident in a text he wrote, published in *Flash Art* also in 1974. Framed by reproductions of recent works, the text features poetic, stream-of-consciousness prose, typical of Ontani. Launching an attack against the “conformist”, “false”, and “repressive” bourgeois society in which gender and power are divided and kept separated, Ontani declares that, by contrast, he welcomes in both his work and life the “wonderful possibility of being at the same time... masculine/feminine”, “hermaphrodite”, “*ange infidèle*”.⁵⁹ The coexistence of opposites is synonymous with ambiguity, which, together with citation, is key for Ontani.

Permutability of Identity in the *anni di piombo*

One may say that in the *anni di piombo* Ontani's "desperate vitality" took the form of a voyage of identities that started with figures from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings and then branched out to other works, periods, and fields, such as history, literature, opera, folklore, and the mass media, which provided a host of other characters to Ontani's impersonations throughout the 1970s. Ontani's tableaux were first exhibited in 1974 in several solo and group shows. One of them was the now mostly forgotten *La ripetizione differente*, which opened at the Studio Marconi in Milan in late 1974. Gathering mostly Italian artists, it was curated by the Bologna-based art and literary critic Renato Barilli. The main supporter of Ontani's work since 1970, Barilli conceived the exhibition as a first assessment of what he identified as a new contemporary art trend that privileged quotation and a return to the past over originality and a rejection of the past. With Ontani, who stood out for his "splendid, rhetorical poses from the golden days of Italian art",⁶⁰ the most significant presence was Salvo. Another independent figure of this period, he began impersonating characters from Renaissance and Mannerist painting – from Raphael to El Greco – around 1970, first in photography and then in painting, in parallel to Ontani.

In his essay for the catalogue, Barilli celebrates Giorgio de Chirico as the most important precursor to this citationist trend for his "colossal and systematic revisitation of the museum".⁶¹ Barilli's interest in de Chirico was sparked by the first retrospective dedicated to the artist at Palazzo Reale in Milan in 1970. A few months before the *Ripetizione differente* show, Barilli published a study on de Chirico's post-Metaphysical work that provided the theoretical framework for the exhibition. Proposing a reevaluation of this much-dismissed production, Barilli hailed de Chirico as an artist who consistently favored *originarietà* over *originalità* – a return to origins over a search for originality. Owing much to Nietzsche, the painter's disinterest in originality, Barilli wrote, was a sign of awareness that the idea of history as an indefinite, linear progression is but an illusion, hence the deliberate choice of "revisiting the museum" and "'repatriating' by quoting places, themes, and styles from the masters of the past".⁶² A curious lexical choice in this context, the verb "repatriate" seems to ensue from a conception of Italy as a country in which past and present are necessarily interwoven.

The terms "citation", "pose", and "mask" – distinguishing features of mannerism as a form of existence according to Binswanger – recur in Barilli's study. In reference to a series of self-portraits in which de Chirico depicted himself in costumes and settings from another era, Barilli wrote that "the de Chirichian self presents itself as holding a pose (*in posa*), or, if you will, wearing a mask (*in maschera*)".⁶³ Begun on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, in

