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‘La vera Diversità’

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ABSTRACT: Before completing his uncharacteristically hopeful filmic vision of an African *Oresteia*, Pier Paolo Pasolini invented a theatrical continuation of Aeschylus’s trilogy. *Pilade* (1966/70) imagines what happens after Orestes, having being absolved by the Aeropagos in Athens, goes back to Argos. With its clear allusions to political developments in the last century – fascism, the Resistance, and Communist revolutions – the play reads as a mythical allegory for the situation of engaged intellectuals in the twentieth century.

‘LA VERA DIVERSITÀ’

Multistability, Circularity, and Abjection
in Pasolini’s *Pilade*

Christoph F.E. Holzhey

Before completing his uncharacteristically hopeful filmic vision of an African *Oresteia*, Pier Paolo Pasolini invented a theatrical continuation of Aeschylus’s trilogy. *Pilade* (1966/70)¹ imagines what happens after Orestes, having being absolved by the Aeropagos in Athens, goes back to Argos.² With its clear allusions to political developments in the last century – fascism, the Resistance, and Communist revolutions – the play reads as a mythical allegory for the situation of engaged intellectuals in the twentieth century.³ Inasmuch as most scenes can be read either on a literal level or allegorically, the play forms a *Kippbild* or multistable figure: much like the most famous cases of *Kippbilder*, the Necker cube and the duck-rabbit image discussed by Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Rubin vase, it can be seen under different aspects according to the way in which the viewer directs his/her attention. However, unlike similar operations of cross-cultural analogy and allegory in *San Paolo*, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, or indeed – as Manuele Gagnolati’s essay in this volume shows – the *Appunti per un’Orestiade africana*, in *Pilade* the different readings between myth and present do not seem to interfere much with each other. My focus in this paper is therefore on aspects shifts and multistable figures on a different level, namely that of the play’s narrative.

In the course of the play, unexpected events repeatedly produce aspect shifts that change the way in which the various characters appear to the reader and to each other, showing different relationships between self and other as well as different affinities and possibilities of alliance and opposition. Insofar as there is progression and development in the play, it would seem inappropriate to invoke the *Kippbild* model here: we have situations that are on the edge and tilt or flip over – and in German one can speak of ‘auf der Kippe stehen’ and ‘kippen’ for pivotal situations. But such irreversible aspect changes are quite different from *Kippbilder*, for which the reversible movement back and forth

between different aspects is a central element. In a *Kippbild*, the different aspects ultimately co-exist on an equal footing, even if we are only conscious of one aspect at a time and continuously oscillate between them. In other words, in the experience of *Kippbilder*, there is no linear progression in time. At least, once we have seen all the different aspects, the temporality is instead circular and repetitive. What I would like to explore is the extent to which this is what ultimately happens in *Pilade*. On my reading, the multiple aspect shifts do not, in the end, lead to a progressive development, but rather to an open ending, which itself appears under at least a double aspect. On the one hand, it can be read as the character Pylades' ending up in a position of radical otherness, embracing a form of social death that may be related to the psychoanalytic notion of the death drive and to the controversially discussed anti-social thesis within queer theory.⁴ On the other hand, the multiple aspect shifts performed throughout the play destabilize a linear, progressive temporality; rather than leading to an irreversible progress, they suggest a circular temporality of eternal recurrence with transformations and transfigurations layered upon each other.

If Aeschylus's *Oresteia* can be read as an allegory for the transition from such a circular, pre-historic, archaic temporality (represented by the pre-Olympian world of the Furies and the never-ending cycle of blood vendetta) to a linear temporality of reason, progress, and history (represented by the Olympian world and Athena's institution of the Aeropagos and civil law), Pasolini's sequel can be read as destabilizing this transition and restoring archaic time (which in turn allows for its recurrence in modernity). In this discussion of *Pilade*, I would like to focus on how such an ultimately paradoxical reworking of temporalities engages questions of otherness, experience, and intelligibility. Four elements will inform my discussion: first, the critical role of both radical novelty and otherness; second, the realization that insofar as it can be grasped, novelty or otherness is not truly other, but a construction or fantasy that is already part of the existing self; third, the concept that radical otherness, far from being impossible, can be experienced as an abjection even if – or, rather, precisely because – it is unintelligible within the current order; and, fourth, the idea that we can understand Pylades as experiencing, and the play as making experienceable through aesthetic means, a radical otherness that seems necessarily unintelligible insofar as it is a radical novelty that paradoxically consists in the restoration of a mythical, non-progressive temporality.

