

ARBOR TRE ITALIA





With contributions
from ...



Vittorio Escomel



Ty Negerkultur

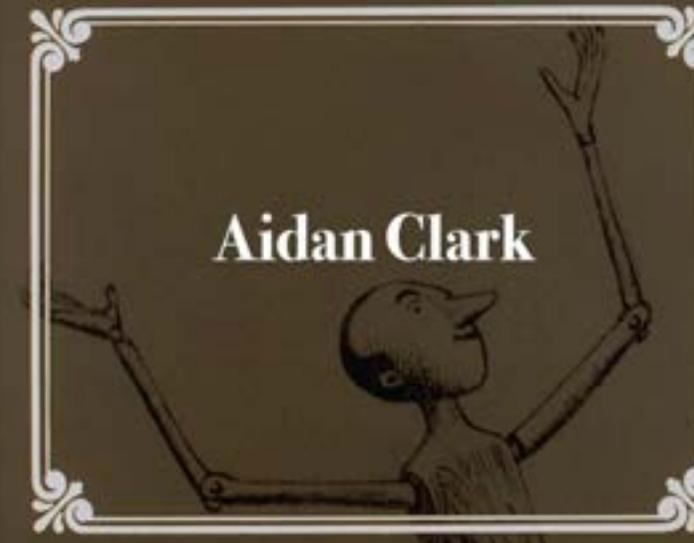
Arbor No3 - Italia



Nadia Cattazzo



Pierro
Pierro



Aidan Clark

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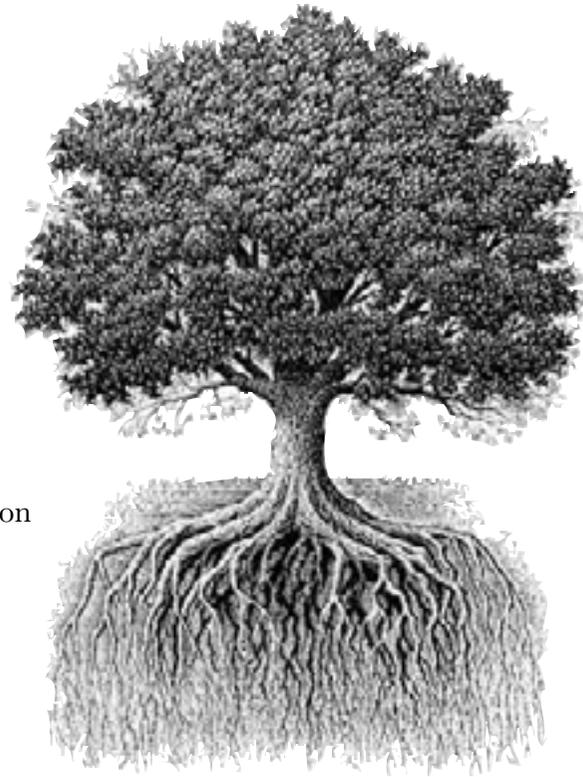
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Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975)

An intellectual tour-de-force in Italy and beyond, Pasolini was a natural point of reference for us as we began putting together Arbor's Italian edition. To the bottom right of this page there is a link to a video, that provides a sweeping introduction to the man and his life's work.

The first three pieces in this issue each relate to a Pasolini film:

1. Dialogue and stills from *Teorema* (1968) selected by Monsieur Gilles, Arbor's in-house frenchman.

<https://www.instagram.com/parmigiano66/>

2. *Salo & Gomorrah*, a fragment inspired by *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975). Written by Ty, precocious highschool student, and the mastermind behind @maoisthug

3. *La cosa*, a piece by Nadia Cattazzo that draws on scenes from Pasolini's adaptation of *Il Decameron* (1971), to springboard a wider meditation on sexuality in the works of both Pasolini and Alberto Moravia.

Audio-visual introduction to Pasolini: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dyF-tWCmeKGzbcH39WNf10Bp0dJW4TIX/view?usp=sharing>



Bisogna cercare di inventare nuove tecniche
Che siano irriconoscibile
Che non assomiglino a nessuna operazione precedente
Per evitare la puerilità, il ridicolo

Costruirsi un mondo proprio
Con cui non siano possibile confronti
Per cui non esistono precedente misure di giudizio
Che devono essere nuove come la tecnica

Nessuno deve capire che l'autore non vale niente
Che è un essere anormale, inferiore,
Che, che come un verme si contorce e strisca per sopravvivere

Nessuno deve mai coglierlo in fallo di ingenuità
Tutto deve presentarsi come perfetto
Basato su regole sconosciute

E quindi non giudicabili

Come un matto, sì, come un matto!

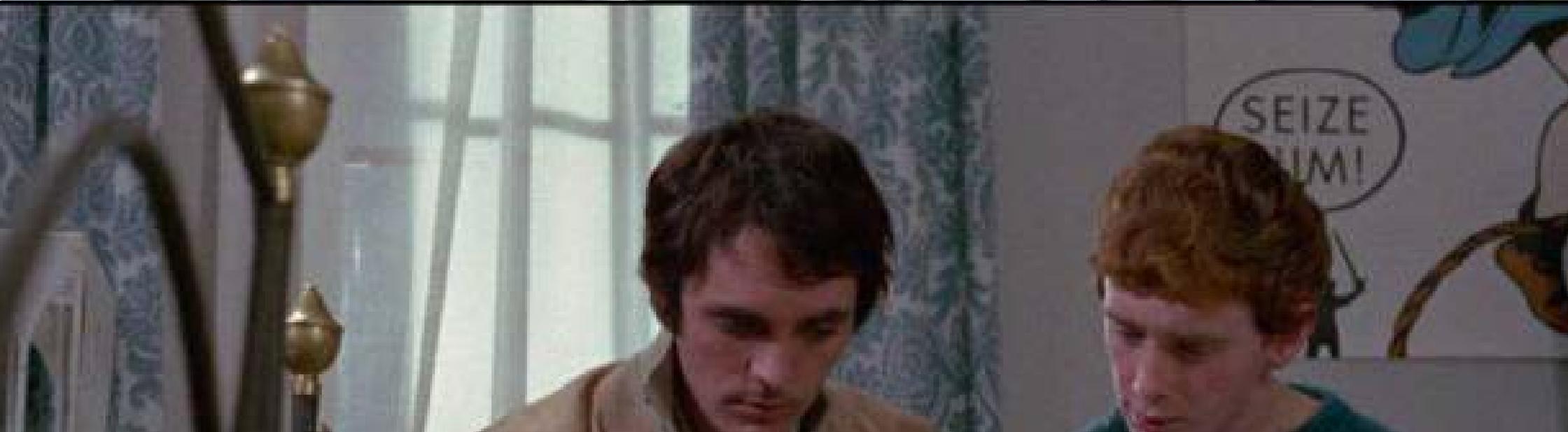
Vetro sù vetro
Perché non sono capace di correggere niente
E nessuno se ne deve accorgere,
Un segno dipinto su un vetro,
Corregge senza sporcarlo
Un segno dipinto prima sù un altro vetro,