late 1939, the series occupied de Chirico for the next twenty years. It comprises over fifty works that portray the artist in costumes either borrowed from the Opera House in Rome or from past paintings, mostly from the Baroque period. The series constitutes a significant precedent to Ontani's tableaux, which combine citation and pose with a certain notion of the mask. The concept of the mask is key in relation to Ontani's practice and is the focus of a book by Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, later to emerge as a leading theorist of postmodernity. Titled *Il soggetto e la maschera: Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione* and published in 1974, the book investigates the relevance of the notion of the mask in Nietzsche's writings and ties it to other important concepts in his thought, such as fiction, illusion, and truth become fable. “The problem of the mask in Nietzsche”, Vattimo wrote, “is the problem of the relationship between being and appearing”,⁶⁴ a central philosophical question that Nietzsche tackles in the first significant new way since Hegel. Rather than maintaining the dichotomy between appearance and thing-in-itself, Nietzsche considers the world of appearances and their transformative forces to be the only real world. Rejecting the fundamental assumption of the unity of being, he yearns for a non-metaphysical redefinition of the relationship between being and appearing. It is within the parameters of this redefinition that Ontani's impersonations seem to operate. As Vattimo observes, duplicity characterizes the notion of the mask in Nietzsche's early writings. It is a productive contradiction that leads to the mature configuration of Nietzsche's thought on the problem of truth and appearance. On the one hand, there is the conventional, stiff mask that modern man adopts out of insecurity. It corresponds to a stereotypical role and has “only one expression”.⁶⁵ Vattimo refers to this kind of mask and the process it entails as *travestimento*, or masquerading. On the other hand, there is the mask that involves full identification and transformation into what is other than oneself. This is what Vattimo calls *maschera*, or mask proper. Whereas “*travestimento*, with its ability of simulating and dissimulating, leaves the particular individuality of the person who adopts it intact and even exalts it,” the mask proper “seems to leave without foundation any difference between being and appearing, as it comes down to a pure and simple identification of being with the becoming of appearances themselves”.⁶⁶ So if *travestimento* belongs to the world of consolidated reality, hierarchies, and social taboos, *maschera* reveals reality as appearance. It belongs to the world of art as a symbolic activity that holds “the joyous hope that the spell of individuation can be broken”, as Nietzsche puts it.⁶⁷ This is also the hope that Ontani's impersonations seem to hold. Art, for him, is a “vehicle for freedom from social rules, constrictions, and even denunciations”.⁶⁸ In Nietzsche's mature elaboration of the theme of the mask, the “true world” has become a

fable and the “seeming world” has been eliminated, in the sense that no appearance exists as distinct from reality. The permutability of identity that the multiplicity of Ontani’s impersonations embodies may be seen as an expression of the truth that “all is mask”⁶⁹ in the Nietzschean, anti-metaphysical sense.

Ontani professes that the first tableau he ever realized was *San Sebastiano nel bosco di Calvenzano (d’après Guido Reni)* (c. 1970) [fig. 8], after the painting by Reni housed in the collection of the Pinacoteca nazionale in Bologna.⁷⁰ Ontani could have seen it there during one of his visits to Bologna from his hometown of Vergato, in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines (Calvenzano is a hamlet of Vergato and, according to popular belief, Reni was born there). Certainly, Ontani used as a visual aid for his pose the full-page, high-quality color reproduction of the painting in the monograph of the series “I Maestri del Colore” (“The Masters of Color”), published by Fratelli Fabbri and sold weekly at newsstands starting in the second half of 1963.⁷¹ Confronted, like Pasolini, with the difficulties of dealing with his homosexual identity in a country that discriminated against non-heterosexuals, Ontani was drawn to the subject because, as he said, he saw it as “a powerful image of ambiguity and desire”.⁷² It has been said that Saint Sebastian is “the single most successfully deployed image of modern male gay identity”.⁷³ For Ontani, Reni’s Sebastian reveals not only the androgynous sensuality of a male youth, but also, more generally, the ambiguity that art can convey.

Compared with Reni’s figure – a beautiful, anemic youth who glances heavenward and placidly surrenders to his own destiny, his body set against a menacing sky – Ontani’s version lacks any references to pain and pushes the combination of sacred and profane to an extent comparable to *La ricotta*. Barely covered by a pink loincloth and leaning against a tree surrounded by rich vegetation, Sebastian appears whistling, his gaze lost in reverie. The tableau evokes the *dolce far niente* of a midsummer afternoon, an atmosphere of pleasant inactivity. Nothing could have been further from this than the terrorist attacks and sociopolitical tensions that were plaguing the country. In the *anni di piombo*, when the deadlock of political conformism and binary extremism weighed on the country and the homogenization and bourgeoisification of Italian culture and society were firmly embedded, performing the past seems to have functioned for Ontani as a survival strategy. His impersonations contrast with the *italiano medio*’s rigid mask that holds only one expression. His tableaux, along with Pasolini’s, underscore the performative nature of identity and culture, thus revealing the potential intrinsic in what exists as becoming.

Together with ambiguity, instability is a notable feature of Pasolini’s and Ontani’s tableaux vivants and of the works recreated: The figures of

Pontormo’s *Deposition* seem to float in midair; in Pasolini’s tableau a group of actors falls to the floor. In Brueghel’s *Parable of the Blind* the figures have either fallen or are bound to fall; this becomes the subject of Ontani’s tableau, which focuses solely on the figures’ positions. And as he stages the Arcimboldo-like portrait head, fruit keeps falling off his face. While physical instability may be seen as a visual metaphor for the transformations and unrest of Italian society and culture in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps it can also be seen, together with ambiguity, as that which leaves other possibilities open, holding the liberating potential of a desperate vitality.

