

A Revaluation of Pasolini's Salò

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**Abstract:** In his study, "A Revaluation of Pasolini's *Salò*," A. Robert Lauer argues that in his last film, *Salò o Le centoventi giornate di Sodoma*, Pasolini deals specifically with Fascism as substance and system, as well as -- structurally and intentionally -- with the Sadeanism of *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*. Moreover, as a self-consuming artifact, in *Salò* Pasolini condemns simultaneously the excesses and failures of the postmodern state and advances the concept of a new peratology based on a greater sense of personal and historical responsibility. To demonstrate his points, Lauer refers to four cinematographic techniques that Pasolini uses in this film, all of which serve to enclose the characters in ever more confining spaces. This claustrophobic effect connects the viewer with the final enclosure of the Socialist Republic of *Salò* and with Sade's concept of the solitaire. The viewer is likewise engulfed in the final cinematic angle, which reverses the perspective of the gazer and its victim, making one into a kinophiliac of sorts, no different indeed from the notables of the film *Salò*.

## A. Robert LAUER

### A Revaluation of Pasolini's *Salò*

Donatien-Alphonse-François, Marquis de Sade, while confined in the Bastille, composed his major work, *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, from 22 October to 28 November 1785. As the Grove Press editors of the work maintain, the work was meant to shock the society that had imprisoned him and to "outrage the laws of both Nature and religion" (Sade 183). In *Sodome*, Sade would depict four notables who, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, would isolate themselves in Château Silling for the months of November, December, January, and February. Therein they would create a "city" where they would abuse, torture, and kill a number of young men and women procured for their pleasure.

Pasolini's last film, *Salò o Le centoventi giornate di Sodoma* (1975; for a list of Pasolini's films, see the Appendix below), based on the Marquis de Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, would tell a similar story by transposing the original French novel's eighteenth-century setting to the Italia Settentrionale near Salò, Lombardy, site of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana from 1943 to 1945. In spite of its temporal and geographic displacement and added social dimension, or perhaps thanks to them, the film, going beyond Sade's scabrous list of 600 excesses, treats themes not dissimilar from those of eschatology, the branch of theology that deals with final events (death, judgment, and the beyond). Its scatological or excremental vision, consisting of chosen youths who are systematically tortured, sentenced, and killed, presents also instances of purgation, illumination, and transcendence by which characters and viewers alike might be contained in the imaginary realm of the scopophilic. Consequently, what might at first be considered a purely scatological or psychosocial purgative event (the elimination of partisans or a social class) becomes in effect an exercise in eschatology in its treatment of the final stages of an era (Modernism and the ancien regime), only to conclude in a supplemental and complicit spectatorial "excess."

It is perhaps astonishing that no study of Pasolini's *Salò* to date has studied the film formally in order to extract the most meaning from it. It is also surprising that most studies of this work have denied its apparent historicity or its debt to Sade. In an exceptional essay, Roland Barthes, author of the 1971 *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, claims that Pasolini's film has nothing to do with Fascism or with Sade (100-101), in spite of the fact that the director privileges both signifieds in the title of his film exactly in that order. Italo Calvino, likewise, tries to remove the film from both milieux to establish the apparent sadism of the work elsewhere, namely in us (111). Leo Bersani, in his eloquent theory of the aesthetics of violence, notices the connection between sex and power (85) but, by stressing the divertissements of the film (dance, music, painting), he first mitigates and subsequently cancels its apparent violence altogether: "Pasolini's brilliant trick in *Salò* is to use repetition and replication as distancing rather than imitative techniques" (91). Perhaps the most enthralling works on this film to date are those of Naomi Greene and Kriss Ravetto, who, nevertheless, continue to place the ideology of the film elsewhere, namely, in the 'new' fascism of neocapitalism (Greene 236; Ravetto 101), thus transforming the film into a political allegory, similar in part to *Porcile* (1969), an earlier Pasolini work. In a similar vein, Thomas E. Peterson connects *Salò* to *Teorema* (1968), another seemingly allegorical work. Moreover, Maurizio Viano claims that "*Salò* nevertheless marked his [Pasolini's] most definite return to the portrayal of contemporary reality" (297). Pasolini himself muddles the waters by defending at least two seemingly opposite positions with regard to his film. Hence, on the one hand, he states in an interview with film critic Gideon Bachmann that "[*Salò*] ... well expresses this era of fascism, when all real values had disappeared under a heavy coating of power-seeking and exploitation" (52); in addition, in the same interview, he further declares that he, Pasolini, had hoped to create in *Salò* a mystery in the medieval sense: "A holy presentation, and thus profoundly enigmatic" (53).

