

OEDIPUS AT OUARZAZATE: PERFORMING FAILURE AS POST-COLONIAL RESISTANCE IN DAUD AOULAD-SYAD'S *WAITING FOR PASOLINI*

Of Pier Paolo Pasolini's films, *Edipo re* (*Oedipus Rex*, 1967), a visionary adaptation of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, is certainly the most literal exercise of regression.² In this film, regression is mainly suggested by breaking linear temporality. Pasolini superimposes Oedipus' ancient Greece and the fascist Italy of his own youth. Therefore, myth and autobiography, history and meta-history, all coalesce into a somewhat didactic Freudian visual body, which lives between two different regressive dimensions. Only at the end of the movie, when Oedipus' tragedy has reached its peak, does Pasolini interrupt linear temporality once again, plunging us into the present. Not our present as today's spectators, but Pasolini's present as he was directing the film in 1966. It is an abrupt interruption, which connects the idea of regression developed in the movie with the intellectual and artistic crisis that Pasolini was experiencing in the mid-sixties. In the last scenes of the film, Oedipus is portrayed as a blind poet in 1966 Bologna, unable to recognize and decipher the reality that surrounds him anymore. Once king of Thebes, he has become a misfit, a marginalized other, a foreign body in the new Italian society. Thus Oedipus' blindness, the dark landscape of confusion and alienation he inhabits, becomes also a metaphor for Pasolini's uncertain intellectual role within the new context of neocapitalist Italy. By manipulating the metaphorical darkness that comes from the mythical past, he indeed presents his political and social critique of the present. And yet there is another way to interpret darkness, namely as the metaphor for the aesthetics of Pasolini's new intentionally obscure cinema.

In a remarkably dense 1970 essay later included in *Empirismo eretico*, he offers a disorienting yet simultaneously illuminating description of his new kind of experimental cinema, which he calls unpopular.³ Pasolini's unpopular cinema opposes mass culture and the clarity and transparency of his early cinema, which had been inspired by the Gramscian notion of *nazional-popolare* and sustained by the belief that the intellectual could still represent a link between ideology and popular masses. In proposing his new aesthetics under the sign of obscurity, Pasolini does not view darkness as limitation, but – as Daphne Brooks claims in her *Bodies in Dissent* – as 'an interpretive strategy', a different way of reading reality from a particularly dark position. Such a reading challenges our tendency to resort to the clearness, coherence, and rationality that the Capital proposes as fundamentally positive to production and subject

1 I would like to thank my Ph.D. student, Zoe Kemp, for the invaluable copyediting assistance.

2 In the aftermath of this film, Pasolini would refine and complicate his exercise of regression; particularly with the barbaric and unsettling beauty of *Medea* (1969), and the pansexual orientalism of *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* (1974). For *Medea* see Massimo Fusillo, 'Introduzione' and 'Medea: un conflitto di culture', in *La Grecia secondo Pasolini* (Rome: Carocci, 2007). For *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* see in particular Joseph Allen Boone, 'Homo-Orientalism on Screen', in *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 413-422.

3 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'The Unpopular Cinema', *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. by Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2005), pp. 267-275.

formation.⁴ *Edipo re* is indeed the first example of Pasolini's obscure and often opaque 'unpopular cinema'. Through it he also presents a new kind of intellectual and author. Such an author seems to have a lot in common with the kind of queer artist described by Jack Halberstam in his *The Queer Art of Failure*. In Halberstam's words, the queer artist 'works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness', so that accepting the positive potential of failure turns it into a possible tactic for political autonomy in the context of the struggle against the capitalist system, based on the symbolic and ruthless logic of losers and winners.⁵ In order to dramatize and make more explicit the dialectic of success and failure in Oedipus' story, Pasolini creates a scene that is not present in Sophocles' text. In this scene, Oedipus and some friends are playing javelin in a field near Corinth. When Oedipus covers the greatest distance of all, he waves his 'victorious' javelin in the air, and 'he laughs triumphantly'. He is a winner. Also when they move on to a discus throw competition, Pasolini makes it clear that failing is not an option for Oedipus

Oedipus takes off like a bolt of lightning, reaches the spot first and has a look: the discus has landed only a hair's breadth short of his enemy's mark. As deft as a thief, with the tip of his foot, he pushes the discus past the twig, at the same time shouting, jumping up and down and dancing, as if to conceal the shady movements of his foot.