The play's title character indeed seems to embody contradiction and paradox. Pylades enters into focus in the third episode when he is on trial for questioning Orestes' order in Argos. In response to the chorus's surprise and disbelief that Pylades should have suddenly become unrecognizable, the reason for scandal, and 'la Diversità fatta carne', an old man makes an insightful distinction between two different kinds of otherness. It was always known that Pylades was different, but in the past, his otherness was recognizable and intelligible, whereas now it has become truly different:

VECCHIO:

[...] la sua Diversità, per noi,
era come noi avevamo stabilito in cuore
che la Diversità doveva essere. Ossia:
noi vedevamo in lui uno di noi
— niente altro che uno di noi —
dotato di una misteriosa grazia.

[...]

Pensiamo, insomma, ch'egli sia com'è –
cioè un uomo ideale – senza che ciò contraddica
le semplici norme umane.

CORO

Ma, che cosa c'è invece in lui, ora, al posto
di quella grazia che noi gli attribuivamo?

VECCHIO

La Diversità, appunto. Ma la *vera* Diversità
quella che noi non comprendiamo,
come una natura non comprende un'altra natura.
Una diversità che dà scandalo. (384)

Here, what I would call 'intelligible otherness', to be distinguished from 'radical otherness', appears as idealized – as an excess of virtue and grace – but then changes into a true and scandalous otherness that is subsequently vaguely associated with Pylades' homosexual attachment to Orestes.⁵ However, this distinction is also helpful in other contexts, in particular in accounting for the changing alliances that unfold throughout the play, where a reverse movement takes place: in the face of a radically new situation what was an apparent radical otherness, an irreconcilable difference, turns into an intelligible otherness, a merely internal difference.

The first example for such a movement from radical to internal otherness follows the intervention of Athena, the goddess who had

saved Orestes by creating the first democratic tribunal in history in Athens and establishing a new, rational order that would break with the repetitive cycle of attempting to correct injustices through further injustices: the killing of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and Aegisthos; the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthos by Orestes, Electra, and Pylades for having killed Agamemnon, and so on. The play begins with Electra's burying the corpses of Clytemnestra and Aegisthos, with the tacit agreement of all others, who seem to expect both that the murderers should be avenged and that Orestes should return as legitimate heir to the throne. Orestes does indeed return to Argos from Athens, but he seeks to change the whole situation in accordance with Athena's spirit. He presents Athena as so radically other that the chorus wonders how they could relate to her:

Ma come potremo conoscerla e pregarla, questa Dea,
se non ha in comune niente con noi?
Se, per la sua diversità, non la possiamo concepire? (364)

The members of the chorus are referring to Orestes' characterization of Athena as light and reason, with no interference or contradiction due to the body, having been born without a mother directly from the head of her father:

Non ha conosciuto l'attesa dentro le viscere
come un vitello o un cane: non è uscita annaspando
da quel buio della madre bestia, alla luce. [...]
È dalla testa del padre che è venuta alla luce.
Nessun ricordo di carne impotente
è dunque rimasto in fondo a lei.
Essa non ha ricordi:
sa solo la realtà.
Ciò che essa sa, il mondo è:
non ci sono opposizioni assurde alla sua conoscenza. (364)

Orestes rejects the assumption of Athena's radical otherness ('diversità'): she is in us, he says. At the same time, Athena demands a radical change, namely a forgetting of the past, or rather a transformation of our attitude towards it by considering it as a dream rather than reality and therefore as something that can be turned into grace – 'grazia' – through language.

This is what happened with the transformation of the Furies into Eumenides, and through this transformation the old cycle of revenge is to be broken. At the same time, Orestes' striking description of Athena does not hide the brutality of her violent break with the past and its tight connection with a male-gendered repression of corporeality. The new order thus bridges previous divisions only by creating a new one: Electra, who had originally helped Orestes to kill her hated mother, but then buried her next to Agamemnon, insisting on maintaining the bonds to the past, is the first to oppose Orestes and the ways of Athena and reason. Orestes, who defends Athena's mandate of oblivion, maintains that a new life is about to begin for everyone and that he cannot understand Electra's adherence to the past: *'Perché vuoi negarti al futuro, / perdendoti in un'arida solitudine?'* (372). But Electra, whose allegiance to family bonds and immunity to utilitarian considerations are reminiscent of Antigone,⁶ insists that nothing has changed and that nothing will change for her: *'Per me non è mai cambiato nulla. [...] Preferirei morire che ascoltarti. / La fedeltà che mi lega a ciò che / adoro eguaglia l'intera vita'* (370-71). Despite – or rather because of – her fidelity, things do in fact change for her; in particular, she makes an alliance with her previous enemies, the followers of Clytemnestra and Aegisthos. The introduction of a new, radically different order thus re-arranges the entire previous field by causing it to be seen under a new aspect that reveals other affinities and differences and leads to new alliances and divisions.

