

## The Pope-celebrity and the role of cinema \*

Isabella Pezzini\*\*

Sapienza Università di Roma

Bianca Terracciano\*\*\*

Sapienza Università di Roma, Università degli studi della Tuscia

Cinema, in particular the *auteur* one, often offers a dense and sometimes visionary reflection on the processes of constitution and medial recognition of celebrities, some religious figures included, helping us to understand the depth of these phenomena also in relation to the different moments of history and of media development. The essay proposes a first exploration of this vast topic focusing on the analysis, conducted with semiotic instruments, of two texts considered prime examples in this sense, linked through the theme of the relation between worldliness and religion, as well by the direct connection of inspiration between the two directors. We refer to the historical sequence "The Princess Domitilla" from *Roma* (1972) by Federico Fellini and to the television series *The Young Pope* by Paolo Sorrentino (2016). In the first one, the link between sacralization and desecration is widely and provocatively explored, through the hyper-Baroque imaginary of an Ecclesiastical fashion show occurred in the heart of the Roman "Black nobility". Fellini already in the *Dolce Vita* (1960) staged the role of the media – especially the gutter press and the beginnings of television – in the construction of mass "fanaticism" phenomena, both worldly and religious. In the TV series created and directed by Paolo Sorrentino, *The Young Pope*, on the other hand, the question of the Pope as celebrity is explicitly addressed and theorized at different levels, starting with the choice of the lead actor, Jude Law, who emphasizes this theme.

**Keywords:** semiotics, sacred, profane, fashion, consumption

## Religious celebrities between sacralization and desecration: catwalk of the absurd and improbable psychotherapies

According to *Cambridge Dictionary* "desecrate" means "to damage or show no respect towards something holy or very much respected", whereas the *Merriam-Webster* reports these two definitions "1: to violate the sanctity of: PROFANE [...]; 2: to treat disrespectfully, irreverently, or outrageously".

---

\* Articolo proposto il 02/11/2018. Articolo accettato il 04/12/2018

\*\* Email: biancaterracciano85@gmail.com

\*\*\* Email: isabella.pezzini@uniroma1.it

So “desacrating” something or someone implies a status or a preliminary process of “sacralizing”: for example, in the field of mass communications, it is exactly the phenomena called “divism”, that is the accurate semiotic construction, realized by apparatus of cultural industry, that consists of particular aura and charisma, built around actors and personalities of the star system, made through mundane interventions on both their bodies and images, vastly imitated thanks to social networks. To establish an essential reference, in a very extensive bibliography, we should start by considering some famous books like Edgar Morin’s *The spirit of the time* (1962) and *The Stars* (1957), or their contemporary *Mythologies* (1957) analyzed by Roland Barthes, of which there is the one dedicated to the dematerialized face of Greta Garbo, or, entering in the religious sphere, to the head of Abbé Pierre, so much negligently coiffed to reveal an accurate production of meaning, the “signs of charity” rather than charity itself.

On the basis of Barthes and Morin studies celebrities can be placed in a sort of limbo, between sacred and profane – an “affordable” sacred –, and also halfway between real and imaginary: it’s because they are at the same time unattainable ideal beings, but imitable too. We can affirm that their binary nature is analogous – without prejudice to the proportions – to God who makes himself a man in the Christian religion: celebrities are equal to the deities for the aura of perfection imposed by their public role, while in their private life they are simple humans among humans. The process of deification starts from media, that make celebrities mythological beings, although they enter in their private sphere to generate identification mechanisms, promoting their credibility, an element that also explains the success of their social networks verified profiles, which represent the official window on their daily life, as confirmed even by Pope Francis himself.

The celebrities, therefore, have a dual nature, they are both attractors of projection-identification, and role models of culture and life, and their acting as energetic condensers of mass culture generates many myths of self-realization in public and in private which gather around them, that also make their lifestyle based on seduction, love, well-being an example to follow.

