

Contributi/4

Searching for fireflies

Georges Didi-Huberman and the Re-assessment of Pasolini's Legacy

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For a long while the vocabulary of 'Pasolini corsaro' has been part of contemporary political debate, but often in the service of a deeply pessimistic reading of the possibilities of progressive politics. Within the last decade however, a current of more varied references to Pasolini has also appeared. A turning-point was the publication in France in 2009 of Georges Didi-Huberman's essay *Survivance des lucioles*. A particular characteristic of this turn to Pasolini is that it looks beyond the polemical journalism of the 1970s to find contemporary resonance in earlier texts. This essay will concentrate on two texts by Didi-Huberman and on the further elaboration of the concept of 'firefly-resistance' to be found in Howard Caygill's *On Resistance* (2013). Caygill's analysis of resistance movements will also serve to indicate other Pasolinian themes which are detectable in contemporary or near contemporary debate, and in light of these we will compare Didi-Huberman's conclusions with other revisitations of Pasolini in search of a new class-politics, particularly the radical re-reading of *Accattone* offered by Fabio Vighi in 2003. In examining these texts we hope to show how the political Pasolini can be revitalised by tempering the dark prophecies of the Corsaro texts with some glimmers of surviving light from earlier battles.

“On ne saurait exiger de celui-ci quelque chose qu'il n'a jamais promis [...]
La valeur générale [...] résulte d'une lecture et, donc, d'une interprétation [...];
elle n'engage que la responsabilité de notre propre construction”

Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*

Introduction

For a long while the vocabulary of 'Pasolini corsaro' has been part of contemporary political debate, in Italy and beyond; from the use of 'Palazzo' as regular journalistic shorthand for the political establishment, to the lines written in defence of the policemen of Valle Giulia which resurface truncated, castrated and traduced in every debate about policing, to the largely self-evident employment of phrases like 'anthropological change' when discussing the social

and cultural developments of the past forty, or thirty, or twenty years. Even in its most sympathetic and reflective form, much of this redeployment has been in the surface of a deeply pessimistic reading of the possibilities of progressive politics in the contemporary world, a tendency well exemplified by many of the contributions to the 2005 Special Edition of the French journal *Lignes*.

Within the last decade however, and to some extent in response to this, a current of more varied references to Pasolini has also appeared in that part of left-wing political philosophy which is actively seeking a viable way to resist an increasingly pessimistic consensus. Although this has been sporadically true throughout the 2000s, a turning-point, at least in terms of visibility, was the publication in France in 2009 of Georges Didi-Huberman's essay *Survivance des lucioles*¹. While Didi-Huberman develops his political thought to some extent against the *Scritti corsari*, (although even more explicitly against the use made of them by others), he also finds in them his founding metaphor, and his essay reaches back into Pasolini's earlier work in order to formulate his resistance to the impotence of apocalyptic pessimism. Didi-Huberman's essay was much discussed in the months following its publication: it offered an attractive, even an inspiring, vocabulary in which to conceptualise the new forms of political activism then developing around, for example, the Indignados and the Occupy movement². When in 2013 the British political philosopher Howard Caygill offers significant space to Pasolini in his book *On Resistance*³, his discussion is profoundly informed by Didi-Huberman's reading, even when he turns to different texts and slightly different conclusions: indeed the mechanics of Didi-Huberman's firefly metaphor enter into Caygill's complex discussion of forms of resistance even outside his passages on Pasolini, and to trace it through the book is to discover connections with Pasolini's work in some less obvious quarters, which offer inspiring openings for other uses of his texts. Didi-Huberman returned to Pasolini in 2012 from a slightly different angle, in the course of

¹ G. Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles*, Paris 2009. The Italian translation appeared the following year: G. Didi-Huberman, *Come le lucciole. Una politica delle sopravvivenze*, tr. C. Tartarini, Torino 2010: the title chosen interestingly reduces the direct polemical contrast with Pasolini's famous article. A Portuguese version, *Sobrevivência dos vagalumes*, was published in Brazil in June 2011 (Belo Horizonte). The Spanish version (tr. J. Calotrava Escobar) appeared in January 2012 as *Supervivencia de las luciérnagas*, (Madrid), and a German translation was published in October of that year (*Überleben der Glühwürmchen*, Munich 2012). There has been no English translation to date.

² The first edition of Stéphane Hessel's bestselling tract *Indignez-vous* appeared on 21 October 2010. Hessel certainly makes no reference to either Didi-Huberman or Pasolini, but the French newspaper *Libération* did not hesitate to invoke the 'firefly' metaphor to discuss the demonstrations of that year, always with reference to Pasolini but clearly with Didi-Huberman's use of the term in mind. See G. Lefort, *Le Masque des lucioles, le visage de l'année*, «Libération», 30 décembre, 2011. http://www.liberation.fr/culture/2011/12/30/le-masque-des-lucioles-le-visage-de-l-annee_784891. The book's immediate influence can be read for example in G. Lavaudant, 2009, *année cynique*, «Libération» 30 décembre, 2009. http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2009/12/30/profits-faineants-et-crocs-de-boucher_601704.

³ H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, London 2013.

his ongoing project on the politics of the image, *L'Oeil de l'histoire*⁴. The fourth volume in this series, *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants*⁵, which is concerned with the representation of *people(s)* in political art, devotes more space to Pasolini than to any other individual artist. This analysis, conceived partly in response to Gilles Deleuze's observation in *L'Image-mouvement* that in modern cinema «le peuple manque»⁶, finds in Pasolini's films indications of a 'new class-consciousness' which re-positions the resistant or even revolutionary subject for a new era. If the model developed in *Survivance des lucioles* persists in this text in illuminating but arguably limiting ways, it remains perhaps the most visible example of another field in which a re-examination of Pasolini has proved stimulating.

A particular characteristic of this turn to Pasolini in a context of *resistance* is that it looks beyond the polemical journalism of the 1970s to find contemporary resonance in earlier texts: Didi-Huberman's work is particularly noteworthy in that it theorises this non-linear approach in terms of a philosophy of history as montage. It also assumes unequivocally its selective approach, engaging in critical dialogue with certain exemplary texts rather than adopting them as precursors or prototypes, and using Pasolini as a resource for political invention rather than analysing his work for its own sake. The inspiration may come from earlier texts, but these writers' conclusions and constructions are their own responsibility.

The result is to give Pasolini's writing renewed dynamic force as a political and philosophical resource. This essay will concentrate primarily on Didi-Huberman's two texts and the picture of Pasolini as an artist of resistance which develops from them and from the further elaboration of the concept of 'firefly-resistance' to be found in Howard Caygill's important book. Caygill's analysis of resistance movements will also serve to indicate other Pasolinian themes which are detectable in contemporary or near contemporary debate, and in light of these we will compare Didi-Huberman's conclusions in *Peuples exposés* with other revisitations of Pasolini as possible source of a new class-politics, particularly the radical re-reading of *Accattone* as a text for the modern age offered by Fabio Vighi in 2003⁷. In examining these texts we hope to show how the political Pasolini can be revitalised by tempering the dark prophecies of the Corsaro texts with some glimmers of surviving light from earlier battles.

