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## 2

# Giving Flowers to Policemen: Pasolini, “Flower Children” and *figli di papà*

*Simona Bondavalli*

Visiting the United States for the first time in 1966, Pasolini is fascinated by New York, “a magical, overwhelming, beautiful city.” He compares it to those naturally gifted poets who, “every time they write a line, create a beautiful poem.” It isn’t just the city’s beauty that strikes him. Its youth distinguishes it: “it’s the least crepuscular city I have ever seen.” He regrets not having gone earlier, “twenty or thirty years [before], in order to stay.” (“Un marxista a New York”, *SPS* 1598).<sup>1</sup> His fascination with America, however, is different from the aesthetic attraction for Third World countries that characterizes the later part of his life.

Africa is like a drug that you take not to kill yourself, an escape. New York is not an escape: it’s a commitment, a war. It makes you feel like acting, facing things, changing them. You like it in the way that you like things, say, when you are twenty. (“Un marxista a New York”, *SPS* 1598)

The city exerts its charm on Pasolini for its youth, the variety of people it hosts, the freedom of attire and behavior that characterizes its dwellers; however, it also attracts his interest because it gives

him the impression of a place in which intellectuals are actively involved in social and political protest. Unlike Africa, the escape of his later years, New York represents for him a renewal of political commitment, a place of action, of change. It is like an apparition, “a blinding light at the end of a tunnel [...], Jerusalem appearing to the eyes of the Crusader” (SPS 1599). It immediately strikes him, the filmmaker, as a challenge for the camera: “Maybe it is not filmable. Seen from far away it is like the Dolomites, too photogenic, too wonderful, and it irritates you. From up close, from inside it, you can’t see it: the lens can’t contain the beginning and the end of a skyscraper” (SPS 1599). Nevertheless, or precisely because of the city’s ineffable nature, he immediately starts planning to shoot his film on Saint Paul among the skyscrapers of New York:

I want to move the entire action from Rome to New York, setting it in our times but without changing anything. [...] Remaining faithful to his letters. New York has many analogies to the ancient Rome described by Saint Paul: corruption, clientage, the problem of blacks, of junkies. And to all of this Saint Paul gave a sacred response, and therefore a scandalous one, like the SNCC. (SPS 1599)

The film on Saint Paul would never be realized, but it represented Pasolini’s ultimate project, the one that would occupy his mind until his death.<sup>2</sup> A symbol of intimate contradiction, on one side the strong, vital, self-confident founder of the Church, on the other the weak, humble creature who is tormented by the question of God, Saint Paul embodies for Pasolini the dichotomy of meditation and action, of *trasumanar e organizzar*, that is the subject of the poems written in this period.<sup>3</sup> In the contradiction between his revolutionary spirit and the need to organize the Church, Saint Paul becomes an alter ego for Pasolini’s own contradictory relationship with the Communist Party and his problematic approach to militancy in general. His vision of the film on Saint Paul as set in New York is therefore not only motivated by an aesthetic fascination with the city, but also by an ideological agenda.

Pasolini’s ideological attraction to New York is largely due to his enthusiasm for the activity of the New Left, “the most beautiful Left

that a Marxist can discover today" (SPS 1599). The young SNCC organizers make him "think of early Christians": "they are neither communist nor anticommunist, they are mystics of democracy: their revolution lies in taking democracy to its extreme and almost crazy consequences" (SPS 1601).

Pasolini praises the total dedication to the cause, the "intensified and almost mystical extremist democracy" of the Civil Rights movement in an article, titled "Civil War", published in the communist newspaper *Paese Sera* (*Heretical Empiricism* [hereafter *HE*] 142–43). Recalling the atmosphere of hope and anticipation he breathed in New York, he describes America as the place where "everything seems to be about to begin" and where "one lives [...] as if on the eve of great things" (*HE* 143). The various events he has witnessed in New York, including a peace rally, the meeting of a black labor union, a gathering of leftist intellectuals and even a right-wing demonstration in favor of the Vietnam war, have given him the sense of a "great human experience," the visionary aspect of which is perhaps more important to him than its immediate political content. The most similar event in Pasolini's personal experience is the Italian Resistance: "In America, granted the very brief nature of my stay, I lived many hours in the clandestine climate of conflict, of revolutionary urgency, of hope, that was proper to the Europe of 1944 and 1945" (*HE* 143). The feeling of hope, the degree of popular participation, the active involvement of artists and intellectuals in this communal experience seem to rekindle Pasolini's interest in protest at a time of disillusionment with political commitment. It is with renewed enthusiasm that he states:

What is required of an "independent" American intellectual is all of himself, a complete sincerity. Since the days of Machado I hadn't experienced such a brotherly reading as that of Ginsberg [...] American intellectuals of the New Left (because where people fight there is always a guitar and a singing man) seem to do precisely what a line of an innocent song of the black Resistance says: "You gotta throw your body into the fight." (*HE* 148–49)

This "new motto of a real and not boringly moralistic commitment" (*HE* 149) summarizes the sincere and passionate adhesion of

American intellectuals to the cause of peace and of civil rights, and it reflects Pasolini's own ideal position. In the enthusiasm and the "brotherly" affinity he feels for Ginsberg one cannot help but see the desire for a more direct involvement in his own country, for the possibility to throw his own body into the fight.

Paradoxically, this enthusiasm for social commitment and sympathy for the American Civil Rights movement helps understand Pasolini's harsh reaction to the Italian student movement in 1968. His appreciation for the "mysticism" of American counterculture is also a criticism of the Marxist rationality dominating the protest discourse in Italy. The "other America," grown inside a social structure that lacks class consciousness, supports and is supported by an alternative political discourse: a form of "spiritualism [...]" which, having first become revolutionary democratic radicalism, is now run through by a new social consciousness which, not accepting Marxism explicitly, is presented as total confrontation and anarchic desperation" (HE 147–48). Its goal is a "complete confrontation of the establishment," a global questioning of the principles underlying the present social structure. Conversely, Pasolini sees the Italian Student movement as restricted by its reliance on Marxist discourse: as unavoidable as such discourse is, it nevertheless does not account for the fundamental changes undergone by Italian society in this decade. A protest envisioned in terms of class conflict, such as that of the Italian *Sessantotto*, reflects a lack of awareness of one's specific situation and will not bring about any real change. An important component of Pasolini's critique also concerns the role assigned to poets and intellectuals by each movement, and his encounter with American poet and countercultural icon Allen Ginsberg is the occasion for a clear comparison.

Pasolini's interpretation of Ginsberg's poetic and political role is inscribed in his, perhaps superficial, interpretation of America. Just like New York, Ginsberg enthralled Pasolini, rekindled his enthusiasm for social protest at a time when he is disillusioned and prone to cynicism, and provides a model for a redefinition of the function of committed artists in neo-capitalist societies. The two poets meet for the first time in the fall of 1966, during Pasolini's visit to New York. They cross paths again about one year later upon Ginsberg's visit to Milan, and have the opportunity to discuss their

relationship with social protest and with the political establishment in their respective countries.<sup>4</sup> While Pasolini is not only uninvolved in the Italian Student movement, but will soon be openly in conflict with it, to the point of being publicly labeled as a student hater, Ginsberg regularly participates in rallies and sit-ins in the Bay Area, in New York, and even in Europe. In Prague, the year before, Ginsberg was crowned King of May and he was carried through the streets in a rose-covered chariot; in London he was welcomed by seven thousand students at a poetry reading at the Royal Albert Hall.<sup>5</sup> Even in Italy, where his poetry has been translated and made popular by Fernanda Pivano, his reputation among young people is by now that of the father of the Flower Power movement.<sup>6</sup> Ginsberg is obviously *with* the students, while Pasolini is apparently *against* them. However, Pasolini sees Ginsberg's and his own positions as analogous, inasmuch as the object of their critique is the bourgeois establishment and their critical instrument is poetry. The encounter with one of the poetic leaders of student protest in the US gives Pasolini the opportunity to compare that movement with its Italian counterpart, a comparison on which he reflects again in a subsequent letter to Ginsberg:

Dear, angelic Ginsberg, last night I heard you say everything that came into your mind about New York and San Francisco, with their flowers. I have told you something about Italy, (flowers only to be found in flower shops.)<sup>7</sup> Your bourgeoisie is a bourgeoisie of insane people, mine of idiots. You rebel against insanity with insanity (giving flowers even to policemen) but how can one revolt against idiocy? (*Lettere* 632)

The half-joking tone of the letter does not detract from the sharpness of an analysis that, within a couple of pages, outlines the differences in the social and historical structure of the two countries and illustrates the role played by such apparently different poets as Ginsberg and Pasolini in the revolt against the bourgeois establishment. If Pasolini's analysis of Ginsberg's poetic and political role is occasionally superficial, when not arguably fallacious, it is nevertheless revealing: the idealization of Ginsberg seems to



correspond, in Pasolini, to an admission of his own limits and frustrations, while the acknowledgement of Ginsberg's poetic achievements indirectly sheds light on Pasolini's own redefinition of the poet's social mandate.