OEDIPUS: I've won! I've won!

And without waiting for the others, still like a bolt of lightning, he sprints across to the group of girls, screaming:

OEDIPUS: Here you are, crown me, give me the crown of oak. I'm the winner!⁶

This scene, with its stress on Oedipus' obsession with victory, sets the tone for the tragedy of his later existential defeat. Ultimately, Pasolini conceives of Oedipus' story as a progressive performance of failure, paralleling his own intellectual trajectory.⁷ Like him, Oedipus fails at understanding reality: his is a tragedy of knowledge. After his visit to the Delphic sanctuary of Apollo and the horrific response of the oracle, Oedipus seems to recognize nothing: 'He walks at random, cutting through the crowd and gazing at the objects one after another as his eyes come to rest on them. These are the faithful and mysterious symbols of a reality which eludes him'.⁸ In a similar way, after witnessing the dramatic changes in 1960s Italy and the failure of the ideals that animated the immediate post-war years, Pasolini no longer believes in his ability as an author to directly represent a reality that eludes him. Therefore he turns to unconventional techniques, exposing himself to the risk of potential artistic failure. For instance, in *Edipo re* he creates extreme *contre-jour* effects by pointing the camera directly toward the sun. On the one hand, if considered from the point of view of conventional cinematography, the resulting blinding effect is disastrous. On the other, these failed shots brilliantly convey the sense of Oedipus' slow descent into darkness.

In the following pages I will not engage directly with Oedipus' story, but with its role in determining Pasolini's legacy today. If failure is one of the conceptual operative categories that

4 Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 109.

5 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 96.

6 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Oedipus Rex*, trans. by John Mathews (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p. 31.

7 On the significance of the concepts of '(queer) performance' and 'failure' in Pasolini, see Manuele Gagnolati, *Amor che move. Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2013), pp. 35-67.

8 Pasolini, *Oedipus Rex*, p. 45.

Pasolini uses in *Edipo re* to discuss his new function as an artist, what theoretical function does it assume when re-territorialized in a different cultural context? To put it simply, what can we do with Pasolini's art of failure today? In order to answer this question, I will propose a reading of Pasolini's film in a non-Western cinematographic context, by focusing on a 2007 Moroccan film by Daoud Aoulad-Syad, entitled *Fi Ntidbar Pasolini (Waiting for Pasolini)*. By reading *Edipo re* through Aoulad-Syad's film, I will suggest that Pasolini's performance of failure can be transformed into a practice of resistance when productively and creatively linked to post-colonial awareness.

Born in 1953 in Marrakech, Daoud Aoulad-Syad grew up in the medina of Jmaa El Fna. A former Physics professor at Mohamed V University in Rabat, he developed an interest in photography when he was a doctoral student in Paris after seeing an exhibit of Henri Cartier-Bresson's work. In 1989, after a prestigious career as a photographer and the publication of *Marocains*, a book of black and white street photography,⁹ he began to make short films and documentaries. It was only ten years later, in 1998, that he realized his first feature film, *Adieu Forain*, based on the story of a young female impersonator who dances with a group of travelling showmen. To date, Aoulad-Syad has directed five internationally award-winning films dealing with some of the most pressing subjects in Moroccan society.¹⁰ The explicit queer subject of his debut film and his later interest in Pasolini invite us to consider Aoulad-Syad a particularly interesting example of an African queer filmmaker.

Waiting for Pasolini, winner of the Best Arab Film at the Cairo International Festival, stands as an excellent case of the 'social-realist style' that – according to Valérie K. Orlando – characterizes contemporary Moroccan cinematography.¹¹ Moroccan filmmakers working within the context of the contemporary social-realist genre openly criticize the limitations of traditionalism and Western modernity. In particular, according to film scholar Manthia Diawara, they “often use a traditional position to criticize and link certain forms of modernity to neocolonialism and cultural imperialism.”¹² In *Waiting for Pasolini*, Aoulad-Syad does exactly this by addressing the neocolonialist aspect of today's Moroccan film industry.