1. *Survivance des lucioles*: the philosophy of the firefly

The title *Survivance des lucioles* is a double declaration of allegiance, a conceptual knot tying Didi-Huberman's text closely not only to Pasolini and his fireflies, but also to the German art-historian Aby Warburg, to whose concept of

⁴ Published by Editions de Minuit from 2009 (*Quand les images prennent position: L'Oeil de l'histoire 1*) to 2015 (*Passés cités par JLG: L'Oeil de l'histoire 5*). *Survivance des lucioles* was apparently an offshoot of this project.

⁵ G. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants: L'Oeil de l'histoire 4*, Paris 2012.

⁶ G. Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps*, Paris 1985, p. 282.

⁷ F. Vighi, *Pasolini and Exclusion: Zizek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-Proletariat*, «Theory, Culture and Society», 20, 5, 2003, pp. 99-121.

Nachleben (translated as *survivance*) Didi-Huberman dedicated a major book in 2002⁸. The implications are, therefore, more complex than a mere contradiction of Pasolini's report of the fireflies' disappearance, just as the book's relationship to Pasolini's thought is much closer and more intricate than a simple rejection of the despairing finality of texts such as the *Articolo delle lucciole* or the *Abiura della Trilogia della vita*. The two quotations which Didi-Huberman sets as epigraphs to the text indicate something of this complexity: rather than the 'lucciole', he selects lines from two of Pasolini's best-known poems, *La Resistenza e la sua luce*⁹ and *Supplica a mia madre*¹⁰, both published in the early 60s, precisely the period to which Pasolini would later date the disappearance of the fireflies. Their enigmatic conjunction on the title-page provide a succinct commentary on the arguments to come: from *La Resistenza* comes the metaphor of light which will be fundamental to Didi-Huberman's interpretation of the role of 'fireflies'¹¹; while the five lines of *Supplica a mia madre*, re-framed in this context, are startlingly transformed from a statement of personal devotion to a precociously *corsaro* text in which finality is immediately contradicted by 'survivance', Susanna Colussi/Pasolini re-imagined as a (still-living) firefly, threatened with disappearance, who must be *begged* to survive.

The presence of Pasolini in Didi-Huberman's text is thus from the start a re-framing, which mixes references from different times and contexts to produce an unexpectedly renewed meaning. And the fireflies with which Didi-Huberman opens his analysis are not the famous lost memories of 1974, but living fireflies described in a letter to Franco Farolfi in 1941. There's a certain heretical defiance in giving equal weight to a personal letter written by a nineteen-year-old to a friend, in countermeasure to one of the most famous commentaries of a respected intellectual distilling thirty years of poetic and social criticism. Such is the liberty, however, which Didi-Huberman enjoys by virtue of the fact that he is not assessing Pasolini's political conclusions but creating his own. The book is an elaboration of a concept of 'fireflies' as a metaphor for a viable political/poetic activism against the odds of the times: an image borrowed from Pasolini but elaborated in the course of the book in relation to the writings of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Georges Bataille or René Char, among others, not to mention Giorgio Agamben with whose then most recent work, *Il Regno e la gloria*¹², the text is in constant polemical opposition.

Although reviewers of the work were apt to describe it as opposing both Agamben and the later Pasolini, the position of these two authors in relation to

⁸ G. Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Paris 2002.

⁹ P. P. Pasolini, *La Religione del mio tempo* (1961), in Id., *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie, vol. 1*, Torino 1999, pp. 471-3. All indications suggest that the lines were written in the late 50s.

¹⁰ P. P. Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa* (1964), in Id., *Bestemmia*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 640-1.

¹¹ Didi-Huberman makes no further explicit use of this text, but its relevance to his entire book is evident. Howard Caygill develops it into a core text for understanding the complexity of Pasolini's attitude to resistance.

¹² G. Agamben, *Il Regno e la gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo*, Torino 2009.

the book's *modus operandi* is in fact quite different. From the third part of the book on, Didi-Huberman engages systematically with Agamben's text, elucidating its arguments and confronting them with his own criticisms, for the most part founded on an equally systematic textual engagement with Walter Benjamin as a mutual explicit reference. Pasolini's most prominent role, especially in the earlier part of the book, is as a source of quotations and images, which are briefly explained, then brought into contact with other texts and images, Agamben's and Benjamin's included. The cross-references are often implicit, or constructed by Didi-Huberman himself. In other words, Pasolini's vivid and visionary writing is used by Didi-Huberman as material for *montage*, and re-ordered according to the internal affinities which Didi-Huberman perceives between words and images produced at different times and for different intentions. Such an approach, while certainly not ignoring the chronological imperative which for example places the «discouragement with the Italian people» expressed in 1975 after the combative insubmission of the popular audience in *Che cosa sono le nuvole* (p. 87), nonetheless refuses to accept this as the only possible direction of travel through the texts. Montage, or more explicitly *re-montage*, is in fact a vital principle for Didi-Huberman's understanding of a politically vital use of history: all four volumes of *L'Oeil de l'histoire* could be described as essays on various projects for creatively 're-cutting' the (visual) historical text. «On ne tranchera dans le paradoxe de l'histoire [...] qu'à réexposer toute chose en procédant au remontage du temps perdus tels qu'ils "surgissent à l'instant du danger"»¹³.

In bringing together two texts, produced over thirty years apart, in which the same Pier Paolo Pasolini finds himself drawn to talk about fireflies, and in bringing these texts in their turn into contact with entomological data on the insects' life and habits, with 'human fireflies' («êtres luminescents, dansants, erratiques, insaisissables et résistants comme tells»¹⁴) in Pasolini's films, with metaphors of light in Dante, or with a text of 1981 in which the photographer Denis Roche describes an encounter with fireflies six years after their supposed 'disappearance', Didi-Huberman generates a 'firefly-concept' (or, as he might prefer to put it, a firefly-*figura*): a small, uncertain, but at the same time extremely active, erotically dynamic light-in-darkness which contrasts with the unwavering bright searchlights of a system of power. This flickering, dancing light, reduced in 1974 to «un ricordo, abbastanza straziante, del passato»¹⁵, is then aligned with Pasolini's declaration in 1975 that, just as the fireflies had disappeared, «non ci sono più esseri umani, ci sono strane macchine che sbattono l'una contro l'altra»¹⁶, and the firefly-figure becomes a certain version of humanity: «aux yeux de Pasolini [...] rien d'autre que l'humanité par excellence, l'humanité

¹³ G. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants*, cit., p. 33.

¹⁴ Id., *Survivance des lucioles*, cit., p. 19.

¹⁵ P. P. Pasolini, 1 febbraio 1975. L'articolo delle lucciole, pp. 128-134 in Id., *Scritti Corsari*, Milano 2001, p. 129.

