

## Toward an Understanding of *Salo*

Written October 14, 1977, this feature essay was published in *Drummer* 20, January 1978.

- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written February 15, 2007
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### I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written February 15, 2004

Fighting American Fascism: The American Civil War (1860-1865)  
Continues as the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Culture War

On October 14, 1977, I wrote this review-essay which was published in *Drummer* 20 (January 1978), pages 66-67, with six photographs from the Italian film *Salo* (1975). Based on the book, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, by Marquis de Sade, *Salo* was directed by international filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini who, shortly after the release of *Salo*, was murdered, age fifty-three, on the beach at Ostia, near Rome, by the rough-trade hustler Pino Pelosi. In this world, there are the dreamers and the predators who follow them. Then come the legends and the acolytes.

On a brilliant spring day, March 22, 2006, Mark Henry and I, having taken rooms at the Hotel Quirinale in Rome, set out from Pyramide Station on the Roma-Lido railway for a day trip to Ostia, making pilgrimage to lay roses near the beach where Pasolini was killed thirty years before on November 2, 1975. In our camera bag we carried from home in San Francisco a copy of Pasolini's *Roman Poems* translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti at City Lights Books. Outside the train window, huge quadrangles of apartments gave way to tenement slums, and at EUR Magliana Station to the large white cube of Mussolini's Palazzo della Civita del Lavoro, and then to the suburbs of trackside country villages Pasolini had satirized with Terence Stamp in *Teorema* (1968). We exited the graffiti-covered train at the seaside village of Ostia Antica. Pasolini

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himself had made this exact trip many times by train, by car, and by slow boat down the Tiber.

Outside the tiny deserted station, we climbed the pedestrian overpass, and through the pine trees saw Ostia Antica spread out before us: a once busy city abandoned in ruins. In its maze of empty streets, grass and ivy covered the brick outcroppings of Roman baths, merchant warehouses, Agrippa's theater, and ancient restaurants with inlaid floors of intricate black-and-white mosaics. It is a wild place where young men easily prowl at night, vandalizing this wall, stealing that statue's hands. The Romans have so much antiquity that they select what to secure.

Ostia, the first harbor for Rome, is no "perfect moment in time" like Pompeii because Ostia's people drifted away as the mouth of the Tiber silted over and closed the port. We were alone; it was only the second day of spring and the summer tourist buses had not yet arrived. As if left behind centuries ago, gentle but wary dogs, the unpetted kind, the cruising kind who had gone back to nature, watched us making our way through the ruins. Had their eyes seen Pasolini? And Pelosi? Had they seen Mafiosi? Had they barked at the violence? Had they run in fear when Pasolini was run over repeatedly by his own car? Over our heads, huge jetliners roared in low over tall Corinthian columns to land one after the other at the new port, Leonardo da Vinci Fiumicino Airport.

The perfect morning folded down under a March storm sweeping in from the Tyrrhenian Sea. Dark clouds, lightning, and chilly winds, but no rain, alternated with intense humid sunshine while the sky fifteen miles to the north hung unmoving and black with cold drizzle over Rome. Any gay man instinctively knows that the labyrinth ruins of Ostia have been a hot spot for cruising since its founding as a naval base in the third century BC to its demise as Rome's commercial port in the third century AD. In the way that the abandoned West Side maritime piers along the Hudson River in New York became an equally abandoned orgy of industrial-strength outdoor sex in the 1970s, Ostia smacks of its own pagan roots as a port town filled with laborers, sailors, slaves, and prostitutes. On the very night that Pasolini was killed, the dilapidated piers, and the jeopardy of trucks parked near Keller's leather bar in the West Village, were jammed with a thousand men, including *Drummer* readers and pickpockets and assassins, doing the same thing he was. The choreography of Pasolini's night out cruising ended not in wonderfully anonymous sex but in the kind of murder that moralists figure is the luxury tax on the evolved state of being born gay.

The barbaric attack against Pasolini remains mysterious because the suspicion is that Pino Pelosi was hired by the very kind of conservative

Fascist politicians and Mafiosi whom Pasolini dismantled in films such as *Salò*.

The film caused an international sensation that only increased with Pasolini's murder two years before this feature essay, "Pasolini's Last Picture Show," was published in *Drummer*. His murder rocked the gay world. Pasolini and anti-gay Fascism were extremely hot topics in the politics and pop culture of the 1970s. I wrote this essay to pique reader interest and to make *Drummer* respond realistically to homophobic attacks by American Fascists such as Anita Bryant and John Briggs who began the culture war that continues to this day.