In view of such divergent points of view I should like to make the following asseverations: a study of certain cinematic structures within the film *Salò* suggest at least three things simultaneously.

*Salò* is a film about Fascism: not only as substance, whose ideology can circulate anytime, but also as system or historical phenomenon (the distinction is made by Barthes [qtd. by Greene

236]), in this case Northern Italy in 1943-45. It should be noted, for instance, that the film is shot in Mantua, Lombardy, ca. 37 miles from the city of *Salò* -- the capital of the Italian Social Republic -- and that city markers register the road to Marzabotto, where Major Walter Reder massacred 1,800 partisans on 29-30 September 1944 (Cervi 69). Also, unlike Sade, who prefers ecclesiastic sadists, Pasolini in *Salò*, has all the narrated crimes performed by Italian military officers, carabinieri, judges, magistrates, and even academics like Prof. Gentile, all in Italian northern regions like Milan (the ideological capital of fascism), Verona (bombed in 1944 by Allied forces; see Cervi 19), Ferrara, and Rovigo.

In addition, *Salò* is a modern recast of Sade's most important work, *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, although in a transferred context (as the RSI). It should be observed that Pasolini's debt to Sade, although anachronistic, is both substantive and systemic. The destructive and negativistic spirit of Sade is there, as well as his architectonic, repetitive, and copious narrative style, and even his exhaustive and meticulous tendency to include all possibly imagined minutiae. It is telling that Pasolini includes in the film's narration elements that Sade himself scribbled down but then did not incorporate, like the supplementary torture of introducing a mouse into a woman's vagina (Sade 673). The enclosed structure of the novel, the high social class of the main characters, and even Sade's consistent use of numbers in his main literary work are all faithfully preserved. Gideon Bachmann even notices that Pasolini had planned to shoot *Salò* in 37 days, the number of days the Marquis de Sade spent writing *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* in the Bastille (50).

Finally, the movie *Salò* is about the final stages of an era, in the same way that Sade's work is about the final days of the monarchy of Louis XIV. The era in question in Pasolini's film is Modernism and modernity, encapsulated in a representation of the Republic of *Salò*, which would serve here merely as an icon. For us, the viewers, the era in question is Postmodernity and, as Bertalan Pethő would put it, its "scandals" -- reflected in catchphrases used in the late twentieth century such as "differance," "difference," "deconstruction," "anything goes," "semiurgy," "paralogy," "differend," "rhetoricity," "death of the subject," "simulacre," "writing," "postmodern sublime," "virtual reality," "otherness," and, of course, "supplementarity" (see Pethő 655-56).