¹⁶ *Ma io continuo a dirvi che siamo tutti in pericolo* (1 nov. 1975), pp. 290-299 in P. P. Pasolini, *Interviste corsare sulla politica e sulla vita 1955-1975*, a cura di M. Gulinucci, Roma 1995, p. 294.

réduite à sa plus simple puissance de nous faire signe dans la nuit»¹⁷. By a further extension, still explicitly Pasolinian, the «signs in the night» are then offered to be read as «la *culture*, où Pasolini jusque-là reconnaissait une pratique [...] de *résistance*»¹⁸. Didi-Huberman's fireflies are, in all aspects of their metaphorical definition, drawn from Pasolini's texts, interpretations and images – but they are also, it should not be forgotten, his own: it is his re-montage which creates the figure in all its range.

When the metaphor is brought back into contact with its winged original, however, the Pasolinian *disappearance* becomes problematic. Denis Roche saw fireflies in Italy in 1981, and Didi-Huberman himself in 1986, so the announcement of their vanishing was premature. Besides, when Roche watched his fireflies 'disappear', they had clearly not plunged into extinction, but only moved on. Can this literal survival be carried back into the metaphor by Didi-Huberman's textual montage and shored up philosophically?

Didi-Huberman's strategy for doing so lies firstly in the vital notion of *survivances* – parcels of the past which resurface, actively, in the present: «ayant disparu[es] à un point de l'histoire; étant réapparu[es] bien plus tard, à un moment où, peut-être, on ne l'attendait plus; ayant, par conséquent, survécu dans les limbes encore mal définies d'une "mémoire collective"»¹⁹. A *survivance* is «la façon dont l'Autrefois rencontre le Maintenant pour former une lueur, un éclat, une constellation»²⁰. Fireflies today are at once, as Pasolini described them, a *ricordo del passato*, a personal memory of the past, and, at times, a present phenomenon, «anachronique et atopique [...] pourtant à l'ordre du jour»²¹: thus, in the full sense of Didi-Huberman's definition, a *survivance*, cultural as well as biological. Didi-Huberman then reverses this proposition in order to arrive at his founding metaphor: a *survivance* is, by definition, a firefly. The two concepts become merged in a sudden resistant light which takes its energy from its anomalous status in the time of linear history: the spark generated when the past encounters the present. The Pasolini of the early 60s, points out Didi-Huberman, understood very well the potential of *survivances*, as is proved by the «prise de position efficace, perturbatrice, inventive, joyeuse, sur les rapports entre l'histoire [...] et le présent»²² represented by *La Ricotta*, in which the Director declares himself so unequivocally a «Forza del Passato».

It is in these terms, and with this example, that Didi-Huberman rejects the *Articolo delle lucciole* most directly: «Comment peut-on déclarer la mort des survivances?»²³. Although he acknowledges Pasolini's position in 1975 at this point with bitter and unambiguous regret: «ce qui avait disparu en lui

¹⁷ G. Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles*, cit., p. 25.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 35.

¹⁹ G. Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*, cit., p. 67.

²⁰ Id., *Survivance des lucioles*, cit., p. 51.

²¹ Ivi, p. 42.

²² Ivi, p. 54.

²³ Ivi, p. 54.

était la capacité de voir»²⁴, the regret is personal rather than philosophical: this change in vision was unfortunate for the man, but has no necessary theoretical precedence. The fact of turning Pasolini's own past work into the foundation of his counterargument thus cannot but lead the reader to the obvious conclusion: Pasolini's own 'autrefois', dismissed by its author as irrevocably outdated, here comes into contact, as it were in ricochet from the unyielding pessimism of the *Articolo delle lucciole*, with the 'Maintenant' in which we read *Survivances des lucioles*. Didi-Huberman's evidence, against Pasolini's pessimism, of the living resistance of paradigms from the past is thus the Pasolini of *La Ricotta*, of *Accattone* and *La Luce della Resistenza*, even the teenager of 1941 – Pasolini himself is Didi-Huberman's most prominent firefly! The resistant force of these texts, far from being annihilated by subsequent re-assessments, can be re-ignited by this *remontage* which offers a salutary temporal collision but refuses to submit to the dictates of a linear history which would restrict any continuation of Pasolini's thought into the present to a projection, 'tested and approved', of the direction in which it was developing in 1975.

For if the 'survivance' strikes a spark from past and present, the gist of the rest of the essay is that the 're-montage' which generates it also implicates a possible future. The 'firefly' which Didi-Huberman encourages us to seek is also conceived as a 'projectile' – a 'boule de feu' – capable of briefly and transiently transgressing the 'horizon' of a radiant, or crushing, authoritarian or apocalyptic light. In developing this argument Didi-Huberman's primary apocalyptic target is Agamben rather than Pasolini, and the images – the 'boule de feu' and others – which further enrich the firefly-figure owe most of their inspiration to Walter Benjamin – a founding influence on Didi-Huberman and Agamben alike. We will set them out briefly here, however, because it is essential to understand the full political implications which Didi-Huberman gives to 'firefly-moments', and because the metaphor has been so systematically associated with Pasolini in subsequent references to this text. Thus, moments of *survivance* are associated with Benjamin's fleeting images of messianic redemption which are able to «franchir l'horizon des constructions totalitaires»²⁵. Didi-Huberman also emphasises, against Agamben (and, incidentally, the *Articolo delle lucciole*), how Benjamin's declarations of finitude are always formulated as process: a falling value or a tendency to disappear, a descending trajectory converging on but never quite crossing the apocalyptic line at which disappearance becomes total. Processes which are developing can to some extent be acted upon, and Didi-Huberman emphasises particularly Benjamin's suggestion that we may «organiser le pessimisme» dans le monde historique en découvrant un «espace d'images» au creux même de «notre conduite» politique²⁶. In this gloss on Benjamin, fleeting images, in «leur immanence fondamentale»²⁷, offer a resource with which to resist apparently inevitable, predictable, projectable decline. They may, indeed, have

²⁴ Ivi, p. 55.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 101. Emphasis original.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 110.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the power to radically surprise us by unprogrammed movement: this time the resonant metaphor which Didi-Huberman adds to his developing firefly-figure is from Lucretius, who describes the moment when «un atome bifurque légèrement de sa trajectoire parallèle pour qu'il entre en collision avec les autres, d'où naîtra un monde»²⁸. 'Organising pessimism' involves an ever-vigilant alertness to such instants of collision, an ability to seize the opportunities they offer and to perceive the worlds they open as they diverge from the linear projections of history. They may appear at any moment, and flicker only for an infinitesimal time, offering «Une "porte étroite" messianique que recèle "chaque seconde" de temps investi par la pensée»²⁹, a door no sooner open than it's closed. Thus Didi-Huberman employs his reading of Benjamin in order to project into the future the potential of the 'firefly-words', 'firefly-images', or 'firefly-moments' that he had previously seen as an encounter of past and present: «les "images-lucioles" peuvent être regardées, non seulement comme des *témoignages*, mais encore comme des prophéties, des *prévisions* quant à l'histoire politique en devenir»³⁰. They are not necessarily previsions of a radiant future, or even of a bearable one, but announcements of the non-inevitability of loss and destruction, with «leur faculté de faire apparaître le désir comme l'indestructible par excellence»³¹.