Ma tutti, dovranno credere,
Che non si tratti del ripiego di un incapace,
Di un impotente,
Nient'affatto,
Ma che si tratti invece di una decisione sicura
Imperterrita, alta e quasi prepotente

Nessuno deve sapere che un segno riesce bene per caso,
“per caso” e tremando,
e che un segno appena si presenta,
Riuscito bene per miracolo
Bisogna subito proteggerlo, o studirlo
Come in una teca
Ma nessuno, nessuno deve accorgersene
L'autore è un povero tremante idiota
Una mezza calzetta, vive nel caso e nel rischio,
Disonorato come un bambino
Ha ridotto la sua vita alla malinconia ridicola
Di che vive degradato dal impressione
Di qualcosa perduto per sempre.





Salo & Gomorrah by Ty Negerkultur

Salo & Gomorrah

If there is one unsettling feature in Pasolini's filmography beyond the mystery of his death, beyond the supposed possibility of his conscious drift to death and doom; it has to be his pornographic, homosexual gaze. In Pasolini's sense through Salo, homosexuality is something modern: vivisection, experimental, destructive and revelatory. Salo, intended as an adaptation of the Marquis de Sade's 120 days of Sodom, erects the meeting point of homosexuality, Sade's sovereign man and Spengler's civilised man. In each second of the film, the sovereign man, man of transgression, in violence "denying others" for the attainment of his pleasure...his sexual gratification...violating figures, boys and girls, in unity under Pasolini's view and eye for primordial, nascent, prelapsarian beauty...the audience wails "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly". Beyond conscience, the sovereign men, the anarchic fascists versed in Nietzsche, they proceed, they continue, vivisectively, modern, to piece apart humanity in full virtue of latent desires that require no explanation; libidinal, erotic and so forth. It is at the height of this description, scenes wherein excrements are turned inside out: they are attempted to be made increments, food; a girl is forced to eat shit...the men: rejoice. They are "virile" they are "intense" as Spengler's civilised man, the principle of transgression, "infinite and ultra-visual", the men draw upon their secured "form-language" and are assured in their "sense of its power", they are mature. This is unsettling. Pasolini's film reaches Sodomy in full authenticity, but Sodomy is homosexual...this display of Sodom and its inhumanity achieves fluidness by its centralness to the film; there is something of Sodom in homosexuality, Pasolini is speaking through his fantasy as a homosexual: Pasolini falls victim to his inner sodomite. Homosexuality is civilised, it is against the piously ecstatic feeling which typically dominates Pasolini's lens, it's gaze over young men, homosexuality is hostile to primordial beauty...there is something of Sodom in homosexuality. Homosexuality is not saintly and other. Breaking with "Theorem", Homosexuality is not the beatific conduit to a young man's open rejection of bourgeois society..."you made me different by taking me out of the natural order of things"... Homosexuality, in Salo, is a will to death. Sodomy is ugly but homosexuality hides in sodomy and likewise sodom hides in homosexuality.



La Cosa by Nadia Cattazzo

La cosa: la sessualità come ponte tra Moravia e Pasolini

Tra La cosa e il Decameron

La cosa. La cosa é. Moravia la definisce. Moravia la mette in valore, La cosa ed altri racconti. La cosa è tabù all'epoca, la cosa è tabù ancora oggi. La cosa governa da molto, ma della cosa non se parla da poco. Lo avrete capito: la cosa è ovunque.

Ma che cos'è la cosa?

Un concetto vago. Sapete, quando si parla vagamente è probabile che si voglia far sottintendere all'interlocutore un'intenzione: "Ma sì, sai di che cosa parlo, di quella cosa lì!". La mancanza di rigore linguistico segnala tutt'al più una scappatoia alla morale. Quando qualcuno è vago, non può essere accusato per le sue intenzioni, benché possano esser immorali. L'accusa è ritirata grazie all'indeterminato.

Il vago è immorale. Al contrario, l'immorale è vago? No, ciò che è immorale è chiaro e distinto. Nelle novelle di Moravia, la cosa non è quasi mai definita espressamente. Moravia la definisce attraverso gli atti dei personaggi messi in scena. Il lettore comprende rapidamente che si tratta del sesso maschile. La cosa è perennemente presente, in ogni scena. La cosa è presenza. La cosa, il sesso maschile quindi, assume un'identità. Un'identità completamente immorale.

La cosa tenta persino il diavolo!

Ci verrebbe quasi voglia di pensare che a causa della sua immoralità, la cosa detta legge.