This pattern keeps repeating itself in the play: an unexpected event introduces the possibility of seeing the situation under a new aspect and leads to a disagreement over whether or not things have fundamentally changed. As a result, there is a division between those who see and go along with the aspect shift and those who do not. And this new division unites those who refuse to go along with the shift and relativizes the differences that previously divided them.

A little later, for instance, a new situation presents itself during the city's 'economic miracle', when it is reported that half of the Eumenides have transformed back into Furies. In this case, Orestes refuses to see or accept the novelty and holds on – with fidelity – to Athena's order of enlightenment and progress. He is willing to repeat the expulsion of the Furies: *'Cercheremo, insieme, di far luce su tutto, / e, se è il caso, di ricacciare da noi, / un'altra volta, le forze mortali del Passato'* (381).

For Pylades, by contrast, everything is now different. When Orestes calls Pylades his brother, Pylades objects:

Con che nome mi chiami? Non senti come suona stonato?
Non c'è realtà, neanche la più dolce e radicata
in una vita – tanto da confondersi con essa –
che non sia destinata a invecchiare.
La vera fatica dell'uomo
è seguire l'avventura di questa realtà. (387)

And when Orestes insists that Argos is not immobile, Pylades contradicts him by agreeing: 'Argo, anzi, si muove! / Si muove ... verso il suo Passato' (387).

By seeing the situation under a different aspect, Pylades himself appears under a different aspect and creates a scandal. It is here that he is put on trial and his 'Diversità fatta carne', his radical otherness, is articulated. As was the case with Athena at the beginning of the play, this otherness results in new divisions and alliances: Pylades leaves the city and mobilizes peasants for a counter-revolution against Orestes, whereas Electra ends up taking sides with her brother. Interestingly, Pylades' action has the support of the Eumenides and hence also of Athena/reason, who makes a prophecy that starts out sounding apocalyptic,⁷ but ends with a vision that reason will eventually rule and all seemingly indestructible barriers will be broken down:

Cadranno tutte le barriere
che si credono incrollabili,
come la barriera che divide i giovani dai vecchi. [...]
Tra padre e figlio nascerà
– incredibile! – una silenziosa alleanza. [...]
Cadranno poi le barriere
tra gli operai e gli intellettuali.
Negli occhi degli operai ci sarà la sapienza
negli occhi degli intellettuali l'innocenza. (408)

The allusion to a communist revolution is clear, and it is the fear of such a revolution that makes Orestes forge a coalition with Electra, thereby proving Pylades correct in his claim that Orestes and Argos are ultimately progressing towards the past.

At the same time, Orestes also receives a prophecy from Athena, who tells him that his alliance with Electra makes him responsible for an indescribably horrible fate ('un destino / indescrivibile di dolore e di

orrore'; 418), but that he will bring about a second revolution, which, unlike Pylades' attempt, will be successful. Allusions to the atrocities of national socialism and to the repression of their memory in post-war capitalism are clear in this 'RIVOLUZIONE DI DESTRA' (425). In this case, the allusions problematize temporality and call into question the possibility of establishing a clear temporal sequence,⁸ but what I would like to highlight is that, on a non-allegorical level as well, the play both emphasizes and problematizes the distinction between the new and the old, making it ultimately undecidable what is more advanced and what already outdated.

