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Reanimating *Saint Paul*: From the Literary to the Cinematographic Stage

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Abstract

In several of his writings on the relation between film and language, Pasolini discusses the possibility of a moment in which a screenplay can be considered an autonomous object, “a work complete and finished in itself.” In the first part of this essay, I will reflect on the concept of the screenplay in a larger context and more specifically, Pasolini’s writings on the ontological status of the screenplay as a “structure that wants to be another structure.” The case of *Saint Paul* is thought-provoking, precisely because this original screenplay was never turned into an actual film. Despite this, Pasolini argues that the screenplay invites – or perhaps even forces – its reader to imagine, to visualize, the film it describes. Pasolini’s ideas on the function of language as a means to conjure up images are central to this act of visualization. In the second part of this essay, I will attempt an act of visualization. This endeavor to visualize *Saint Paul* as a possible film is hinged upon a careful reading of the screenplay. I analyze the opening and closing sequences outlined in the screenplay to visualize the possible filmic expression of its protagonist Paul.

Keywords

Pasolini – screenplay – film – semiotics – adaptation

The problem with the screenplay is that it’s not literature, and it’s not a film. It’s a very weird, technical kind of blueprint that will be absolutely

transformed into something else that is not that, you know? Honestly, a screenplay is no literature.

ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU¹



Iñárritu's deliberation on the problematic status of the screenplay provides a good starting point for this essay. The director and screenwriter expresses his frustration with the screenplay's ambiguous ontological status: neither film (yet), nor literature. Also, he speaks of the "weird, technical" nature of the screenplay, which presupposes a skilled reader who can decode it. Most telling, though, is Iñárritu's observation that it "will be absolutely transformed into something else that is not that." This final observation is crucial here, since the transformative powers of the screenplay are a subject of Pasolini's writings on cinema. Iñárritu's frustration with the screenplay, a crucial aspect of the production of any film, mostly refers to the problems one can encounter with "something" that will become "something else" (on the condition that the "technical blueprint" is understood correctly, he adds). However, not all screenplays are eventually transformed into films, as is the case with *Saint Paul*.

In the first part of this essay, I will reflect on the concept of the screenplay, in order to make sense of *Saint Paul*, specifically within the oeuvre of Pasolini. Furthermore, the screenplay invites – or perhaps even forces – its reader to imagine, to visualize, the film it describes. Therefore, in the second part of this essay, I will analyze the opening and closing sequences outlined in the screenplay to visualize the possible filmic expression of the screenplay's protagonist Paul.

The Screenplay as an Autonomous, Literary Object

In his foreword to Elizabeth Castelli's new translation of *Saint Paul*, Alain Badiou praises Pasolini's screenplay not as an unfinished and unrealized work of film, "but [as] a literary work of the first magnitude."² Badiou's remark alludes to a long-standing debate in film theory and screen writing discourse, that of

1 A. Karpel, "Alejandro González Iñárritu: Rules for a Successful Collaboration," *Fast Company*, Feb. 23, 2015. Accessible at <<https://www.fastcocreate.com/3042714/alejandro-gonzalez-inarritu-rules-for-a-successful-collaboration>>.

2 A. Badiou, "Foreword," in P.P. Pasolini, *St. Paul: A Screenplay* (trans. E.A. Castelli; New York: Verso, 2014), p. x.

the literary status of the screenplay. In this dispute, issues around artistic status and standing are played out in the struggle between older and newer arts, established and popular forms, and high(er) and low(er) expressions of culture. Badiou's remark can be situated in a larger history and development of film theory (and film studies as a result). One influential historical supporter of the screenplay as literature, and one of the first and key writers on the interconnection between literature and the screenplay, is Hungarian theorist Belá Balász. Writing in the 1930s, Balász states:

Not so very long ago it was still difficult to convince the Philistines that the film was an independent, autonomous new art with a law of its own. Today ... it is also admitted that the literary foundation of the new art, the script, is just as much a specific, independent literary form as the written stage play.³