Didi-Huberman himself makes barely any mention of Pasolini in the last part of the book, and it has not been difficult for certain scholars of the Italian's work to argue that he detaches Pasolini from his re-organisation of resources too soon, and underestimates the latter's sensibility to *survivances* and to resistances³². Nonetheless reaction to the book indicates that for almost all readers it established an organic connection between Pasolini's writing and Didi-Huberman's; the fireflies of resistance which it evokes tend to be attributed to both, in an amalgam which may be strictly inexact but which has certainly contributed to re-inventing Pasolini as a dynamic referent.

2. Howard Caygill: Pasolini between past and future

It is a metaphor which reappears with particular resonance in Howard Caygill's *On Resistance* (2013), a reasoned history of the notion of resistance³³

²⁸ Ivi, p. 106.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 100. There is an irresistible echo here of the Pasolinian formulation «*Trasumanar e organizzar*». Although this is not the place to follow it up, it should be remembered that Didi-Huberman is not alone in associating Pasolini with Walter Benjamin: see for example A. Sichera, *La Consegnà del figlio: Poesia in forma di rosa di Pasolini*, Lecce 1997. More recently Alain Naze has offered a fascinating elaboration of the connections suggested by Didi-Huberman here, see A. Naze, *Ni liquidation, ni restauration de l'aura. Benjamin, Pasolini et le cinéma*, «Appareil», 2009. <http://appareil.revues.org/711> Consulted 1/8/15.

³⁰ G. Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles*, cit., p. 119.

³¹ Ivi, p. 133.

³² See for example A. Ricciardi, *Pasolini for the Future*, «*Californian Italian Studies*», 2, 1, 2011, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8v81z3sg>.

³³ «One of the most important and enduring expressions of twentieth-century political imagination and one ever more important in the struggles of the present century». H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit, p. 6.

by an eminent British political philosopher, which gives Pasolini a significant place among the examples it deals with. In his passage on Pasolini Caygill shows himself to have been considerably influenced by *Survivances des lucioles*, but he does not merely reproduce Didi-Huberman's analysis. Caygill's work is of interest here because of the political significance it gives to Pasolinian texts within a very wide frame of reference: although his reading is original and detailed it is not produced primarily for the benefit of specialists but as one version among others of a political concept in constant development. Equally interesting, however, is to trace the firefly-metaphor, to which Caygill gives great prominence in certain contexts, independently of its direct association with Pasolini: as we shall see, a re-montage of Caygill's work on those terms can lead us to some very intriguing political associations.

In his discussion of Pasolini, however, Caygill begins by distancing himself from Didi-Huberman's critique, accusing him of underestimating Pasolini's «commitment to resistance»³⁴. He offers as rapid evidence an overview of Pasolini's work, emphasising themes rather than linear developments: for example his interest in Gandhi, the importance of «bare life»³⁵, or the 'Socratic' dialogue the writer engaged with the *polis*. Caygill's first few paragraphs thus constitute a rapid catalogue of possible directions not followed, implicitly emphasising how selective is the approach that he eventually chooses to elaborate.

No doubt the selection is motivated in part by Pasolini's position in the book. The section on his work comes at the end of a chapter dedicated to different theorisations of resistance to 'total domination', mostly understood as historical Fascisms: Pasolini thus shares a chapter with Gramsci, Benjamin, the French Resistance, and Agamben, a philosophical context very comparable to Didi-Huberman's. By placing Pasolini at the *end* of this chapter, which is also the last dealing with 'historical' resistance movements and theories, Caygill frames him apocalyptically; the title of the section devoted to him, *Salò and the End of Resistance* seems decisive – and predictable, even as Caygill's combative opening contests this finality and predictability. Although Caygill's judgement of Pasolini's significance does sometimes revert to a traditionally pessimistic one, his reading of the texts is both wider and more complex than the section-title might suggest. After all, its position at the end of the 'historical' section of the book also gives it the vital role of transition to Caygill's final chapter, which deals with the contemporary, with change and with development.

The most fundamental feature of Pasolinian resistance, for Caygill, is that it is a «predicament»³⁶, a complex and difficult position rather than an action or series of actions. Resistance is a place to be rather than a thing to do, and its parameters must be constantly negotiated and re-thought, never taken for granted. By definition, therefore, it is dynamic and in development, and

³⁴ Ivi, p. 165.

³⁵ Caygill even claims (p. 166) that Pasolini preceded Agamben in the use of the term *homo sacer* in its modern context: he gives no reference however and I have been unable to locate the quote.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 169.

it makes no sense in those terms to decree its 'end': the process of negotiation which Caygill sees in Pasolini is sometimes radical enough however to involve a turn against itself, a 'resistance to resistance' whenever the concept seems to be solidifying into obvious forms. This argument is first elaborated through an extremely detailed, line-by-line analysis of the poem *La resistenza e la sua luce*³⁷, tracing how the unfading 'pure' light in the enthusiastic first part is shown in the second to be an illusion, an «incerta alba» which needs to be *thought*, not simply experienced. The reading is a compelling³⁸ development of Didi-Huberman's conception of total domination – be it by Fascism, capitalist neo-fascism, or a messianic perfect state – as pure and un-nuanced light in which fireflies become invisible: superimposing one argument on the other we extract the idea that 'resistance' conceived too idealistically or considered only as a form [*stile*], however wondrous an experience it may seem, becomes static and potentially oppressive and risks suffocating its most vital sparks, when it cannot be met with question or contradiction. *La Resistenza e la sua luce* ends with a tentative resolution in communist orthodoxy, but Caygill posits that the process of the poem itself renders almost inevitable that this too will be temporary.

It is in the (flickering) light of this analysis that Caygill then turns to ask, What can be done with the later Pasolini? Has he «abandoned» this active ambivalence in favour of «renunciation»³⁹, as Didi-Huberman would have it? Rather than following Didi-Huberman's strategy of «restoring the fireflies against Pasolini himself»⁴⁰, Caygill prefers to seek in *Salò* evidence that Pasolini's resistance is still a dynamic process, not a static abandonment. Observing that the firefly strategy – seeking out and valorising «moments of “firefly” intensity» within the film – is likely to be as futile in this context as those moments themselves are represented to be⁴¹, Caygill instead considers the idea that *Salò* itself represents a re-think of every element of Pasolini's prior resistant position(s). Against «a society of consumerism where desires themselves have become measurable and predictable objects of exchange»⁴², resistance 'by firefly' (understood here as a small, erotic spark) may have little impact, but resistance itself is as necessary as ever. Despite wishing to «dare[...] l'intera Montedison per una lucciola»⁴³, therefore, Pasolini's response is neither abandonment nor renunciation, but a determination, voiced in his last interview, to find forms of resistance effective in the here and now. «I pochi che hanno fatto la storia sono quelli che hanno detto di no»⁴⁴, he told Furio

³⁷ In P. P. Pasolini, *Bestemmia*, cit., pp. 472-3.