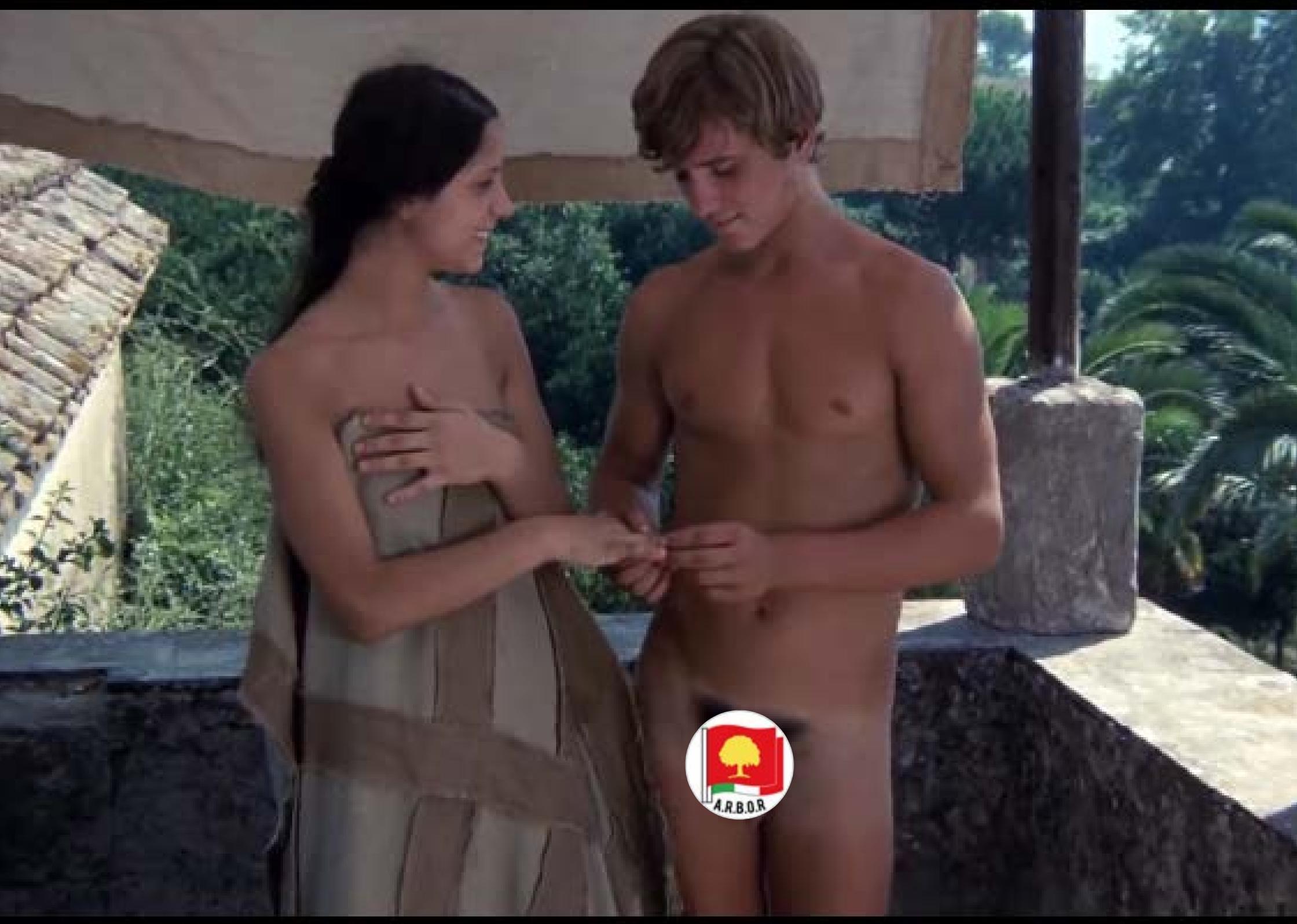
Insomma, Moravia esce dallo scandalo intorno al sesso maschile, riducendo quello femminile all'obbedienza. La cosa conduce a dei racconti macabri, essa non si riduce al sesso umano. Nella prima novella, per esempio, Moravia mette in scena la fascinazione d'una donna per il sesso di un cavallo. I racconti di Moravia sono macabri: pedofilia, violenza domestica, zoerastia et quanto altro ancora.

L'autore ricerca la sessualità, l'obiettivo è di concepirla come un tutto, andando oltre i tabù ordinari che nascono dal semplice fatto dell'accoppiamento. Moravia sembra mettere in evidenza non solo i divieti morali classici imposti da secoli di religiosità cattolica, come avere dei rapporti sessuali fuori dal matrimonio; ma anche i divieti considerati malsani, aggiungendo delle aggravanti singolari ai rapporti sessuali "ordinari". Bisognerebbe definire che cosa è ordinario e che cosa non lo è, ma questa è un'altra storia.

Ed è esattamente a questo punto che Pasolini entra in gioco. Si sa che la sessualità per il Maestro è sempre stato un oggetto di curiosità, fino a fare un documentario riunente le opinioni popolari e intellettuali sulla sessualità degli italiani degli anni 60. Nel documentario Comizi d'amore (1965) ritroviamo i pensieri del nostro caro Moravia, un Moravia che critica acerbamente lo scandalo dicendo che "il giudizio è legittimo ma non lo scandalo".