Pasolini was born March 5, 1922, the year Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini came to power over Italy. He took esthetic cue for his irony from Dante who also punctured politicians. Lest anyone be confused about precisely why the S&M images in *Salò* are so extreme and so tailored to history, note that Pasolini lifted his title from the Repubblica di Salò. This Salò Republic during World War II was a sham government much like the Vichy government in France. At Hitler's orders, it was established in the North of Italy by Mussolini after Mussolini had been driven out of Rome. The Salò government was Hitler's hand puppet in rounding up hundreds of Italian Jews, gays, and gypsies. However, before Salò officials—living aristocratically in art deco palazzos—sent them to concentration camps, they played terminal sex games with them. Such is the *mise en scene* of the film, *Salò*.

Pasolini, always bucking authority, was very much part of the 1960s and 1970s gay lib *zeitgeist*. Fascism specifically is an authoritarian political movement that flourished in Italy under Mussolini and in Spain under Franco. World linguistics often applies the Fascist label to any oppressive government limiting civil liberties. I use the term, always capitalized, both ways.

That said, now, so many years past the Titanic 70s, the films named in this essay may guide S&M enthusiasts and queer studies professors seeking "must-see viewing" within BDSM culture. These 1970s films have been resurrected on DVD as leather-heritage art objects.

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#### American Fascism I

If there is an Absolute Timeline on an Absolute LGBT Calendar, one date requiring annual observance is February 19, 1942: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, the internment order requiring Americans who happened to be of Japanese descent to be held in concentration camps for the duration of World War II.

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I believe that the “Leather Decade of the Titanic 1970s” began on November 25, 1970, with the world-shocking suicide of Yukio Mishima at age forty-five. The homomasculine author had directed and starred in his own internationally acclaimed sadomasochistic film *Rite of Love and Death* (1965) in which he acted out his own future muscular *harakiri*. Moralists rarely condemn Mishima’s film, although both the right-wing and the left condemn his politics. Leatherfolk romanticize him for his dreamy S&M self-portraits that—while very similar in pose to the Kris Studio leather-muscle esthetic—so shaped the work of many gay photographers in *Drummer* including Mapplethorpe.

It is not fair, and it may be quite sexist on their part, that politically correct fundamentalists single out the gay, male-identified *auteur* Pasolini for condemnation when other filmmakers of his era, particularly the wonderful women directors (Liliana Cavani, Lina Wertmueller), dealt with similar sadomasochistic material for similar political reasons. In addition, the French male director Barbet Schroeder made his shocking S&M film *Maitresse* (1976) without being, as Pasolini was, undeniably political. In Spain, Fernando Arrabal, founder of the surreal Panic Movement, directed his political and violent S&M film *Viva La Muerte* (1970) which was every bit as brutal as *Salo* and ran many weekends as the “midnight movie” at the St. Mark’s Theater in the East Village. Undisturbed by politics, *Maitresse* with its graphic scenes of pain and mutilation was cast with masochists who paid to be in the film and it was, in those pre-reality-TV times, a huge hit among S&M aficionados. As mainstream as was *Maitresse*, Nagisa Oshima’s *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), often referred to as *In the Realm of the Censors*, was another explicit S&M hit wherein sexual transgression through edge-play relieved Fascistic repression. When this feature essay was written in 1977, I mentioned some of these films as akin to *Salo*.

My eyewitness presumption was that *Drummer* readers had seen most of these mainstream movies as part of how we lived—and how we used gaydar to discover S&M where we could in heterosexual films in those days when there was hardly any gay publishing or gay film industry.

Having taught the history and esthetics of cinema at university for ten years before becoming editor of *Drummer*, I introduced a bit of European and Japanese film culture which expressed my intent of growing *Drummer* into *International Drummer*. (I had been traveling east to gay culture in Europe since May 1969, and west to Japan since October 1975.) On September 14, 1972, I had been immensely impressed when the startling Brazilian film, *The Case of the Naves Brothers* (1967), had its quiet little American premiere at the Carnegie Hall Cinema. Director Luiz Sergio Person’s black-and-white palette and *verite* camera made the explicit

torture of this brutal film a landmark in anti-government cinema. In the hardon helix between art and sex, I can attest, *The Naves Brothers* greatly enhanced the subtext and the actuality of S&M games played by gay men in 1972. If somewhere a film print of *The Naves Brothers* exists, it should be digitally preserved like a note in a bottle from a lost civilization.

Might I note that in the 1970s, gay men in their thirties had come to first consciousness during the violence of World War II that was projected on screen in newsreels shown between double-feature musical comedies. Has anyone ever bothered to study the causative impact of that war on the sexual abandon of the 1960s and 1970s? Connecting the dots of the leather, uniform, and S&M interests of the Nazi-obsessed 1970s, I find comparative films shot at the same time as *Salò*. “S&M literacy” requires some knowledge of Antonin Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty theories as well as the viewing of both high-art films and pop-culture movies. Pasolini, similar to the rest of us, had feasted on the anti-Fascist film *Viva la Muerte* by Fernando Arrabal (1970) and the not-to-be-missed fetish feature *The Holy Mountain* (1973) by Alejandro Jodorowski, which leathermen made so popular at the Ghirardelli Square Cinema that I included the erotic experience of watching that very film in a significant scene in *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novels of San Francisco 1970-1982*, Reel Six, Scene Four.