PLATES

1 Luigi Ontani, *La caduta dei ciechi d’après Brueghel*, 1970-71. Cesare Bastelli photographer. B/W slide projections. Courtesy of the artist. @Luigi Ontani, photos by the author.

2 The tableau vivant of Rosso Fiorentino’s *Deposition* in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *La ricotta*, still from *RoGoPaG* (Arco Film, 1963).

3 The tableau vivant of Pontormo’s *Deposition* in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *La ricotta*, still from *RoGoPaG* (Arco Film, 1963).

4 Frame from Luigi Ontani’s *Favola impropria*, 1970-71. Color video, STS Studio, Rome. Courtesy Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, Turin. @Luigi Ontani, photo by the author.

5 Stage set photograph of the tableau vivant of Pontormo’s *Deposition* in *La ricotta*. Published in Alberto Marchesini, *Citazioni pittoriche nel cinema di Pasolini (da Accattone al Decameron)* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1994), 211, fig. 5.

6 Close-up of the actor holding the figure of Christ from behind, in the sequence of the tableau vivant of Pontormo’s *Deposition* in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *La ricotta*, still from *RoGoPaG* (Arco Film, 1963).

7 Luigi Ontani, *Ecce Homo d’après Guido Reni*, c. 1972. Cesare Bastelli photographer. C-Print, 44,5 x 69 cm. Private collection, Modena. @Luigi Ontani.

8 Luigi Ontani, *San Sebastiano nel bosco di Calvenzano (d’après Guido Reni)*, c. 1970. Giorgio Gramantieri photographer. C-Print, 100 x 70 cm. Collection Fabio Sargentini, Rome. @Luigi Ontani.

- ¹ The poem “10 giugno 1962” was first published in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Mamma Roma* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1962), 159-160. Different English translations have appeared; the one here is the author’s. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are the author’s.
- ² The years 1963 and 1974 were selected because they witnessed a series of important events and publications that relate to the topic of this paper.
- ³ In his “Postille a *Il nome della rosa*” (1983) Umberto Eco embraces this notion and draws a parallel with Postmodernism, which, for him, consists in recognizing that the past “cannot really be destroyed” and thus “must be revisited.” “We could say,” he wrote, “that every period has its own postmodernism, just as every period would have its own mannerism (and, in fact, I wonder if postmodernism is not the modern name for mannerism as meta-historical category). I believe that in every period there are moments of crisis” [*Postscript to “The Name of the Rose”*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 66-67].
- ⁴ Luigi Ontani, “Ceri d’Ontano: A Dialogue between Cerith Wyn Evans & Luigi Ontani”, interview by Cerith Wyn Evans, *Nero*, Autumn 2009, 35.
- ⁵ Luigi Ontani, interview by author, 30 March 2008, New York, audio recording.
- ⁶ Cesare Bastelli, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Castello d’Argile (Bologna), audio recording.
- ⁷ The text of the presentation was published in Achille Bonito Oliva, “L’arte per accrescere il campo del dubbio”, *Avanti!*, 16 November, 1980. The last part of Bonito Oliva’s sentence – the idea that art is a way of affirming one’s own identity – seems more pertinent to the Transavanguardia artists, whom the critic had just launched with a manifesto on the pages of *Flash Art*, than to Pasolini.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ ID., “La citazione deviata: L’ideologia”, in *Critica in atto* (Rome: Incontri Internazionali d’Arte, 1973), 156. This essay constituted the basis for a book on Mannerism published in 1976, *L’ideologia del traditore: arte, maniera, manierismo*.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 157.
- ¹¹ Pietro Citati, “Ritratto di Pasolini”, in *Il tè del cappellaio matto* (Milan: Mondadori, 1972), 224. Originally published in *L’approdo letterario*, April 1959.
- ¹² Antonio Costa, *Il cinema e le arti visive* (Milan: Einaudi, 2002), 313.
- ¹³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa* (Milan: Garzanti, 2010), 9. On Pasolini’s concern and affinity with Mannerism in his literary work, see Marco Vallora, “Alì dagli occhi impuri: Come nasce il manierismo nella narrativa di Pasolini”, in *Lo scandalo Pasolini*, ed. Fernaldo Di Giammatteo (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1976), 156-204. This is a dense essay, rich in citations from Pasolini’s writings that unfortunately are not footnoted.
- ¹⁴ After the trial, RoGoPaG was rereleased under a new title, *Laviamoci il cervello*, but today it is better known under its original title. On the trial, censorship, and reconstruction of the censored parts of *La ricotta*, see Tomaso Subini, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: La ricotta* (Turin: Lindau, 2009), 41-85.
- ¹⁵ Leo Steinberg, “Pontormo’s Capponi Chapel”, *Art Bulletin* 56, no. 3 (1974): 385.
- ¹⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568), trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 353. On the presence of Moors in Rosso’s paintings, see *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., Vol. III, *From the “Age of Discovery” to the Age of Abolition*, Part 1, *Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 119-