Indeed, when Orestes comes to Pylades' camp of revolutionaries, the chorus notes that the new world of Orestes' first revolution has quickly grown old and did not really change anything: 'Il mondo nuovo è presto invecchiato, / un potere vale un altro potere' (429). This time, it is Orestes who insists that things have changed radically since Pylades left Argos and that it is now Pylades who fails to recognize the changed situation and remains stuck in the past:

Argo è nuova di zecca, e io,
suo principe democratico, con lei.
Tu sei vecchio, invece,
nel candore di ragazzo dei tuoi sentimenti.
La tua indignazione! Mi fa sorridere,
e mi stringe il cuore, amico.
Il tempo ti ha lasciato indietro;
e ciò che mi commuove è che ti ha lasciato indietro,
te lo ripeto nel momento stesso
in cui tu eri più vicino alla verità. (433)

Orestes, who now seems to concede that Pylades was right in his opposition to the new Athenian rule of Argos, detects in him an obstinate fidelity that does not allow him to recognize the radically changed situation of Argos. As a result, he ends up resembling Electra, and his words of truth and reason sound like religious hymns as old as the screams of the Furies:

Eppure, Pilade, com'è passato male
il tempo su di te.
Non lo sai, proprio tu, che bisogna essere, sempre,
degli sconfitti? La vittoria è turpe.
E non si può, impunemente avere ragione
per tanti anni! Diventa

una cattiva abitudine. [...]
[...] Ecco...
sì... *tu assomigli ad Elettra*. (430-31)

È perciò che le tue parole qui davanti ad Argo,
suonano come un vecchio inno religioso,
vecchio ormai anch'esso come gli urli delle Furie. (434)

While the chorus of revolutionaries returns the accusation of outdatedness – ‘Non ascoltarlo, Pilade. / Sono le vecchie parole’ (435) – Pylades remains speechless and is indeed seen to turn towards Electra in the subsequent episodes.

By the end of the play, all alliances between Orestes, Electra, and Pylades have been played through: at first, the three characters were united against Clytemnestra, then Electra joined the followers of Clytemnestra against Orestes and Pylades; Pylades’ revolt led to an alliance between Orestes and Electra, and in the newest constellation we find Orestes victorious, while Electra and Pylades are both isolated, although potential allies. Yet my point is that, the hierarchical distinction between the new and old having become more than questionable, we should expect the newest constellation not to be the *telos* of a progressive narrative but rather to represent merely a single instance in a cycle of permutations.

If we include Athena in the picture, her opposition to Electra appears as the only constant in the constantly shifting play of oppositions, affinities, and alliances. Athena’s rule is in fact much more ambiguous than originally presented by Orestes, and throughout the play she appears under different, seemingly contradictory aspects: at first, she stands for reality, freedom, and democracy, and for letting go of the past or at least taming it through the transformation of Furies into Eumenides (363–68). But, in the dialogue with Orestes, she now acknowledges not only that the return of the Furies was to be foreseen, since gods do not die, but also that the old function to which they return is ultimately the same as her own:

[...] nessun Dio mai muore!
E, se non muore, ma nemmeno avanza,
che cosa fa? Mio caro, ritorna indietro,
Esse son dunque retrocesse
alle loro vecchie sedi
e alla loro vecchia funzione:

che, se tu ci pensi bene,
è infine la mia stessa [...]. (418-19)

Indeed, it is in the name of memory, in opposition to Orestes' forgetting, that Athena prophesizes the revolution of the right and the atrocious war to which it will lead. If the conjunction of Athena and the Furies resonates with Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – which asserts no dialectical synthesis but a continuity between myth and reason, causing them to transform into one another like in a Moebius strip – Athena's subsequent clarification that her sole function is consolation resonates with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and its characterization of the Apollinian order of beautiful semblance.

This consoling function is reaffirmed in the final episode:

PILADE

[...]

TU, LA RAGIONE, SEI SEMPRE E SOLTANTO CONSOLATRICE.

ATENA

Io, questo, non l'ho mai nascosto...

PILADE

Sì, ma Oreste

(sapendo, e fingendo di non sapere)

ha costruito su questo

la stabilità del suo mondo.

ATENA

E non pensi che ogni stabilità del mondo

si fondi sempre sopra la mia funzione

che è in apparenza quella di capire

in realtà quella di consolare? (456)

Yet the play also questions this final, seemingly definitive characterization, as is evident if one thinks back to Athena's interventions and prophesies that were just as worrisome as they were consoling. Indeed, in his dialogue with Athena, Orestes had lamented: 'Fai con me come il gatto con il topo: / con lo stesso argomento, prima mi spingi / a sperare e poi a sentirmi perduto...' (420).