The hit list continued.

Pervy British filmmaker Derek Jarman directed *Sebastiane* (1976), the first “gay” S&M film to gain international notoriety with its spear-and-sandal story of gay icon and long-suffering martyr Saint Sebastian tortured and killed by rough young Roman soldiers on the hot, burning desert sands of Sardinia—northwest of Ostia.

The deliciously decadent *The Night Porter* (1974) by Italian director Liliana Cavani, starred the incomparable Dirk Bogarde trampling the peerless Charlotte Rampling. *The Night Porter* reveled in the same highbrow sadomasochism as *Seven Beauties* (1976) by Lina Wertmüller. Both were popular and highly respected during the same season as the lowbrow gore-genre exploitation blockbuster *Ilsa She-Wolf of the SS* (1975) directed by Don Edmonds and starring Dyanne Thorne. *Ilsa*, gorgeously advertised as “One of the Most Notorious and Reviled Films of Our Time,” showed its hotsy-totsy Nazi fantasies continuously—grinding through projectors 24/7 to the end of the 1970s—at the Apollo Theater on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and at the Strand Theater on Market Street where leathermen bought tickets time and again for *Ilsa’s* extreme torture of bound males, as well as for the anonymous “balcony blow jobs” ready to finish the viewers off as they sat in full leather masturbating to the S&M Nazi high camp on screen.

This feature essay appeared soon after the first American release of *Salo*, less than two years after Pasolini's shocking death, and, since then, films *about* Pasolini have become numerous if not definitive: Paesi Bassi's *Whoever Says the Truth Shall Die* (1981); Aurelio Grimaldi's *Un Mondo d'Amore* (2002); Marco Tullio Giordana's *Who Killed Pasolini?* which Mark Henry and I viewed at its premiere screening in Paris at a small Left Bank movie house in May 1995. Abel Ferrara, the director of the mortally sinful *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), has announced plans for a feature film about the life and death of the Italian icon whose mystique so captivated the fancy of intellectuals and straights. Besides Pasolini's own novels, poetry, and film scripts, the book to read is *Pasolini Requiem*, the definitive biography by Barth David Schwartz (1992).

In the Dumbing of America, which has taken its toll even among homosexuals, there is no artist of recent memory, and certainly no gay artist, who like Pasolini, transcends his politics, his art, and his own faulty self to become an icon of art, intellect, and politics. Italians mention Pasolini's name with reverence; and, while the "S&M philosopher," Michel Foucault is worshiped by the French, his world-class intellectual body of work does not have the populist diversity of Pasolini's films, fiction, poetry, and political theory.

Pasolini's "death by rough trade" is perfect archetype of gay bashing from Saint Sebastian to Saint Matthew Shepard.

Apropos *Drummer*: Pasolini's taste helped shape *Drummer* because his hustlers whom he cast on screen prompted me to be the first editor to dare publish the street hustler photographs of the American photographer most like Pasolini, Old Reliable (David Hurler). That was in *Drummer* 21 (March 1978) when every other gay mag had rejected Old Reliable's gritty erotic aggro photos that were too scary for the vanillarinas, but not for the leatherstream. In the late 1970s, David Hurler and I thought the death of the bashed Pasolini—as most likely engineered by politicians—was a warning shot to gay culture at the time when ever-onward-marching Christian soldier-homophobes like pop-singer Anita Bryant, California politician John Briggs, and comedian Richard Pryor were waging war against gay liberation. (Pryor's nasty gay jibes were particularly offensive to me because we had both grown up in Peoria which wasn't too fond of either one of us. So we should have stuck together.)

In Florida, former Miss America Bryant who was the TV advertising "spokeswoman" for the Florida Orange Juice Commission campaigned with her "Save Our Children" group to get the then just-passed 1977 Dade County Human Rights Ordinance repealed. As a result, even to this 21<sup>st</sup>-century day in Florida, GLBT people may not adopt. However, as certainly as a tornado dropped Dorothy's house on the Wicked Witch

of the West, there was a 1970s “spin.” The GLBT reaction to the attacks by Bryant and Briggs galvanized gay liberation and drove us to change its character from fun “gay liberation” into serious “gay politics.”