So, for Balász, the script must be regarded as a literary form in itself (which echoes Badiou's assertion).⁴ Unlike other theorists of that era, most notably Russian film theorists Vsevolod Pudovkin and Lev Kuleshov, Balász does not subordinate the art of the script to the art of the cinema. The script is not literary because it is part of the literary side of production, but rather the script becomes a unique literary form because of the demands cinema makes of it.⁵ Balász is even proposing an alternative way of looking at the relationship between script and film, namely, as separate yet connected art forms interacting with each other. Indeed, there seem to be few obstacles to perceiving the script as literature; they are written (and often draw on techniques shared by poetry and novels), read, and discussed by critics. He writes, "[U]p to now the history of the film script has been merely a chapter in the history of the film. But soon the script may in turn determine the history of the film."⁶

Interestingly enough, Balász's estimation of the value and importance of the script is historically preceded by the French literary avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s who took a keen interest in the theoretical possibilities of film and,

3 B. Balász, as quoted in S. Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009), p. 46.

4 I use these terms interchangeably and in a generic way in this essay. I.W. MacDonald uses the term screenplay "as a generic term for any document that outlines the proposed screen narrative" (MacDonald, *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea* [London: Palgrave, 2013], p. 10). For a detailed exploration between screenplay, screen play, script, and scripting, see the introduction to Maras, *Screenwriting*.

5 Maras, *Screenwriting*, p. 47.

6 Balász, again quoted in Maras, *Screenwriting*, p. 47.

more specifically, the part writing and the screenplay take up in this art form. All of this did not necessarily result in the engagement of avant-garde writers and the actual production of films based on their film scripts, but, for a short while, it “led to an intensification of the practice of publishing film scenarios.”⁷ This, in turn, “made possible a truly peculiar development in the theorization of cinema: the positing of the unfilmed scenario as no less than the cinematic form par excellence.”⁸ In this light, Balász’s plea for the preeminence of the screenplay in relation to the film can be seen as a more astute analysis of the relationship between the two, since he neither discards nor disregards altogether the end product, the actual film, as the French avant-garde did. As such, Balász’s theoretical position is closer to contemporary screenplay theory, which sees the screenplay as bound to the cinematic medium and the actual realization of the film as a result, while at the same time not being entirely subservient to it.

Contemporary theorists, particularly within the field of adaptation studies, have suggested labeling the screenplay as an “intermediate” or cross-medial work.⁹ This means that there is a strong intermedial link with the actual film, for instance in the ways a screenplay is often marketed in the “glow” of a film. The published screenplay in this definition is a literal written down or written out version of the film, thereby inverting the situation of the unfilmed screenplay (as is the case with Pasolini’s *Saint Paul*). The published screenplay can be seen as another example of the marketing strategy of the tie-in.¹⁰ Marketing issues aside, this example demonstrates the ways in which the screenplay sits among different contexts, predominantly the industrial, commercial, and the artistic. From this contemporary perspective, the published screenplay is a kind of literary work, adapted to specific means (artistic and commercial) in the contemporary media-scape. However, for Pasolini the relationship among film, literature, and screenplay is not straightforward but rather contradictory at times, as he considers the interplay among the three as at once concrete and abstract.

7 P. Levi, “Doctor Hypnison and the Case of Written Cinema,” *October* 116 (Spring 2006), pp. 101-118 (115). Accessible at <<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/octo.2006.116.1.101>>.

8 P. Levi, *Cinema by Other Means* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 73.

9 See, for instance, J.A. Bruhn, A. Gjelsrik and E.F. Hanssen (eds.), *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); and J. Bruhn, *The Intermediality of Narrative Literature: Medialities Matter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

10 See, for example, S. Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Literary Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

The Screenplay as an Intermediate Object

What interests me about the screenplay is the moment in which it *can be considered an autonomous “technique,” a work complete and finished in itself*. Let us consider the case of a writer’s script which is not taken from a novel or – for one reason or another – translated into a film.¹¹

In his essay “The Screenplay as a ‘Structure That Wants to be Another Structure,’” published in 1965, Pasolini discusses the possibility of a moment in which the screenplay can be considered an autonomous object, “a work complete and finished in itself.”¹² Interestingly enough, he evokes the example of an original screenplay that has not been turned into a film, which is what *Saint Paul* is in Pasolini’s oeuvre. In Armando Maggi’s careful analysis of Pasolini’s poetics and the use of analogy in *Saint Paul*, he argues:

[A] screenplay is an organism that longs for transformation. Read in this manner, *Saint Paul* had to remain a screenplay. The inherent tension Pasolini sees within the apostle Paul (the founder of a dead text, the law of the church, versus the living text of the spirit) mirrors the tension regarding “expression” within the screenplay *Saint Paul*.¹³