The movie is set in a small and poor Moroccan village near Ouarzazate, where, in 1966, Pasolini shot most of his *Edipo re*, using the bare terracotta landscape and the intense faces of the Maghreb to recreate his imaginary and barbaric ancient Greece. Located on the border of the desert, Ouarzazate became an important center for international film productions following Morocco's independence from France (1956). Cost of labor and extras was cheap, and the stunning scenery and dreamy *kasbahs* provided the perfect backdrop for Hollywood films such as *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Kundun*, *Gladiator*, and an endless number of sword-and-sandal and Bible films. Although in the wake of independence Morocco's national cinema was meant to contribute to national consciousness within the process of decolonization, the capital brought by the Western film productions soon introduced neo-colonialist dynamics. From this point of view, Ouarzazate is the perfect embodiment of 'third space', one of Indian postcolonial

9 Daoud Aoulad-Syad, *Marocains* (Paris: Belvisi, 1989).

10 *Adieu Forain* (Bye-bye Sourty, 1998), *Aoud Rib* (The Wind Horse, 2001), *Tarfaya* (2003), *Fi Intidar Pasolini* (Waiting for Paolini, 2007), *A Jamaâ* (The Mosque, 2010). Aoulad-Syad realized also two short films: *Entre l'absence et l'oubli* (Between Absence and Oblivion, 1993), *Mémoire ocre* (Ocher Memory, 1989).

11 See Valérie K. Orlando, *Francophone Voices of the "New" Moroccan in Film and Print. (Re)presenting a Society in Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), and Valérie K. Orlando, *Screening Morocco. Contemporary Film in a Changing Society* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).

12 Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 141.

scholar Homi Bhabha's key concepts. Its fake Egyptian temples, Buddhist stupas, and Roman ruins coexisting with the ancient and beautiful architecture of the Berber *kasbahs* render Ourzazate's studios a postcolonial cultural space created by 'the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures—a space where, according to Bhabha, 'the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences'.¹³ In Aoulad-Syad's film, this is particularly visible in the characters of the Muslim extras, who are forced by financial need to play the roles of Christians and Jews in films they will most certainly never see. In a short dialogue between two of them, Aoulad-Syad suggests ironically that the cultural context in which the Moroccan extras act is even linguistically alienating: EXTRA 1: 'Once I only worked two days in a movie about Zizi, because I had some lines'. EXTRA 2: 'Don't you get it? It is not pronounced "Zizi". It's "Jesus". You have been an extra for years and you still can't say "Jesus" correctly!'. When we see some of the characters desperately rehearsing their lines in Italian, without any clue of what they are actually saying, it becomes clear that for the people of Ourzazate even the language of the foreign films represents a meaningless tongue. It is a language removed from reality, to be repeated mechanically, as in an act of complete neo-colonial submission, void of any subjective agency.

Ali Essafi (1963), one of the most prolific and awarded documentary filmmakers in Morocco, cannily exposed the borderline existence of Ourzazate's extras in his 2001 documentary *Ourzazate Movie*. Specifically, he focused on the imbalance between the international film industry and the dire economic reality of the locals, following the lives of some of the people that also appear in *Waiting for Pasolini*. Along with Pasolini's *Edipo re*, Essafi's documentary was in fact the main inspiration for Aoulad-Syad, who literally restaged some of Pasolini's and Essafi's scenes in his own film, thus creating a hybrid meta-movie, half fiction and half reality, with the goal of representing Western cinema as an exploitative, neo-colonialist power.