Therefore celebrities represent and conciliate three universes:

- The imaginary
- The information,
- The field of advice, exhortations, norms

What do the “famous” religious share – like a Pope or a saint can be – with the stars? The fact of belonging to a middle ground, above the common mortals but still in their midst, being by definition the dispensers of behavior and cultural models. In contemporary media they also share very similar dynamics of media presence, of interaction with the public, of participation in major events, crowds and so on, as well as the recent book on Pope Francis communication edited by Annamaria Lorusso and Paolo Peverini (2017) represents.

What are their differences? Compared to the secular celebrities that are always “too human”, the saints are characterized by a strongly oriented earthly and spiritual path that

leads them to transcend the human, from which they come, fully entering and participating in the regime of the sacred “true”: privacy, solemnity and sometimes even the mystery surrounding them help to wrap celebrities in a halo of respectful distance from ordinary mortals. The biographical parable of the saint, as the institution of a sacred legend, is counted among the *simple forms* – that is basic – of narration identified by André Jolles (1930), and to which the nowadays biographies and media hagiographies are still held.

Vice versa, how does cinema “desacralize” the religious sphere? The discourse would be long and complex, but in this paper we focus on two prime examples, two texts about “desecration”, staged through comedy, irony, paradox, at most a bit of satire, in the common sense spirit well resumed in the definitions cited at the very beginning of this paper.

Shown below the texts chosen for our research:

- *Roma* (1972) by Federico Fellini (with special reference to the ecclesiastical fashion show)
- *The Young Pope* (2016) by Paolo Sorrentino.

It is not a matter of proposing an in-depth analysis of the work of the two directors and of the considerable bibliography about them, but of focusing attention on the aspects – in our opinion unpublished – that we have identified as pertinent in this context. The methodological background adopted is of a sociosemiotic type, therefore focused on the organization of the levels of construction of the textual meaning, with particular attention to the figurative dimension. It is a way of reading where it is given prominence to how the sensible is inscribed in the discourse (see Bertrand 2000, p. 21) starting from the social dimension of the text, considered a “formal device through which the meaning, articulating itself, manifests, circulates in society and in culture” (Marrone 2018, trans. mine).

All of these filmic texts and particularly some of their sequences, rely on the imagination and on the cinematic translation of some Vatican backgrounds, trying to tear apart its ritual and formal veil. They are as well linked to each other by a series of intertextual references as demonstrate the explicit ancestry claimed by Paolo Sorrentino regarding Fellini, or they share some themes that indirectly concern or even contradict the celebrity of Pope Francis, like, for example, the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI that led him to the papal throne, or his “aversion” towards protocols and rituals, his sobriety and distance from every detail from the “Father of princes and kings” designation.

As for Fellini's *Roma*, we have to focus on the episode “The Princess Domitilla”, which culminates with the famous catwalk of ecclesiastical fashion. The sequence reconstructs with nostalgic accents by its protagonists the familiarity, now lost, between the so-called black nobility and the Roman clergy, and if we consider that the film was shot in 1972, perhaps we can identify a direct reference to the abolition of the Pontifical Court, decreed by Paul VI in 1968, in which certainly took place anachronistic rituals and attires similar to those shown by Fellini, as their rhetorical exaggeration. In particular it seems that the references are to the apparatus of Pope Pius XII, a pontiff who symbolized the

conservative ideas of the Roman aristocracy, whose icon is however recognizable in the final apotheosis of the sequence.



Fig. 1. The Fellini's Pope and Pius XII in comparison.

This complex sequence mocks the spectacular and profane background of rituals, the exhibition of luxury and treasures and the consequent excitement through which the Church of Rome and its representatives often celebrate their saints, revealing the night and secret dimension of vanity linked to the temporal power, to the political alliances and to the potentates of the Roman nobility.

The procession/catwalk is a moment in which Fellini lets his imagination run freely, where the entertainment aspect, in a dreamlike atmosphere underlined by music, is almost superior to that of satirical overthrow. Very interested in the ecclesiastical rite, Fellini writes, for example: "I like the choreography of the Catholic Church [...] its grandiose mortuary apparatus. The merits of the Church are those of any other creation of thought tending to protect us from the ravenous magma of the unconscious..." (Bondanella 1992, p. 215, trans. mine).

