

# PASOLINI, an improvisation (OF A SAINTLINESS)

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Of him I know only his act and only his death  
The other to the one gives no authority  
nor is it nevertheless inscribed in advance nor  
the other the first (or perhaps the second)  
where no epitaph to read no index  
that he knew the storm of sanction near.  
Isn't this also what he had always said?

## HYPOTHESIS I

*"Perhaps saintliness, since the advent of the modern, has found  
refuge (asylum) in art: in the act of art."*

Saintliness: the signification of this word must be extracted from Christianity, even still latent. And from religion — it, probably, indelible.

Modern is devastation, desolation: the one who enters into it and stays there, thereby in solitude, but not in mourning, is *atheistic*, "deprived of god" (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 661). His melancholy is heroic; it is a furor, wrath ("*Menin aeide, Thea*").

The act, which is older than the work, is the enigma of its cessation: grace without mercy. "I did say *act*. In any case, no question of *creation*. You know?"

Solitude — desolation — is indeed the desert: *ego vox clamantis in deserto*, "the desert grows." In ancient tragedy, where the god is "present in the figure of death," this can be said thus:

*It is a great resource of the secretly working soul that at the highest state of consciousness it evades consciousness...Consciousness at its highest, then, always compares itself to objects that do not have any consciousness, yet which in their destiny assume the form of consciousness. One such object is the land that has become a desert, which in originally abundant fertility increases the effects of sunlight too much and therefore dries out.*

— Hölderlin, *Remarks on "Antigone,"* §2.<sup>1</sup>

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He follows the ancient to its traces: he tracks vestiges. He wanders “under the unthinkable” (Hölderlin, but this time on Oedipus).

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Left behind, abandoned — he has simply been *dropped*. If he strays, it is, consequently, governed by what he lacks: the very one.

“What do you mean, exactly?”

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Religion is peasant: here to stay. But it is unchained, now that the dissociation has taken place, now that they have all been deported. It is even the “disappearance of the fireflies”<sup>2</sup>: *Mors stupebit et natura...*

\*

The mother and child in the immemorial prairie (*vaffanculo*) and the anterior noise of the wind: presentation by breath, the most acrid. The mother, a slowness; and child, the overturned gesture of desire, with an absolute precision, more powerful than the innocence that troubles him.

*Madame stands up too straight in the prairie  
Nearby, where threads of work snow down...*

— Rimbaud, *Memory.*<sup>3</sup>

\*

A music, sacral and choral, common passion at a distance, there, unbreathable aura of the dry *banlieue*. The faces are primitive, the smiles are those of bad violence and obscenity — of pure goodness.

Filth. The gazes are fleeting, also, and sly, daring. Vain courage, but courage still, furtive, halting: a frankness.

\*

Religion is familial: the unchecked fall (of everyone: father and mother, brother and sister, or son and daughter), and the improbable elevation of the peasant woman, the servant (*au grand coeur?*).<sup>4</sup>

*Blank is the instant.*

— Hölderlin, *Bread and Wine*.

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Behind the ones whom one could say were in a state of resemblance to the saints, the homeless of Assisi and Siena, speechless but in dialogue with the beasts, the birds most of all, there are the Greeks and their native oriental savagery: these are brutal and ferocious, not truly superstitious but restless, without respite, opening their ears (organs of fear: night and music), to listen for another noise. They shiver at the murmur of what is, indiscernible, and they avow as much (Hegel).

Other times, in terror, they are mute.

The heaven of the saints under their feet is the earth itself.

They, the Greeks, they fall and raise themselves up, they never stop crossing the distance that never separates the highest from the lowest.

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Depopulated peasantry:

*Where do they presage, the wise peasant sentences?*

— Hölderlin, *Bread and Wine*.

\*

He has — they have — no age.

## HYPOTHESIS II

*“Saintliness is a discipline of the thing. It engages the experience of the abject.”*

The saint experiences the inhuman in man: the fact of man, that outstrips him inside, his most intimate outside.

*Interior intimo meo.*

It is his ferocity.

\*

He says:

*It is obvious that I have always been of an inferior race. I cannot understand revolt. My race never rises up except to pillage: like wolves who go after the beast they did not kill.*

Before that, he claimed the right to “idolatry and love of sacrilege; — oh! all the vices, wrath, luxury — it’s magnificent, luxury; — but, most of all, deceit and sloth” (Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*).<sup>5</sup>

This is not false, he responds, but it is revolt: to consider this step already taken, all revolt is logical, etc. Not the least effusion. Already said.

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Religion: always archaic: the thing consumes us. Do not encircle it with precautions, nor single it out. No luster. The most consequential among them dispense with objects.

\*

He has nothing *to do* except with materialities: sounds, pigments; languages, light. Or with bodies whose soul is their indecency.

A nothing will attract him.

\*

No murder: one must elude figuration.

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Saintliness, because it demands and responds, is rigorous, as exact as a calculation. It derives from a theorem, that is, from pain. Such is the act.

\*

This can be repeated thus:

*It is a great resource of the secretly working soul that at the highest state of consciousness it evades consciousness and that, before the present god actually seizes it, the soul confronts him in a bold and frequently even blasphematory manner, and thus keeps alive the holy possibility of the spirit.*

— Hölderlin, *Remarks on "Antigone,"* §2.<sup>6</sup>

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He experiences debasement; it is required by being defiled. The pigpen is not the world, but reality: the dull blooming of things, barely lit: natural evil.

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(While he dies, falsely crucified, it is for real. Welles, if I remember correctly, missed the whole thing.)

\*

It is the animal that palpitates in him and strives, the ancient ferocious god, bristling. That's why his very history is natural, blue as a myth.

*...I have been handed over to the ground, with a duty to seek, and coarse reality to embrace! Peasant!* — It has been said once and for all.

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Whence his rage, his joy, his perfectly intransigent "one must." *Cazzo*. He neither prays nor supplicates, he sings torment. Superb atonal voice.

*Three remarks (for Armando Battiston).*

*No effusion: Monk and Dolphy – not Coltrane; Morandi, Bram van Velde – not Kandinsky.  
No “spiritual in art.”*

*There are three of them, one for each of Western (hesperian) Europe’s three religions: Kafka,  
Beckett, and him, Pasolini.*

*Practically, he was just.*

*Translated by Steven Miller*

The text translated here originally appeared as *Pasolini, une improvisation (D’une sainteté)* (Bordeaux: William Blake and Co.), 1995. [All citations are the translator’s.]

1. Friedrich Hölderlin, “Remarks on ‘Antigone’” in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University at New York Press, 1988), 111-112. [Translation modified.]
2. Pier Paolo Pasolini, “1 febbraio 1975. L’articolo delle lucciole,” in *Scritti Cosari* (Milan: Garzanti, 1975), 160-168.
3. Arthur Rimbaud, “Memory,” in *Rimbaud Complete*, ed. and trans. Wyatt Mason (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 351. [Translation modified.]
4. See Charles Baudelaire, “La servante au grand coeur dont vous étiez jalouse,” rendered as “That kind-heart you were jealous of...” in *Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 203.
5. See Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*, *Ibid.*, 196. [Translation modified.]
6. Hölderlin, “Remarks on ‘Antigone,’” 111. [Translation modified.]