- 121.
- ¹⁷ For a detailed reconstruction of the other sources, see Alberto Marchesini, *Citazioni pittoriche nel cinema di Pasolini (da Accattone al Decameron)* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1994), 52.
- ¹⁸ *Pontormo's Diary*, trans. Rosemary Mayer (New York: Out of London Press, 1979), 110-11. Hervé Joubert-Laurencin discusses the relationship between Pasolini and Pontormo in depth in his "Miroir noir, coeur noir. Pasolini et Pontormo", in *Le dernier poète expressionniste. Ecrits sur Pasolini* (Besançon: Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2005), 143-154.
- ¹⁹ *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, edited by Sandro D'Amico (Rome: Le Maschere, 1961), 612.
- ²⁰ See, for instance, Francesco Galluzzi, *Pasolini e la pittura* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1994), 49 et passim; and Marchesini's study, *Citazioni pittoriche nel cinema di Pasolini*.
- ²¹ The dedication reads as follows: "A Roberto Longhi, cui sono debitore della mia 'fulgurazione figurativa'" (Pasolini, *Mamma Roma*, 8).
- ²² On the decisive influence of Longhi and Pasolini, see Galluzzi, "Le fulgurazioni longhiane", in *Pasolini e la pittura*, 15-45; and Dario Trento, "Pasolini, Longhi e Francesco Arcangeli tra la primavera del 1941 e l'estate 1943", in *Pendragon*, edited by Davide Ferrari and Gianni Scalia (Bologna: Pendragon, 1998), 47-66.
- ²³ Marchesini, *Citazioni pittoriche nel cinema di Pasolini*, 50.
- ²⁴ Pasolini, *Mamma Roma*, 145. Part of the passage is from the English translation published in Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 45.
- ²⁵ Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa*, 78.
- ²⁶ Marchesini, *Citazioni pittoriche nel cinema di Pasolini*, 17-20.
- ²⁷ Danilo Donati, "Interview", in *Teoria e tecnica del film in Pasolini*, edited by Antonio Bertini (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), 195. The costumes consisted of fabrics and pieces of iron wire holding them in place. Already prominent for his work on Visconti's opera productions, Donati was involved with several of Pasolini's later films.
- ²⁸ Giuliano Briganti, *Italian Mannerism*, trans. Margaret Kunzle (Leipzig: VEB Edition, 1962), 20.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 13. The notion of Mannerism or the *maniera moderna* as a style displaying a higher concern with previous art, *la bella maniera*, than with nature itself, owes much to Vasari, its first theorist.
- ³² Marco Antonio Bazzocchi, *Burattini filosofi: Pasolini dalla letteratura al cinema* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 59, 67, 154.
- ³³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Una discussione del '64", in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, edited Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 780-781. The text is the transcription of the debate organized in Alessandria by the local Circolo del Cinema on November 21, 1964.
- ³⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 196. The conception of 8½ dates back to at least 1960 and the filming coincided with the period of Pasolini's work on *La ricotta's* screenplay. For a brief account of the collaborations and friendship between Pasolini and Fellini, see Enzo Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), 259-262.
- ³⁵ Briganti, *Italian Mannerism*, 12.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6, 11, 13.
- ³⁷ See *ibid.*, 8; and Roberto Longhi, "Ricordo dei manieristi", in *Cinquecento classico e Cinquecento manieristico, 1951-1970* (Florence: Sansoni, 1976), 87. Originally published in *L'Approdo* II, n. 1 (January-March 1953): 59.
- ³⁸ Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa*, 126.

