Piero Tosi between Luchino Visconti and Silvana Mangano on the set of *Death in Venice,* 1971. Note the naturalness and detail of Mangano's sumptuous day-dress. *Courtesy of Photofest.*

Hide in Plain Sight: An Interview with Piero Tosi

Drake Stutesman

In an ideal world Piero Tosi's name would serve as a benchmark for any kind of artistic excellence. One of the greatest costume designers ever, Tosi–now in his eighties and still teaching in Rome–has worked with Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, among others. Renowned for his range, Tosi's versatility has extended from hair design (Visconti's *La Caduta degli dei/The Damned*, IT, 1969), to make-up (Fellini's *Fellini Satyricon*, IT, 1970), to sets (Fellini's "Toby Dammit" sequence in *Histoires Extraordinaires/Spirits of the Dead*, with Louise Malle, FR/IT, 1968); not to mention the historically precise costumes he created for much of Visconti's work and the prodigious imagination he brought to those in Pasolini's *Medea* (FR/IT, 1969). Though many of these films demonstrate Tosi's expertise with historical dress, he is equally comfortable with modern clothes, ensuring that they convey character, as exemplified by Terence Stamp's praise for his designs as indispensable to his part in "Toby Dammit," and the iconic costumes he devised for Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (*Il Portiere di notte*, IT/US, 1974) and Eduoard Molinaro's *La Cage aux folles* (IT/FR, 1978). But, for all these extremes, it is Tosi's long collaboration with Visconti that remains the backbone of his career.

Visconti's films straddle the artificial and the realistic often by combining a stage setting's stark contrastive lighting, either in black and white or clashing colors, with an historically accurate *mise-en-scene*. Yet, within this odd mix, his stories manage to carry an almost palpable sense of the real. To achieve that, he worked with people who well understood how to create a living atmosphere from such false sources as sets, lights, and acting. That is, Visconti embellished his own genius with a genius for choosing talents such as Suso Cecchi d'Amico, his screenwriter on many films, Armando Nannuzzi

Framework 47, No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 107–121.
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and Pasqualino De Santis, two of his great cinematographers, and Tosi, his ubiquitous costume designer, whose job was as complex, demanding and subtle as any below or above the line.

The subtlety of costume design is often unobserved by an audience but nevertheless guides their unconscious through the narrative as few other elements of a film can. We make sense of the social world through clothing: its tailoring, its colors, its familiarity, or its shock anchors us in the structures of everyday life. We access someone's status or individuality through the way they wear their clothes (clean, dirty, sagging, fitted), through their clothes' textures (denim, silk, synthetic), through insignias such as hats (often revealing rank such as a crown or a veil does) or shoes, and through sartorial clues that we take for liberation or hipness (flowing, revealing, baggy, or tight) or repression (unkempt, misshapen). Film costume design must work along these profound psychic lines yet remain discreet at all times. The costume designer Gabriella Pescucci, whose work ranges from the riotous imagination of *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (Terry Gilliam, UK, 1988) to the historical accuracy of *The Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, US, 1993)–and who trained with Piero Tosi through the 1970s–declared this phenomenon plainly: ". . . my greatest satisfaction comes from having my work disappear in the film."[1] The costume is a subliminal vehicle and it is the costume designer's "job," as Albert Wolsky, Academy Award winner for his costumes for *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, US, 1980), said, to "identify, through elimination and simplification, who somebody is."[2] Years before, Adrian, MGM's Head of Costume from 1928–1942 revealed this interior structure of costume design as both signifier and narrative guide with his statement that "one could line up all the gowns and tell the screen story."[3] That the costume tells the story *on its own* is a radical and yet valid idea. A film can be read through its clothing, much as we read daily life through clothes, and the costume designer is ever cognizant of the costume's power to be the storyline's most influential *leit motif.*