We could thus say that reason's sophistic character is what keeps producing cuts and aspect shifts, which pertain in the play to the justification of different orders, the identification of different affinities, and the forging of ever-changing coalitions involving Electra, Orestes, and Pylades as well as the Furies, Athena, and the Eumenides. Its brilliance lies in its ability to turn anything into a multistable figure – even reason-

ing itself, as Athena indicates when she says 'la ragione è brillante. Non solo / essa gioca con le parole, ma anche con il ragionamento!' (420).

In his *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro*, Pasolini theorizes a 'suspended' kind of theatre that would seek to raise questions rather than to answer them: 'Non è detto, certo, che gli stessi gruppi culturali avanzati siano qualche volta scandalizzati e soprattutto delusi. Specie quando i testi siano a canone sospeso, cioè pongano i problemi, senza pretendere di risolverli.'⁹ In agreement with Pasolini's programmatic statements, *Pilade* has a suspended end. However, as we shall see, this suspension can also be seen under different aspects.

The play reflects about its end in an overtly metapoetic scene, where, after Orestes' victory, Pylades is found quite alone in the mountains, wondering what to make of the end of his story, in a way that resonates with the passage from the *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro* just quoted:

E così dovrei ora chiedermi
qual è la novità
alla fine di tutta questa mia storia.

Dovrei chiedermi come mai,
se era una tragedia,
non si chiude con nuovo sangue.
Dovrei chiedermi il senso
per cui l'intrigo di un'esistenza
che ha tanto cercato qualche verità
può ora sciogliersi
in una pura e semplice incertezza.

È vero:
tutto ciò che non finisce, finisce secondo verità.
Ma io non so capire questa fine sospesa
della mia storia; né i nuovi sentimenti
in cui, bene o male, senza conclusione,
io continuo a vivere. (454-55)

Pylades is 'in una pura e semplice incertezza', yet he seems to retain some certainties, such as the refusal of reason on account of its consoling function. He insists on a form of protest, albeit in the seemingly ineffective mode of complete isolation, 'Stando qui [...] in quest'angolo del mondo, / dove non si ha più bisogno di essere consolati' (456).

In the dialogue that unfolds with Athena, it becomes clear that this is an impossible position, a position impossible to describe or understand: any understanding would already be a consolation and even recognizing contradiction is a form of consolation. Asked about his plans for the future, Pylades answers that he will love Electra, which is not simply a contradiction, as Athena suggests, but ‘ben peggio di una contraddizione, / di una bella, lucida, *consolante* contraddizione’ (457). Indeed, to love Electra is something that goes against nature: ‘Amare Elettra! / Qualcosa che la natura rifiuta’ (457). Athena claims that she has no problem accommodating even this perspective and that, while nature might reject love for Electra, she does not, but Pylades insists once again that he does not want any consolation: ‘Ah, non vuoi proprio capirmi! Io non intendo [...] sentirmi consolare!’ (457). Finally, he explains that he loves Electra ‘Perché io amo in lei la mia abiura’ (457).

As is well known, ‘abiura’ is a very important concept in Pasolini’s works of the last years,¹⁰ and I would like to suggest that this ‘abiura’ could be read in the sense that in Electra and through his love of her, Pylades loves his abjection, his being outside the realm of reason or Athena (‘essere fuori di te’) in an isolated corner outside the social world – in short, outside of any sort of intelligibility. Pylades would thus end up embracing the position of radical otherness that, as we shall see, he was previously lamenting even as he desired to be other. This trajectory in Pylades’ relationship to otherness is particularly interesting as it resonates well with a similar trajectory that one can identify in Pasolini – from his attraction to the Friulan peasants and the Roman sub-proletariat as other in the 1940s and 1950s to his feeling himself to be other in the 1970s.¹¹

Talking to a farmer after first moving to the mountains, Pylades reflects on his ignorance of the ‘reality’ in which he would like to live by giving up his rights to live in the city, which he hates for its ‘irreality’.¹² He claims that for the first time in history, ‘UN UOMO RICCO SOGNA DI ESSERE UN UOMO POVERO. // E così, per la prima volta nella storia / io so che c’è una differenza tra gli uomini’ (403). Having discovered class consciousness, Pylades also realizes that there is no place for him:

l’uomo, in ogni caso, pensa di essere uomo
 – uomo innocentemente, senza aggiunte, uomo e basta –
 solo se appartiene, inconsapevole,
 a una delle parti in cui gli uomini sono divisi ...