³⁸ Even if Caygill erroneously assumes the subject to be a child in the first part, the mistake proves revealing in representing its excitement as «childish».

³⁹ H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., p. 169.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p. 170.

⁴¹ The Didi-Huberman of *Peuples exposés*, as we shall see, is rather more sanguine about the effectiveness of such moments.

⁴² H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, p. 171.

⁴³ P. P. Pasolini, *1 febbraio 1975. L'articolo delle lucciole*, pp. 128-134, in Id., *Scritti corsari*, Milano 2001, p. 134.

⁴⁴ P. P. Pasolini, *Ma io continuo a dirvi che siamo tutti in pericolo* (1975), in Id., *Interviste corsare*, cit.

Colombo, but in order to say an effective no it is important not to, in his words, «prend[ere] l'orario ferroviario dell'anno scorso»⁴⁵. Caygill's conclusion is that *Salò* itself, in its aggressively unpleasurable existence, is a new act of resistance: the film testifies that the resistant predicament can still (just) be negotiated, albeit by «a *via negationis* which said no to everything except the unescapable fact that this negation was being staged in a resistant work of art»⁴⁶. Pasolini thus represents to the last a projection towards an unknown future resistance⁴⁷, and is an evidently logical choice as the last example of 'historical' resistance and as the bridge towards contemporary reformulations.

Unfortunately, when Caygill refers back to Pasolini from the chapter on the contemporary it is to lodge him, with Guy Debord, in the camp of the angry pessimists in order to throw contrasting light on the more forward-looking stance of Debord's colleague Raoul Vaneigem. Caygill thus finally espouses Didi-Huberman's assessment of the essential negativity of Pasolini's final position: certainly it indicates the urgency of finding new forms for sombre times, but it does not offer an indication of what those new forms might be. Caygill does not concur with Didi-Huberman in an attempt to resurrect the fireflies: in fact, he definitively abandons that metaphor in his final chapter⁴⁸. He has, however, found good use for it in other parts of the book, and I would like to make a small digression to hunt fireflies among Caygill's varied collection of resistances, a digression which yields interesting results.

3. Firefly Resistances: from Lenin to the Zapatistas

For Caygill, the firefly image is firstly Leninist. Discussing Lenin's distinction between 'resistance' and 'revolution', it takes form in his text unbidden, and leads the writer straight to Didi-Huberman:

The spontaneous beginnings of resistance are flickerings of a consciousness that emerges from the reactive and defensive postures of riot and sabotage. For Lenin these flashes of resistance [...] were 'more in the nature of outbursts of desperation and vengeance than of *struggle*' [...] Against Lenin's resolution of the flashes of resistance into the blazing light of revolutionary class-consciousness, subsequent Marxism (Benjamin, Bensaïd) has seen in the flashes and intermittencies of resistance an index of its messianic, irruptive character. Indeed, we shall see that for Georges Didi-Huberman

⁴⁵ Ivi, 294.

⁴⁶ H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., p. 174

⁴⁷ For another strong defence of this thesis, which relates Pasolini's stance closely to Walter Benjamin's, see A. Naze, *Ni liquidation, ni restauration de l'aura. Benjamin, Pasolini et le cinéma*, cit.

⁴⁸ It is still active however in contemporary debate on modes of resistance. For example as I was writing this article, *Libération* published an opinion-piece entitled *Penser le fragile et l'incertain en vue d'une société vive* [O. Frérot, L. Gwiazdzinski, «Libération», 29 juillet 2015, p. 22]. Neither Pasolini, nor Didi-Huberman, nor the firefly-metaphor was explicitly mentioned in it, but its declaration of the importance of the «nouvelles formes de mobilisation. Sur la Toile et dans les rues. Entre désobéissance, résistance et mobilisation citoyenne, [...] plastiques, malléables, et en transformation continue» uses a recognisably 'firefly-friendly' vocabulary and enters into this current of thought at least in its defence of transience.

in *Survivance des lucioles*, the flashes of resistance in the night of history are all we can have⁴⁹.

A few pages later, contrasting Lenin's approach to revolution with Rosa Luxemburg's, he once again mobilises Didi-Huberman's contrast between the immanent spontaneous and the great light on the horizon. The metaphor is so closely associated with Lenin's thought as to be implicitly attributed to him, and it is slightly surprising to find that, at least in the text which is Caygill's primary reference (*What is to be done?*), Lenin himself does not use it at all, beyond the passing reference to «flashes of consciousness»⁵⁰ which Caygill quotes. In fact he tends to reject metaphors of light with disapproval. The association of Didi-Huberman's firefly-figure to the kind of spontaneous resistance of which Lenin disapproved is thus Caygill's own contribution, and makes of Pasolini, tendentially, an anti-Leninist including in his nuancing of the 'pure light' in the poem which Caygill explores.

Apart from this direct reference, we find the firefly image once more in Caygill's text, in the writings of the Mexican Zapatista movement⁵¹. The Zapatistas are singled out in *On Resistance* in that they are the subject of detailed discussion on two separate occasions, first in the chapter on *Resistant Subjectivities* which still reads its subjects in the context of history⁵², then, in the final chapter, as potential callers to a resistant future⁵³. Caygill obviously considers their writings of considerable significance. It is therefore of interest to note that, while Caygill makes no association between them and Pasolini other than through the presence of the 'dancing stars', two other aspects of their texts to which he gives considerable space resonate immediately to anyone familiar with Pasolini's work, in ways which we will have reason to return to later when seeking readings of Pasolini in search of a new class-solidarity.

Firstly, there is the self-description of themselves as «the resistant dead», a phrase to which Caygill gives such importance that it figures as the title to his first section dealing with the movement. To quote one early use of this trope:

'Dying to Live' says 'enough' to the life of death – death from curable diseases, from poverty – accepting in its place the death in life of a resistant: [...] «We are ready

⁴⁹ H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., p. 45.

⁵⁰ V. I. Lenin, *What Is to be Done?* (1902), Letchworth, undated, p. 32. These three words are quoted by Caygill p. 45: otherwise, the darkness/ light metaphor is elaborated around rather than with quotes from the text. It is true that *Iskra*, the title of the journal Lenin wrote for at this time, means 'spark': but Caygill does not mention this implicit valorisation of the spontaneous 'flash'. One must also of course accept that metaphors may be lost in translation, but there seems little evidence of this.

⁵¹ A similar image of resistance as transient light (albeit in the violent form of a thunderbolt) appears, and is glossed, in Clausewitz who is one of Caygill's fundamental authors. All these instances, including Didi-Huberman's, are associated by Caygill to Nietzschean metaphors – an intriguing association which offers space for a challenging re-montage of Caygill's resistant history, although we do not have space to pursue it here.

⁵² H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., pp. 122-128.

⁵³ Ivi, pp. 183-6.

to die, 150 000 more if necessary, so that our people may awaken from this dream of deceit that holds us hostage»⁵⁴.