Pasolini's parallel analysis is centered on the relationship between poetic and political discourse in Italy and the United States in the Sixties, and the role assigned to artists and intellectuals in movements of social protest. Pasolini identifies Ginsberg's advantage in his ability to operate outside of a discourse of class struggle. Because the United States, in Pasolini's view, does not recognize itself in terms of classes, a poet like Ginsberg engaged in a critique of the establishment is free to invent a new "revolutionary" language through his poetic art.

You rebel against the bourgeois assassin fathers by staying within their world [...] and you are therefore compelled to invent your revolutionary language anew and completely—day by day and word by word. (*Lettere* 631)

Ginsberg, in Pasolini's view, speaks from inside the world he is criticizing. His protest does not come from a marginal position, from where avant-garde artists traditionally speak, because Pasolini conceives of these margins in terms of class. Due to the apparent lack of a class conflict discourse in the United States, Ginsberg does not move his protest from a revolutionary outside that throws itself against the establishment; instead, he remains within the bourgeois world and uses his awareness of his position critically to expose the absurdity of the system.<sup>8</sup> By virtue of this position, Ginsberg represents a possible model for the intellectual who wants to be socially committed even in a world that denies the artist the marginal position he traditionally maintained, such as the neo-capitalist world.

Ginsberg's position—within the bourgeoisie, the universal middle class that is America, in Pasolini's view—does not prevent him from exercising his critical function. To do so, however, the American poet is compelled to invent a new language, and uses poetry to that end. He is not tied by a pre-existing political discourse of protest such as that limiting Pasolini. Political discourse in the United States at this time is dominated by war propaganda

and Ginsberg uses creative means, both verbal and non-verbal, to expose its absurdity: on one hand he uses the language of mass-media, the same language used in war propaganda, to compose poetry against the war;<sup>9</sup> on the other he organizes peace rallies encouraging protesters to offer flowers to policemen: a creative way to speak not only against physical violence—the kind exercised by the police upon protesting students, and the violence of the war—but also against the psychological violence implicit in mass society. In his suggestions to the organizing committee of a demonstration march planned in November 1965 in Berkeley in support of peace in Vietnam, Ginsberg writes:

Masses of flowers—a visual spectacle—especially concentrated in the front lines. Can be used to set up barricades, to present to Hell’s Angels, police, politicians, and press and spectators whenever needed or at parade’s end. (*Deliberate Prose* 10)

Flowers, just like the march itself, introduce a visual spectacle in a war discourse that is mainly verbal, and show the “insanity” of what is presented as a logical discourse—the necessity of attacks in Vietnam—through a creative “insanity.” It is this kind of creativity that Pasolini admires in the American student movement and that he sees missing in its Italian counterpart: in Italy, flowers remain in flower shops, and the students protesting in the streets are unable to invent their own language of protest. The new revolutionary language, invented day by day by Ginsberg and other American intellectuals is opposed to the traditional Marxist language that seems inescapable in Italy:

We here, instead, (even those now sixteen years old) already have our revolutionary language, pre-fabricated, and with its own ethics behind it. [...] Who provided us—both young and old—with the official language of protest? Marxism, whose only poetic vein is the memory of the Resistance, now recalled by the thought of Vietnam and Bolivia. (*Lettere* 631)

Marxist discourse still dominates the language of protest in Italy, and it has lost the “poetic vein” that characterized it in the “great days of Hope of the Forties” (HE 143). That was the only time, according to Pasolini, in which revolutionary discourse had gone beyond the practical goals of Marxism and embraced existential issues: the intent was not simply to overturn Fascism, but rather to reconstruct society on a different basis, to redefine democracy. The “mysticism” that characterized the Italian Resistance and the Civil Rights movement in the United States is absent from the Italian Student Movement of the Sixties, and this constitutes its greatest limitation. Not surprisingly, in criticizing the latter, Pasolini introduces the American flower children as a positive model for the Italian *figli di papà*, and he offers the poetry of Allen Ginsberg as a new form of critical poetry in a post-avant-garde world.

