

ANOTHER VERSION: JOHN DI STEFANO'S REDEEMING TRANSLATIONS

The American writer Dave Hickey recognizes in the sheer abundance of love songs produced and consumed by Western societies a deep cultural anxiety, an index of emotional inexperience and alienation. The institution of love songs, he explains, has become a "critical instrumentality of civil society" through which we make declarations that are essential to the survival of the species. Contemporary expressions of affection are now re-routed through radio and video request lines. Enter, then, the politics of presentation.

Biographies emanate from the same social imperative as love songs. Both are languages that facilitate the translation of personal affairs into information for use in the public domain. The dirty laundry of private intent and individual conduct have social currency not simply because they are alone moving, but because their public presentation has become an essential apparatus through which we now understand each other. Biography as such is inseparable from its obligation to public display.

In his exhibition *Je Me Souviens (I Remember)*, John Di Stefano engages with the biography of the Italian filmmaker and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini in order to excise certain questions about the nationalism and sexuality embedded within the director's work and public life. Di Stefano's installation, comprising projections, single-channel video, and interactive bookworks, form a sort of alternative Pasolini museum, a critical reframing of the public archive of press imagery, film material, and literary production left behind by the slain filmmaker.

In a characteristic work, such as *Theorum*, Di Stefano deftly blends material from Pasolini's artistic oeuvre and documents from his violently scandalized public life. Subtitles from Pasolini's 1968 film *Teorema* are projected in "real time" as captions beneath the famous newspaper photograph of his bloody, mutilated corpse laying in an Ostia street. The disparity between the projected words and the image is key for Di Stefano: the crystallized public image is reworked as a palimpsest whose inscriptions are never absolute and so effortlessly replaced. As Di Stefano has pointed out in his own writings on Pasolini, the filmmaker's public image was indeed freely inscribed with various politically motivated subtexts. Examining the display of Pasolini's body in the Italian press, Di Stefano traces the methodology by which his queer body is continually remade: as outsider, as aging "daddy," and a fatality, as a warning to other potential subversives.

With the video installation *Volgar Eloquio*, it becomes apparent that unpacking the politics of display is central to Di Stefano's project. In a darkened space, a tiny monitor embedded in a plinth looping a torture scene from Pasolini's last film, *Salò*

(1975), stands opposite a large wall projection of a typewriter hammering out the words of a Pasolini poem entitled "Lines from the Testament (Solitude)". The work's meaning resides in the skewed scale of presentation: the disproportionate space allocated to physical and psychological anguish presents the viewer with an unsettling dialectic in which to contemplate Pasolini's case.

Ultimately, Di Stefano's relationship with Pasolini is not that of quasi-biographer, but that of translator. Here the intention is not to rewrite public memories — or misconceptions — but simply to consider them in a different configuration. And in the same way that we are more aware of a song's terms of production when we hear it covered by another artist, or a movie's terms of production when we see it as a remake, Di Stefano uses translation as a liberating strategy to make the details of presentation more public. Neither sentimental nor elegiac, *Je Me Souviens* is not an ode — it's a love song.

Will Kwan
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Will Kwan is a Toronto-based performance artist and writer interested in public art.