The fashion show begins with the cleaning and the preparations of the huge room in which the event will take place. Among them, there is the setting up of several paintings, removed from the walls to be dusted, all large portraits of red dressed cardinals, whose attitudes and expressions can not fail to recall the disturbing variations on the portrait of Innocent X by Velasquez realized by Francis Bacon.

The semantic base on which Fellini works is provided, among other things, by the isotopies that unite the <procession> and the <fashion show>. In fact, they are both events of a spectacular nature endowed with an internal narrativity, which responds to a progression: the series of surprising manifestations grows gradually, increasing expectation, surprise and wonder until reaching a peak with an exceptional event that

triggers pathos. Usually the fashion shows climax with very elaborated wedding dresses, the true triumph of the designer who at that point is called on the catwalk to be applauded and acclaimed. In Fellini's *Roma*, however, the audience falls into swoon and in mystic ecstasy at the manifestation of an old pope set in a baroque machine like a relic, but effective. The ecclesiastical fashion show is divided into three parts. The first has a highly ludic character: for the initial figures – the nuns, the novices, the country priests – dominates the funny, comic aspect: the dress is functional until the paradox due to its improbable details, like the fan-wings on the nuns' hats, or the cuts for comfortably riding the bicycle in the garments of the country curates, emphasizing on one side the details of the common religious clothes, on the other the usual ways and gestures of their wearers.

In the central part of the show the bodies disappear: only the dresses are paraded, in the most luxurious versions: the symbolic dimension of the canonicals prevails on the body that has become accessory and secondary. Here is shown a dress that is the emblem of the ecclesiastical hierarchy that imposes itself, which could wear any body, not vice versa – the dress, unlike the popular saying, does make the monk. In the third part, certainly phantasmagoric and grotesque, the dead walk down the catwalk in ever more sumptuous and complex clothes, real machines and baroque triumphs, and therefore we can consider them as saints: clothes for relics, for transportable saints and miraculous apparitions, for bodies beyond the opposition between life and death. Fellini had dedicated meticulous drawings and instructions to Danilo Donati: "Remember: a cardinal like a pinball machine, a cardinal like a cuttlefish bone, a cardinal (invisible?) made by bright lights" (trans. mine from Lo Vetro 2015).



Fig. 2 – Iconic clothes from the clerical fashion show.

Here Fellini has had – perhaps without even imagining it – a fantastic insight into the *medial body* whose traits would have increasingly contaminated the religious one,



especially that of the Pope, a phenomenon progressively accelerated with the papacy of John Paul II, which we refer to the careful reading by Federico Boni (2002). As is known, at the beginning of his pontificate, the good looks of John Paul II has made him known as “bionic body, ATHLETE of GOD”, transformed progressively into the representation of the “suffering servant of God”. In particular this transformation had its cruel peak in the inauguration of the Great Jubilee of 2000, in which he was forced into a cloak, miter and cope with bright colors and fabrics (silk and lurex) suitable for television shooting. A Pope who became a dummy, a sacred object, before death and sanctification.

The satire then extends from the mundanity of the church to the mimicry by the outside world, as indeed suggests a joke pronounced during Fellini's fashion show by some of the public: “It is the world that must look to the Church and not the Church that must look at the world”. With his imagination Fellini anticipates and also senses a radical development of the fashion meaning of our time. If the world of the old and disgraced ecclesiastical nobility represented into the film falls in ecstasy for its past glories and for its rituals of luxury and death, in the current "worldly world", not otherwise, one falls into swoon for the designers, the top models and the other deified characters of the fashion star system. The relationship between the sacred and luxury, which we perceive as a seductive mixture of sacred and profane, in the film is considered evident, as well as the link between the search for transgression and the simple inspiration to the religious symbolism, and today the now common identification of the objects of fashion as objects of cult (Violi, Cosenza 2008).