Both the visual language introduced by flowers in the anti-war protest and the poetic use of communicative language to debunk the logic of war propaganda represent creative responses based on an awareness of the specific conditions of the country where the protest originates. In his attempt to redefine the critical role of poetry and the poets’ mandate in a neo-capitalist world, Pasolini is inspired by the creativity of American activists and poets. The universal middle class that is the United States for Pasolini represents a perfect lab for what Italy is becoming—a homogenized bourgeois society—and the functioning of resistance in the US can provide positive models for the position of dissenting intellectuals in Italy. Since protest in the United States does not oppose one class to another, but comes from within the system, “staying within their world” as he sees Ginsberg doing, American “independent” intellectuals can create a revolutionary discourse that is not limited by Marxist rationality, that is not strictly verbal, and that can address existential issues. In the discourse of counterculture and peace movements, with which he becomes acquainted through Ginsberg, Pasolini identifies a new function for poetry that exceeds literary experimentation and preserves its critical potential.

In his essay “The end of the avant-garde” Pasolini delineates precisely this new function for poetry.<sup>10</sup> He juxtaposes Ginsberg’s work to that of contemporary Italian avant-garde poets, which he harshly criticizes for their fundamental acceptance of the status

quo.<sup>11</sup> Against the *Neoavanguardia* poets, whose only response to the cultural and economic homogenization produced by neo-capitalism is a type of poetry that simply reflects the flatness of that world, he proposes Ginsberg's existential approach as a positive example of socially committed art. Analogously, in a way, to the members of the *Neoavanguardia*, Ginsberg lives in a bourgeois world and does not openly reject its socio-economic conditions, at least in Pasolini's view. His merit lies, for Pasolini, in his ability to confront the bourgeois world from within, using a critical awareness of his position to expose its absurdity. He represents therefore a useful model for the exercise of a critical activity under the new power conditions created by neo-capitalism, which make it impossible for intellectuals to maintain a marginal position. Unlike the linguistic, and ultimately just literary, approach of the *Neoavanguardia*, for which form is the only possible social commitment, Ginsberg's poetry does not accept the unambiguous, unproblematic attitude of the bourgeois world to which he belongs; instead, it puts the problematic individual, "the protester, the abnormal person, the Different, etc." at its center, and exposes the insanity of what presents itself as normal or, even worse, normative. It questions "both Marxist rationalism and bourgeois rationalism" (HE 139) through the "re-presentation of 'naked and poor' problematics" from which neo-capitalism diverts attention (HE 138).

Following Roland Barthes' redefinition of the function of contemporary art as "not to *generate* meaning, but on the contrary to *suspend* it; not to construct meanings, but to not fill them *exactly*" ("Entretiens avec Roland Barthes," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, quoted in HE 136), Pasolini chooses the suspension of meaning as the basis of the new writer's mandate and Allen Ginsberg as a positive model thereof: "'To suspend the meaning': here is a stupendous epigraph for what could be a new description of the commitment, of the mandate of the writer" (HE 136). The suspended meaning characterizes this reemergence of a problematic approach to the bourgeois world, which he has exemplified through Ginsberg's work. The suspended sense differentiates the work of Ginsberg and other representatives of "the other America" from the work of the Italian *Neoavanguardia*. Both operate from within a bourgeois system and both choose anti-literary forms, but while the poetry of the *Neoavanguardia* merely

reproduces the lack of problematics of the neo-capitalist world, Ginsberg's work enhances its problematic aspects and suspends meaning. It establishes, in Pasolini's words, a "scandalous relationship" with neo-capitalism.

In the letter to Ginsberg referred to earlier, Pasolini admits his own shortcomings by using a very simple phrase: "I cannot MIX PROSE AND POETRY (as you do)." The expression "mix prose and poetry" allows Pasolini to define, by opposition, literally and metaphorically, Ginsberg's work and his own, or rather to project upon Ginsberg and American counterculture the realization of his own literary and political aspirations. Mixing prose and poetry is presented as a viable alternative to using the language of "civil servants," that Pasolini finds he is now forced to use, i.e. an obsolete language that refers to a now non-existent reality. Pasolini's expression seems thus to refer as much to his own stylistic solutions as to traditional Marxist revolutionary discourse, both of which have been superseded by the new social and political reality. The admission of his own failings is accompanied by the acknowledgment of a more successful solution on Ginsberg's part. Mixing prose and poetry, as Ginsberg does in Pasolini's view, acquires therefore both a poetic and a political connotation: from the point of view of poetics, Ginsberg is able to maintain poetic expressiveness even using a language that is as primarily communicative as that of the media; politically, Ginsberg and the other intellectuals of "his America" take a more visionary approach to political action and invent a new revolutionary discourse that is not thwarted by the "practical and rational" Marxist discourse. "To mix prose and poetry" would therefore mean, in a political perspective, to combine realism and idealism in a revolutionary discourse that relies as much on artists and intellectuals as on politicians. Inventing a new language day by day assumes therefore this double meaning: it means appropriating the language of neo-capitalism, where the communicative function prevails, and using it to compose poetry, thus adding an expressive dimension to it; it also means maintaining a social function for poetry even in a society that denies poets a marginal position.