Despite this sway, Tosi approaches the task as a worker and described the "essence of costume design" to me as "the willingness and humility to accept each project as a new venture," and his versatility and thoroughness in these ventures is legendary. Tosi began his film career on Visconti's monochrome urban set for *Bellisima* (IT, 1951), starring Anna Magnani. He famously clothed the film by stopping people in the Roman streets to ask them for the clothes they were wearing. They willingly stripped when he said three magic words: " cinema," the adored escape from postwar depression, and "Anna Magnani," the idol of millions of Italians. In 1960, Tosi clothed Visconti's working class tale, *Rocco and his Brothers* (*Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, IT), starring Alain Delon. Though this seems merely an exercise in dressing people ordinarily, the outfits always fulfilled strategic cinematic needs. The costume designer must work closely with the cinematographer and a prime example of this collaboration can be found in Tosi's handling of a nocturnal

fight scene for the film shot by Giuseppe Rotunno. Here Tosi used a white line around the collar of Delon's sweater to highlight his head so that he was easily visible in the darkness. Unobtrusive yet crucial, taking the eye exactly where it has to go or fixing the mind psychologically–this is the crux of costume design. These details appear distinctly in Tosi's exceptional historical designs, especially for Visconti's films such as *Senso* (IT, 1954), about wealthy nineteenth-century Italians under Austrian occupation; *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, IT/FR, 1963), about the fall of nineteenth-century Sicilian aristocracy; *The Damned*, about the penetration of the German upper-class in WWII by Nazis; *Death in Venice* (*Morte a Venezia*, IT/FR, 1971), about the fin-de-sieclé city's vacationers; and *Ludwig* (IT/FR, 1972) about the nineteenth-century Bavarian king. Even the briefest examination of these films reveals Tosi's ability to create a realness in the clothes, which, however ignorant of the era we may be, allows us into the scene through recognizable, sentient clues. In *Senso*, *Ludwig* and *The Leopard* the clothes are suitably period (riding gear, morning dress, lounging robe, etc.) but they also seem personal because they appear lived in: both well preserved (carefully packed or closeted daily after each use) and worn (very difficult to wash or iron), a blend rarely accomplished or even sought in design. To achieve this, the designer must not only cut them correctly (at times sewing them by hand if machines were not in use during the film's era), but also handle the clothes to authenticate them. This can mean burning, pounding, steaming, greasing, or even just touching the fabrics and manipulating them to show wear on a hem, a pocket or a shoulder. Subliminally these minute details create *mise-en-scene* as much as any set design, perhaps even more, because we are already used to using them.

On August 9, 2003, I met with Tosi in Frascati, just outside of Rome, and the interview that follows–translated and transcribed thanks to Monica Facchinello–is the result of this meeting.

Drake Stutesman: How did costume designing become your profession? What in your early youth drew you to costume design?

Piero Tosi: I don't know. It was probably my vocation. Every year, in the school where I teach, I have many students. We have more girls than men who want to become costume designers–the average is three men and thirty girls–nowadays women want to realize themselves at all costs. Some among them, though, are hopeless. One needs something innate in order to pursue a certain profession and then maybe, by attending the course, one can possibly improve. I understand immediately if a student is inclined to this profession. In the last few years hardly anyone of my students would show that innate inclination, and it was difficult for me to teach them. Only three years ago I had a young man from Tuscany, who came from the countryside and somehow he had made himself and was talented.

When I was young I liked reading a lot. I was fascinated by atmosphere in novels. I loved Balzac and Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. How can you forget those characters? I would imagine the characters and their clothes in their atmosphere. It all originates from this desire and great passion to understand a certain context. Oscar Wilde, for instance, he was a social man, and he would receive many invitations, but some evenings he would decline them all and say–"Tonight I stay here in the company of Julien Sorell"–the protagonist in *The Red and the Black*.

DS: Was literature your main interest when you were young?

PT: Sure, literature and cinema. I liked the cinema. I remember when the American cinema–when *Washington Square* [*The Heiress*, William Wyler, US, 1949]–came to Italy, I understood what good quality was like. The hairstyle, the clothes–it is a perfect American film. They were not just costumes. They were works of art. And then the Italian film *Piccolo Mondo Antico* [Mario Soldati, IT, 1941], which was made by a great director and great costume designer, also contributed to my understanding. In the 1930s and 1940s there wasn't much.

DS: The extraordinary thing about *Washington Square* is that it is so natural, the story, the acting, the clothes, everything.