In California late in 1977, conservative Orange County state senator John Briggs, emboldened by Ronald Reagan’s two terms as governor of California, began tub-thumping “Proposition 6: The Briggs Initiative” that intended by law to ban gays from teaching in any public school.

Also mentioned in this review-essay is “avowed heterosexual Ed Davis” who was the chief of police in Los Angeles. In the Swinging 60s and the Titanic 70s, the Fascist Davis famously deployed his LAPD cops as some kind of New Wave Brown Shirts to terrorize and raid innumerable gay bars, baths, and to destroy the LA publishing base of *Drummer* magazine.

April 10, 1976, was a defining moment for *Drummer* and homomascu- line culture when Davis busted *Drummer* for hosting a “Slave Auction” for charity. This social event was about as sinister as a church auction, but Davis, planning his attack long before the event occurred, characterized the glamorous evening as some kind of medieval sex orgy of queers.

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In my opinion, 1) the LAPD police attack and raid on the *Drummer* Slave Auction (April 1976) is a West Coast version — in fact, a Keystone Cops version — of 2) the NYPD attack on the Stonewall Bar seven years earlier (June 1969), and both prefigure 3) the SFPD attack on gays on Castro Street the night of the White Night Riot in San Francisco (May 21, 1979).

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These three police attacks connect the dots of major physical battles in the new American civil war between homophobic citizens and homo- sexual citizens. Some call it a culture war. I think this war is the same as the unresolved issues of the Civil War (1860-1865) which was about states’ rights, the Constitution, and human rights vis a vis slavery wherein, by extension to our day, the state of *being Black* stands in for the state of *being homosexual* by nature.

Being born Black is no more a choice than being born gay. You know homosexuality is not a choice when your dreams, over which in sleep you have no control or choice, are gay.

(Tell me what you dream and I’ll tell you your sexual preference.)

Being redneck, however, is different because redneckery is a choice.

The theocracy of the American South, toting its Bible as a weapon and waving its Confederate flag, literally believes — in the way fundamentalists

believe everything literally—that “the South will rise again.” Red State voters are in angry denial that the South lost the Civil War and they seek a restoration of their confederacy of dunces.

In the *sturm* and *drang* of the operatic 1970s, the cast of characters was huge and the plot lurched forward on events that were epic. (That’s why, as critic Michael Bronski, pointed out, *Some Dance to Remember*, like *Gone with the Wind*, sweeps through fifteen characters and a dozen plot points.)

It is an intellectual mistake, especially for GLBT people, to dismiss the 1970s because of cliched and jokey attitudes about disco, grooming, clothing, political incorrectness, and pre-AIDS behavior.

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In the 1970s, we took the virtual world that had been the gay world before Stonewall and worked to turn the virtual dream into actual life.

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The night of that LA “Slave Auction,” April 10, 1976, Davis arrested approximately forty gay personalities and stars including *Drummer’s* first editor in chief Jeanne Barney, *Drummer’s* first publisher John Embry, porn legend Val Martin, and director of *Born to Raise Hell*, Terry LeGrand.

They were charged—and here’s a pattern!—with breaking the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution forbidding slavery. Invoking an antique law twenty-eight years later (2004) was the same way that then Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney denied gay marriage in his state to people who did not reside in Massachusetts.

The LAPD asked Jeanne Barney if she was a real woman and she answered, “Honey, if I were a drag queen, I’d have bigger tits.”

The way John Embry, ever ambiguous, handled the advertising, charged for the event, and changed his story about the nature of this event (was it for charity or was he charging admission for profit?) had played into Davis’ hands. Whatever happened, this raid drove *Drummer* to San Francisco to escape Davis’s clutches the way that Jews fled Hitler.

One cannot help but remember that the inspiring text for gays in the 1970s was the iconic, political, and sexually liberating film *Cabaret* (1972) which as a 1960s Broadway musical initiated an equation between Nazi Germany and Fascist America beyond, I think, even what Christopher Isherwood intended in what he called his *Berlin Stories* which were Herr Issywoo’s combination of his two short novels, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939).

His autobiography, *Christopher and His Kind* (1977), was a gay best seller at the same time I became editor in chief of *Drummer* and *Christopher*



and *His Kind* colored the way many participants felt about the *Drummer* salon and its kind.

Sprung from Isherwood via Kander and Ebb, the Weimar musical *Cabaret* dramatized how 1970s San Francisco mirrored 1930s Berlin: decadent, dazzling, diverse, doomed.

Following the exodus of *Drummer* out of LA by only a few months, Robert Opel (the performance artist and *Drummer* contributor who had streaked the 1974 Academy Awards) fled to San Francisco after he was arrested by Davis for indecent exposure when Opel protested nude inside a courtroom against the censorious legislating away of Los Angeles' nude beaches.