Pasolini's enthusiasm for the visionary approach of the American student movement, for their ability to "mix prose and poetry", helps clarify his disapproval of the Italian students in 1968.

While the representatives of “the other America” are able, in his opinion, to create a new revolutionary discourse suitable to the specific conditions of American society, Italian students seem to ignore their own specific condition and adopt a protest discourse that cannot bring about real change. This opinion is confirmed and explained by Pasolini in the “ugly verses” of the poem “The PCI to the young,” written only a few months after his encounter with Allen Ginsberg in Milan.<sup>12</sup> In commenting upon the students’ clashes with the police at Valle Giulia, in Rome, Pasolini turns his interpretation of the students’ protest into a satirical pamphlet mocking the students’ “revolutionary” aspirations in the face of their bourgeois background. He refers to them as “*figli di papà*,” spoiled children whose revolt is a self-delusion, because they are simply following in their fathers’ footsteps.<sup>13</sup> They are apparently unaware that their protest is inscribed in the power structure they are allegedly fighting—the power of their fathers—and that the attention they are receiving from the media is only the ratification of a process whereby the bourgeoisie reaffirms its power: “You are their children, / their hope, their future; if they reproach you / they are certainly not preparing a class conflict / against you!” (HE 150) Their slogans, recalling the discourse of class struggle, are therefore not only a sign of the students’ lack of perspective, but also of the absurdity of the whole struggle: “At Valle Giulia, yesterday, we have thus had a fragment / of class conflict; and you my friends (even though on the side / of reason), were the rich, / while the policemen (who were in the / wrong) were poor. A nice victory, then, / yours!” (HE 150) To expose such absurdity, Pasolini takes the stance that made him unpopular, siding with the policemen, “children of the poor,” who were the only representative of a different class at the rally. Unlike the American flower children, the Italian *figli di papà* only demand what they already have by birthright: their fathers’ power. The absurdity of their protest is not a result of a creative approach, but the unwarranted result of their lack of self-awareness.

The European revolutionary discourse, in Pasolini’s opinion, cannot be disregarded without pre-empting the protest: “Look at / the Americans, your adorable contemporaries, / with their foolish flowers, they are inventing / a “new” revolutionary language! / They invent it day by day! / But you can’t do it because in Europe there

already is one: / can you ignore it? / Yes, you want to ignore it (with great satisfaction /of the *Times* and of *Tempo*.) (HE 151) The contrast indicated by Pasolini in his letter to Ginsberg is here addressed directly to the students. While American students can invent a new and creative revolutionary discourse disregarding class conflict, because their society does not recognize itself in that discourse, Italian students have Marxist discourse at their disposal and must come to terms with it, or else they play the game of the power that they are trying to contest. Revolutionary discourse in Italy must deal with Marxist discourse, even though its rationalism, which Pasolini felt as a strong limitation even in earlier years, appears out of touch with the reality of social and cultural homologation characterizing Italy in the Sixties. A truly revolutionary movement, then, would engage in a radical renovation of the Communist Party: "But instead, children, go attack Federations! / Go invade Cells! / Go occupy the offices of the Central Committee! Go, go / camp out in Via delle Botteghe Oscure! / If you want power, at least take over the power/ of a party which nevertheless is in the opposition" (HE 153) Pasolini seems here to reconfirm his faith in the Communist Party as the instrument for promoting change, especially over the "heretical variant of it" adopted by the students, which is based on "the lowest jargon/ of sociologists without ideology." However, the series of rhetorical turns concluding the poem cast on the whole argument an ironic light, confirmed by the "Apology" following it, which asks that the poem be read as "a piece of *ars retorica*:" "Everything is said *in quotation marks*:" it is ironic and self-ironic, and it requires the "good will" of the reader to be understood. The poet's ambiguous and rapidly changing stance is a comment on the impossibility of solving the real current problems through a direct confrontation and a demand for power. The reader is forced to consider different and often opposing opinions and question the simplistic approach of the Student movement.