PT: Olivia de Havilland is the right character, her clothes and hairstyle. It's memorable–she was marvelous. It did not work as well with the other character. What is she called, the one who played the aunt ['*arpia d'Italia*']? She was a famous actress in the thirties. In that case there was an optical problem, her hairstyle . . .

DS: Miriam Hopkins.

PT: Yes. But Olivia de Havilland put up resistance, for the work on the other characters was perfect in comparison.

DS: Which costume designers in the twenties and thirties most interested you?

PT: There were great costume designers, such as Adrian, but they were primarily repetitive. They were influenced by the fashion of the moment. Greta Garbo was always dressed the same way. She was always Greta Garbo. And so Marlene, whom I loved, was always Marlene. Actors were not feeling with the characters, the persona. There were others–creators of marvelous stars. How could you otherwise have Garbo, Marlene, Joan Crawford? The characters they played were all forged by them. But of course, these actors were

not only talented, but they also had extraordinary bodies. Take Garbo, and Marlene, and Zombrotto–how could one invent these characters? They were so vivid. Marlene was memorable. Marlene was probably the best, even though Garbo was prettier.

DS: Great bodies and great faces. Is the face important to you?

PT: It's essential. The face is a fundamental trait. Even in my daily life I look at people most. Yes, I like landscapes, but I like people most. Choosing between the portrait of a landscape and the portrait of a man and a landscape, I'd go for the latter. I've always been interested in the human individual. I am fascinated by faces. This is why Fellini chose me, because he too was "the count of faces." He was crazy about faces. Before he started a film, he would receive thousands of people. He basically lived in Cinecittá. He would spend his time meeting people, look at them, at their faces, talk to them. Then, of course, he would use them like mere objects; the actor was nothing to him but something he needed. And he loved the face. This is why he would choose me, because I was also very interested in the face.

I will tell you of one time during the production of *Satyricon*. Camillo Donati was working there, but I spent eight months exclusively dealing with hairstyles and face makeup. I remember an English actor who came for the makeup and asked for the screenplay of the scene he was to be in, but Fellini refused him that. The actor asked for at least one page or just to know what he was supposed to do, to say. "Yes, you will have it," Federico replied. Fellini was terrible, such a manipulator, a bitch I would say. "Yes, don't worry," he added, "you will have your page." Eventually it was the day when the scene was to be shot. The stage was arranged. But still Federico said he would not give the actor the page. Instead, Federico hugged him and took him around the theater and said: "I need to ask you something." Federico was terrible and he said, "You see, I don't want you to deliver the screenplay but I want you to say a few numbers, I will tell you when and you will say, one, two, three. But I will also tell you turn around this way and that way." He was humiliating him. Meanwhile, a man came to me for makeup. He looked like a Roman ivory engraving. I made him up and dressed him. Then I went to Federico and I told him I had an extraordinary looking person. He said: "Bring him here." Holding his hand, Fellini took the first actor down from the stage, and then, in the same way, brought the new man on the stage. He didn't care about the other actor. He didn't care at all about the person he left behind.

DS: How was it to work with Fellini?

PT: It was very fascinating. Fellini was as nasty as a hyena and a liar, a bitch, and as seductive as a snake. It was torturing to work with him because he

would never lose control, day or night. When he was working on a film, he would not put it down for a second. Unlike Visconti, who at nine in the evening would stop and we wouldn't talk about work any longer. With Federico it would be months of incessant labor. Federico would work all day long, building during the day and dismantling it all during the night in order to start building again the day after.

On Saturdays, he would drag me to Progene–where Fellini had a house on the beach. On the way there, after the entire week spent talking about work, we would still be talking about work. He would take me for dinner and we would talk about work. Masina, his wife, would try to divert from all this and bring up some other banal issues, but he would cut her off. Well, she was banal! But this doesn't mean anything. Actors can be banal. At ten in the evening, it would be bedtime and Federico would take me to bed like a mother and kiss me good night, like a caring mother, and say, "Sleep well, darling, little treasure, sleep well." [laugh] At five in the morning I would already hear footsteps, and Fellini would come and knock at my door and say, "Little treasure, are you up?" [laugh] And we would be starting again. All his life he was constantly working, and even his sexual phobias were literature. They were not real, but part of his work.