- ³⁹ Ibid., 113.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 132.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 133.
- ⁴² Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1965), 7.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 10.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 355.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 356.
- ⁴⁶ Ludwig Binswanger, *Drei Formen missglückten Daseins: Verstiegtheit, Verschrobenheit, Manieriertheit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1956), 131. The third (and last) section of the book is dedicated to mannerism (ibid., 92–197). This book has not been translated into English.
- ⁴⁷ For this insight I ought to thank a young scholar of Dorfles's work, Antonello Tolve. See his *Gillo Dorfles: Arte e critica d'arte nel secondo Novecento* (Naples: La Città del Sole, 2011).
- ⁴⁸ Gianni Contessi, "Nuovo manierismo/ New Mannerism", *Data*, fall 1974, 60-66.
- ⁴⁹ Subini, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: La ricotta*, 13.
- ⁵⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Le belle bandiere: Dialoghi 1960-65*, edited by Gian Carlo Ferretti (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978), 164.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 271.
- ⁵² Gian Carlo Ferretti, "Introduction," in ibid., 7.
- ⁵³ See Subini, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: La ricotta*, 114.
- ⁵⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Pietro II", in *Poesia in forma di rosa*, 78.
- ⁵⁵ See in particular ID., "Gli italiani non sono più gli stessi", in *Scritti Corsari* (Milan: Garzanti, 1975), 46-52. Originally published in *Corriere della Sera*, 10 June, 1974; and "Il potere senza volto", in Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*, 53-59. Originally published in *Corriere della Sera*, 24 June, 1974.
- ⁵⁶ Franco Monteleone, "Vedere a distanza", in *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: Un secolo di costume, società e politica* (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), 268-294.
- ⁵⁷ Pasolini, *Scritti Corsari*, 54.
- ⁵⁸ ID., "Lettera aperta a Italo Calvino: P.: quello che rimpiango", in ibid., 60-5. Originally published in *Paese Sera*, 8 July, 1974. This is not the place to discuss Calvino's position with regard to Pasolini's ideas. However, it should be remembered that in the mid-1950s he collected folktales from a wide range of regions and dialects, and translated them into standard Italian, publishing *Fiabe italiane* in 1956.
- ⁵⁹ Luigi Ontani, "Luigi Ontani", *Flash Art*, April 1974, 11.
- ⁶⁰ Renato Barilli, "Il comportamento frequenta il museo", *NAC*, December 1973, 18.
- ⁶¹ ID., *La ripetizione differente* (Milan: Studio Marconi, 1974), 3.
- ⁶² ID., "De Chirico e il recupero del museo," in *Tra presenza e assenza: due modelli culturali in conflitto* (Milan: Bompiani, 1974), 271. Barilli first presented his reinterpretation of de Chirico's post-Metaphysical work in a lecture delivered at the University of Salerno, in the context of a symposium on Surrealism promoted by Filiberto Menna at the University of Salerno in the spring of 1973, and later published in *Studi sul surrealismo. Saggi/ Documenti n. 6*, edited by Filiberto Menna (Rome: Officina, 1977). Only minor changes differentiate the two essays.
- ⁶³ Renato Barilli, "De Chirico e il recupero del museo", 288.
- ⁶⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *Il soggetto e la maschera: Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione* (Milan: Bompiani, 2007), 11. This book has not been translated into English, unlike other texts by Vattimo, who is considered one of main Italian philosophers of the postwar period.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 39.
- ⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52-53.
- ⁶⁸ Luigi Ontani, "È arrivato un angelo", interview by Franco Fanelli, in *Vernissage*, montly supplement to *Il Giornale dell'Arte*,

November 2003, 6.

⁶⁹ Vattimo, *Il soggetto e la maschera*, 41.

⁷⁰ It is hard to say if this was truly Ontani's first tableau, but his insistence that it was reveals the importance of the work.

⁷¹ Andrea Emiliani, *Guido Reni, I maestri del colore* 35 (Milan: Fratelli Fabbri, 1964), ill. XII. This is the only Saint Sebastian by Reni reproduced in the booklet. The impact of the availability of stunning and inexpensive color reproductions of artworks was enormous on all fronts, including art production.

⁷² Luigi Ontani, interview by author, 24 June 2009.

⁷³ Richard A. Kaye, "Losing His Religion: San Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr", in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, edited by Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 87.