Caygill glosses this in terms of liberty: «The sense of no longer being hostage to life releases the resistant from the passive death in life or “reactionary suicide” of the vanquished Hegelian slave, but without re-entering the life-and-death struggle of the master and slave [...] By affirming death, by saying “enough”, the resistant is no longer hostage to the useless death in life and assumes the dignity of a resistant life without fear of death»⁵⁵. Clearly we are very close indeed to Pasolini’s radical definition of liberty in 1970: «Dopo averci ben pensato ho capito che questa parola misteriosa non significa altro, infine, nel fondo di ogni fondo, che ... “libertà di scegliere la morte”. E ciò, non c’è dubbio, è scandaloso, perché vivere è un dovere»⁵⁶.

Secondly, there is the list of those for whom the Zapatista movement speaks: «Behind our masks is the face of all excluded women/ Of all the forgotten indigenous/ Of all the persecuted homosexuals/ Of all the despised youth/ Of all the beaten migrants/ Of all those imprisoned for their words and thoughts/ Of all the humiliated workers/ Of all those dead from neglect./ Of all the simple and ordinary men and women/ Who don’t count/ Who aren’t seen/ Who are nameless/ Who have no tomorrow [...]»⁵⁷. The verse form invites an almost seamless edit: «diversità, mitezza e impotente violenza: /gli Ebrei, ... i Negri ... ogni umanità bandita»⁵⁸. Caygill describes this stance as a «Nietzschean strategy of becoming no one in order to become everyone»⁵⁹; a search for a ‘universal subject’ taken out of the realm of theory to attempt to negotiate a problematic place in practical action.

4. A new class-solidarity: representing the people in Didi-Huberman and others

If Caygill does not register either of these passages as connecting to Pasolini, the problems and the political potential of Pasolini’s identification with the excluded have certainly been recognised by others, and in 2003 Fabio Vighi brought them powerfully into contact with the radical definition of liberty in *Il Cinema impopolare*. We will return to Vighi’s extremely rich article at the end of this section. But for Didi-Huberman too Pasolini’s significance for the 21st-century is fundamentally connected with his engagement with «les peuples»,

⁵⁴ Subcomandante Marcos, *Dying in Order to Live*, in J. Ponce de León, *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*, New York 2001, p. 17. Quoted in H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., p. 126.

⁵⁵ H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., p. 128.

⁵⁶ P. P. Pasolini, *Il Cinema impopolare*, (1970), pp. 269-276, in Id., *Empirismo eretico*, Torino 2000, p. 269.

⁵⁷ Subcomandante Marcos, *Opening Remarks at the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism*, pp. 101-107, in J. Ponce de León, *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*, cit., p. 104. Quoted in H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., pp. 184-5.

⁵⁸ P. P. Pasolini, *La realtà*, pp. 649-665, in Id., *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie*, cit., p. 657.

⁵⁹ H. Caygill, *On Resistance*, cit., p. 184.

anonymous, powerless individuals in their subjectivity and in their community. This is the subject of *L'Oeil de l'histoire 4: Peuples exposés, peuples figurants*, a book which, as part of the vast research project which is *L'Oeil de l'histoire*, represents Didi-Huberman's principal interest in Pasolini inasmuch as his work contributes to the wider thesis which Didi-Huberman has been developing throughout the current decade.

L'Oeil de l'histoire attacks many different problems of representation and understanding, but its fourth part is concerned with the notion of human community, human individuality, human solidarity, and the ethics of representing human individuals in their individual and collective subjectivity. It is a knotty problem, which Didi-Huberman unfolds around the four words of his opening sentence: «les peuples sont exposés»⁶⁰. Who exactly is meant by 'les peuples', and in which of the multiple senses of the word is their 'exposition' most significant? 'Exposé', in French, can mean 'shown' or 'exhibited', and hence visible, but potentially in a very alienating way; it can mean presented in depth, with a view to clear understanding, as in the 'exposé' of a problem; or it can mean exposed to danger, or even disappearance – hence to inevitable invisibility. *L'Oeil de l'image*, as is evident from its title, is a search for a politics of visibility; disappearance is to be combated at all costs:

On aimerait bien, “âge des médias” aidant, que cette proposition veuille dire: les peuples sont plus visibles les uns aux autres qu'ils ne l'ont jamais été. Les peuples ne sont-ils pas l'objet de tous les documentaires, de tous les tourisimes, de tous les marchés commerciaux, de toutes les télé-réalités possibles et imaginables? On aimerait aussi pouvoir signifier, avec cette phrase, que les peuples sont aujourd'hui mieux «représentés» qu'autrefois, “victoire des démocraties” aidant. Et pourtant il ne s'agit, ni plus ni moins, que du contraire exactement: les peuples sont *exposés* en ce qu'ils sont justement menacés dans leur représentation – politique, esthétique –, voire, comme cela arrive trop souvent, dans leur existence même. Les peuples sont toujours *exposés à disparaître*. [...] Comment faire pour que les peuples s'exposent à eux-mêmes et non pas à leur disparition?⁶¹

The analogy is evident: we are dealing here with another avatar of the fireflies, in fact with that interpretation of them as «l'humanité par excellence» which Didi-Huberman had evoked in *Survivance*. At this point the question is not one of resistance except in the most basic sense in which it can be equated with survival, but in the final passages of the book which are devoted precisely to Pasolini, resistance-survival gears up into something more active and defiant.

What Didi-Huberman is seeking in *Peuples exposés* is a way to render visible a human reality which is simultaneously individual and part of a community, specific and representative, anonymous and universally significant. The search is fundamentally political: in fact it could be argued to be the *sine qua non* for any meaningful progressive politics. Gilles Deleuze, one of Didi-Huberman's great influences, had declared in 1985 that, as far as the modern cinema was

⁶⁰ G. Didi-Huberman, *L'Oeil de l'histoire 2: Peuples exposés, peuples figurants*, cit., p. 11.

⁶¹ *Ivi*, p. 11.

concerned, «le peuple n'existe plus, ou pas encore ... le peuple manque»⁶². In this circumstance, he continues:

Il faut que l'art, particulièrement l'art cinématographique, participe à cette tâche: non pas s'adresser à un peuple supposé, déjà là, mais contribuer à l'invention d'un peuple. Au moment où le maître, le colonisateur proclament "il n'y a jamais eu de peuple ici", le peuple qui manque est un devenir, il s'invente, dans les bidonvilles et les camps, ou bien dans les ghettos, dans de nouvelles conditions de lutte auxquelles un art nécessairement politique doit contribuer⁶³.

Peuples exposés in general, and the passages on Pasolini in particular, are an explicit attempt to respond to this challenge. True to his ethic of *survivances*, Didi-Huberman declines to espouse Deleuze's *fait accompli*, or – essentially – to dismiss the present relevance of earlier production 're-edited'. (Deleuze offers Eisenstein as an example of a 'pre-modern' film-maker who represented 'le peuple' in unanimous consent to a political moment: Didi-Huberman cites details of Eisenstein's work as exemplary in their attention to 'les peuples', the anonymous individuals who make up his crowds in their power and movement. For the former, *Potemkin* represents 'last year's train timetable' and its strategies belong to an irrecoverable past; for the latter, its images are part of the search for a present and future). But *Peuples exposés* is driven by the desire to identify a political art for peoples *en devenir*: or rather, adopting the phrase used by Agamben, 'communities to come' (the plural is essential). And Pasolini figures here in conclusive pride of place: as the final example⁶⁴, the closest Didi-Huberman can find to exemplary. In the 63 pages devoted to him many of the themes of the book are summarised.