The narrative movement of Pasolini's *Salò* is strictly circular. It begins and ends with a 1940s foxtrot, a dance noted for its four-four rhythm. In conjunction with this, the numbers 4 and 8 are incessantly reiterated throughout the film, as they are in Sade's novel (*Les 120 Journées de Sodome* has 4 parts, 4 libertines, 4 relatives, 4 narratresses, 4 duennas, 8 little girls, 8 little boys, and 8 'fuckers' [Sade 255-60]). Hence, there are four parts (*Antinferno*, *Girone della manie*, *Girone della merda*, and *Girone del sangue*) lasting, respectively, 19:36, 31:51, 28:06, and 19 minutes. Likewise there are 4 protagonists (the Duke, the Bishop, the Chief Magistrate, and the President), four daughters, 4 narratresses (3 storytellers and 1 virtuoso), 4 prostitutes, 4 soldiers, 4 collaborators, and 16 victims: 8 youths and 8 girls. Although the numbers 4 and 8 are found in Sade's novel, Pasolini carries the exigencies of these numerals beyond Sade, as one sees in the representation of outdoor spaces (e.g., the chateau has 8 columns) and even in the realm of nature (4 geometrically designed trees surround the entrance to the palace). Eight, of course, is the number of completion and infinity, for it consists of 2 circles where the beginning and the end merge, as in a palindrome. Consequently, when the diegesis of the film threatens the circularity or evenness of the numerals by introducing the extraneous element of odd-ness, order imposes itself automatically: thus, among the youths, 3 boys are captured, 2 pass inspection, 9 are abducted, and 1 is shot trying to escape, thus giving one a total of 8; while among the girls, 3 are inspected; one, Albertina, is rejected for having a missing tooth; nine are abducted; and 1 has her neck slashed for having uttered God's name, thus minimizing the number of victims to 8. Hence, 18, the original number of victims,  $(1+8 = 9 \times 2)$  -- a significant number in its own right -- is reduced to 16  $(9-1 = 8 \times 2)$ . This exacting evenness twice inspires il presidente to tell jokes having to do with the number eight (*otto*) and a man named Perotto ("times" 8). As a supplement, it should also be noted that the circularity of the numbers is likewise manifested in the last part of the name of the town where the 1944  $(4+4 = 8)$  Axis massacre took place, Marzabotto, where 1,800 partisans (we return to the numbers  $1+8$  now in millenary and centenary augmentations) lost their lives on the orders of Major Reder, whose last name, whether spelled from right to left or from left to right, is

as palindromical as the otto of Marzabotto, the otto of the year of the execution, the internal centenarian number of victims and the 2 presidential jokes, whose final pun consists on a play of words and numbers: 8 (otto), Perotto, "sei Per-otto?" ("are you Perotto?" ["6 times 8"]) and 48 (quarantotto). To belabor the point, the signifier quarantotto in Italian refers also not merely to a number but to a tumult or insurrection, namely, to the events of the [milleottocento] quarantotto, when Milan in particular rebels against Austria in its first war of independence. In Battaglia's Grande Dizionario della lingua italiana this term is defined as "figur. Situazione d'emergenza, confusa e incontrollabile" and "Per estens. Sommossa, tumulto" (vol. 15, 73).

It would be an understatement to say that *Salò* as cinematic narrative is simply grandiose in proportion, for it incorporates multiple diegetic devices which as a whole are highly effective. As stated already, the movement of the action is circular, as demonstrated by the music, whose predictable rhythm in effect boxes one in the same space, which subsequently turns. Likewise there are 4 parts in the film, as there are 4 parts in a foxtrot and in Sade's novel, e.g., the 150 simple passions narrated by Madame Duclos in November (Part the First), the 150 complex passions narrated by Madame Champville in December (Part the Second), the 150 criminal passions narrated by Madame Martaine in January (Part the Third), and the 150 murderous passions narrated by Madame Desgranges in February (Sade 189-90). In the film, each cinematic time measure is called girone (circle) and not tempo (time, but also musical measure), as is usual in other Pasolini films (the allusion to the circles of hell in Dante's *Inferno* is apparent). Hence, each action begins and ends but also turns or gyrates. In effect, all shots are viewed from several angles in this film, thus giving one a sense of gyration, completion, and infinity, as in the numeral eight.

Out of the many possible cinematic movements to suggest narrative continuity, four stand out in *Salò*. These are as follows.

Movement from an external to an internal space: in the *Antinferno*, for instance, the viewer is led from an outdoor, tranquil, light, and static scene shot with a wide lens to internal, tense, dark, and dynamic spaces shot with long and middle lenses and in which oppressors spit upon, fondle, and abuse their victims. Once fully established inside the internal milieu of the palazzo, subsequent external space tends to disappear altogether. Whatever glimpses (synecdoches) of or allusions to it in subsequent circles will be perceived only from an internal or subjective perspective. When Signora Maggi, for instance, looks out the window to "see" the war airplanes whose noise she hears, the camera records a reverse angle position. Hence, if Signora Maggi saw anything at all, she did not tell. Subsequently, the rest of the characters will systematically ignore intermittent external airplane noises as the internal space of the chateau muffles all other sounds and screams.