Waiting for Pasolini opens with the protagonist, an older man named Thami, excited to hear that an important Italian film will be produced in his village. As a boy, he worked as Pasolini's personal assistant during the *Edipo re* shoot, and he has convinced himself that his friend is finally coming back. Thami has developed a true veneration for the Italian director, whom he sees as 'a communist intellectual committed to the poor's cause', as one of the last representatives of a cinema of ideas that has no place anymore in the present world. I would suggest that through Thami, Oulad-Syad offers an embodiment of the relatively recent concept of 'celebrity colonialism', an expression coined by British journalist Brendan O'Neill in a 2006 article.¹⁴ Although Pasolini was indeed a harsh critic of colonialist power, the mere idea that this famous director might be on his way back to Ourzazate appears in Thami's eyes as possibly redemptive for his people, who get wildly excited about the generous amount of money that the Italian filmmaker is about to bring to the community. Their reaction clearly shows 'the reactionary effects of celebrity in postcolonial culture',¹⁵ where Western celebrity essentially means a form of economic and thus symbolic power exercised over a subaltern world. The fact that Thami knew Pasolini and was able to build his own house with the Italian director's money is enough to turn him into a local celebrity himself, so that everyone in the

13 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 218.

14 Brian O'Neill, 'Brad, Angelina and the Rise of "Celebrity Colonialism"', *Spiked*, 30 May (2006).

15 Robert Clarke (ed.), *Celebrity colonialism: fame, power and representation in colonial and postcolonial cultures* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p. 6.

village asks for his help in securing a role as an extra in the upcoming Italian film. When an old friend that worked with him on the set of *Edipo re* informs Thami that Pasolini was killed over thirty years before, he is shocked by the belated news. The scene of this exchange between the two men is particularly important. On the one hand, it underlines the cultural isolation of rural Morocco—significantly, at the beginning of the movie, Thami tries installing a satellite antenna to no avail. On the other, it represents the first example of transcultural negotiation in the film. Here is how Thami’s friend describes Pasolini’s death:

FRIEND: They stabbed him but he didn’t die. So they cracked his head open, but he didn’t die. Then they decided to run him over with a car... He was unrecognizable.

THAMI: But why?

FRIEND: He was a communist. He was completely naked. Only a fine *djellaba* covered his nudity.

The imaginary reference to the *djellaba*, the Arab-Berber traditional long robe, queers the Western filmmaker’s body, which becomes a site of cultural inscription, a space where meaning can be negotiated. Metaphorically, as I will show, it is the same operation that Aoulad-Syad performs on Pasolini’s *Edipo re*.

Despite the disconcerting news, when Thami returns to the village he tells the members of the community that Pasolini is really coming back to direct the new Italian film and – just as he did forty years before with *Edipo Re* – he will hire everybody and bring wealth to the entire village, without exploiting them. The reason Thami lies, as he confesses at one point, is that he wants them ‘to believe in something,’ but ultimately his lie serves only to set the mechanism of failure into motion. Pasolini’s impossible arrival becomes the metaphor for an inactive Third World that passively waits for the West to send support and hope. The tragic and absurd quality of such a metaphor is underlined by the titular reference to Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, a play about two men who wait for someone named Godot, who never comes.

Aoulad-Syad’s use of the absurdist play in a post-colonial context recalls a 2007 short story by Nigerian writer Epaphras C. Osondu. In his remarkable ‘Waiting’, winner of the 2009 Caie Prize for African Writing, Osondu portrays Africa’s similarly vain and endless wait for salvation by the West. The protagonist of his story is a child named Orlando Zaki. Orlando, we are told at the beginning, ‘is taken from Orlando, Florida, which is what is written on the t-shirt given to [him] by the Red Cross’.¹⁶ He lives in a refugee camp, and after a nun gives him a copy of *Waiting for Godot* to read, he establishes a striking parallel between Beckett’s play and the life in the camp:

the people in the book are waiting for God to come and help them. Here in the camp, we wait and wait and then wait some more. It is the only thing we do. We wait for the food trucks to come and then we form a straight line and then we wait a few minutes for the line to scatter, then we wait for the fight to begin, and then we fight and struggle and bite and kick and curse and tear and grab and run. And then we begin to watch the road and wait to see if the water trucks are coming.¹⁷

Similarly, in Oulad-Syad’s film, the protagonists are waiting for a cinema that literally comes from the West. ‘The cinema has arrived’ is what people of the village shout at the beginning of the film, as clouds of dust rise from afar. The director underlines the idea of this constant waiting by dwelling on the extras selection process, which consists of endless lines, discriminations based on skin color and physical features, and of course idle repetition of