Opel was murdered in San Francisco on July 8, 1979, 1) only eight months after Harvey Milk was assassinated, 2) six weeks after the White Night Riot, and 3) only five weeks after Opel appeared in his own performance art in the wide-open UN Plaza in front of City Hall where he had protested the jury's soft "Twinkie Defense" verdict that had pillowed rather than pilloried assassin Dan White.

At high noon, in the Gay Parade crowds, Opel had costumed himself as "Gay Justice," and, brandishing a gun, he "executed" a fellow actor costumed in white as the former policeman-fireman-and-conservative-politician "Dan White" who in his own private Fascism had shot both Milk and the liberal Mayor George Moscone. I created an entire section around Opel's life and murder in *Some Dance to Remember*, Reel Three.

I think Opel's death less than four years after Pasolini's fits a pattern, especially factoring in the bass-boom archetypal 1936 death of Federico Garcia Lorca shot, literally up the ass, by Fascists. The leftist poet Lorca was, like Pasolini and Opel, masculine-identified, and evinced the roots of his homomascularity in his "Ode to Walt Whitman."

The rumor that Pasolini's murderer was an operative of darker political forces is exactly what I was once told about Opel's murderer. On March 4, 1990 at a San Francisco cocktail party for a hundred men in uniform, a man pulled Mark Hemry and me from the gay chatter to a dark stairwell, and, because, he said, I had been the editor in chief of *Drummer* he had a story to tell us....

Let me ask you to sit on the ground in a circle as I tell the sad deaths of queens.

I wrote this *Salò* review because immediately post-Watergate and post-Vietnam all of us gays could feel the hate explode in the American air; gains we had made after Stonewall were beginning to be attacked by the fundamentalist religious right.

I thought *Salò* was a convenient pop hook on which I could hang some of our gay angst while at the same time I mobilized *Drummer* readers by

showing them that what they could take from *Salo* was not just S&M but also political rage against what all we leather hippies accused much of the establishment: Fascism.

Besides, “Gowns and Uniforms” were in the air. (“Gowns and Uniforms” is my code phrase for the modern anti-Nazi genre of movies nostalgic for World War II.) A year after this Pasolini essay was published, the Museum of Modern Art in 1979 hosted a “Fascism and Gays” symposium in which gay historian Martin Duberman participated.

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### American Fascism 2

Fascism is totalitarianism marked by a fundamentalist right-wing dictatorship supporting war-driven patriotism and nationalism. What we feared in the 1960s and the 1970s came true on 9/11 with members of the Senate and the Congress singing a fundamentalist arrangement of “God Bless America” on the Capitol Steps while some of them made threatening gestures to suspend the Constitution and declare the sitting president dictator-for-life. When George W. Bush reaches the end of his second term, he may decide not to leave the White House.

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Down Castro Street, a few blocks from the *Drummer* office, Supervisor Harvey Milk was warning gays not to let their civil rights be taken away as they had, Milk said, in Nazi Germany.

On November 7, 1978, the Briggs Initiative was defeated.

Twenty days later, on November 27, 1978, Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were gunned down in San Francisco City Hall by Dan White, the only supervisor to have supported the Briggs Initiative.

The alarm I tried to sound in this review went off.

My career thumbnail: Internal evidence in my *Drummer* writing shows that while I always wrote sex-text about living life in the fast lane, I also wrote a sub-text about being careful medically and astute politically.

As Pasolini had been murdered, as Milk had been murdered, as Opel had been murdered, so were we all at risk—faced with the murderous Fascism of our anti-gay enemies.

It did not please me that I had to write my column on Harvey Milk’s death, on the very day he died, while his body was still warm, for *Drummer* 26 (January 1979).

**Excerpt source:** ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

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 American Fascism 3
 

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What happened in the 1970s was archetypally repeated in 1989 when the government, driven by the tobacco-funded Republican Senator Jesse Helms, prosecuted and censored the S&M gay photography of my bicoastal lover Robert Mapplethorpe. In the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the same crap has been reeling out again in the fundamentalist opposition to gay marriage.

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There may be a point here: gay art, such as *Salo*, is a cautionary tale that prompts us to look at the principles we stand for even as we are attacked by Fascists of whatever stripe simply because they have to point at somebody they say is bad so that nobody will notice that they themselves are evil. They need us the way Hitler needed Jews to get his way.

Pasolini is template of many gays, particularly Catholic gays, who are anti-clerical yet profoundly religious. To me, trained as a social-worker priest, his film of the life and death of Jesus, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (1964), is a Catholic-Marxist “take” on the gospel, by way of Saint Francis. It is equal to Martin Scorsese’s erotic *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and far superior to the fundamentalist S&M Jesus created by the right-wing director Mel Gibson in his blood-dripping whip-fest *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

On November 3, 1992, *The Advocate* (Issue 615) published a huge black swastika on its red cover headlining its lead article, “The Rise of Fascism in America.”