Maids likewise are told to leave the confines of the chateau, but as they do so, the camera jumps up suddenly above the chateau, giving one a high angle shot of the running servants from an inside (albeit superior) perspective. Even suicides or would-be suicides undertake their acts by jumping or trying to jump from windows inside the palace, their corpses being visible afterwards only from the point of view of a camera positioned inside the building. In effect the only witness of the pianist's death at the end of the film is the camera, which seems to be an additional mechanical victim of claustrophobic internal space. This is dissimilar from the suicides in Pasolini's *Medea*, where Glauce and Creonte jump frontally as they face a camera in a low angle position. It is superfluous to add that the final images of the youth massacres, although supposedly taking place in an external space, notwithstanding the fact that this would be an external space within the internal space of the chateau, are visible only from the inside perspective of the notables, who use binoculars precisely to bring those images into their focus by maximizing or minimizing the image. It should be noted that the idea of an enclosed space (a castle) from which there is no escape is precisely the idea suggested by Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*. As the Duc de Blangis informs his victims, "You are enclosed in an impregnable citadel; no one on earth knows you are here, you are beyond the reach of your friends, of your kin: insofar as the world is concerned, you are already dead" (Sade 251). Moreover, the punitive measures entertained by the notables on the young partisans in *Salò* remind one of the notorious round-ups, tortures, and executions of the infamous Banda Carità, an internal fascist police force active in Florence, Bergantino, and Padua between 1943 (at the end of the ventennio) and 1945 (at the end of the *Salò* Republic). Its head-

quarters were in Palazzo Triste in Florence's Via Bolognese (Timberlake 15) and in Palazzo Giusti in Padua's Via San Francesco (Timberlake 18). Between November 1944 and April 1945, in the second site, 130 partisans were detained for varying lengths of time; among them 22 university professors and their students (Timberlake 19). The Sadean and Fascist similarities reflected in Pasolini's *Salò* would thusly not seem to be accidental but, on the contrary, quite intentional.

The second narrative movement to be noted in *Salò* consists of up/down cinematic motions as characters enter into rooms (characters rarely merely leave rooms; they simply enter into different rooms, where their action continues or is sustained). The establishing scene of every girone, for instance, shows wide-angle stationary shots with front stairs that only lead down. Each narratrix in effect comes down into this room, wherein she narrates to a literally captive audience stories in multiples of 5 (the final story encompassing 15 victims, just as the profilmic massacre consists of 15 youths [one being spared]). Subsequently, coming down into a room is always a signal of empowerment. Persons dress up to come downstairs. Whores (usually "bottoms") become MCs ("tops") in this privileged space. Whoever enters the lower room from above possesses as it were the word, which is subsequently inscribed in the bodies of the victims, in effect making the word flesh. The strictest decorum is observed in these "lower" rooms, even when the nobles interrupt the narratrices to get more details, like the size of a client's penis or the amount of an ejaculation. It should be noted, for instance, that when the unfortunate Renata is told to eat the Duke's excrement, she does so with a spoon. On the other hand, going up to a room (usually a white or greenish room) signals subservience or loss of power. In the upper rooms all dignity is lost, all decorum, all protocol. Soldiers sodomize maids and nobles, nobles dress up as women, unusual gender-bending ceremonies take place, table manners become atrocious, and even the president's jokes lose their subtlety and humor. Finally, whoever is seen intransitu going up the stairs, whether from a frontal high angle or a lower reverse angle shot, is already in the process of transformation or of losing something. The victims lose their clothing and human dignity and become dogs or disengendered subjects (orifices to plug, as it were). The sadists lose their temper and their identity as they dress up as women. The virtuoso loses her composure and her life as she defenestrates herself. All values are inverted in this topsy-turvy space, the middle transitional position being the most critical, for as characters go up or down a space, they subsequently change or die.