Maggi mentions the screenplay’s central anachronism of “an impossible future when the apostle Paul would be become incarnate,” an aspect of Pasolini’s vision I will consider in more detail below. This observation leads Maggi to conclude that precisely because of this “impossible future ... it is of essential relevance that *Saint Paul* did *not* become a film.”¹⁴ As such, Maggi characterizes *Saint Paul* (the screenplay and the apostle as well) as a “failed text.”¹⁵ Rather than following Maggi’s negative evaluation of the screenplay, I would propose to attempt an act of visualization.¹⁶ The act of attempting to visualize *Saint Paul* as a possible film is hinged upon a careful reading of the screenplay. Pasolini’s ideas on the function of language as a means to conjure up images are central to this act of visualization.

11 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism* (trans. B. Lawton and L.K. Barnett; Washington, D.C.: New Academia, 2nd edn, 2005), p. 187; italics original.

12 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 187.

13 A. Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 39.

14 Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 40; italics original.

15 Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 40.

16 What Maggi calls “what this or that would look like if the screenplay had turned into a film” (*The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 40; italics original).

As Pasolini argues, a screenplay does have poetry or metaphor, but this comes from a different language system, that of cinema, the “cinematographic work which it presupposes,” hence the title of his essay: a screenplay is a structure that wants to be another structure.¹⁷ The screenplay offers two different paths towards meaning, Pasolini argues: “the normal path of all written languages,” but “at the same time, it is “forwarding the addressee to another sign, that of the potential film.”¹⁸ As such, interpreting and critiquing a screenplay as an autonomous technique will:

obviously require particular conditions so complex, so predetermined by an ideological tangle which has no connections either with traditional literary criticism or with the recent tradition of film criticism, that it will actually require the assistance of potential new codes.¹⁹

Pasolini’s use of the words “sign(s)” and “code(s)” alerts the reader to his larger intellectual work in his writings on film theory. Pasolini is, as Ben Lawton and Louise Barnett explain in their introduction to *Heretical Empiricism*, “above all else a semiologist out of the intellectual matrix of Saussurean linguistics.”²⁰ In another essay (his first on film theory), “The Cinema of Poetry,” Pasolini states: “I believe it is no longer possible to begin to discuss cinema as an expressive language without at least taking into consideration the terminology of semiotics.”²¹ This shows Pasolini’s indebtedness to the work of film theorist and systematic semiologist Christian Metz, whose work he admired and at the same time vehemently opposed. While Metz argues that cinema cannot be regarded as a language with a code, Pasolini states that cinema is a language and has a structure it communicates, and it is based on a “patrimony of common signs.”²² However, he adds to this, “cinema is predicated on a ‘system of signs’ which is different from the written-spoken one; that is, that cinema is another language.”²³ More specifically, he argues, “the word of the screenplay is thus contemporaneously the sign of two different structures, inasmuch as the meaning it denotes is double: and it belongs to two languages characterized

17 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 187.

18 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, pp. 188-89.

19 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 188.

20 B. Lawton and L.K. Barnett, “Introduction,” in Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. xxviii.

21 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 167.

22 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 167. For a more detailed discussion of Pasolini’s dispute with Metz, see his 1966 essay “The Written Language of Reality” in Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, pp. 197-222.

23 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 191.

by different structures.”²⁴ In light of this, one must understand Pasolini’s discussion on the sign of the screenplay as the “double road,” activating and “bringing forth images in the collaborating mind of the reader.”²⁵ What is more, the structure is to be understood as dynamic and transformative, as the will to be a form that moves toward another form. As such, the structure of the screenplay consists “precisely in this passage from the literary stage to the cinematographic stage.”²⁶ It is in this passage from one stage to the other that the role of the reader comes into play. Pasolini ends his essay on the screenplay by pointing out what the reader does: “empirically reanimating the passage from a structure A to a structure B,”²⁷ where A stands for the literary phase and B for the cinematographic stage.