One evening in the car . . . Fellini always had nice, charming cars . . . but he was a bad driver. On the way from the beach house to Rome he would say, "You know, I was thinking of the set for the scene we're shooting tomorrow morning. What if we had some of those paper cartoonist bags with the caricatures by Steinberg?" My reply was, "Yes, fine, but where do I get them from now at eleven in the evening?" And of course, I'd have to have them ready at five in the morning on stage. And he would say, "Oh, no problem, we'll go back to Progene and we'll have a store opened for us and we'll buy the bags." I spent the whole night working on these bags to have them ready for the day after. And in the morning he didn't make any mention of them to me. First I thought I wouldn't remind him of them. Only in the late afternoon I called him and said, "Federico, do you remember that I spent the whole night making those bags? Do you still need them?" "Oh yes, put one on that face, please!"

DS: It's unusual for a costume designer to also do hairstyle and make up. Why did you want to do all three?

PT: Well, because the face is fundamental. You know, you do a lot on the costumes, but then the whole scene is focused on the face.

DS: Your hairstyles are very accurate. That's unusual in cinema. How important is the hair?

PT: Well, one only needs to consider the role hair plays in fashion in recent

years. Hair has been taken to the level of Mongolian sheep. [laugh] The hair is most highly affected by the whims of fashion and hair also most affects physical appearance. Hair can do a lot for the face. Especially in Italy, where hair is horrible. While American hair is beautiful, Italian hair tends to be afro-style, which covers up the face.

DS: Did you enjoy hairstyling?

PT: Yes, but it was extremely hard work. I was at the *Satyricon* set at five AM everyday. There was a corridor–makeup on one side and hairstyling on the other. I had my palette of colors for the makeup and would only do half the face and leave my palette and go to do the hair.

DS: There must have been a tremendous amount of research that went into it.

PT: No, it was mainly imaginative. Fellini didn't want to have any reference to the historical set-up of what we imagined being Roman. He wanted faces as if coming out from a dream.

DS: Was that inspiring to have full imaginative rein or more difficult?

PT: It was inspiring but it was very hard too. I had to forget, get rid of all the cultural background and only deal with the inspiration of the face. I would be doing more than twenty faces a day. And I'd put makeup on all day long. On any free afternoon I happened to have, I was creating noses. I was even working with materials like egg white and chalk, I would mix them. And with the hairdryer I would create cracks.

DS: Did you like to work with natural material?

PT: Yes, absolutely. To some extent it becomes a challenge.

DS: You're from Florence. Did growing up there especially charge your imagination, inspire your sense of challenge?

PT: Sure, it gave me some sort of rigor. Florence was rigorous. The architecture there is rigorous and stone is the prevailing material. Colors are sober. Rome is entirely different. It is a baroque city, while Florence is based on Renaissance rigor.

DS: That's an interesting contrast because it shows in your work. You're so talented in being able to create something simple from something that is opulent.

PT: I don't know. When I first went to Rome, in 1948, I was seduced by the city, which I immediately felt as my own, more than I did with Florence, and I realized I wanted to stay in Rome.

DS: Did you grow up in Florence?

PT: Yes, I grew up and went to school in Florence.

DS: Did you study design?

PT: I first attended an art-based secondary school, Liceo Artistico, then went to the Academy of Fine Arts.

DS: Did you study painting, sculpture?

PT: No, I did graphic arts. I already knew I wanted to move towards costume. I took a course on costume while I was attending the Academy. But it was very old-fashioned. In a way I was already moving towards something different, innovative. Florence is an intellectual and beautiful city, but it can be very hard to move out of it. I was lucky. Visconti happened to attend the Festival of Music, a major event in Florence in those years, great musicians and artists would be there. And it was a great event in the history of Italian cinema. Visconti was directing Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. I was very young, and when I showed him my portfolio, he looked at my work and asked how old I was. I was 21 and he said, "Oh, you are young, you have time!" Luckily, though, he took me on as fifth help costume designer. And that was my start.

DS: Your first film with him was *Bellissima*. How did you research it?