### **Objects of common use, of fashion and of consumption as signs of celebrity and signs of sanctity**

We could define the last filmic text of our corpus – *The Young Pope*, a 10-episode drama series, created and directed by Paolo Sorrentino – as a direct derivation of the previous paragraph, both because of the visible citations, and the paradoxical vein that runs through the whole story, focused on a Pope to be considered as the perfect crisis between desacralization and sacredness, precisely because of his peculiar relationship with celebrity, of which we are going to examine the characterizing trait of the two sides of this medal divided between the sacred and the profane, in other words some signs of celebrity and sanctity that play an important role in the significant relationships that determine the transmission of the television series deep meaning and the identity construction of its protagonist.

Lenny Belardo, also known as Pius XIII, is a 47 years old young Pope, and he likes to wear Havaianas, Louboutin and Armani sunglasses, as seen on him in combination with a huge white cape with gold filigree and clasp, during the meeting with the Italian prime minister interpreted by Stefano Accorsi ("Episode 6"). Havaianas is the most famous brand of rubber flip flops, made in Brazil, inspired by Japanese Zori, and become the global footwear for leisure, while Christian Louboutin is a French shoes designer, known for his signature red sole. Despite being flip-flops, Havaianas is undoubtedly a significant brand

of social status, like the luxury labels as Louboutin, because as the latter covers the feet and footsteps of celebrities on red carpets, the first does the same work on sidewalks, pools and beaches, as evidenced by the celebrity section of the Havaianas USA Website.

Pius XIII wears Havaianas exactly as the celebrities do, during free time, whilst red sole shoes by Louboutin, specially made for Jude Law, have been chosen to be in antithesis with the barefoot Franciscan monks, developing the opposition between rich and (fake) poor. Another reason to commission the red leather shoes resides in the color that, as the costume designer Poggioli said in various interviews, figurativizes the blood of Christ.<sup>1</sup> So flip-flops and red soles represent a figurative qualification of a form of life, a modality of stereotyped presence, which aim to organize the figures of clothing with respect to certain narrative programs. The outfit details are surely traits of celebrity characterization, as the preference for the Coke Zero Cherry, a fizzy drink that suits an adolescent top model like Kaia Gerber or Lily-Rose Depp.

Even in the real world we can also witness the creolization of ecclesiastical fashion with that of the laity, just like in the case of the Met Gala 2018 marking the grand opening of the exhibition *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, May 10-October 8, 2018). I refer to Rihanna's papal outfit by Maison Margiela, enriched with luxurious and precious baroque embroideries, which makes her a true feminine declination of Belardo, where nothing was missing, neither the tiara nor the Louboutin shoes, so that seen on the Met Ball red carpet, along with the other attendees, it seemed a contemporary replica of Fellini's catwalk.



Fig. 3 Belardo wears Armani sunglasses and Havaianas flip-flops; Rihanna at the Met Gala 2018.

Reconnecting to the analysis of the Ecclesiastical fashion show staged in *Roma*, if we consider the latest models that walk down on Fellini's catwalk of the absurd – sequence also showed during the Met Costume Institute's exhibition – we notice that they are

characterized by impressive volumes, and heavy materials not easily wearable – although they are defined with the adjective “light” by the presenter – so much to walk the catwalk virtually empty, as entities with a life of their own, fantasmatic. Now it is intuitive to make a parallel with *The Young Pope*'s meta-drama about Pope Paul VI's triregnum, a very precious tiara, symbol of the abdication of temporal power, due to which Pius XIII postpones continuously the first address to cardinals, waiting for its restitution, because it is no longer in Rome, but at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. The real issue at stake it is not the tiara, but the restoration of papacy temporal power, one of the cornerstones of Lenny's strategy, totally figurativized in an accessory, in a sort of hat, which also serves to highlight the subordination of the American church to the European one.

If a past Pope had taken off his hat as a sign of respect for secular power, standing aside as regards the government of men, the present Pope puts on the headpiece, the supreme baroque object, transforming a simple gesture into a signic and expressive event (see Fabbri 1991). So we have to consider the triregnum a prosthesis of power and a trope of the physiognomic device like the one of Fellini's dazzling clericality, but this time declined in a traditional way. Fellini's sparkle is due to the grafting of the aesthetics of the new consumption and the devilry of modern technology, while Lenny, preferring the darkness of the veiled, of secrecy, of mystery, wants to dazzle with the light reflected by the insignia of power, restoring the threefold power of the Pope figuratively represented by the three superimposed diadems: *Father of princes and kings*, *Rector of the world*, *Vicar of Christ on Earth*.