My *Salo* essay, because its subject matter and argument were relevant to Robert Mapplethorpe, was re-printed (albeit censored) in my erotic-bio memoir *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, Hastings House, New York (1994). Robert Mapplethorpe and I were bicoastal lovers. I cast the models in some of his San Francisco and New York photographs, including the cover of *Drummer 24* (September 1978). I gave Mapplethorpe his first magazine cover (the same *Drummer 24*) and was the first gay magazine editor to print his photographs in America in my special “New York art” issue *Son of Drummer* (September 1978).

In his book *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Art*, the critic Richard Meyer cited the pioneering importance of my feature essay and my photo captions, “Robert Mapple-

thorpe Gallery (Censored),” the first article on Mapplethorpe in the gay press, in my special *Drummer* edition *Son of Drummer*; see also my “Pentimento for Robert Mapplethorpe: Fetishes, Faces, and Flowers of Evil,” *Drummer* 133 (September 1989).

Finally, I should make an eyewitness note that Mario Simon, the lover and business partner of publisher John Embry, was a singer born and raised in Franco’s Fascist Spain. He immigrated to America as an adult, met Embry in LA, and was arrested with Embry by the LAPD which made him two-times a Fascist victim when he fled LA for the open city of San Francisco in 1977. In the 1980s he was type-cast in local stagings of *Evita* as Magaldi, the over-the-top tango singer who gives *Evita* her first leg up singing “On This Night of a Thousand Stars.” Long after I exited *Drummer*, Embry listed “Mario Simone” on the masthead of *Drummer* 57 (October 1982) as “General Manager” which was flattering—and, one opines, tax-deductible, which made legitimate sense for benefits because he was not unknown as “Mrs. *Drummer*,” the owner’s “wife.” The tempestuous “Mario Simone” was more often “Mario Simon” as spelled in his obituary; he lived from March 5, 1942 to December 12, 1993.

## II. The feature essay as published in *Drummer* 20, January 1978

### ***DRUMMER* Views the Flicks...**

**The last and best review of  
the controversial *Salo* you’ll ever need.**

**What’s an S&M man to think of leather and Fascism?**

## **Toward an Understanding of *Salo***

**(*Drummer’s* Farewell to Pasolini’s Last Picture Show)**

Let’s cut through all the queenly bullshit about *Salo*, the last and most controversial vision of Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. If you’re alive and gay, you waited two years for the U.S. release of this film. Now that you’ve seen *Salo*, how do you handle its scenes in your own head and explain them to unkinky gays? Especially since *Salo’s* explicit scenes, at first viewing, seem so directly tied to the S&M lifestyle. You can’t laugh *Salo* off like *Pink Flamingo’s* outrageous Divine eating shit. *Salo* is no joke.

TWO KINDS OF CINEMA

**Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008**

Make a distinction: movies and films. You go to a *movie* to escape life's tension. You go to a *film* to intensify life. You go to a movie for entertainment. You go to a film for intensified input. Some guys short-circuit when they pay admission for a movie only to find out what's on screen is more than they bargained for: a film.

Before you approach the box office, read reviews and listen to word-of-mouth to determine if the feature showing is a *movie* or a *film*. Then figure out if you're in a movie-mood for entertainment, or in a film-mood for intensity. Since most reviewers are confused assholes trying to judge movies by film criteria, and films by GP-movie standards, you basically pay your money, take your chances, and wind up as your own best movie/film critic.

With an entertainment-movie, you get pretty much the sound of music that you bargained for. With the intensity of a film, you can bet you'll be yanked into some artful spaces you never expected to go. When you leave a movie, you exit much the same as when you entered. When you leave a film, you exit changed by an experience that really opened your eyes and your mind.

#### *SALÒ* IS A FILM

Poor Pasolini: more misunderstood dead than alive. He filmed clues to his murderer's identity. His murder is our attempted murder. His clue is *Salò* itself: a film about the Bryants and Briggs and Pryors (whose grandmother's name is Bryant). Pasolini's *Salò* is a cautionary film, a warning flag. He is frankly blunt in his message about political Fascism that kills the individuality of sex. For Pasolini there is no pentimento in *Salò*. No regret. No change of heart or mind. Certain murder, he cautions gays, lies in wait.

*Salò* is a dark film shot in a narrow space.