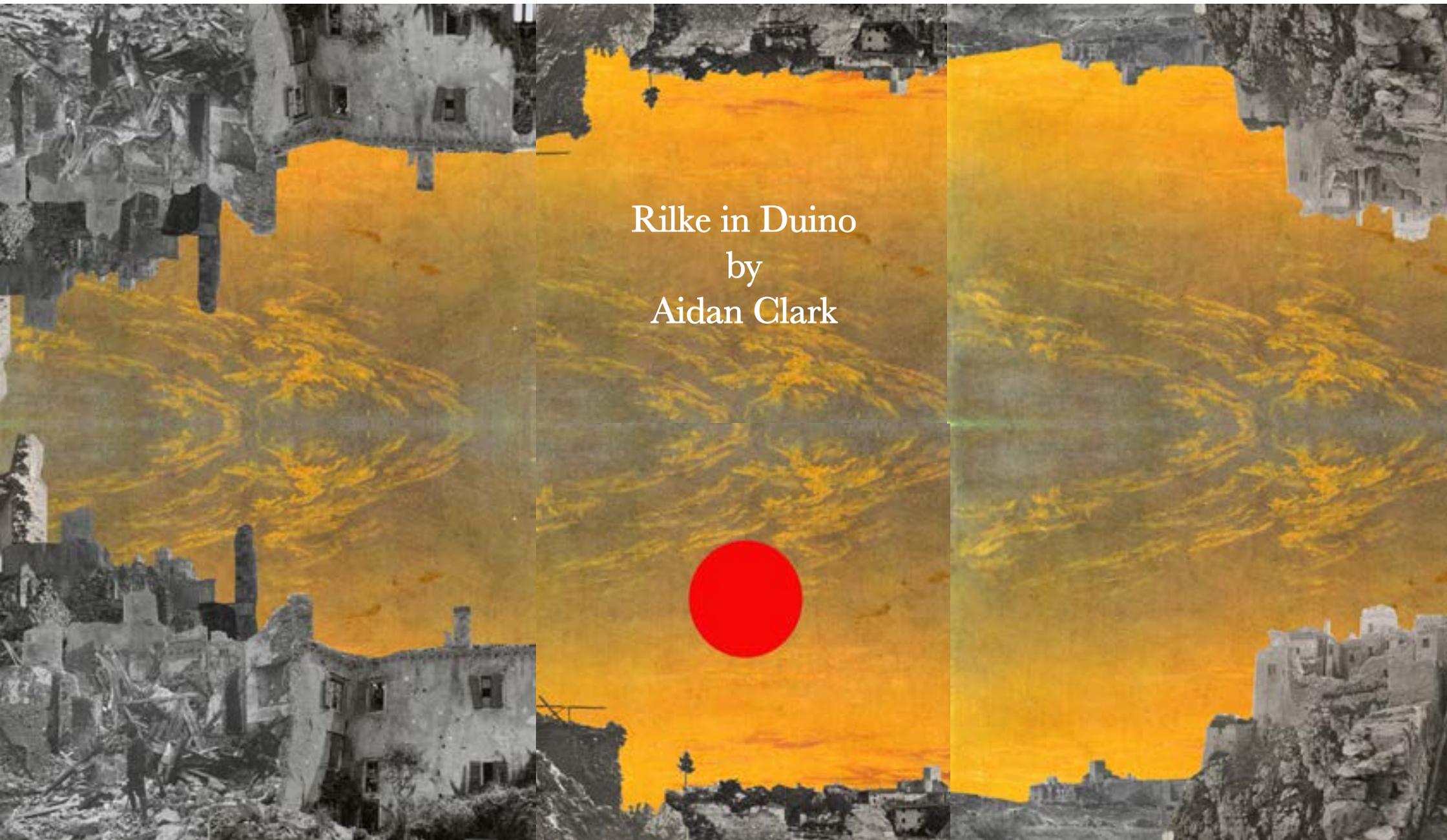
Sia Pasolini che Moravia annientano gli scandali del buon costume. Niente nelle loro produzioni rileva dello scandalo, persino quando l'opera disturba lo spettatore o il lettore. Lo scandalo è semplicemente ignoranza e tacendo la sessualità in società, essa diventa scandalosa. È per questa ragione che Pasolini mette in opera i capolavori letterari sotto un prisma critico, politico, volto a s'opporre alla morale del buon costume. Nel Decameron, il quadro storico proprio all'opera originaria del Boccaccio sparisce, il film comincia senza narrare perché degli episodi diversi si susseguono. Capiamo più tardi, nel bel mezzo del film che il filo conduttore non è più l'industria, intesa come capacità a cavarsela con l'ingegno, bensì la sessualità. Pasolini riprende dieci novelle del Decameron originario dove il sesso o l'amore proibito giocano un ruolo fondamentale, ovvero provare che benché in situazioni differenti, l'uomo individualmente rifiuta d'agire nel nome del buon senso. In pratica quest'ultimo funziona in un senso collettivo, istituzionale e non individuale. Il buon senso, in quanto ignorante, e la morale, in quanto trascendente, sono puramente ipocriti. L'ipocrisia è alquanto culminante nell'episodio della suora con l'amante (ispirato dalla novella La badessa e le brache del prete del Decamerone di Boccaccio). In questa novella, un giovane chiede vitto e alloggio in un convento in cambio della sua mano d'opera, spacciandosi per sordo muto. Una suora comincia ad avere degli incontri notturni con il ragazzo, fino a quando le altre suore scoprono la relazione tra i due, le quali si dirigono verso la Madre Superiora per comunicare quanto successo. Contro le loro aspettative, la Madre stava avendo un rapporto illegittimo. È così che la Madre decide di permettere a tutte le suore di avere dei rapporti con il sordo muto, che si scopre essere un impostore: il giovane è completamente valido e gioisce di tutti i benefici della vita, quali vitto alloggio e sesso a volontà. Il paradosso sta nel fatto che questi atti immorali abbiano luogo in un convento. Pasolini sottolinea l'ipocrisia delle suore volte all'amore di un impostore piuttosto che a quello di Dio.

Nadia Cattazzo





It wouldn't be an Arbor issue without a classic piece by Arbor talisman Aidan aka hegelsh. So here is:



Rilke in Duino
by
Aidan Clark

i.
upon the cliffs, withdrawn from himself and his surroundings, the untranslated words of la vita nuova travelling his mind, he hears from off the sea

Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel
Ordnungen?¹

so spoke a voice, once. clear and uncomplexed, like a string unravelled to its source,
speaking with the newness of the virgin invisible. stimmen, stimmen².

und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem
stärkeren Dasein³.

what do invisible things say to invisible things? and as the night approaches, where
do they return? an angel, in its newness, is that everything already which cannot
fail to see the world anew. it asks is this your first time with the absolute? but nothing
follows. only the silence which began. only your own voice is heard.

and where you are, any voice that's heard is held above the rising water of the
night. what has no body has no body already. if it sings, it is already singing. if
the world comes unbodied, measureless in either time or space, then it is already
measureless and you are still called to trespass upon it.

and if das Schöne ist nichts als des Schrecklichen Anfang⁴ and if es gelassen ver-
schmäh, uns zu zerstören⁵ then we are not bodies already annihilated, but we are
alive already in this annihilation.

Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich⁶

and all our wonder arises from within our terror. this is the secret of beauty.

1 Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?" (Stephen Mitchell's translations) -- I feel that "orders" works better, though Mitchell's translation are first-rate.

2 voices, voices.