The Role of the Film’s Reader-Spectator

Reading, then, is at the center of arguments that deal not only with the possible literary standing of the screenplay, but even more about the means to actually make sense of the screenplay. To some, the conventional screenplay style makes it unreadable; Stanley Kubrick claimed, “[T]he screenplay is the most uncommunicative form of writing ever devised.”²⁸ Often, the common wisdom even among professionals in the field is that very few people actually know how to read a screenplay. Certainly, the conventions, or perhaps one can even speak of the poetics, of screenplays are not readily known and understood by every reader. Pasolini emphasizes the intricate relation between screenplay and cinema and how to make sense of the screenplay, namely, “through a long and careful analysis of the ‘usages and customs’ of screenplays.”²⁹ Furthermore, in order to read a screenplay, understand it, and to visualize its possible end result, we need to familiarize ourselves with the conventions of cinema and the technicalities of filmmaking.

One of the difficulties when trying to read a screenplay such as *Saint Paul* has to do with the *form* of the screenplay; it is a regulated format. It is defined by rules of pacing and page design. Ideally, a well-designed screenplay flows with the reading and accentuates the pacing. The organization of the

24 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 193.

25 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 192.

26 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 195.

27 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 196.

28 As quoted in Maras, *Screenwriting*, p. 63.

29 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 195.

screenplay into scenes forms the basis for a technical way of reading it, breaking it down to locations, numbers of actors, props, and so forth. The unique aspect of the screenplay is that it (ideally) functions as an audio-imaging machine. What is more, one can imagine that cinema would no longer involve the actual cinematic apparatus (screen, projector, spectator), but would conflate these aspects, resulting in a kind of cinema of the mind.³⁰ The appeal to the spectator's mental work is echoed in Pasolini's description of the collaboration the author of a screenplay asks for in the reader, namely, that of:

lending to the text a "visual" completeness which it does not have, but at which it hints. The reader is an accomplice immediately – in the presence of the immediately intuited characteristics of the screenplay in the operation which is requested of him [*sic*] – and his [*sic*] representational imagination enters into a creative phase mechanically much higher and more intense than when he [*sic*] reads a novel.³¹

So, Pasolini regards the reader (addressee) of a screenplay not only as accomplice and collaborator, but even a creator. Thus, Pasolini defers much of a screenplay's potential to the representational imagination of its reader-spectator. Furthermore, the screenplay's particular structure, as opposed to the structure of the novel, activates a "creative phase." This phase is engendered by connecting the oral signs (phonemes) and the written signs (graphemes) to the visual ones (kinemes):

Through an incalculable series of conditioned reflexes of our mysterious cybernetics, we always have simultaneously present these different aspects of the linguistic sign, which is therefore one and three. If we belong to the class which holds culture captive, and therefore we at least know how to read, the "graphemes" appear immediately to us simply as "signs", infinitely enriched by the simultaneous presence of their "phonemes" and their "kinemes."³²

³⁰ The artistic movement of the French Surrealists was also interested in the hallucinatory possibilities of the written text and conceptualized a possibility of cinema, as "projecting the film beyond its material-written basis, onto the screen of one's imagination" (Levi, "Doctor Hypnison and the Case of Written Cinema," p. 108). This accords with André Breton's conception of the surrealist image as "neither a descriptive mirror nor a narrative window, but a fantasmatic window" (Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, p. 55).

³¹ Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 189.

³² Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 189.

So, in the case of the screenplay text, the reader needs to see the kineme in the grapheme, and thus to think in images, constructing in his or her own head the film to which the screenplay alludes as a potential work.

Reanimating *Saint Paul*

In the remainder of this essay, I will highlight a number of technical aspects in the screenplay: aspects that have to do with the formal conventions of the screenplay, the proposed style of the film, and how one can construct not only the narrative, but most importantly, the character of Paul on the basis of this. As such this reading of the screenplay is similar to the kind of textual analysis one would perform with an actual, realized film. As several commentators have pointed out, *Saint Paul* contains stylistic similarity to Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964). Knowledge of cinematographical style and recurring techniques in Pasolini's realized films helps to more closely imagine the unrealized one – to “reanimate” graphemes into kinemes.