This is not the apocalyptic Pasolini of *Survivance des lucioles*, although traces of the arguments of the earlier book are very apparent, and its conclusion returns to the need for 'firefly-representations', moments of resistant defiance produced by striking a spark from past and present. Here Didi-Huberman is concerned less with concepts than with representations, and it is Pasolini's contribution *as a visual artist* which interests him. He thus turns to the film-maker, not to the writer, and primarily to the early film-maker: *Accattone*, *La Ricotta* and *Vangelo* rather than the Trilogy or *Salò*.

What makes this cinema exemplary in Didi-Huberman's eyes is its politics and poetics of 'figurants' ('extras' in English), the non-professional proletarians of cinema, stereotypically 'human props', and yet individuals, neither wholly integrated in the pattern of the story nor entirely possessed by the world of cinema (as non-professionals, their lives take place in the vast world off-set). Didi-Huberman reminds us that the word 'figurants' contains 'figura', a vital (Auerbachian) concept for Pasolini and also for himself as art-historian. It is

⁶² G. Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps*, cit., p. 282.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 283.

⁶⁴ Apart from the epilogue which offers a close reading of a 2009 film by the Chinese director Wang Bing, which brings the arguments in the rest of the book into a context as near as possible contemporary.

as 'figura' that represented reality acquires not only visibility as documentary realism but also poetic significance and emotional engagement. The gist of Didi-Huberman's discussion of Pasolini's work is to show how and for what purpose the *figurant* becomes a *figura*, representing not only him or herself as individual but the condition of those peoples who have not yet vanished, but who are certainly exposed to danger.

The figurative strategies which he identifies as ensuring this complex significance relate to contact and contrast, an argument which soon develops into an emphasis on conflict. While he gives predictable importance to Pasolini's close-ups and his intense, physical attention to the presence of the most anonymous subjects, to his «"passion prédominante" [...], *l'amour de l'autre en tant que semblable*»⁶⁵ (which does not exclude desire, on the contrary), this does not develop into a Levinasian encounter with the Other but into an analytical position: «la "douloureuse douceur" du poète-enfant [...] devient *colère de la raison*»⁶⁶ through a constant representation of clashes and confrontation. Didi-Huberman, unsurprisingly, makes of Pasolini a great montagist, and of montage an access route *par excellence* to understanding (this, after all, is the theme of *L'Oeil de l'Histoire* in its entirety), through the confrontations which it engineers, within shots, between shots, and between image and sound.

Conflict is both a figurative strategy and an essential insight for honestly engaging with the precarious survival of marginal populations, where the pattern of confrontation sits ill with schematic or dogmatic assumptions. «L' "action" est à la fois globale et locale: son champ global est celui des *peuples* affrontés [...], son champ local est celui des corps affrontés et de leurs désirs toujours singuliers»⁶⁷; and the two fields of action are not necessarily in harmony, as we see, for example, in the interactions between the *figurants* in *La Ricotta*. Pasolini's use of contrasting montage is thus a means to represent a spiky, inconvenient human reality («une *mise en conflit des formes* dont l'enjeu politique n'est autre, justement, que la *mise en forme des conflits* où les peuples se trouvent impliqués»⁶⁸). While at the same time insisting upon the positive importance, the vitality and the emotional force which must be invested in this very intractability. The confrontations which Didi-Huberman is describing here are not the blind clashes of «strane macchine che sbattono l'una contro l'altra»⁶⁹. They pose challenges and strike sparks: «si faire du cinéma n'est rien d'autre que de composer un poème d'action, alors celui-ci ne fera rien d'autre que *faire danser les conflits*, c'est-à-dire exposer l'affrontement en tant que dialectique du désir et forme ultime de la beauté»⁷⁰. And particularly significant as a «mise en conflit des formes/ mise en forme des conflits» is the *creative anachronism*, for example that generated by the inseparable mixture of

⁶⁵ G. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés*, cit., pp. 204-5

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 207.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 182.

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 184.

⁶⁹ P. P. Pasolini, *Ma io continuo a dirvi che siamo tutti in pericolo*, in Id., *Interviste corsare*, cit., p. 294. Quoted, in French, by Didi-Huberman in *Peuples exposés*, p. 211.

⁷⁰ G. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés*, cit., p. 187.

religious art of the past and ragged Roman present in the tableaux of *La Ricotta* (a film which quite literally places the *figurant* at its sacred centre).

Thus we return to that vital feature of the firefly-image of the previous book: its transgression of linear time in a flash of insight which unites past and future. Introduced as a strategy to ensure to the *figurant* their value as *figura*, the superposition of different times soon develops into something much more important to Didi-Huberman: the *survivance* as resistance, as declaration of the people's continued presence against all the odds of the present time. With the previous book already in the public domain, Didi-Huberman's theoretical justification for concentrating on the early texts against Pasolini's own abjurations has been made clear. He can now unequivocally endorse Pasolini's work as a disseminator and purveyor of such defiant, and difficult, anachronisms: for example in the temporal tangle of antiquity, archetype, immediacy and revolutionary future which is *Vangelo*, in which Susanna Pasolini's mourning gestures belong to the Biblical story, to the continuous past of a peasant tradition documented by Ernesto de Martino, to her own past⁷¹ and to the most immediate present. In the end, it is once again through *survivances* that Didi-Huberman arrives at a political art for communities to come: the past for him must enter into any gesture of defiance against present danger: «toute décision politique concernant l'exposition des peuples se prendrait au moment même où la *survivance* (un symptôme) se fait *résistance* (un enjeu)»⁷². The raised fist of defiance of the young man in *Salò*, which Didi-Huberman firmly declines to dismiss as futile, thus becomes a «*défi de la douleur*» in which the representative individual – *figura* or *exemple* – can proclaim their existence as part of a future community.

The conclusion is not as optimistic as at first glance it may appear: Didi-Huberman gives the 'douleur' equal force with the 'défi', and any future community the films may contribute to inventing is still at risk, its becoming will not be easy. A rather similar conclusion is reached by Alain Naze regarding the effect of the close-ups of *figurants* in *Il Fiore delle mille e una notte*: on the one hand these image-encounters, unmistakable *survivances*, «aboutirai[en]t à une sorte de résurgence de l'aura, au beau milieu du film»⁷³: on the other, their present predicament leads to a salutary shattering of any aura of sacred reverie: «leur regard plongé dans la caméra rompt le fil du récit [...], les visages nous regardant apparaissant dans leur réalité corporelle prosaïque, misérable. Une réponse à ces regards bouleversants devient alors possible à travers cet *éveil*»⁷⁴.