3 "...and even if one of them pressed me suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed in that overwhelming existence."

4 "...Beauty is the beginning of terror."

5 "...it serenely disdains to annihilate us."

6 "Every angel is terrifying."



ii.

at this point, rilke is pretty grief-stricken. his libello¹ remains unfinished. wwi looms. el greco's angels haunt him, and die Aufzeichnungen² has wrung him. his neue gedichte³ remain in all their quiet strength. but only duino has the cast his silence. and in the evening, it is dark and warm. beside the adriatic. cliff-bound and untimed. calm with despair.

the virgin new is an experience of angels, who, appearing at the cusp of grief, come to see what they are. unmistakable. the tone of his existence is not unfamiliar to them, but it is like a memory they have not yet had. angels remember nothing. how could they if their existence calls everything back into them entire?

his angst – does he see the glimmer of death? everything which fades seems to reconceal itself, and the terror of this concealment is how it upturns the visible. how can I not expect the void to appear? how can I forfeit its appearance when, if it exists, it is already within the world. and it, being already within the world, in the force of its upturning, to the visible as yearning is to one in love, must appear unforgivingly.

and if it does not yet exist, then there is nothing in the world that can delimit it. this is the meaning of the 'already' which circumscribes the visible. if our despair exists, then all of our love, the labour of our love in the world, must arise out of that despair. there is no other place. and there is no way the weight of despair can resist it.

in the lack of all expectation. in the shadow of an angel. we must imagine that the visible is not the measure of itself, and nothing can be excluded when everything, that is now, we see by chance. the glimmer of death is the wake of light on a river in daylight, which appears without our choosing, and shows that our reception of the world involves the crisis of our disbelief in it. we cannot return this despair, because it rises out from under us. right from where we are. right from where we are walking.

1 Das Marien-Leben.
2 The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge."
3 New Poems.

was willst du deines Ortes tun¹

what you give now is given for forever. and the chorus rises.

Herr, unser Herrscher, dessen Ruhm
In allen Landen herrlich ist!
Zeig uns durch deine Passion,
Daß du, der wahre Gottessohn,
Zu aller Zeit,
Auch in der größten Niedrigkeit,

Verherrlicht worden bist!²

they cannot imagine transformation. but, close your eyes. can you not see how what you see rises from another source, how christ's transformation and the transformation of a branch into a tree, how it becomes possible when you close your eyes? and imagine that eternity has closed its eyes. all transformation is at last suddenly possible.

iii.

rilke's clarity in these elegies is not simple, and his encounter with an invisible being draws out all the paradoxes of the absolute. it is not enough to imagine this angel veiled, unseen, behind the curtain of the world. all of hegel swims forth with the line

Es zeigt sich, daß hinter dem sogenannten Vorhange, welcher das Innre verdecken soll, nichts zu sehen ist, wenn wir nicht selbst dahintergehen³

rilke lives this out, for what appears is his own voice, speaking what he will speak: who, if I cried. he questions the place of loss if angels may appear. the language of being incises everything, forgetting to close upon each thing with form. hegel knew, however, that this is not a mistake of the absolute, that angels only appear in the move from one life to another. they appear on the other side. on the side of that which you can only see once you have arrived.

1 "How shall you react from your depths?" -- from Bach's Johannes-Passion. my favourite moment in Bach. occurs upon the death of christ. "Mein herz in dem die ganze welt.."

2 "Lord, our ruler, whose fame in every land is glorious! Show us, through your passion, that you, the true son of God, through all time, even in the greatest humiliation, have become transfigured." Opening chorus of the Johannes-Passion.

3 "It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we go behind it ourselves" (Hegel, Miller)



und die Nacht, die Nacht, wenn der Wind voller Weltraum
uns am Angesicht zehrt –, wem bliebe sie nicht, die ersehnte,
sanft enttäuschende, welche dem einzelnen Herzen
mühsam bevorsteht. Ist sie den Liebenden leichter?¹

is it any easier for lovers? to suffer the pale of angels. to foreclose the infinite depths, the
Fluten der Herkunft rushing at your heels. they do it together, but only if the shadow
that exists remains unconcealed.

Ach, sie verdecken sich nur mit einander ihr Los².

and all of Rilke weighs upon this betrayal. his clarity arises from this betrayal, because it
happens before the seal of any love is broken. when he begins to raise the question of
the dead, he is thinking, death is real. and this is what love bears witness to. this is the
why he writes that we

1 “Oh and night: there is night, when a wind full of infinite space gnaws at our faces. Whom would it not remain
for -- that longed-after, mildly disillusioned presence, which the solitary heart so painfully meets. Is it any less difficult for
lovers?” First elegy.

2 “But, they keep on using each other to hide their own fate.”

are these transformers of the earth; our whole existence, the flights and plunges of our love,
everything, qualifies us for this task

to turn the visible into the invisible and back. it is Knusgaard who writes that

the owl is nothing other than this: a soundless highly effective bird of prey. If the true task of poetry is
revelation, this is what it should reveal, that reality is what it is. That the forest, with its dense spruces
and its snow-covered floor, is real. That the falling dusk is real. That the owl taking off from the branch
and flying across the field is real.

when it is that ja, die Frühlinge brauchten dich wohl¹, it is because the call of despair that comes first
through the world is like a handwave. when it is, that Engel (sagt man) wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter
Lebenden gehn oder Toten², it is because angels see our deaths already.

but, the handwave from eternity interrupts itself. the already unbearable absolute which angels see
immediate. which qualifies that ach, that

ach, wen vermögen
wir denn zu brauchen? Engel nicht, Menschen nicht³

1 “Yes – the springtimes needed you.”

2 “Angels (they say) don’t know whether it is the living they are moving among, or the dead.”