In order to get a sense of the overarching narrative structure of the screenplay and how this narrative structure is distributed into specific acts or sequences, the section of the screenplay called “Plan for a film about Saint Paul” is very illuminating. This is basically a treatment, an account of the “narrative scaffolding” of the film.³³ In the words of film theorist Stephen Heath, this plan is a segmentation of the film, resulting in the narrative breakdown (in distinct sequences) of the film. It helps the analyst in his or her analysis of the film, since it “allows reference to the film as narrative.”³⁴ Pasolini outlines nine episodes, which, apart from the overall narrative flow of events, also contain quite detailed instructions on how they must be visualized in the ensuing film. For instance, episodes four, five, and six, dealing with Paul's preaching (“Adventures in Preaching”), should show three or four typical episodes from the first part of the preaching to make them “representative of an entire series of other

33 Based on Pasolini's plan and the number of pages one can make a fairly educated guess on its running time. One rule in screenplay writing states that one page of writing represents one minute of screen time. On the basis of this, *Saint Paul's* running time would be around 95 minutes (excluding opening and/or closing credits). Nowadays, films tend to have a much longer running time (150 to 180 minutes is very common and not just in the case of Hollywood blockbusters), but in the 1960s to the 1970s, a running time of around 100 minutes conforms to the norm.

34 S. Heath, as quoted in R. Bellour and C. Penley (eds.), *The Analysis of Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 196.

episodes that cannot be narrated.”³⁵ Clearly, this remark should be understood as an instance of a montage sequence: a segment of the film that summarizes a topic or compresses a passage of time into brief symbols, or, as is the case here, typical images. Pasolini’s plan is the narrative structure of the film, outlined in nine particular sequences, which can be labeled in terms of their narrative progression.

From the technical remarks in the plan for the film and the screenplay, it is possible to construct certain aspects of the film’s projected style. A film’s style, then, is the characteristic, repeated use a film makes of a certain technique. Also, directors, and perhaps especially directors such as Pasolini, are often analyzed in terms of their directorial style. The above-mentioned ability of the informed spectator to reanimate Pasolini’s graphemes into kinemes is implicitly based on the assumption that there is such a thing as a Pasolini style, which can not only be discerned in his past films, but also be pro-actively projected onto his future films. In terms of making meaning of a film, style plays an important role in that process. A repeated technique has a certain effect on the reader-spectator, and an effect can lead to the construction on a narrative level and on the level of interpretation of a film.

The most important directive Pasolini gives, which will greatly define the overall style of the film, is formulated in the first sentence of the plan for *Saint Paul*. The “novelty” of the film will be “transposing the entire affair of Saint Paul to our time.”³⁶ As Noa Steimatsky remarks, this transposing is a recurring element in Pasolini’s work, “classical and medieval texts will be ‘exported’ outward, beyond Europe, adapted to historical and social processes at work in the third world of the present.”³⁷ This geographical and historical displacement of a biblical figure and its intended visualization are immediately laid out in Scene 1 of the screenplay. Pasolini describes the use of actual documentary footage of daily life in Paris under Nazi occupation, which comes back in Scene 5 and more specifically Scene 8.³⁸ The latter scene also gives the reader an indication of style, that is, the use of a “documentary style,”³⁹ and its use of actual, non-studio locations resembles Pasolini’s use of certain Neorealist

35 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 7.

36 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 3.

37 N. Steimatsky, “Pasolini on *Terra Sancta*: Towards a Theology of Film,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11 (1998), pp. 239-258 (239).

38 Pasolini has Paris stand in for Jerusalem, New York City for ancient Rome, modern Rome for Athens, and London for Antioch. In other words, “the theatre of Saint Paul’s travels is no longer the Mediterranean basin but the Atlantic” (Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 4).

39 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 18.

conventions in his earlier films, most clearly *Accatone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962).

In a textual analysis of a film, detailed attention is given to the opening and the ending of a film, even if it is in the intermediate form of a screenplay. The exposition of a film is an important moment, since the rules of the game are laid out there. A film's opening contains a common characteristic that is likely or expected to govern the overall narrative construction of the film. Therefore, textual analysis privileges a film's ending in the process of narrative construction and meaning. As Raymond Bellour has pointed out:

The classical film from beginning to end is constantly repeating itself because it is resolving itself. That is why its beginning often reflects its end in a final emphasis; in this, the film acknowledges that is a result, inscribing the systematic condition of the course it follows by signing with a final flourish the operation it constructs throughout.⁴⁰

Thus, the reflection, or sometimes even straightforward replication, of aspects of the film's opening in the ending provides the reader-spectator of a film text with the key to interpret and construct meaning.