Here, however, Naze touches on something essential which seems to me neglected in *Peuples exposés*, at least in its discussion of Pasolini: the matter of response. In the development of this new collective subject, where are *we*?

⁷¹ According to Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, quoting Ninetto Davoli, Pasolini asked her to remember her reaction to Guido's death for this scene. H. Joubert-Laurencin, *Pasolini, portrait du poète en cinéaste*, Paris 1995, p. 103-4.

⁷² G. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés*, cit., p. 229.

⁷³ A. Naze, *Ni liquidation, ni restauration de l'aura. Benjamin, Pasolini et le cinéma*, para 20.

⁷⁴ Ivi, para 22.

And, for that matter, where is Pasolini? «Si Pasolini a pour projet d'exposer les peuples, il doit s'exposer à eux»⁷⁵, Didi-Huberman points out, but for most of the discussion, and even the conclusion, artist and subject are separate: 'he' shows and 'they' are shown, while 'we', who watch the films or read the texts, are doubly distanced, observing at one remove with a largely impotent desire to participate⁷⁶. Pasolini's own conception, as set out in *Il cinema impopolare*, which Didi-Huberman quotes, is more radical: «il momento della lotta, quella in cui si muore, è al fronte»⁷⁷. This is not, or not only, a matter of exposure to the people, however much risk this latter confrontation may involve. The fight in question, in *Il cinema impopolare* is *with* and *for* the people, not (yet) identified in any way with 'the enemy'. It is a fight to the death, an absolute exposure, and it is a fight which engages the audience along with the artist, provided of course that it is a committed audience: «Lo spettatore è colui che comprende, che simpatizza, che ama, che si appassiona. Tale spettatore è altrettanto scandaloso che l'autore»⁷⁸. Audience and artist alike have accepted the 'freedom to choose death' with which the article opens, even if the audience's exposure is less absolute: they (we) may be *with* the artist, or, at a small distance, 'enjoying another's liberty', allowing the artist to be free *for* us, accepting the responsibility of understanding and transmitting the artist's action: «lo reinser[ire] nel parlabile»⁷⁹. The political art of the coming community, as conceptualised in *Il cinema impopolare*, brings artist, audience and marginalised peoples together on the frontline, indistinguishable in their exposure and their necessary commitment.

It is at this point that we may return to Fabio Vighi's 2003 article *Pasolini and Exclusion: Zizek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-Proletariat*⁸⁰, which goes perhaps further than any other text – certainly further than Didi-Huberman – in locating the *position* which Pasolini's work demands of a would-be contemporary political subject. His article, although centred particularly on *Accattone*, conjugates the two aspects of Pasolinian thought which we saw echoed in Caygill's account of the Zapatista movement: displacement of the centre towards the excluded margin, and an identification of subjective – and artistic – liberty with the ability to choose death. It is the latter, in Vighi's analysis, which ensures the revolutionary potential of the former. A Pasolinian position in fact goes well beyond a «defence of the excluded as underprivileged», to embrace «his determination to refer to the excluded as the universal human beings»⁸¹ too fundamental to be dismissed either as a lost primitive nobility nor as one difference among others. Pasolini's identification with the sub-proletariat of the 60s, and later with *ogni umanità bandita*, is, Vighi argues, a 'bet' – almost a Pascalian bet – that its 'indigestibility'

⁷⁵ G. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés*, cit., p. 198

⁷⁶ Id., *Survivances des lucioles* offers the reader a more active position, since it demands that the elusive firefly-moments be both sought and responded to.

⁷⁷ P. P. Pasolini, *Il Cinema impopolare*, cit., p. 274.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 271. Emphasis original.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ F. Vighi, *Pasolini and Exclusion: Zizek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-Proletariat*, cit., pp. 99-121.

⁸¹ Ivi, p. 103.

by the current social order is so radical as to have the potential to fracture that social order: it is a form of the Lacanian ‘real’, a void at the heart of the social structure, a ‘hard kernel’ of inaccessibility⁸². To seek a position within it is to accept that there can be no resolution to the search: one cannot exist in the real any more than in the black hole at the heart of a vortex. Thus a Pasolinian political position must be radically unstable, but this need not be problematic, it simply reflects an «understanding of life as an endless process of change rather than as a static structure»⁸³. Accattone becomes the representative or universal subject – the *symptom*, in Vighi’s terms, borrowed from Žizek, but one could also consider Agamben’s ‘example’ or Didi-Huberman’s *figura* –, inasmuch as he is *not* contented and fully integrated even in his own marginal social space. «Accattone’s “sacredness” does not designate a condition of positive fullness outside the social contract, the ideal status of the modern-day *bon sauvage*, but, quite differently, the non-symbolizable fracture constitutive of both subjectivity and the socio-symbolic network»⁸⁴; and in the realisation that he is *neither* fully realised by the slum existence he lives in *nor* integrable into the world of work, «Accattone chooses freedom as “*libertà di scegliere la morte*”»⁸⁵. The political artist, his committed audience, and the people who must be represented as the community to come are thus identified, interchangeably, as those who share this desperately unstable position at the front-line, constantly at the edge of the void. «The emergence of social antagonism, or, in more appropriately political terms, class struggle»⁸⁶ depends, according to Vighi, on this position and this commitment.

Conclusion

Georges Didi-Huberman’s engagement with Pasolini has offered a particularly fruitful re-assessment of the potential uses which can be made of his legacy, not only because the ‘firefly-figure’ developed in *Survivances des lucioles* has proved to be a genuinely inspiring image for re-formulating a concept of resistance, but because the process of elaborating it has provided a theoretical underpinning for re-explorations of the films and texts of the 50s and 60s which Pasolini himself considered superseded, at least politically, but which when *re-edited* into the current context may offer unsuspected points of resistant light. This opens the way for a redeployment of Pasolini in political theory outside the now rather tired field of lament for neo-capitalist hegemony, and also for a selective re-use of texts as and when they seem promising for a progressive politics, in the lucid understanding that they offer a resource for interpretation

⁸² Another author who associates the Lacanian real with Pasolini’s work in search of a possible revolutionary position is Alain Badiou: A. Badiou, *A la recherche du réel perdu*, Paris 2015. His formulation seems to us however to be less satisfactory than Vighi’s, and his readings of Pasolini’s texts (*Le Ceneri di Gramsci* and *Vittoria*) rely on some contextual misunderstandings.

⁸³ F. Vighi, *Pasolini and Exclusion: Žizek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-Proletariat*, cit., p. 119.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 117.

⁸⁵ Ivi, p. 113.

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 118.

and not a seal of authoritative approval. The majority of the texts considered here were not primarily written as Pasolinian exegesis, and all accept responsibility that the conclusions they draw from their readings are their own. They are, as we have seen, notably dynamic, emphasising a conception of political action as a constantly changing response to an unstable, but always dangerous, status quo. What constants there are relate to Pasolini's commitment to marginality, not as a potentially stable alternative establishment but precisely because of its instability: it is on the frontline, at the point where the tolerance of the social structure fails, that a point of revolutionary potential, but also of simple human need, demands attention and offers a desperate spark of hope.

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