A third narrative technique consists of side to side camera movement, creating a Chinese box effect, as when the Bishop goes from room to room finding disobedient victims (first Graziella, then Eva and Antoniska, then Ezio and the Abyssinian maid [note here another historical referent to Italian fascism]). As in the transitional up/down actions listed above, these movements are critical for the characters who literally run into these spaces or are dragged into them, usually from right to left. The final stasis is also lethal, especially for those whose position is to the left. All partisan victims enter from the left or are positioned there already before they are inspected, condemned, and executed. The left side seems also to be the position of Eros, as it expresses itself freely (between Eva and Antoniska and between Ezio and the maid). Consequently, the right position is the position of power and Thanatos. Those on the right of the camera (the Fascists) literally call the shots. From this position the Duke declares who shall live and who shall die in the Girone del sangue. From this position the notables execute Ezio, the rebel soldier, and his paramour, the African maid, who literally makes the wrong move, to the left, after they shoot her lover. From this position the nobles observe the tortures and final executions of their victims, stationed to their left, as is seen in the final extreme portrait-like shots of the sadists (one of them reminiscent of the painting known familiarly as 'Whistler's Mother'). From this position also his Excellency, the Chief Magistrate gives one of his "bitches" poignant food (nails inserted in gruel) in the Girone della manie. Side to side movement is therefore critical and dangerous. It is the motion of deferral, of invasion of space, and of the naked and transgressed body. More acutely dangerous, of course, is the final stasis as the camera stops moving. At this nodal point, those on the left (partisans) die or are made to suffer excruciating pain, at times making superfluous or painful gestures like giving a Socialist salute before being executed; and those on the right (fascists) kill, perhaps stressing, as if it were necessary, that right is right, right is might, and, in at least one instance, even that right is white. Note: It should perhaps be reiterated that Pasolini shoots the same scene from sev-

eral positions, as has already been mentioned, and that many of the shots are frontal, although from the point of view of the libertines. The preponderance of right (power) and left (subservience) thematic angles is, however, sufficiently noticeable, especially in the examples mentioned here.

The final narrative cinematic movement consists of maximizing or minimizing a stationary shot. Throughout the *girone della manie*, and the *girone della merda*, victims are dragged from open public spaces to enclosed private spaces. Once inside this space, the equivalent of Sade's *solitaire*, the camera's wide angle is minimized to medium- or close-up shots, thus enclosing the victim and his/her predator. Close-ups are always dangerous for the victims, for the camera will not go away until it witnesses an act of communion between victim and sadist as bodily fluids are evacuated, consumed, or exchanged. Failure to emit fluids, of course, is a non-representational act. In those rare occasions the camera refuses to enter into such private and perchance embarrassing vacua. A sudden return to a long shot at this point signals relief and release as the victim is either ignored or rejected (as the Bishop's first victim is); or, more often than not, merely deferral for the victim to build up the necessary courage or ability to watch, evacuate, or consume, depending on the theme of the circle: semen, tears, and urine in the circle of manias; excrement in the circle of shit; and blood in the final *girone*. However, a return to a medium- or close-up shot from a wide angle is always conclusive. At this point, a sitting dressed girl must watch the standing Bishop's flowing urine, a kneeling nude girl must eat the squatting Duke's excrement, and a leaning semi-dressed girl must urinate into the mouth of a supine Duke. In these profilmic events, two final camera positions are possible: an extreme close-up, which privileges only the sadists; or an extreme reverse angle, with roving camera movements to the right or the left. Extreme frontal close-ups signal the end of a narrative sequence. Sra. Vaccari, Sra. Maggi, and Sra. Castelli end their narratives ecstatically as the camera moves closely to them and sustains an extreme close-up of their faces. Each notable's face is shown this way at the end of the *girone del sangue*, especially after they stop viewing the theater of blood enacted before their eyes. The Duke's glowing face, especially after his urinous sprinkling, is also in this manner apotheosized. The extreme close-up is in effect the ultimate shot of safety, power, survival, success, excess, and *jouissance*. It is the shot reserved for the extreme voyeur, the master storyteller, the successful scopophiliac. Extreme reverse angle shots with roving camera movements to the right or the left are also shots of excess. Nothing is possible after this point. The camera has literally taken everything in, consuming everything in its path, including the spectators. In *Girone del sangue*, as the camera moves back, it can only infer the existence of an implicit or complicit spectator viewing soldiers viewing sadists viewing collaborators viewing partisans, who in turn view the aforementioned and, by implication, us, through the isolated iris shots of the binoculars of the sadists. Should we miss or deny our implied and complicit spectatorial activity for a second, the Duke is there to reverse the position of the binoculars at a critical point for one of the victims; making us at that precise liminal instant of life at the moment of death into both gazers and gazees, viewers and participants, sadists and victims. This and similar scenes are accompanied by highly ceremonial and triumphant music (a Chopin composition and Puccini's "Hymn to Rome" [Ranvaud 204]), an Ezra Pound poetry recital (another specific historical referent to Italian Fascism), the lyrical tones of Carl Orff's *Carmina burana*, all politically unambiguous referents, and, finally, the familiar harmony of the initial foxtrot. The final allusion to Margherita, the girlfriend of one of the soldiers, can just as easily suggest salvation or damnation, depending on which tradition or part of Goethe's *Faust* Pasolini had in mind. After communally experiencing these brief albeit intense moments of hyperkinophilia, the surviving scopophiliacs seem to have only three choices to make: the closing of one's eyes; the blinding of both eyes, as Edipo re does in Pasolini's 10th film; or the gouging out of one's eyes, as happens to one of the victims of the Chief Magistrate in *Salò*. One has seen enough. One has seen too much. One has seen it all.