3 “Ah, whom can we ever turn to in our need?”



it is the quality of death upon which angels would have already arrived. but, they would find us, like a flower, having arisen, in our life, out of that death. it is angels who are horrified at us; us, these creatures of time. we are alive in death, and Rilke realizes that our despair, if it has already existed, is not that which we come upon, but that which we realize is the source of our own creativity already. our temporality is that which unhinges us for angels, make us literally inaccessible. we twist too much and find our ourselves in the passive reception of our retroactive selves, twisting to say impossible things, *wenn ich schreie*. they cannot follow us, in turn, because what we twist is the absolute itself. exposed in the indirection of the eternal's bath in all that is temporary, the absolute is unclosed.

it provides a lasting paradox to trick us: if, when in all your despair, you foresee your death, do you not realize you are already dead, that that is that towards which you are bound? to which our response, which horrifies *der engel ordnungen*, is that, yes, we accept this, we are already dead. we are alive in death.

see that which, in pure paradox, arises out of this. our life. creatures of time. again, that cry which arrests Rilke is time. all life comes after death. if the absolute, expecting all, can be seen in no single part of its everything, then it is life which defeats the absolute. giving it more of itself, gaining in that which cannot be denied. in despair, life is. and the absolute dies with us, or else calls itself into temporality.

Ist die Sage umsonst, daß einst in der Klage um Linos
wagende erste Musik dürre Erstarrung durchdrang¹,

we are nothing risen out of itself. things, creatures, which exceed the pure possibility of our death in each act of life. and despair, the call from off the wind, the cliffwall, what is this but the call to live, which rises rises rises rises, exceeds the already of invisible things, and exists from within its own annihilation.

1 "Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus, the daring first notes pierced through the barren numbness..."

iv.

love is the moment of this encounter. it is not despair, but the core of despair in love, that finds that lovers, that *sie verdecken sich nur mit einander ihr Los*, exists in the fruit of love. to love, not only in the face of annihilation, but from within it, is to ask the sublime question of the first elegy.

ist sie den Liebenden leichter?

is it?

for how is it that love, even when it is away, even when it dies, remains, if it does not, in that moment, at the moment of its utterance, give all of conditions of its existence. its death, included. how else can we be expected to live it?

Rilke is not in-love in *duino*, but what he faces is the terror that all lovers must be facing already, and this relates him to the paradox of love. it relates him, in despair, through his despair, to the love which he does not yet possess.

this paradox is that love does not exceed the terrible. when Rilke imagines the moment, which is almost the fruit of this elegy, he asks

Sollen nicht endlich uns diese ältesten Schmerzen
fruchtbarer werden? Ist es nicht Zeit, daß wir liebend
uns vom Geliebten befreien und es bebend bestehn:
wie der Pfeil die Sehne besteht, um gesammelt im Absprung
mehr zu sein als er selbst¹.

and he concludes with the line *Denn Bleiben ist nirgends*². what he imagines is the moment when we give away the beloved. this moment is the closest we come to understanding what we feel when we are in love.

1 "Shouldn't this most ancient of sufferings finally grow more fruitful for us? Isn't it time we lovingly freed ourselves from the beloved and, quivering, endured: as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension, so that gathered in the snap of release it can be more than itself?"

2 "For there is no place where we can remain."



we must ask how is it that we live when we are in love to begin with. when we are separated from love, or even when we are before that love which is undeclared, or unconsummated, how would we live differently. when rilke conceives of this moment, held in suspension, before the mehr zu sein als er selbst, he wonders on how you navigate love when the moment of love is the encounter with despair.

the unforgiving uncertainty of love is not the doubt as to whether we are loved, but the uncertainty before the despair which continues living even in love. to unthink the beloved is come closer to that which is not any easier for lovers, but which, for lovers, existing in them still, resolves towards a new beginning. the beginning of despair is love.

what rilke sees in despair is that only when we can think to face our fate alone, do we approach the condition by which anyone becomes a lover. to think our loneliness, what else becomes but that we feel the weight of that which we trust to give another? the love which exists in silence, on the cliffedge, without yet knowing where it will come, this is the condition by which we are all made lovers. to wait, before despair, is to be in love. only one in love could think to face the void. only one beyond love, even. fallen into that realization that love is not enough, so that one must improve it.

if I am truly sensitive to what is passing, then I give everything in every moment. rilke's sense is that maybe, without love, we can begin to hear where it arises. without complaint for it, with only the yearning that is already there. would we not improve it?

daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah göttlicher Jüngling plötzlich für immer enttrat, die Leere in jene Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft¹.

nothing looks as far as love. nothing so twists time. nothing demands the unreconciled absolute to declare that the only serious condition of immanence is unfinishedness. love, alone, allows us to live without knowing what we do and yet remain in the embrace of the world.

1 "... and then in the startled space which a youth as lovely as a god had suddenly left forever, the Void felt for the first time that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us."

even loveless rilke can know that, at least, he does not, in his despair, tread too far. that, whether we know when we say it or not, we know we cannot avoid saying the truth.

v.

and he tries to listen, in his loneliness. and repeats Denn Bleibein ist nirgends. stimmen, stimmen.

Höre, mein Herz, wie sonst nur
Heilige hörten¹

there are rhythms, murakami knows, in crisis. he approaches deathliness. what hegel calls the germ of death. when all his fate becomes in the act of weißt du's noch nicht. this is how he means.

wirf aus den Armen die Leere zu den Räumen hinzu, die wir atmen².

he wants to throw everything into death, redeem the dead in their deathliness. for it is not that they cannot exist without us, but könnten wir sein ohne sie³?

all things are deathly. what are we without the passing of time? unthought, unhearing. we come upon a river in the mountains. and we float for a moment in die ewige Strömung⁴. the deathliness we pass over is our own, which cannot cover us entire. we pass through it as though holding our breath. as though plunging in deep and frigid water. this is death.

.

then, we pass out of the water, and the wind picks up for a moment. we hear a voice, carried by the wind, and we turn to see who's coming.

1 "Listen, my heart, as only saints have listen..."

2 "Fling the emptiness out of your arms into the spaces we breath."

3 "Could we exist without them?"

4 "the eternal torrent."