PT: Yeah, this was another big point. Visconti wanted someone who had no previous working experience in theater. He wanted to catch the real. For *Bellissima,* I had to walk in the street looking for the people who most resembled the characters and get their clothes off them. And without washing them or changing them, I had to put them on the actors. This was for me the most extraordinary lesson I ever had. No school could have taught me that. In those days the cinema held a great appeal for people, a lot more than today. If I stopped people on the street and asked for their clothes, they would think I was mad. I only had to say I needed their clothes for a film by Visconti with Anna Magnani and they would suddenly be astonished and they would not believe their dirty clothing could be used by Anna Magnani. "Yes," I would say, "I need it exactly like that."

DS: Was it your idea or Visconti's?

PT: It was Visconti's idea, of course.

DS: You feel the body heat in those clothes.

PT: Sure! And that's why that was a great lesson.

DS: And your talent in doing that, for creating that naturalism, hasn't been outdone.

PT: Oh! James Acheson is a great costume designer too.

DS: He *is*. You worked on many Visconti films. Was it difficult to work with his use of dark lighting?

PT: Yes, it was. If in *Gattopardo* [The Leopard] we had had the cinematic abilities we have now, it would have been easier. We did an experiment. We lit the set only using candles and chandeliers to render that atmosphere and shot a scene. It was very emotional. We wanted to see to what extent the film would cope with the dark colors. But unfortunately it came out red and everything was too red.

DS: What about working on *Rocco and His Brothers*? That is very dark. Does this make it difficult for the costume designer?

PT: No, not really. The purpose is to have that kind of drama, intense black and white and dark.

DS: The clothes are very simple but boost the story so subliminally. In one fight scene, when Delon is fighting outside with his brother at night, it was fascinating how you used that single white line around the collar of his sweater to highlight the face. But the sweater was ordinary, unnoticeable.

PT: It's impressive, you remember everything! Yes. I wanted it to have its own drama, which goes beyond the historic moment. I wanted the costume to be anonymous.

DS: I'm not sure of your collaborations with other specialists. I'm writing a biography of the milliner Mr. John and I've heard that he made the hats for *Death in Venice*. Is that true?

PT: I made all the hats for that film in cooperation with the milliner of [the Italian costume house] Sartoria Tirelli. I don't really know about this person. What is his name?

DS: His millinery name was Mr. John. He did hats for Adrian in the thirties and the forties, and many for Garbo and Dietrich films, as well as running his own label.

PT: Those hats were remarkable. Unfortunately, though, I didn't get to meet him. When all the hats for ***Death in Venice*** were almost ready to be delivered and we were to leave to Venice in a week, there was a fire and all the hats got destroyed. In a week we had to recreate all the hats.

DS: Was Tirelli helpful in that time?

PT: Thank God, yes! In those days there still was an old lady, a talented hat maker who helped me to recreate them properly and fast. And fortunately I bought a lot of stuff in the flea market in Paris: 1910 original ribbon, flowers and fixing. Therefore, all the decorations applied to the hats were authentic.

DS: Did you buy that by chance or were you specifically looking for it?

PT: No, I bought them for that purpose. The only original hat, which I also bought at the flea market, was the one which Silvana Mangano was wearing on the beach. It was an original Florence straw hat with an ivory veil and violet flowers, which were kind of trembling because they were built up with wire, curlicues . . .

DS: Fascinating! How do you research? Also, do you use actual antique fabrics in the period costume that you make for a film?

PT: I used antique fabrics, which were quite rare too. Besides when you find antique fabrics, being handmade, they normally are too small. The looms were small. So I would use them for details.

DS: Did you find working with ancient material especially inspiring in making the period costumes?

PT: Yes, of course. Well it also depends on the stories, the director, but yes, if a costume designer has to rebuild a context, an atmosphere, first of all he needs to be aware of what happened in a certain period. One needs to research and read. And yet reading is never enough. In order to increase my understanding of that period I would draw step-by-step in order to gain familiarity with it. By drawing details I try to understand and get into the taste of the moment. I draw details. First I try to understand the architecture of the body, and the female body in particular–for the body pertains to a certain historical context.

DS: Is it the body which affects the style of the moment?