As a further confirmation of what has been said so far, it is worth recalling the name of the Pope who inspired Fellini for the final acme of the catwalk, that is Pius XII, whom we easily link to Lenny, that is to say Pius XIII. It is probably one of the tributes to his teachers disseminated by the director Paolo Sorrentino, but it is also a reference to the ideal predecessor for the first part of the pontificate of Lenny, devoted to the rigid observation of traditions and to the obscurantism.





Fig. 4 – Triregnums in comparison: Pius XIII and Paul VI.

In the end the question of the triregnum resolves in favor of Lenny, and the arrival of the precious baroque object requires an appropriate outfit and a careful dressing ritual, so that Paolo Sorrentino celebrates this topical moment with an elliptical editing, *remedying* the typical style of romantic comedies, during which the protagonist intends to choose the perfect dress for a great event, a topical moment always highlighted by a pathemic and at the same time energetic soundtrack, and, in fact, in *The Young Pope* we can hear the LMFAO's "Sexy and I Know It" song ("Episode 5"). In this occasion, as in the more solemn others, the Pope's outfit is composed of overlapping layers, constituting a complex system aimed at underlining the complete lack of functionality of his clothes: a Pope must not work physically, he must not walk or run, must meditate and emanate spirituality. His body is treated in the same way as a statue, as an object of worship, so much that it is transported on a gestation chair, another point in common with the Fellini's catwalk. So the iconoclast Lenny refuses to expose his image because he knows that as Pope only his corporeity suffices, but on the other hand he does not want to support this model based on the indiscriminate acceptance of his holiness, but he intends to build the foundations to be venerated, even if in a debatable way.

The triregnum marks Lenny's passions, becoming the privileged trope to express his value and his way of relating to others, necessary for the rite of passage of the address to the cardinals, fundamental event of the Pope's coronation, rite of passage to celebrity. The triregnum on one side desecrates and degrades the efforts of the predecessors of Pius XIII, that is the refusal to exercise power over the issues of men, but on the other it makes up for the interference of the grotesque in Catholic worship with the return to tradition, sweeping away every shade of populism and carnivalism. Pius XIII does not want to please, he has no will to seduce believers, and therefore rejects media voyeurism, using the past to disavow the present. Belardo refuses to be seen and consumed through

merchandising with his effigy, rebelling against the dominance of market dynamics on the religious sphere, proposing himself as a contemporary iconoclast.

The celebrity of Lenny derives from his role as Pope, of which he denies the canonical practices: being a pontiff does not necessarily means to show off, and therefore he chooses to cover himself with the veil of secrecy, positioning himself halfway between the two complementary categories of veridiction, namely *being* and *non-seeming*, where the complex term is the *secret*.

