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**COLLECTIVE SPECTERS AND COLLECTIVE SIGNS:
THE ROMAN HAUNTOLOGY OF *THE ASHES OF GRAMSCI***

Abstract: This article proposes a reading of Pasolini's *The Ashes of Gramsci* (*Le ceneri di Gramsci*) as a crucial reflection on the inheritance of Gramsci's notion of collective man in post-war Italy and the different ways in which instances of power and hegemony are expressed through language and lived within the spaces of a newly rebuilt city. While the concepts of collective man and multitudes will become the central paradigms shaping the Italian cultural left in the late 20th and 21st century, these notions are here explored for their linguistic and visual power. The poem brings forth some of the keywords destined to dominate the Italian political and intellectual discourse, while its meticulous construction mirrors, as well as contradicts, the scattered and disorderly Roman architecture that constitutes its setting. For this reason, the poem represents what Jacques Derrida has called a *hauntology*, or an ontology that is at once what is and what is not.

Keywords: Pasolini, Gramsci, ashes, specter, collective, multitude, language, monument.

Introduction

The collection *The Ashes of Gramsci* (*Le ceneri di Gramsci*, 1957) is a cornerstone of Pasolini's work: not only does it comprise the author's most celebrated poetry; it has often been considered the gateway for his shift from poetry to film, due to its unique interpolation of ideological views with rich visual and descriptive passages. With few exceptions, the tendency of criticism has been to see the collection as an overture, either for an analysis of Pasolini's movies, or for his approach to political and philosophical stances within the scope of Gramscian thought. *The Ashes of Gramsci* has been fundamental for the affirmation of Pasolini as a Gramscian intellectual and a crucial—if controversial—figure of the Italian cultural left. The collection's evocative title has also been frequently reprised in artistic and academic production, even when not directly linked to the poems. *The Ashes of Gramsci*, in other words, is an expression that has transfigured its literal meaning to become a metaphor, in turn for the crisis, the transformation, or the funeral of the left.¹

Critics have extensively approached Pasolini's collection, and particular attention has been dedicated to the eponymous poem, written with the backdrop of Rome's English cemetery (*cimitero acattolico*, or *cimitero degli inglesi*) behind the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, in the working-class neighborhood of Testaccio, where Gramsci's ashes are buried. The dominant interpretation of the

¹ See Viano (51-60); Sillanpoa (120-137); Francese (20-41); Agosti (140).