The communal exchange of bodily fluids is, of course, a dominant theme in all works by Sade, including *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*. Nevertheless, the cruelty of some Fascists in Padua during the Repubblica Sociale Italiana would at times exceed even Sade's imagination. Giovanni Gonelli, a barely literate jailkeeper at Palazzo Giusti in Padua and a member of the Banda Carità, apparently enjoyed dehumanizing his prisoners by refusing their requests for food or blankets. The sentence

of the Appellate Court of 8 January 1946 states that Gonelli would tell prisoners who asked for water to "piss and drink" (qtd by Timberlake 27). Is *Salò o Le centoventi giornate di Sodoma* then about Fascism, Sadeanism, or even "eschatology," as I first suggested and as the critics have systematically denied? My categorical answer to these questions is, of course, yes, as I have argued in the analysis of certain "lethal" and politically unambiguous (right/left) camera angles suggestive of enclosure and pain. In addition, the film *Salò* is about another important and contemporary matter that at this point I wish merely to call supplementation or excess (what Baudrillard calls "this obscene delirium of communication" in "Ecstasy" 132).

What Pasolini seems to have created in *Salò* was a self-reflective supplement, a multidimensional filmic event that teases and seduces with multiple signifiers, being all and none of them simultaneously. Like Baudrillard's *trompe-l'oeil*, it is an ironic simulacrum (see Baudrillard, *Select-ed* 157), a homosexual (non-productive) encounter, "cruising for a bruising," as it were; a self-consuming artifact that attracts and detracts; a secret whose power lies precisely in not telling; an enigma whose truth lies in effect in its power to seduce without delivering the expected goods. In that respect *Salò* is the most Postmodern of Pasolini's works. Consider, for instance, its use of playfulness (puns); cinematographic subjectivity (multiple perspectivism based on four unique camera movements); mimicry of other models (architectonic literary Sadeanism; excessive historical Fascism [the RSI being a supplement to the other equally supplementary Regno del Sud in Brindisi, created by King Vittorio Emanuele III]); and even parodic pastiche (of a fictitious Enlightenment novel [a self-parodic genre since Sade's time] that reads like annals and of a historical account that defies even fiction [the Germans themselves, when they intervened in *Salò*, "displayed an air of disapproval of the criminal vexations of their [Italian Fascist] companions" [qtd by Timberlake 13]). In addition (or as a supplement), *Salò* is a perfect example of what Marxist critic Fredric Jameson calls "schizophrenic literalness" or the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers ((118-19); see the final scenes that combine silence [muted screams], poetry [Ezra Pound], high and low music [Chopin, Orff, Puccini, and a foxtrot], realistic and modernist painting, dance [between men only], literary allusions [to Faust but also to dadaism], and a kaleidoscopic cornucopia of camera angles and movements). All of these elements (playfulness, subjectivity, mimicry, pastiche, and schizophrenia) are essential characteristics of Postmodernism (see Pethó 653; Jameson 113, 120)), a "movement" (or "condition," as Lyotard calls it) which, similar to the Regno del Sud and the RSI, is itself a supplement or an addendum, an oppositional discourse opposed to another oppositional discourse (Modernism): an excess, a tumor, and a scandalous obscenity (Baudrillard, "Ecstasy" 132) which, never having found its name, except as a negation (Postmodernism), would eventually be dissolved in another negation (Post-postmodernism).