Pierro and la comedia dell'arte

James Reid-Thomas:

When I first began looking for other people with whom to discuss my love of Nanni Moretti's films, I sensed Moretti was a figure much like Will Self: there are plenty of people out there who know him, but not many of those people particularly like him. Eventually, *attraverso* the Arbor discord server, I was able to meet a maltese gentleman who shared a similar love for Moretti's finer works. We soon bonded and he has written the following piece. An excellent piece for sure, but that doesn't mean to say it's easy to categorise. I will say it's a composite, a real blend of multiple writing styles in the space of 2 pages. The name Pierro he tells me, is a nod to the *commedia dell'arte*; a theatre group whose itinerant ways and satirical observations I can certainly appreciate. So much so that it has become my fantasy of late to create a revived form of the *comedia dell'arte*, with a set of contemporary players: Aidan Clark as the graceful and eloquent white clown, Quentin Scobie as the trickster harlequin . . . the other figures are still in development. Moving interminably from *piazza* to *piazza* in the Tuscan countryside of my great-grandparents (pictured in this edition's cover).



Il Convento della Signora by Pierro

Film Name: Il Convento della Signora

Director: Unknown (But he is Italian)

Geordie D Harbottle:

Harbottle is a film reviewer working for Arbor Magazine specialising in art film. He has studied in the University of American Neo-Tijuana and has written his PHD on the artistic value of the Italian Impressionist film movement.

Half of the difficulty and half of the joy of reviewing Italian impressionist films is their rarity. They're sold in scrap piles in Italy, or thrown away by Italians who simply don't know what they're handling. Over here, they're increasingly rare, which means that a find such as this one made me eager to review it as soon as I could. I was halfway through the first scene, of a drive through the Italian countryside, as a convent loomed ahead. The director made sure that the image of the convent's tower bulged in the shot, demanding room to express itself. No title card, no credits, only cinematography. Had I looked in the mirror at that moment I would have probably seen my eyes twinkle. I was as excited as when I saw *il Postino* the first time.

The doorbell rang, mid-film, right in the middle of a scene properly detailing the director's blunt understanding of the promiscuity of the Mediterranean people. I opened the door and I didn't recognise the woman there. Then I did, and then I wished I didn't. "GEORDIE, I need your help!" She screamed at me, like she was my friend.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh me, I'm running a soviet"

"But you're an accountant"

"Yes, a Communist financials firm, we make accounts not profits".

"What do you want me for?"

"I'll tell you later, do you still review pornos?"

I had to start explaining to her that there is a clear distinction between Italian impressionism and pornography. In porn sex is a requirement. But the Italian director has no idea what that is at all, anyone south of Veneto reproduces by mitosis. Therefore, the directors in question do not have sex. They will simply ne

She was already on my sofa by the time I got to half of the explanation. She was looking hard at what I had on the screen at the moment, a moment of divine revelation for one of the sisters at the convent represented by the carved head of Christ on a pole being held in her hand as one would hold a phallus. The scene indicates divinity, ecstasy, a unity with the divine which is altogether religious. At first she looked a bit disgusted, then confused, then recognition seemed to dawn on her face as her lightly wrinkled forehead relaxed and the tips of her lips settled back down into a more natural position. The recognition worried me at first, this film was my discovery, I wanted to share it with the world.

"I need you to review a Nanni Moretti film for me," she said. I was surprised, Nanni Moretti is a famous director known for films that aren't Italian impressionism. She didn't wait for me to inform her of the fact. She pulled out an image of the nipple sucking scene from *La Stanza Del Figlio*, her face poorly edited it over Nanni Moretti's.

“My psychoanalyst boyfriend will not stop watching Nanni Moretti. He’s insufferable, I can’t watch Mulholland Drive in peace without him talking about how *La Stanza Del Figlio* was the rightful winner of the Palme d’Or and that the criticism of the festival was unwarranted. I just want to watch a normal film with him. I tell him that we’re gonna watch something like *The Piano* or *Little Women* and he says yes. By the time we’re there he’s got *Habemus Papam* on the television. I begged him to try at least *Dolce Vita* but he refuses.” She was laid out on the sofa and I remembered how much I had wanted her back when we were in Ibiza, and how I’m over her now, and I should firmly tell her to leave and to let me watch my film.

“Watch this film for me, please? You write for *Arbor*, no? He’ll read about this movie, and I can ask him to watch it with me. I’ll sidle up to him, run my arm over his chest, I need a good man to watch a good film with me I’ll tell him.” She looked me in the eye as she rubbed her hand over the picture, over the woman’s chest. As I was still over her, I told her I couldn’t. I didn’t just review pornos, I watched Italian Impressionism. And at that very moment, not just any Italian impressionist film, one of the rarest. I sat there to prove it to her, I showed her the communion scene. The Nun kneeling vulnerably, the Priest, his face as yet unseen, reaching down to place the communion host on her waiting tongue. I explained to her how that technique with the communion host would be so badly imitated in the Sopranos just years later. She bit her lip, and she seemed like she was enjoying it, I wanted her to understand that I needed to keep watching it. I took her to the confessional scene, the intensity, the anticipation, she was brushing up to me (again), the priest was just about to reveal his face to us.

“Oh Yes”

The film cut, the tape was fucked, no priest, no confessional, only a woman I did not love anymore. “Please let’s put in the one I got, trust me”.

“No, I don’t want to watch your porno and I don’t want to have sex with you.”

“What?”

“You heard me, I want to fix the tape, I’ve been over you since Ibiza.”

She didn’t even respond to that, she just ran, she called me a creep and just ran, she said she knew I’m a sick fuck, and that I’ve always been a sick fuck, and that she should have known because I review Italian Impressionist films (she said pornos) and I’m a creep and ran. But I wanted her to want me, she ran, and all she left me was a film to watch.

The film itself certainly felt like it was a Nanni Moretti film. A long shot at the beginning, the journey to the source of emotional turmoil, the use of the Catholic Church and Religious imagery, the discussions. The scene when the Nun held the cross, the psychoanalysis as voyeurism when she received the communion host. I started crying at a point. She’d clearly read my reviews, she knew how I would look at her. A confessional, a Nun repentant, a priest as yet unseen, she reveals to him her sins in rote, routine monotony, the wood panelling becomes like the psychologist. The priest has her now, the Bearded face of Nanni Moretti, ready to devour her. She wanted me to see her tape, so I could write my review for her and her psychoanalyst boyfriend could feel smart fucking her. It’s a fantastic film, a incisive cut into the psychosocial identity of the Italian people, the intersection between their environment, their society, their religion and their inherent sexuality. It is, however, easier to recommend *La Messa e’ Finita*, and if you’ve already watched it once or twice or even three times this year, do not hesitate to watch it again.