16 Epaphras C. Osondu, ‘Waiting’, in *Voice of America* (New York: Harper, 2010), p. 1.

17 Osondu, *Voice of America*, p. 2.

Italian lines. As the people of the village wait behind a chain-link fence to be selected by the casting director, they appear unaware of their financial and cultural oppression. They just want to be hired, no matter by whom, or for what. This idea is confirmed also by the lyrics of a song, with a traditional Berber tune, used as a sort of soundtrack for the film: ‘If it brings us money, we are for Socialism. And for Communism, if it brings us money. If it brings us money. Pasolini, good man. Pasolini, good man, we want to work for you, and fill our pockets with money. We are for Capitalism, if it brings us money’. These lyrics confirm that Pasolini’s project to locate an archaic pureness and uncontaminated popular culture outside the conforming system of Western capitalism (‘Africa! / My sole alternative’, he wrote in a 1961 poem)¹⁸ has not only failed, but it was never more than an illusion, like the tacky sets of Ourzazate.

Just like Oedipus brought the plague to Thebes after giving the illusion of having liberated it from the Sphinx, in Oulad-Syad’s mind the West fails at offering a permanent solution to the problems of developing countries. Indeed, when the Italian film crew suddenly informs the villagers that the production is suspended, despair – like a plague – falls over the village. This is the moment in which *Waiting for Pasolini* begins engaging fully and meta-cinematographically with *Edipo re* and its director. In a sequence that is fundamental to Oulad-Syad’s post-colonial reading of the film, Pasolini appears on the screen in the role of the high priest who addresses Oedipus on behalf of the community: ‘we implore you on bended knees: find us a remedy, no matter what...Oedipus, the best man, give life back to us a second time’¹⁹ (FIG. 1). This sequence is evoked three times in *Waiting for Pasolini*, assuming a pivotal role in the narrative. The first time we just hear the high priest’s monologue after Thami has decided to lie about the death of Pasolini. As Thami is looking at some old photographs of *Edipo re*’s production, he puts on the headpiece that Pasolini was wearing when he played the high priest. The headpiece, an artwork of straw and seashells designed by Danilo Donati, stands metonymically for the archaic beauty of mythical Greece as envisioned by the Italian filmmaker. Like the *djallaba* on Pasolini’s dead body, it generates a corporeal site for cultural negotiation. The second time, Thami is with some friends at the local barber shop, where they re-play the scene of the high priest’s monologue on a small TV set. As they are watching, they try to identify the extras: one spectator is almost brought to tears by the sight of his dead father, and another recognizes his former lover. The regressive past of Oedipus’ story does not exist in their eyes; rather, what they see in *Edipo re* is their own past, much as Pasolini did. In their minds, there is no filter between fiction and reality—the people of Thebes are in fact their own people.

The last time we are presented with the scene in question is after the truth about Pasolini’s death has been revealed. Turning the cinematographic fiction into real life, Thami takes on the role once played by Pasolini and, like the high priest, addresses the Italian film’s production company that has brought catastrophe to the village. Donning the same headpiece discussed above, Thami reenacts the scene that by this point we have already experienced twice, in a gradation from sound, to image, to actual embodiment. Followed by the people of Ourzazate, he walks solemnly toward the Italians, who are standing on a set of stairs as Oedipus was in the original scene (FIG. 2). Then he delivers in broken Italian a modified version of the original monologue, suggesting that the

18 Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘To Death: A Fragment’, in *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, trans. By Stephen Sartarelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 299.

19 Ibid., 63.



FIG. 1 Pasolini playing the High Priest. *Edipo re* (1967). Arco Film, Somafi.