Pasolini's polemical stance, his sympathy for the "poor policemen," and the final recantation of his statements are his provocative way of exposing a more complex problem confronting intellectuals today: the "bourgeoisization" of society through the dynamics of a *Sviluppo*, an economic development that does not coincide with authentic *Progresso*. As he suggests in the prologue to the film *Teorema*,

the conquest of power can no longer be the goal of a real protest: the social and existential problems created by the false emancipation of ever-larger segments of the population to a petty bourgeois lifestyle are.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, what has so far been envisioned as a revolution might well have to be reformulated as a civil war: "(Oh God! must I take into consideration / the eventuality of fighting the Civil War alongside you / putting aside my old idea of Revolution?) (*HE* 152) Set off by parentheses, the concluding statement is qualified by Pasolini as "the only non-provocative passage:" it introduces a real dilemma, with respect to which he does not seem to have a definite answer. Whereas the gradual incorporation of different social groups into a bourgeois-like condition would imply a voiding of revolutionary possibilities in a class-conflict framework, and the consequent need to reconfigure the protest in terms of a "civil war" of the bourgeoisie against itself, Pasolini resists this idea. What he defines, in a characteristically dramatic fashion, as a "traumatic hatred for the bourgeoisie" and its normalizing culture, prevents him from confiding in its renovation from within: it is the result of an experience both personal—"my private exclusion, from boyhood, much more dreadful than that which is the lot of a Negro, for example, or a Jew,"—and public: "Fascism and the war, with which I opened my eyes on life". The particularity of his own experience, an experience of difference, is the only instrument he can provide to the students to fight against the rationality of bourgeois discourse:

Implementing the last possible choice—on the eve of the assimilation of bourgeois history to human history—in favor of what is not bourgeois (a thing that they can now do only by substituting the force of reason for the traumatic personal and public reasons to which I alluded; an extremely difficult operation, this, which implies a "clever" self-analysis of themselves outside of every convention). (*HE* 157)

Pasolini's complex and somewhat contradictory relationship with the Italian Student movement is the indication of a broader concern with the transformation of society and his own poetic and political role within it. He sees the need for a more global protest,



one that goes beyond the rational limits of Marxist discourse and that takes into consideration the existential changes introduced by neo-capitalist power. The admiration he expresses for the American Student movement and Ginsberg's role within it is the admiration for a protest that moves, in his opinion, from an awareness of the specific conditions of the country where it originates. The direct opposition of class conflict is replaced, in the United States, by a protest that comes from within the system: "staying within their world" as Ginsberg seems to be doing, allows American intellectuals to create a revolutionary discourse that is not limited by Marxist rationality and can deal with problems that go beyond the conquest of power. In the discourse of counterculture and peace movements, with which he becomes acquainted through Ginsberg, Pasolini identifies a new function for poetry that exceeds the literary experimentations of the new Italian avant-garde and preserves its critical potential. In the flowers given to policemen by the "adorable" American students Pasolini sees the signs of a non-verbal language that could overcome the rational limits of Marxist discourse and offer poets the opportunity to commit themselves fully to the renewal of society, the possibility to really throw their body into the fight. Pasolini's own contribution to the creation of a non-verbal language of protest is to be found in his "cinema of poetry", which in these same years allows him to explore the expressive possibilities and critical potential of images and confirm the critical function of poetic discourse with respect to the bourgeois world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> These first impressions are recorded in an interview granted to the Italian journalist and writer Oriana Fallaci that was published in the magazine *L'Europeo* on October 13, 1966, with the title "Un marxista a New York" ("A Marxist in New York"). Now in *Saggi sulla politica e la società*, 1598–1606 (henceforth SPS).

<sup>2</sup> The treatment written in 1968 was substantially modified when it became a script in 1973. It was published only after Pasolini's death, in 1977.

<sup>3</sup> The collection *Trasumanar e Organizzar* was published in 1971. Now in *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie*.