#### *SALÒ* IS ABOUT AMERICAN GAYS TODAY: 1978

There are two kinds of S&M: ritual and real. Ritual S&M men go to see *Salò* hoping that Pasolini has made a gay porno-fantasy movie as innocuously entertaining and ritualistic as the gay porn film *Born to Raise Hell* (1974) shot by Roger Earl [Warnix] and Terry LeGrand. Instead, Pasolini, although a fan of ritual-macho S&M, in *Salò* presents a scary film of real S&M. (And rather disappointingly straight at that!) Gay ritual S&M is Black Leather Therapy acted out for mental health with mutual consent. Straight real S&M is the evil stuff of a Hitler born again in a Bryant,

Briggs, or in the LAPD Police Chief Ed Davis. Real S&M is Fascism. Chances are that American Gays in the coming 1980s are in for a fantastically Fascistic bad time. Goodbye, glitter, and, hello, Anne Frank!

### CABARETTO JULIA

Films find Fascism fashionable. *Cabaret* insightfully showed the easy seduction by Fascism when the handsome blond Nordic boy sang “Tomorrow Belongs to Me.” This sequence detailed Fascism’s bandwagon seduction as, on screen, face after face joined his rousing song. Director Bob Fosse’s own filmic power seduced the American audience right into the spirit of the sunny beer-garden song, so that in movie houses everywhere audiences were shocked to find themselves so suddenly, so easily sucked into the thrill of what began as a gloriously innocent song and built to an impassioned Fascist anthem of the Master Race.

*Julia*, directed by Fred Zinnemann, more gently shows American dramatist Lillian Hellman (Jane Fonda) rescuing liberal Europeans from pre-World War II Fascism which eventually murders Julia herself (Vanessa Redgrave). Less delicately than *Cabaret* and *Julia*, the films of Lina Wertmueller such as *Seven Beauties* (1976) and the films of young Spanish director Fernando Arrabal—*Viva la Muerte* (1974) and *Guernica* (1976)—portray the grotesquely real S&M of Franco’s Fascism under which Arrabal and the current generation of young Spaniards have grown up knowing the fact that gay men, like the gay poet/dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca, are shot up the ass with pistols because they are gay; the fact that Arrabal’s own father is buried to the neck in sand so his head can be used by four horsemen as a polo ball; the fact that a woman shits on a male prisoner’s face. In Wertmueller’s *Beauties*, a Nazi She-Wolf performs shockingly cruel and scatological S&M inside a concentration camp. These are strong images meant to stir up strong audience reaction by these filmmakers. A moviemaker like Ken Russell, on the other hand, rolls singer Ann-Margret around in chocolate syrup in *Tommy* (1975), and this movie-brand of “pretend-shit” the audience of faint-hearts think is “just a wonderful camp.”

### SOME GUYS WON’T FACE TRUTH

So what has Fascism to do with Gay Americans in 1978? John Dos Passos, author of *USA Trilogy*, warned, “We will have Fascism in America, but we will call it Americanism.” Bigots from Bryant to Briggs who wrap themselves in the flag and scream “family” are Americanists. Ameri-

canists do what Fascists did. Hitler burned books and censored radio. Germans were not allowed to see what they wanted to see nor say what they wanted to say. Americanist/Fascists always want other people, their victims, in tied-up situations.

Pasolini dared demonstrate this by literally tying up *Salo's* victims, by literally gouging the eye (to symbolize you may not see what you wish), by cutting out the tongue (to symbolize you are not free to speak your opinion), by scalping the head (to symbolize you may not use your head according to the fashion of your own thoughts), by forcing one couple to make love on command (to symbolize you may not fuck except as ordered), by shooting an interracial pair of lovers (to symbolize you must not only procreate with your own kind, but you must also have passion for nothing but the Movement). And always, Fascism makes you eat its shit.

Americanist/Fascist “morality” will not allow gay people to see with the perspective of gay vision, nor stand up to speak out with opinion for gay human rights. Anita wants your eyes, your tongue, and like *Cuckoo's Nest* Nurse Ratched, she wants your balls. Dade County, remember, has “tied-up” gay housing. Add insult to injury: TV gouges your eyes, your ears, and your wallet with Anita's plastic face shilling the Orange Shit Juice Americanists/Fascists automatically swallow.

## THE WIZARD OF OZ MEETS MUSSOLINI

*Salo* offers strong images to strengthen the viewer in his sequences “Circle of Obsessions” and “Circle of Shit.” Pasolini was so aware of the horrors of his third section titled “Circle of Blood” that he softened the images by distancing the audience from the bloody action with a telephoto lens that gauzed out the edges. Sometimes assault is the only way to raise consciousness.

Throughout *Salo*, which is not salacious, Pasolini artfully staged his cautionary political warning at a gut-level. *Salo's* images are contrived to get your attention. *Salo's* message is to hold your interest. *Salo* is a political film in the anti-Fascist tradition of Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1965) and Costa-Gavras' *Z* (1969) and *State of Siege* (1973).