The opening of *Saint Paul* is what Pasolini in his plan calls "the martyrdom of Stephen" and entails the first ten scenes of the screenplay (based on the unity of location, in this case Paris). Here the reader-spectator is first introduced to Stephen and then to the main character Paul. This order of character introduction is significant and the suggested techniques underscore this particular observation. Conventionally, characters are introduced by means of a close-up. Throughout the screenplay, Pasolini gives detailed instructions with regards to the techniques necessary for every scene. Often these instructions pertain to aspects of cinematography of which the close-up is the dominant technique. Several critics have singled out the use of the close-up as a prominent aspect of Pasolini's directorial style. As Bernhart Schwenk argues with regards to *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, the close-up is not only "a characteristic motif of Pasolini's filmic handwriting," one might attribute Pasolini's close-ups with a "sense of an atemporal revelation."⁴¹ In the beginning of *Saint Paul*, one might expect Paul to be introduced to the reader-spectator by means of a close-up. However, Paul is not the first character who receives the film's first close-up; it is the partisan/martyr Stephen whose close-up is called for in Scene 4. In Pasolini's words: "there will be a long close-up on the face ('full of faith

⁴⁰ Bellour and Penley, *The Analysis of Film*, p. 193.

⁴¹ B. Schwenk, as quoted in Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 54.

and strength’).⁴² Ironically and significantly enough, Stephen’s close-up does not signal a sustained role for this character in the narrative. Rather, it precludes his imminent martyrdom in Scene 7 by firing squad. This scene, though, is momentous because here Pasolini not only introduces Paul for the first time, but also gives precise instructions with regard to the narration of the execution/martyrdom scene. The reader-spectator will be aligned with Paul: “everything is from the point of view of Paul. The scene begins therefore with a long close-up on him.”⁴³ This signals the centrality of Paul as the narrator or focalizer of the events.

However, the centrality of Paul is immediately undercut in the following scene. Pasolini instructs the use of a mobile camera in order to shoot on location, and more importantly, on these various Parisian locations, Pasolini instructs that Paul will appear as “foreshortened, almost randomly (as if he were an anonymous and forgotten person from the ‘archival’ material),”⁴⁴ forcing the reader to draw her or his own conclusions about this Paul character. The most striking, unusual word Pasolini uses is “foreshortened,” of which the simple definition is to reduce, diminish, make shorter. What is more, in artistic practice, foreshorten means to reduce or distort parts of the represented object and positioning the object in a three-dimensional space according to the rules of perspective. From this one can deduce that Pasolini’s introduction of Paul goes exactly *against* artistic, cinematic, and narrative conventions: the protagonist is not only (physically) shortened, reduced, Paul’s presence at the scene appears to be almost coincidental; he certainly is not at the perspectival center of the image. Pasolini is withholding a cut-in shot, which most likely would have been a close-up of Paul, thereby explicitly keeping him indistinct, even ambiguous. The contrast between Paul as main narrating instance with his long close-up in Scene 7 versus his foreshortening, almost disappearance from the *mise-en-scène* in Scene 8 points to an essential ambiguity Pasolini’s screenplay conveys about Paul. Based on the opening of the film, one might wonder what the titular character of the film might shape up to be(come). The closing of the screenplay will refer back to the structure that the opening has established: the vacillation between Paul as a present focalizer and narrator versus Paul as distant and even absent character.

This vacillation and ambiguity in the screenplay’s construction of the character of Paul has been discussed by several commentators. In his article, Luca

42 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 14.

43 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 17.

44 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 18.

Di Blasi calls Paul a “split” and “multistable figure.”⁴⁵ Pasolini’s “constant striving” to construct Paul as a split character, Di Blasi argues, is of course first signaled by Pasolini’s choice of the two sources regarding Paul, Acts and the letters.⁴⁶ Castelli describes Pasolini’s choices in terms of source material “fragmentary, ... parts of the Acts of the Apostles, alongside cannibalized and reformulated quotations from the Pauline, deutero-Pauline, and Pastoral Epistles.”⁴⁷ Di Blasi’s and Castelli’s observations are important because they provide a background and explanation of Pasolini’s project, and connect it to his larger religious vision. As a film scholar, I do not have the biblical knowledge regarding these sources, therefore I refer to Di Blasi and Castelli. However, what is crucial is that the scriptural split or ambiguity they observe is actually expressed in the screenplay by cinematic means. In other words, contextual material (what biblical sources are used) is transformed into actual, textual material (how Paul as a character is constructed in the screenplay). As Maggi puts it, “[T]he inherent tension Pasolini sees within the apostle Paul mirrors the tension regarding ‘expression’ within the screenplay *Saint Paul*.”⁴⁸ What Maggi calls “expression” can be found more specifically on the level of the proposed cinematographical techniques Pasolini describes in the screenplay. Taken together, Pasolini’s biblical interpretation is expressed in the construction of Paul’s character in the screenplay and in the formal system of cinematography. One might go even so far as to argue that Pasolini’s labor in biblical “studies” expressed in the screenplay actually makes him one of the few (or at least one of the most prominent) truly biblical cinema makers.