PT: Every eight years the human body changes completely. When you have an insight of the period of time–shapes, clothes, materials, colors–then you have to make the actor in accordance to it, and this is the most difficult task. There are actors who are extraordinarily able to transform themselves, those whose bodies are more flexible, such as women's bodies. However, nowadays beautiful women often are not flexible. They have a big structure. Their shoulders are too broad. They are like men, and it makes it difficult to shape a costume.

DS: How do you structure the costume around these constraints?

PT: I gradually shape the costume on the actor. I work on the actor, step-by-step. After that one has to find the nature of the character. In the end the costume is not just clothing any more, but it becomes the skin of the character.

DS: How do you research for various periods?

PT: I read the story. When I look for material of a period of time I think of the character and the story I am working towards. I gather all the elements, which help me to achieve an understanding.

DS: In *Ludwig*, for instance, how did you find the material?

PT: In *Ludwig* I went to Vienna where I found a lot of material, especially for the clothes for Sissy, the Queen Elisabeth. Those clothes were masterpieces. Queen Elizabeth had a wonderful, perfect body. She was a tall woman. She was slim. But I had Romy Schneider, who was small but had a big head. This happens in my profession, when one cannot find the ideal actor to interpret a character. I thought I could have Charlotte Rampling. Unfortunately the German investors in the film wanted Romy Schneider. I had to deal with those proportions.

DS: The clothes in *Ludwig* were remarkable. They looked as if they had been walked in, as if they had been worn, as if people had been living in those clothes. You have the great ability to make a period of time look natural. How did you do that?

PT: I always doubt my talent. I try to spend as long as I possibly can with the actors, during the makeup, and even when they get dressed. I follow them, like a psychoanalyst, yet without annoying them. And this is easy to do with actors, because they are very vain. So all you need to do is to work around them. When actors try their costumes, they think it is as if they were in a

boutique, where they can choose their colors and shape. It entails a lot of psychological work, you need to work around them and enter into their own trust. Of course, some people are more flexible than others. I remember there was this one actress I really could not tame, and it was obvious. I was very young. I was called to work on a film in Italy. The film was set in 1910 and the actress was in a silent film. In Italy silent cinema was born in Naples and Turin. She was an extraordinary woman and she would not care for her character but would only care for herself. She wanted everything pink. Her hairstyle was perfect. I tried to work with her but it was impossible to change her. I thought I could either leave it or accept her, for, despite all, she was a very friendly and funny person.

DS: Who was the actor you found most comfortable to work with?

PT: I have to say that I was lucky to work with very talented and determined directors and their actors would not play their role wrong. They could not rebel against Visconti. As soon as he appeared on the set, there would be silence. He was a great and charming man. Everyone would obey this leader and nobody would discuss it and after a day of work, we would say, "The count was pleased."

DS: What was it like working with Visconti, especially with his use of colors, his strong blue and yellow and red?

PT: In the beginning I was frightened. But then I understood I had to obey him. And it was actually easy to work with him. He would call me and tell me, "I have this project and this story. Find me some documentation on it." And I would get there with lots of documents, obviously related to the story. This would take place in the morning, and the scene reminds me a bit of the bath in *Gattopardo* [*The Leopard*]. When I watch *Gattopardo* again, the scene in which Lancaster is having his bath and the servant comes and asks the prince what he is going to wear for the day. That reminds me of those mornings at work with Visconti. He had a large dressing room and there was a bathroom. I spread out all my documents on the floor and while he was in his robe, the servant asked the count what he was going to wear, just like in *Gattopardo.* And he talked to me and said," You see, Pierino" . . . he would call me Pierino. . . . "You see, this picture seems to me to be a starting point for us to get into the story, because it catches that atmosphere I want to give the story, and you should work on this image."

DS: For *Gattopardo*, you and Visconti went to Sicily to look at the landscape colors. What was the purpose of that?

PT: Yes, we did, and mainly because it was a color film, and the landscape

was the background of the story. But the shape would come first. Colors would come at a later stage. We would first work on the shape. And we would adapt colors to the backgrounds we chose. Had we chosen this room [indicates the room he is in], then the colors would have to work with this context.