Despite his serious message, Pasolini has the sense of humor to add the comic relief of a bunch of silly women dragged up in his film like Glinda the Good Witch, coming down the Hello-Dolly staircases telling their naughty, campy tales. But, he vehemently warns, behind their fashion lurks Fascism.

## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MGM MUSICALS?

**Excerpt source:** ©Jack Fritscher, [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008

Lots of gay men don't like real things. They hide in fantasy and ritual. They prefer life in a gay ghetto. They need nobody to cover their eyes and ears. On their own, they ostrich-like refuse to look or listen farther than their cocks can shoot. They miss Pasolini's value of using parallax gay vision in a twisted straight world.

Pier Paolo's images are strong. His message is clear: FASCISM IS COMING OUT OF ITS CLOSET, TOO. His film won't let us ignore it. He shakes us so bodily we want to turn away our faces from the screen. We may not emotionally like what we see; but, understanding his visionary point of view, we can intelligently distinguish and explain how what he films is not about our Ritual S&M, but about a real political-moral reality that, like something dreadful, this way comes.

#### GET THE PICTURE?

In defense of her own bizarre short stories' strong images, Flannery O'Connor wrote about people who have eyes and see not and ears and hear not: "To the almost deaf you have to shout; and to the almost blind, you have to write in very large letters."

Pasolini's death-cry, *Salo*, shouts very large.

### III. Eyewitness Illustrations

"Pier Paolo Pasolini," 1974,  
publicity photograph.



©Jack Fritscher

Two publicity kit photographs from Pasolini's film *Salo* (1975). Six of them appeared in *Drummer 20* (January 1978). Based on the book *The 120 Days of Sodom* by Marquis de Sade, *Salo* was directed by international filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini who, shortly after the release of *Salo*, was murdered, age fifty-three, on the beach at Ostia, near Rome, by the rough-trade hustler Pino Pelosi.

**Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008**

©Jack Fritscher

Movie ad, *New York Times*. On September 14, 1972, the startling Brazilian film *The Case of the Naves Brothers* (1967) had its quiet little American premiere at the Carnegie Hall Cinema. Director Luiz Sergio Person's grainy black-and-white *cinema verite* made the explicit torture of this brutal film a landmark in anti-government cinema. In the hardon helix between art and sex, *The Naves Brothers* enhanced the subtext and the actuality of real torture and S&M games played by some *Drummer* men. The *Naves* film, like its victims, has mysteriously disappeared.

Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008](#)

©Jack Fritscher

Publicity kit photograph. Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976) was the first gay S&M film to gain international notoriety with its Steve-Reeves-like spear-and-sandal story of gay icon Saint Sebastian tortured and killed by rough young Roman soldiers on the hot, burning desert sands of Sardinia—northwest of Ostia. The dialog of *Sebastiane* was in Latin with subtitles.

**Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008**

Pervy British filmmaker Derek Jarman directed *Edward II* (1991), a film about leathery Fascist power, gay sex, and Tilda Swinton. Premiere *Edward II* program.

At the same time, the dying Jarman designed the Queen's Theatre production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

©Jack Fritscher

At Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini's Foro Italico, Rome, each statue is twelve feet tall on a six-foot pedestal. "Statue of Boxer Primo Carnera #1," and "Statue of Primo Carnera #2." Photographs by Mark Henry (2006) ©Mark Henry. Inset: Statue of Primo Carnera on the cover of the first edition of *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*. Photograph by George Mott. ©George Mott

**Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008**

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“Jack Fritscher,” March 2006, Ostia Antica, the ancient cruising ground where Pasolini was murdered, and, top, “Ostia Antica.” Photographs by Mark Henry. ©Mark Henry

Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

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Top: "Jumbo Jets Stream in Low over Ostia," the abandoned ancient "sea port" of Rome, to land nearby at the modern "air port" of Rome, March 2006. Photograph by Mark Henry ©Mark Henry. Bottom: "Mark Henry," March 2006, Ostia Antica. Photograph by Jack Fritscher. ©Jack Fritscher

**Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008**



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Eyewitness  
Illustration

DVD and book cover. In the 1970s, both the films and writing of right-wing Yukio Mishima and left-wing Pier Paolo Pasolini became required viewing and reading in the canon wars over establishing gay art and literature.

Eyewitness  
Illustration

Four DVD covers. After the Prague Spring of 1968, Fascists and Nazis invaded the popular culture of the 1970s. Franco reigned in Spain; Nixon ruled over Watergate; and the Vietnam war did not end until one month before the first issue of *Drummer*. Top: Fernando Arrabal's *Viva La Muerte*; Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* morphed into *I Am a Camera* and *Cabaret*; the underground grind-house "guilty pleasure" of *Drummer* readers was *Isa: She-Wolf of the SS*.