The closing sequence of *Saint Paul* begins in Scene 102 and ends in Scene 111. Some of the scenes are set in New York (102, 103, 110, and 111), but the majority of them take place in Naples (104, 105, 106, 107, and 108). Scene 109 is transitional, because within that scene the reader-spectator is relocated from Naples to New York. The sequence as a whole is bookended by New York, where Paul resides in the final part of his life and where he will be shot and killed. In between is Naples, and more specifically the mansion of the bishop, which is where the character of Timothy, head of the church, resides. Pasolini’s directions with regard to cinematography, but, more importantly, to editing, are

45 L. Di Blasi, “One Divided by Another: Split and Conversion in Pasolini’s *Sao Paolo*,” in L. Di Blasi, M. Gragnolati, and C. Holzhey (eds.), *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities, Geographies, Traditions* (Vienna: Verlag Turin + Kant, 2012), p. 191.

46 Di Blasi, “One Divided by Another: Split and Conversion in Pasolini’s *Sao Paolo*,” p. 197.

47 E.A. Castelli, “Introduction: Translating Pasolini Translating Paul,” in Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. xxvii.

48 Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 39.

surprisingly sparse. Throughout the screenplay one can find multiple instructions for the change from one scene and one location to the next. One editing technique Pasolini frequently uses is the dissolve, a transition between two shots in which the first image gradually disappears while the second image slowly appears. The dissolve often signals a change of location or the passing of an unspecified amount of time. However, in the closing sequence these instructions are absent. So, in terms of editing as a means to construct cinematic space, all the shifts between the two locations (and also on a micro level within a location) must be imagined by the use of a straightforward hard cut. Yet, despite the seemingly abrupt shift between the two locations, the sequence as a whole can only be understood as cohesive. This is because Pasolini foregrounds an auditory instead of a visual element that connects the different spaces: we “hear” Paul composing and reading a letter (or perhaps his testament) addressed to Timothy. Starting in Scene 103 and explicitly marked in Scenes 104 to 110 (“Paul’s voice resounds”⁴⁹), Paul’s voice-over dominates the soundtrack, connecting and synchronizing the shift between New York and Naples. As sound theorist Michel Chion remarks, the voice-over is a particularly powerful narrative technique and is “generally reserved for certain privileged characters and is only granted for a limited time.”⁵⁰ In light of Chion’s observations, Pasolini’s choice for voice-over narration seems particularly significant: the dying main character of the film is granted a voice-over, during which he dictates his testament. Within voice-over narration, Chion adds, “a visual cut can be coordinated with a word or group of words specially emphasized by the voiceover commentary.”⁵¹ This point of synchronization between sound and image is meticulously described, and thus quite easy to envision, in Pasolini’s instructions in Scene 104:

Of course there will be a continuous analogy between these words and images above; an image of the poorest people on miserable streets will correspond to the word “slaves,” the image of mansions in the city center will correspond to the word “masters.”⁵²

The effect of “continuous analogy” of which Pasolini speaks is similar to what a voice-over is capable of doing according to Chion, that is, to “engender

49 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 103; cf. pp. 104, 106.

50 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 172.

51 Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 59.

52 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 102.

images with its own logic.”⁵³ Paul’s voice-over, combined with the proposed images of Naples, creates a new logic and meaning. But the voice-over has other functions on top of this meaning making: it holds together two different locations (New York and Naples), and thus reconfigures space or even creates a new spatial unity. In this respect, I think the sequence must be understood as an example of crosscutting, where the alternation between two (or sometimes multiple) lines of action, occurring in different places and sometimes different times, is perceived to be cohesive.