E chi, dunque, come me, non appartiene più a nessuna di queste parti?
Voglio dire, chi vi appartiene male o *consapevolmente*? (403)

As a result, he desires to be other: ‘vorrei essere questo contadino’ (403), ‘vorrei essere anche Oreste’ (404). This desire was expressed before Pylades mobilized and organized the farmers’ revolt; after its failure, in contrast, he seems to embrace precisely his position of unintelligibility and to love his abjection in and through his love for Electra. As just discussed, he considers this to be much worse than a beautiful, consoling contradiction, and he thereby seeks to break completely with reason’s merely consoling function.

Athena does not give up and retorts by arguing that such a move would be complicit with the recent fascist horrors:

Usare la Non Ragione contro la Ragione!
L’hanno fatto i poeti e gli assassini
dell’epoca che è appena trascorsa.
Tutto il mondo ancora ne odora di morte.
L’avevo profetato ad Oreste e su te lo verifico. (458)

If Athena here shifts again from consolation to perturbation, Pylades highlights instead yet another aspect of reason, namely its connection with a will to power. He recognizes that he had listened to reason only in order to gain power and defines this as ‘la più colpevole delle colpe’ (458). He acknowledges the continuity in this respect between Orestes and himself – between a fascist and communist revolution – and now considers it fortunate that he was unable to carry out his offensive:

Oreste [...] ha abbattuto un monumento
e ne ha eretto un altro: io stavo per fare lo stesso,
ma il mio monumento, per fortuna, resterà incompiuto. (458)

Athena finally gives up and withdraws, while the play concludes with Pylades’ curse:

Ah, va’! Va’ nella vecchia città
la cui nuova storia io non voglio conoscere.
Perché temere la vergogna e l’incertezza?
Che tu sia maledetta Ragione,
E maledetto ogni tuo Dio e ogni Dio. (458)

Pylades' position at the end of the play would seem to correspond quite well to Pasolini's. Having recognized the danger that organized resistance remain implicated in power and replicate its violence, and having become a radical Other lonely and isolated from all society, Pylades abjures progressive projects, retaining only an ineffective protest and a self-debasing curse: 'il mio ultimo inno consiste in una puerile maledizione!' (458). He embraces his abjection with the same kind of longing for death that we can identify in Electra (or in Antigone, for that matter), a longing which Pylades himself had theorized in an exchange with the chorus at the end of the eighth act:

C'è nell'uomo un diritto
(a perdersi, a morire)
che Atena non sorveglia,
e che nessun altro Dio conosce.
Ebbene, io ora lo esercito.
E mentre noi tutti siamo qui
travolti dagli avvenimenti,
una musica, che dà scandalo e vergogna,
scorre stupendamente nella mia carne. (451)

Pylades' position can be conceptualized in terms of the death drive in the formulation given to that concept in Lee Edelman's book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.¹³ Accepting but also re-signifying the homophobic argument that, since homosexuals cannot reproduce themselves, they have no investment in the future, Edelman (re)formulates queerness as a subversive and radically other position resisting the linear form of temporality and the 'reproductive futurism' characteristic of heteronormativity. Against what he describes as a cult of 'the Child', Edelman takes sides with a non-teleological repetition and negativity bound to the death drive, stubbornly opposing the idea that some good may be achieved by orienting one's action to productivity and futurity.¹⁴

While Pylades' position seems to resonate with that theorized by Edelman, the work – this play, but also Pasolini's other, increasingly unfinished 'monuments' – also says something else: rather than remaining in isolation in his corner of the world, Pasolini continues to write and publish, to fight and create scandals.¹⁵

This performative contradiction creates a differently queer aspect of the play's open ending, one that emerges not from a linear progres-

sion of disillusionment, negation, and subtraction, but instead involves a circular temporality that is also implied by the text. Now that all combinations and alliances between Pylades, Orestes, and Electra, as well as between Athena, the Furies, and the Eumenides, have been played through, we may recall that the Eumenides not only prophesied that Pylades' understanding would come too late, but also gave a glimmer of hope that everything might start again: 'Non ti resterà nessun compenso se non la coscienza / che qualcun altro dovrà ricominciare tutto di nuovo / sulle tue rivelazioni stupende ma invecchiate' (406).