FIG. 2 Thami playing Pasolini's role. Daoud Aoulad-Syad, *Fi Ntidbar Pasolini (Waiting for Pasolini)*, 2007). Films du Sud, Soread-2M, Vidéorama.

language of the occupying power can indeed become a means of self-conscious expression when creatively appropriated. In Frantz Fanon's terms, Thami has become a native intellectual, he who feels the need 'to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people and to become mouth-piece of a new reality in action'.²⁰ At the beginning, Thami addresses Pasolini directly: 'With your arrival in the village, you brought us sphinxes [...] Pasolini, our master, we implore you, find us a remedy'. On the one hand the scene shows the difficulty the post-colonial subject has in overcoming his Oedipal complex in relation to Western culture. On the other, it provides a precise reading of the original scene, revealing the theoretical function of failure in *Edipo re*. Thami's performance suggests that in taking on the role of the high priest, Pasolini had in fact established a connection between his authorial figure and the notion of failure. Specifically, Pasolini presented the impotence of the traditional or organic intellectual, conceived as a moral guide and representative of the community. Pasolini's monologue is a performance of failure in that it acknowledges the impossibility of understanding and modifying reality, and Oulad-Syad appropriates it as such in the post-colonial context of his film.

By superimposing Pasolini's body on his own, as if it were a *djallaba*, Thami allows for a reevaluation of the critical potential of Pasolini's own performance of failure in *Edipo re*. In fact, in addressing Pasolini as if he were alive, Thami's becomes an impossible discourse, through which a post-colonial subject, accustomed to being denied speech, manifests his dissenting, incoherent voice. Thami's is thus a calculated exercise of failure, which in Oulad-Syad's eyes represents the only viable oppositional tool to the apparent rational discourse of the neo-colonial Western capital. We can consider it an example of 'the weapons of the weak' described by James C. Scott in his study of peasant resistance.²¹ It is resistance that doesn't rely on the conformism of common sense, that is – in Gramscian terms – on accepting the hegemonic discourse and its norms. On the contrary, it employs some of the main categories described by Halberstam in his *The Queer Art of Failure*, namely the impossible, the improbable, and the unlikely. Thami's radical refusal to cohere and his disarming stubbornness build to an unexpected climax in the final part of his monologue, when he addresses the Italians directly:

THAMI: I will tell you something that you don't want people to know. You are afraid of Pasolini, because he is a communist. We are not afraid of communism. Give us communism! Give us socialism! Give us capitalism! Give us something! You have brought here everything. We are in darkness. You took from us the man we care for, the one who would bring us some light. What do you want? You want our death. Come on! We were always good to you. We respect you. But you, you are looking for troubles. I'm going to tell you this: I will not move from here until Pasolini arrives.

FILM ASSISTANT: This is just temporary. They are leaving to fix their problem and they will come back. If they won't come back, you and the village will loose. Who lost his money? You or them? Who will be worried? You or them? You [*to the crowd*], you only want to eat! Go home and wait! There's nothing for you to do here. And you, Thami, be careful of what you do.

This exchange presents us with two different kinds of failure. On the one hand there is the unproductive failure of Capitalism, by which loss is only understood as shortage of capital.

20 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. By Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963. 2002), p. 223.

21 See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).

On the other, we have the productive failure created by Thami's speech, who, despite knowing the truth, insists upon denying Pasolini's death, and therefore reality. In doing so, he actively claims for himself a position within the darkness characterizing the queer intellectual, a category into which Pasolini-Oedipus also falls. Thami opposes and resists the deadly kind of darkness imposed by the Western economic and cultural power ('We are in darkness') with the performance of his destabilizing blindness to reality. Said performance articulates modalities of resistance and protest that draw attention to the epistemic violence of the neo-colonial discourse, which imposes total passivity on its subjects, a condition of eternal wait, like the one described in Osondu's short story: 'Go home and wait'. Symbolically, *Waiting for Pasolini* obliges us to face a utopian rejection of pragmatism, a stubborn denial of the social norms to which the subaltern subjects are supposed to conform. If in Pasolini's *Edipo re*, Oedipus' blindness represented the artist's ability to perceive poetically 'in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot', Thami as well can be conceived of as an embodiment of Giorgio Agamben's definition of the contemporary: someone 'who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light but rather its darkness'.²² In his film, Oulad-Syad demonstrates that Pasolini's body of work, and in particular his engagement with a poetics of failure, still holds a transformative utopian potential. He reminds us that Pasolini remains a contemporary, well beyond the dry mud walls of Thebes, and the mulberry rows of his childhood Friuli.

Gian Maria Annovi
(University of Southern California)

²² Giorgio Agamben, 'What Is the Contemporary?', in *Nudities*, trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 13.