~ Translations ~

Pasolini Teorema excerpt translations
Translated by Vittorio Escomel and James Reid-Thomas

We must try to invent new techniques
That they be unrecognisable
That bear no resemblance to any preceding methods
To avoid puerility and ridicule

To build one's own world
A world beyond comparisons, unlike any other
Where previous standards don't apply
The standards will be new too, just like the techniques

No-one must realise that the artist is worth nothing,
That he is a lesser, abnormal being
Who squirms and twists themselves like a worm to survive
Nobody must ever see that he is naive
Everything must present itself as perfect
Based on a set of unknown rules, unquestionable rules
Like a madman, a madman!

Pane over pane, because I can't amend anything
And nobody must notice

A sign painted on a pane
Corrects, without spoiling it
A sign painted earlier on a different pane
Everyone will have to believe
That it isn't the trick of an untalented, impotent artist
No, it must look as though it were a sure decision,
A fearless, lofty, almost arrogant decision

No-one must know that a sign succeeds by chance and is fragile

And that as soon as a sign appears well made, by a miracle
It must be looked after, protected, as in a shrine
Nobody, absolutely no-one must realise

That the artist is a poor, trembling idiot, second-rate
Living by chance and risk in disgrace like a child
Who has reduced his life to a ridiculous melancholia
He who lives degraded by the feeling of something lost forever



Tra La cosa e il Decameron by Nadia Cattazzo
Translated by Vittorio Escomel and James Reid-Thomas

The thing : sexuality as a bridge between Moravia and Pasolini

Between The thing and the Decameron

The thing. The thing is. Moravia defines it. Moravia puts it into context, *The thing and other stories*. The thing was taboo at the time, the thing is still taboo today. The thing has ruled for a long time, but it is only recently that people have ceased to speak of it. You will have understood by now: that the thing is everywhere.

But what is the thing?

A vague concept. You know, when one speaks hazily, it is probable that one wants to imply some sort of intention to the listener: “Yes you know, you know what I’m talking about, Yes that thing!”.

The lack of linguistic rigor marks at most, a moral loophole. When someone is vague, they can’t be accused of their intentions, even if they are immoral ones. The accusation is withdrawn due to this vagueness.

Vagueness is immoral. However, is immorality vague? No, that which is immoral is clear and distinctly so.

In Moravia’s novellas, the thing is almost never defined explicitly. Moravia defines it via the acts and interactions of the characters. The reader immediately understands that it’s about the male sex. The thing is everpresent, in every scene.

The thing is presence. The thing, the male sex, takes on an identity. A completely immoral identity.

The thing also tempts the devil!

We could even be tempted to think that because of its immorality, the thing makes the rules.

In short, Moravia emerges from the scandal surrounding the male sex, by reducing the female sex to obedience. The thing conduces gruesome tales, that are not reduced to human sex. For example, in the first short story, Moravia stages the fascination of a woman for the sexual organ of a horse. Moravia’s stories are macabre: pedophilia, domestic violence, bestiality among others.

The author is in search of sexuality, with the aim of conceiving it as a whole, to look beyond the everyday taboos which are born out of the straightforward matter of copulation. Moravia appears to point not only to ordinary moral prohibitions imposed for centuries by Catholicism, such as that on extramarital sex; but also to the prohibition against what was considered morbid, adding aggravating circumstances to the “ordinary” sexual relations.

We would need to define what is and what isn’t ordinary, but this is another matter altogether.

And it is exactly at this point that Pasolini comes into play; we know that sexuality has always been an object of curiosity for the maestro, so much so that he made a documentary which gathered intellectual and popular opinion on sexuality amongst Italians in the 1960s. In this documentary - *Comizi d’amore (1965)* - we once again come across the thoughts of our guy, Alberto Moravia, who acerbically criticises the idea of being scandalised, saying that ‘judgement is justified, but being outraged and scandalised is not’

Both Pasolini and Moravia criticise the scandal fomented by the social mores of the time. None of their works feed off of this type of scandal, even in moments where their work disturbs the viewer or the reader. Taboo to them, is simply a form of ignorance, and only by keeping sexuality silenced, does it then become something scandalous. It's for this reason that Pasolini in many of his films, places literary masterpieces under a critical and political prism, one that is set on opposing the morality of contemporary social norms.

In Pasolini's adaptation of the Decameron, the historical setting of the original Boccaccio work disappears, the film begins without any narration whatsoever. It is only later, halfway through the film, where we understand that the central thread of the film is not one of industriousness - understood as the ability to get by with ingenuity - but sexuality. Pasolini retells ten of the tales from the original Decameron, where sex or prohibited love play a key role, perhaps to show that in a different scenario, under a different set of conditions, in another era, the individual refuses to act and abide by the constructed social code of our epoch. In practice this last idea functions on a collective institutional level, and not on the level of the individual. Common sense, as ignorant as it is, and the moral sense, as transcendent as it is, are both purely hypocritical.

Hypocrisy, is the central theme in the Decameron tale of the Third day, first tale - the tale of a man who pretends to be a deaf-mute in a convent of curious nuns. In this tale, the young faux-mute asks for food and shelter at a nunnery in exchange for handiwork and manual labour. One of the nuns initiates a series of amorous liaisons with the young gentlemen, until the other nuns discover the nature of their relationship, and report back to the chief nun. Rather unexpectedly, the chief nun - la Madre Superiora - is also having an illegitimate relationship. Given her compromised situation, the chief nun decides to allow for all the nuns in the convent to have sex with the young deaf-mute man if they so choose. The young man is delighted, over the moon, and he enjoys all the benefits of life: food, accommodation and sex in abundance.

The paradox here lies in the fact that these immoral acts take place in a convent. Pasolini draws attention to the hypocrisy of the nuns, who are overcome by their love for this young imposter rather than their love of God.

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