Pasolini's *Salò*, of course, is a far cry from all his other works: the neo-realistic *Accattone* (1961) or *Mamma Roma* (1962); the psychomythic *Edipo re* (1967), *Medea* (1969), or *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964); the idealistic works of la trilogia della vita (*Il Decamerone* [1971], *I Racconti di Canterbury* [1972], and *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* [1974]); the lyrical *Teorema* (1968); and the comical or scabrous allegories like *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966) and *Porcile* (1969). Supplementarily, *Salò* is Pasolini's most political and personal statement, for it is about excess and heterogeneity, substantial and systemic aspects of Fascism (Bataille 140) and even of the director's personal lifestyle (Pasolini having been a partisan, a heterodoxical director and man-of-letters, and a victim of violence and unorthodox desire). *Salò* is also about ends, violence, and circularity: aspects of the Italian Social Republic of *Salò* but also of the Paris French Revolution of Sade's time, an event with which it shares affinities. As Sade mentions in his *Reflections on the Novel*, "There was not a man alive who had not experienced in the short span of four or five years more misfortunes than the most celebrated novelist could portray in a century. Thus, to compose works of interest, one had to call upon the aid of hell itself, and to find in the world of make-believe things wherewith one was fully familiar merely by delving into man's daily life in this age of iron" (109). One should perhaps recall that systemic Italian Fascism was a populous and, in the end, an antimonarchical revolutionary movement that, like other modern revolutions, eventually consumed its own members and leaders. According to Timberlake, after Mussolini's lynching, approximately 12,000 Fascists were slaughtered in subsequent vigilante massacres (9). *Salò* is also



about division and self-consumption, Saturn devouring his children, betrayal, complicity, and collaboration, all aspects of Fascism in general, and of Italian Fascism in particular. Finally, *Salò* is also about the limits of art and spectatorship: Modernist decadent art in the Fascistic milieu informing the place *Salò* (Fascism being the final solution of Modernism, as Pound so well illustrates [as authoritarianism was the final result of the French Revolution]); and, informing the film *Salò*, "post"-Modern (cinematographic) art (as we now know it): the art of the hyperreal (one recalls Sade's recommendation of "extreme verisimilitude" in artistic depictions [113]), the excessive, the unlimited, and the "obscene," as Jean Baudrillard would phrase it in "Ecstasy" (132).

As an addendum, Leonardo Sciascia reports in "God Behind Sade" that a poor and unfortunate girl who read the Marquis de Sade at an impressionable young age subsequently became a nun (106). And indeed, after Sade, himself a tumorous supplement spared by the Revolution, what else would there be but God as ultimate transcendental Signifier? After all, even Sade, in his Reflections on the Novel, declares: "Never, I say it again, never shall I portray crime other than clothed in the colors of hell. I wish people to see crime laid bare, I want them to fear it and detest it, and I know no other way to achieve this end than to paint it in all its horrors" (116). Pasolini himself, after *Salò*, was contemplating filming the life of St. Paul (an appropriate and enigmatic supplement to Christianity). Anyone viewing Pasolini's *Salò*, or Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*, also based on the Marquis de Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, has little else to hope for as far as cinematographic narrativity is concerned. For what else is there to see, or hear, or say? All other films after *Salò*, with the possible exceptions of Almodóvar's *Kika*, Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, Kurosawa's *Dreams*, and perhaps even Gregory Dark's *DMJ-5: The Inferno*, seem to pale by comparison, or appear merely trite and incomplete. Pasolini had already stated most eloquently in his antepenultimate film: "why tell a story [or show it] when you can dream it?" Why indeed? *Salò* appears to have been the result of that statement. Pasolini's *Salò* seems to (re)present the limits of art, film, and Postmodernity; and also the limits of life, history, and the personal. After *Salò* there would only be the nirvana of ecstasy, the extinction of the flame of life, final emancipation from spectatorship, ultimate reunion with Brahma.