However, Pasolini gives not only instructions for analogy and cohesion, but also for disparity. The obvious contrast set up in the *mise-en-scène* between Paul in his small hotel in New York as opposed to Timothy’s opulent mansion in Naples serves to illustrate and make ironic the larger argument Pasolini delivers. This is most clearly expressed in Scene 108: while Paul speaks of “modesty and moderation,” we see Timothy “dressed literally in gold.”⁵⁴ From the sequence’s multiple juxtapositions between words and images, the reader-spectator is invited to reach his or her own conclusions. Obviously, as several commentators have pointed out, the interpretation that “Timothy embodies the corruption of the new religious institution” is strongly put forward after reading the outline of the final sequence.⁵⁵

In the closing sequence, Pasolini intends to stress not just the betrayal of Paul by Timothy, but also brings to a close the recurring narrative element of Paul’s mysterious illness which must result in a fatal physical collapse. Concluding a screenplay by “killing off,” to put it bluntly, your main character is certainly not uncommon. However, as Castelli remarks in her introduction, “the story of Paul concludes in Pasolini’s text in a weirdly idiosyncratic fashion, thoroughly unfaithful to the sources to which he earlier pledged absolute fidelity.”⁵⁶ Rather than ending the screenplay with Paul giving a triumphant speech, as is described in the Acts of the Apostles, Castelli speaks of the “neo-realist fabula wherein the saintly and persecuted visionary bleeds out on a hotel balcony.”⁵⁷ Even though Paul’s death is not faithful to the biblical sources, it makes sense within the textual construction of the screenplay. In the penultimate scene of *Saint Paul*, Scene 111, Pasolini describes what must be construed

53 Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, p. 172. In Scene 107 the same device is used but with the opposite effect: “Also this time the words coincide, contradictorily, with the images” (Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 104).

54 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 105.

55 Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 104.

56 Castelli, “Introduction,” p. XLI.

57 Castelli, “Introduction,” p. XLI.

as the final close-up of Paul: “Here – with the face of an ailing person.”⁵⁸ Shortly after this close-up, Paul is assassinated and thereby turned into a martyr. Yet, Paul’s demise should not come as a shock, especially when these close-ups are retrospectively evaluated.

In the opening sequence I emphasized the introductory close-up of Stephen (in Scene 4, followed by his execution), and considered it to be unusual in terms of conventions of narrative exposition. Subsequently, Paul’s act of witnessing Stephen’s execution in Scene 7 is signaled by the use of a close-up (Paul’s first in the screenplay). We can see a pattern is being established in the opening of *Saint Paul*: the close-up is the device that connects the soon-to-be martyr Stephen to the future-martyr Paul: in Scene 7 the transfer of Stephen to Paul takes place. The close-up of the face is thus a privileged cinematographical composition with two particular effects. First, on the level of narration, it signals which character is the center of the narrative: Stephen, briefly, in the exposition, followed by Paul in the remainder of the screenplay. Second, it functions as a foreshadowing technique: the close-up indicates who is about to be executed. In Stephen’s fate, announced and underscored by the close-up, Paul’s corresponding death is already foretold. The reader-spectator cannot but recognize the parallels between the two characters and interpret them accordingly; in their sacrificial deaths, both are elevated to the realm of the martyr. Pasolini’s representation of Paul, signaled in Scenes 7 and 8, announced the ambiguity of this character: he wavers between being present, distant and sometimes absent, or vague. On the basis of the closing sequence, one might interpret Pasolini’s final evaluation of Paul’s life work as negative; despite his martyr-like death, likening him to the saintly Stephen, Paul’s ideas, dreams, and visions are corrupted and squandered.

In conclusion, this textual analysis of the opening and final sequence of the screenplay of *Saint Paul* shows that Pasolini’s vision of Paul is captured in both the initial absence as well as the eventual presence of the close-up. Reading *Saint Paul* demonstrates the extent to which the reader must be attentive to the cinematographic aspect in order for the screenplay to become visualized. To reiterate Pasolini’s notion on the screenplay as a structure in movement, the screenplay actively invites the reader-spectator “to coincide his or her imagination and fantasy with the fantasy of the writer, the two coinciding freely and in different ways.”⁵⁹ In the end, the “mysterious cybernetics” Pasolini wishes to activate, allow for every single reader to realize this film in his or her own head.

58 Pasolini, *Saint Paul*, p. 107.

59 Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 193.