Circular time contains a paradoxical form of hope that is not quite a consolation: on the one hand, everything keeps repeating itself, there is no true progress, and there seems to be no way out. On the other hand, Pasolini proclaims no necessity for such an eternal return of the same, but instead emphasizes contingency. As he insists in reference to *Pilade* while defining its 'tema profondo', each of the events bringing about a radical change in the situation happens unexpectedly ('inopinatamente'):

la Dea della democrazia liberale, Atena, trasforma le Furie, dee dell'irrazionalità 'selvaggia', in Eumenidi, dee dell'irrazionalità sopravvivate come capacità di sogno e di sentimento in un mondo razionale: ma ecco che metà delle Eumenidi 'degenerano', e dalle 'misteriose montagne' rientrano in città, nel cuore appunto della democrazia liberale: le altre Eumenidi, rimaste sui monti, 'ispirano', invece, la rivoluzione socialista e partigiana di Pilade. Ma ecco che interviene inopinatamente – e fuori da ogni prevedibilità storica – Atena. È la nuova civiltà capitalista. Atena, dopo aver predetto a Oreste la sua connivenza con le atrocità della borghesia fascista e la lotta partigiana contro di lui, richiama le Eumenidi fedeli dai monti. E queste, sempre inopinatamente, le obbediscono; e divengono le dee del benessere, della nuova era opulenta. Pilade, così abbandonato da esse (da notare dunque che sono state le stesse dee della democrazia liberale a 'ispirare' la sua rivoluzione socialista) non ha più nulla davanti a sé, e gli resta una sola verità: l'orrore del potere.¹⁶

History here has no necessity as all crucial turns happen unexpectedly. The possibility of other outcomes in subsequent repetitions is therefore not excluded. While the play seems to narrate a process of learning for its title character, and while this development resonates well with Pasolini's own development, I would like to suggest that Pasolini cannot be reduced to Pylades' final position. Even if the final position denies the possibility of progress and delves into the death drive, this would still

represent a teleological reading. Rather, Pasolini encompasses not only elements of all the other characters – Electra and Orestes – but also the earlier positions of Pylades himself. In a sense, he embodies all the positions and affinities that I have sketched, but without totalizing or integrating them through some higher synthesis.¹⁷ In other words, he constitutes himself as a *Kippbild*, as a multistable figure, developed over the course of the play as it performs the complex and multiple aspect shifts of a positioned subjectivity in continually shifting constellations and contradictions.

NOTES

- 1 The play will be quoted from Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teatro*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), pp. 357–458. As Siti and De Laude explain, five different versions of the play are extant, and the one they propose is based on that published on *Nuovi Argomenti* in December 1967 and revised by Pasolini with hand-written corrections, probably in 1968; see Pasolini, *Teatro*, pp. 1161–68. Further citations are parenthetical.
- 2 On the originality of this ‘mythopoietic’ operation, which neither elaborates upon any existing data nor offers a new interpretation of the Classical myth, but invents everything from scratch, see Stefano Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini* (Milan: Ubolibri, 2005), p. 152, and Massimo Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), pp. 161–62, who associates this operation with what Euripides himself did in the tragedy *Orestes*.
- 3 Indeed, in the *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro*, published right after *Pilade* in the subsequent issue of *Nuovi Argomenti*, Pasolini claims that the new theatre he proposes should address the ‘gruppi culturali avanzati della borghesia’ as the only way to reach the working class. See *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro*, in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull’arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), II, pp. 2488–89.
- 4 See Robert L. Caserio and others, ‘The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory’, *PMLA*, 121.3 (2006), pp. 819–28.
- 5 The question ‘Ma come, e dove nasce tale Diversità?’ (384) shifts towards the question ‘come nacque, quell’amicizia [between Pylades and Orestes]?’ (385), which a woman in the service of Orestes’ father characterizes as a dream and describes as one of those ‘amicizie, che sono amori’. While a homosexual subtext does little to explain the scandalous otherness of the ancient character, it is relevant to an – always also implied – allegorical reading concerning the twentieth century. What is more, the way in which the woman describes the boys and their love with envious admiration could be read as an instance of indirect speech that both articulates and veils the author’s desiring eye: ‘Sai come vanno queste cose. Un sogno, / se viste dall’occhio di una donna.’ This dream would thus also be

that of the author and would add an autobiographical layer to the anachronistic subtext of a scandalizing homosexuality.