Hence, anything post-*Salò* would have to belong to the "post-postmodern," as Pethó would call it (653), and to whatever that new condition -- of post-multinational capitalism for Jameson (125) or of a new peratology for Pethó (654) -- would entail: a new ethics, the establishment of boundaries, a new sense of (personal, social, global, and historical) responsibility, a non-metaphysical transfer conducive to action, and expedient (peratological) slogans like the ones suggested by Pethó: "Man is a medial sign," "The soul is the virtuality of [a] functioning body," "Man is worth as much as his media," "The transfer is a metaphor of the civilizatum" (659). However, the responsibility for (re)defining any post-postmodern ideology to deal with a post-*Salò* world would have to be supplemented by others and, for now, deferred.

As a final note I would like to state that, obviously, my reading of *Salò* does not cancel other readings or interpretations of what is without a doubt Pasolini's most important work on what is seemingly the end and limits of Postmodernity in this, the year of the palindrome, 2002. On the contrary, it merely adds, quantitatively and qualitatively, to the critical corpus of one of Europe's most lucid and humanist minds in this still transitional age of the post-millenary.

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### Appendix: Pasolini Filmography Online

- 1961 *Accattone*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_accattone.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_accattone.htm)> 116 mins.
- 1962 *Mamma Roma*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_mammaroma.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_mammaroma.htm)> 105 mins.
- 1963 *La ricotta* (an episode of *Rogopag* or *Laviamoci il cervello*): <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_ricotta.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_ricotta.htm)> 35 mins.
- 1963 *La rabbia* (first part): <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_rabbia.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_rabbia.htm)> 50 mins.
- 1964 *Comizi d'amore*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_comizi.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_comizi.htm)> 90 mins.
- 1964 *La Sopralluoghi in Palestina*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_sopralluoghi.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_sopralluoghi.htm)> 55 mins.
- 1964 *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_vangelo.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_vangelo.htm)> 137 mins.
- 1965 *Uccellacci e uccellini*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_uccellacci.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_uccellacci.htm)> 88 mins.
- 1966 *La terra vista dalla luna* (an episode of *Lestreghe*): <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_terra\\_vistadallaluna.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_terra_vistadallaluna.htm)> 30 mins.
- 1967 *Edipo re*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_edipore.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_edipore.htm)> 110 mins.
- 1967 *Che cosa sono le nuvole* (an episode of *Capriccio all'italiana*): <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_cosasononuvole.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_cosasononuvole.htm)> 22 mins.
- 1968 *Teorema*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_teorema.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_teorema.htm)> 98 mins.
- 1968 *Appuntiper un film sull'India*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_appunti\\_india.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_appunti_india.htm)> 32 mins.
- 1968 *La sequenza del fiore di carta* (an episode of *Amore erabbia*): <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_sequenzafiore.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_sequenzafiore.htm)> 12 mins.
- 1969 *Porcile*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_porcile.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_porcile.htm)> 98 mins.
- 1969 *Medea*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_medea.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_medea.htm)> 110 mins.
- 1969 *Appunti per una Orestide africana*:

- <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_appuntiorestiade.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_appuntiorestiade.htm)> 55 mins.  
1971 *Il Decamerone*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_decameron.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_decameron.htm)> 111 mins.  
1972 *I Racconti di Canterbury*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_canterbury.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_canterbury.htm)> 111 mins.  
1974 *Le mura di Sana'A*: <[http://www.pasolini.net/cinema\\_mura\\_sanaa.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/cinema_mura_sanaa.htm)> 16 mins.  
1975 *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*:  
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/4/salo.html>> 114 mins.