<sup>4</sup> Fernanda Pivano, Italian translator of Ginsberg's poetry, thus

describes the encounter between the two poets: "Ginsberg spent a few months in Italy and we were very happy to host him. [...] In order to introduce him to some Italian intellectuals I took him to meet [Eugenio] Montale and [Salvatore] Quasimodo; at my house I introduced him to Umberto Eco and Enrico Filippini. One day Pasolini happened to be in Milan and the two poets met on October 17, in the sumptuous house that the architect Nanda Vigo had decorated for the businessman Spaggiari. The two writers needed an interpreter; we sat on a stone bench and for a couple of hours I felt like some kind of simultaneous translator, without the skills that these professionals have. From that meeting a beautiful friendship was born" (quoted in Naldini 307–08).

<sup>5</sup> A detailed account of Ginsberg's appointment to *Kral Majales*, or King of May, in Prague is provided by Michael Schumacher in his biography *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg* 439–40.

<sup>6</sup> Fernanda Pivano describes Ginsberg's fame in Italy and the reception reserved to him during his Italian tours in *C'era una volta un beat*.

<sup>7</sup> My translation. Only the first two pages of the original text in Italian are available; the whole letter is available only in the English translation made by Allen Ginsberg and Annette Galvano for publication in the "Lumen/Avenue A" review. Where a comparison is possible, the translation appears often inaccurate, when not completely distorting the meaning of the original. I will therefore rely on the Italian text, where possible, providing my own translation. Here, the English translation actually said "flowers only to be found in forests."

<sup>8</sup> From an American studies perspective, Pasolini's misinterpretation of Ginsberg's poetic and political activity raises questions about the apparent marginality on which much of Ginsberg's discourse is based.

<sup>9</sup> The collection *The Fall of America*, which contains poems written between 1965 and 1971, and in particular the poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra" composed in early 1966, offer good examples of Ginsberg's incorporation of the language of street signs, newspaper headlines, sounds from the radio and other sounds captured by the tape recorder in the car while the poet was driving across America. They can be found in *Collected Poems (1947–1980)*.

<sup>10</sup> The essay was included in *Empirismo eretico (Heretical Empiricism)* published in 1972.

<sup>11</sup> Pasolini mentions the poetry of Allen Ginsberg in several instances as the only positive example of the possibility to renew the social mandate of the poet at a time of poetic and ideological crisis. In the above-mentioned interview with Oriana Fallaci, he includes Ginsberg in the extremely brief list of American authors that he appreciates: "I don't like Hemingway, nor Steinbeck, very little Faulkner: from Melville I go straight to Allen Ginsberg"

(SPS 1600). In a short paragraph titled "The great poets" included in what would become "Almost a testament," the result of various encounters and interviews with the English journalist Peter Dragadze, Pasolini lists Ginsberg next to Sandro Penna, Dylan Thomas, Machado and Kafavis. It is particularly the early Ginsberg that he likes, his poetry of the Fifties, "a poetry that exalts despair" and where he sees "the rebellion against the domination of the society of prosperity" (*Il sogno del centauro*, in SPS 1477). This admiration for the American poet even induces Pasolini to think of him as the possible actor for the part of Jesus in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (See Naldini, *Vita di Pasolini* 272). Ginsberg's poetry is also the only poetry, in Pasolini's view, that has been able to truly represent New York (SPS 1599).

<sup>12</sup> The poem, accompanied by a prose "Apology," was written by Pasolini for publication in the literary journal *Nuovi Argomenti*, but was first published in the popular magazine *L'Espresso* with the editorial title "Vi odio cari studenti (*I hate you, dear students*)". It was a verse commentary on the clashes between police and students at the School of Architecture of the University of Rome on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968, which were remembered as "the events of Valle Giulia." The pamphlet's publication in the popular magazine unleashed "a controversy that more than any other unjustly affected Pasolini's posthumous image" (SPS XCVI).

<sup>13</sup> They are *figli di papà*, in Italian (papa's boys): an expression that refers to young people who receive everything from their fathers, without having to work for it. It seems particularly indicative here, considering the comparison with American students as "flower children," and the fathers vs. sons discourse that traverses all of Pasolini's later production,

<sup>14</sup> Released in 1968 in both book and film form, *Teorema* is in many ways Pasolini's own creative response to the movements of protest. He explicitly situates its origin in the context of the American poetic protest of the mid-1960s, in "the times of the *Beat Generation*, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Kerouac;" theirs, he says, is a type of poetry "enhanc[ing] despair," conducting a "revolt against materialism," which will then "lead to the explosion of the student protest" (*Il sogno del centauro* 79).