DS: Your color preference in your costumes seems to be beige, blue, black and white. Would you agree with that? This is contrastive to Visconti's very bright lighting colors: reds, yellows etc. Was there some deliberate contrast there or how did it work together?

PT: No. To some extent one has to abandon oneself to the story and follow the flow of it. If I think that in a moment I need red, I use red. It is the story that dictates the color. And this also marks the difference between a fashion designer and a costume designer. The fashion designer thinks of the exterior. The costume designer goes into the details of the story. When *The Damned* came out, a film which was successful in America, I was asked by a fashion company to design a clothes line inspired by the 1930s, but I could not accept that. I could never design modern clothes for an anonymous person, something you shape on a mannequin.

DS: What is the most difficult thing for you in costume designing?

PT: The actors. It is difficult to enter in the mood of the actor and model him, so that I can make him a model.

DS: You worked with Maria Callas on Pasolini's *Medea*. She was not a film actor. Was *Medea* also a difficult project?

PT: It was hard in the beginning with Pasolini, because he did not accept me. He feared I would impose the style of Visconti on him. In my profession I knew I had entirely to adapt myself to the director. Pier Paolo was a friend of mine. We were peers. He started when he was very young. He was a schoolteacher. It was difficult to understand him. He wasn't clear enough. He gave me too much freedom and no hints. He wanted me to start from any possible trace. You can take anything, any pop tradition, any country, Mexico or Africa, put it all together and come up with something entirely different, a world which doesn't exist. In *Medea*, for instance, Maria Callas' dress is a traditional dress from Sardinia.

DS: Was it pleasurable to create this extravagant world?

PT: Yes, at one point I began to enjoy it.

DS: There seems to be a symbolic theme in the film itself, a theme of dressing and undressing. Did you design around this idea?

PT: Yes, sure. It was the symbol of the sacred dress of the ritual. She was a priestess and the act of undressing, of taking the sacred dress off stands for a return to a human dimension.

DS: Was that an interesting theme for a costume designer?

PT: Well, it was interesting. When you work with talented artists it is always very interesting. Their talent becomes always a challenge for the costume designer. It's very stimulating.

DS: Is that the first thing that excites you in approaching a film–the talent around you?

PT: I am an Aries with descending sign Virgo. First, mainly at work, the Virgo rules. So when they call me and I perceive the director's enthusiasm, I always feel like hiding at first and I feel like I want to flee. I went though this many times with Federico Fellini. Later, though, the Aries comes in, its strength and determination. But the first approach is the one of the Virgo.

DS: Interesting! In films like "Toby Dammit" and *La Streghe* (Visconti, Italy, 1967) where you created a stylish contemporary look, what was it like to work with modern fashion?

PT: Oh, yes, it was also a big challenge with Fellini's idea. When Terence Stamp arrived to play the role of Toby Dammit, he asked what he had to do. On the first day of work Fellini's reply was, "My little sweet Terence, Terencino. You are coming from an orgy last night. You had alcohol, drugs, cocaine, anything and you had sex with several men, women, dogs. And now you've just arrived here."

Yes, it was a beautiful film. And it was fated. The site where we shot it was also the place where Pasolini was murdered. Do you remember that small house?

In the beginning, when I started working on the film, I was working with a photographer. We would leave early in the morning and go around until late at night, and we would take pictures of all that I would find suggestive for that story; focal images such as the airport in Rome, the motorway from the airport to Rome, the castles, Villa Adriana. We had lots of pictures.

DS: You love architecture. How does it influence your work?

PT: Well, you know, I think architecture is part of a series of things which go

together: architecture, painting, sculpture. They go together. My main interest has always been visual arts. I have a bad memory. And that's why I will never learn a foreign language and I am bad at music too. But I have a great visual memory, so an image will stick to my memory forever.

DS: Mr. Tosi, thank you very much. What an honor.

Drake Stutesman is writing a biography of milliner-courturier, Mr John. She is an editor of Framework.

Notes

1 Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Costume Design* (Burlington: Focal Press, 2003), 91.
2 Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Costume Design* (Burlington: Focal Press, 2003), 165.
3 Adrian Archives, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, NY.