- 6 See Christoph F.E. Holzhey, 'Lacans Antigone: Zur Normativität des Lustprinzips und dessen Jenseits', in *Normativität des Körpers*, ed. by Anne Reichold and Pascal Delhom (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 2011), pp. 164–85.
- 7 The Eumenides foretell 'un anno / in cui cadrà un grande silenzio / sulle città e sulle campagne. / E questo silenzio sarà strano e poetico / perché mai come in quell'anno / ci saranno nel mondo rumori così forti: / esplosioni che sconvolgeranno la terra / e lasceranno dappertutto odore di fuoco. [...] L'odore della carne bruciata e delle primule / si confonderanno in quel silenzio. / In cima alle vigne, nell'oro dell'Angelus, / ci sarà una schiuma di calcinacci di chiese crollate. / Arrugginiranno baionette accanto a teste / non del tutto ancora scarnificate [...]' (pp. 406–07).
- 8 Analogies with twentieth-century events would actually seem to indicate that Orestes' second revolution should happen before his first revolution: the open exhibition of the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthos evokes, for instance, the end of Mussolini and his lover, and Argos' economic boom that of post-war Italy.
- 9 *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro*, p. 2487. Compare also 'E, inoltre, vi si leggerà una preghiera: di non applaudire: i fischi e le disapprovazioni saranno naturalmente ammessi, ma, al posto degli eventuali applausi sarà richiesta da parte dello spettatore quella fiducia quasi mistica nella democrazia che consente un dialogo, totalmente disinteressato e idealistico, sui problemi posti o dibattuti (a canone sospeso!) dal testo' (2483). See the interesting discussions of the *Manifesto* by Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini*, pp. 213–34, especially pp. 218–22, and David Ward, *A Poetics of Resistance: Narrative and the Writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), pp. 166–78. On Pasolini's concept of suspending sense, see Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, 'Pasolini-Barthes: engagement et suspension de sens', *Studi Pasoliniani*, 1 (2007), pp. 55–67.
- 10 Most famously, Pasolini's 'Abiura dalla *Trilogia della vita*', dated 15 June 1975, was published the month before his death as an introduction to a collection containing the screenplays of the *Decameron*, *I racconti di Canterbury*, and *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1975).
- 11 See Giacomo Marramao, 'A partire da *Salò*: corpo e potere nell'opera di Pasolini', *aut aut*, 345 (Jan.–Mar. 2010), pp. 116–23.
- 12 Cf.: 'Io odio l'irrealtà / dei luoghi dove per diritto dovrei vivere; / ma insieme non conosco la realtà / in cui vorrei vivere rinunciando a quel diritto. / Sono un'anima in pena / – e non sono neanche tanto sicuro / della sincerità del mio dolore: / ah, io non posso essere te' (402–03). 'Realtà' here seems to refer to the ability to feel attached to life and participate in it, whereas 'irrealtà' refers to its opposite.
- 13 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 14 For a reading of Pasolini's *La Divina Mimesis* and *Petrolio* from this perspective, see Manuele Gagnolati, 'Pier Paolo Pasolini's Queer Performance: *La Divina*

Mimesis between Dante and *Petrolio*', in *Corpus xxx*, ed. by Davide Messina (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 134–64.

- 15 On the incomplete character of Pasolini's late works and its political significance, see, for instance, Antonio Tricomi, *Sull'opera mancata di Pasolini: Un autore irrisolto e il suo laboratorio* (Rome: Carocci, 2005); and Carla Bendetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino: Per una letteratura impura* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998).
- 16 'Una lettera di Pasolini', *Paese sera* (3–4 settembre 1969), rpt. in Pasolini, *Teatro*, p. 1166.
- 17 While Luca Ronconi argues that *Pilade* is 'pazzamente autobiografico' and, insisting on the figure of the double (which indeed is typical of Pasolini), claims that Orestes and Pylades are two aspects of the same person, it seems to me that in this case also Electra reflects an aspect of Pasolini's subjectivity, which is here staged as a multistable, rather than a bistable, figure ('Introduzione in forma di appunti', in Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini*, pp. 11–16, here p. 12).

Christoph F. E. Holzhey, ‘La vera Diversità’: Multistability, Circularity, and Abjection in Pasolini’s *Pilade*, in *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities, Geographies, Traditions*, ed. by Luca Di Blasi, Manuele Gagnolati, and Christoph F. E. Holzhey, *Cultural Inquiry*, 6 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2012), pp. 19–35 <https://doi.org/10.25620/ci-06_02>

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