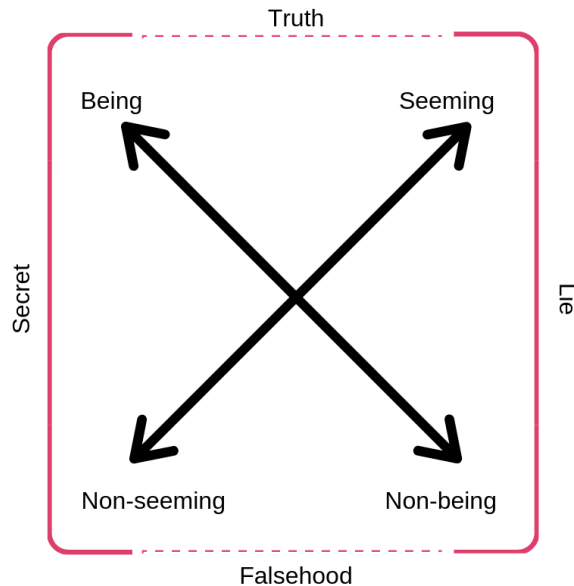


Fig. 5 – Veridiction square

The topic of the secret is the main reason of iconoclasm because Belardo does not want to lend his image simply because he does not have one, therefore he can not be evaluated economically, he is not worth 45 euros as the Vietri plate proposed as merchandising, he is not Jesus Christ, and so he does not deserve icons ("Episode 2"). Hence the absolute veto to propagate photographs of the pope, a choice that is opposed with one of the contemporaneity fundamental axioms: in a visual and social network based society if you cannot see a thing, it does not exist. But it's not always like that, and Lenny knows it so well that he's always been training to become an invisible Pope, going along the road traced by J.D. Salinger, Stanley Kubrick, Banksy, Daft Punk, Mina (celebrities of various fields listed by Lenny himself). These are people who hide to avoid the persecution of the crowd, to work in peace and amplify the notoriety through the curiosity of the public kept alive by the press. If already a Pope has a status unattainable by ordinary mortals, an invisible one is practically similar to God: we can not see both, but they are in this world, we can feel their influences.

The inaccessible is more desirable than the attainable, of what is reachable, and Lenny, who repeatedly alternates his little faith in God with a reverential fear, chooses to compare himself with the exponents of culture and entertainment, probably because they are more

affordable, and their celebrity processes are at their peak, so they can be good examples to follow.

In fact, by bringing the church back to traditional rigor, Lenny would like to wipe out fanaticism and replace it with a real love, the one he's been looking for since he was a child, as an orphan abandoned by his parents. True devotion is the sum of action and emotion, which must be felt by the believers because they share with the Pope and the catholic religion certain values, not because they are seduced by alluring populist discourses.

Belardo is well aware of the aesthetics of the spectacularization of major events: for his first non-appearance in public, he decides to appear at the window late, like the rock stars who get on stage behind time ("Episode 2"). The lights are so low that from below the audience only sees a black silhouette, an alienating and disturbing element that triggers deviant behaviors like the laser pointed at the Pope during the homily, typical of football matches and concerts.

Lenny Belardo is not just a young pope, but he behaves and looks like a Hollywood actor because of his beauty, often opposed by grotesque, almost Fellinian faces, as in the case of the false saint Tonino Pettola, the celebrity of the people. He truly has, like John Paul II, a bionic body, he is an athlete of God, as we can see thanks to his workouts, performed in a cashmere tracksuit by Italian underwear brand La Perla. *The Young Pope* grants us an all access pass to witness the most recondite Pope's daily life, given the lack of public outings, and we come to accompany him even in the shower, where the frames of his naked body contribute to desecrate his sacredness, showing him as a man among men. Belardo is human, too human at times, especially when he performs a series of obsessive-compulsive rituals to ensure correspondence of earthly and heavenly order, and also drags God with him, since during a speech with the confessor Don Tommaso humanizes him saying that he lives in a duplex with a swimming pool, near the Ursa Major, *remedying* the astrological houses in the form of homes ("Episode 5").

The first nine months of Pius XIII pontificate, narrated in the first six episodes, corresponding to the pregnancy of Ester – the wife of the Swiss guard whom he redeems and miracles –, can be defined as the fulfillment of the *celebrification* (see Couldry 2004; Rojek 2001; Turner 2004) process because the ordinary Lenny is transformed in one of the most potent men of the world.

During this period we also witness a degradation of the figure of the Pope, which loses relevance in both the temporal and secular, coming to be almost rejected by the believers, an element that is evident from frequent references to the decline of tourist visits to the Vatican and the languishing of its budget. We would never have thought of the existence of meetings with the head of marketing of the Holy See aimed at raising the fate of Pope image and it is from here, from something that apparently seems a mere strategy of promotion, that starts Lenny's *celebritization* (see Boykoff, Curtis & Goodman 2009; Driessens 2013), which goes hand in hand with the explication of his signs of holiness. In the last 4 episodes *celebritization* is shown as a meta-process of a positive change that falls back in a powerful way on clerical and social equilibriums, investing Lenny with a

sacral aura that becomes mediatizable and commodifiable, just in time to save the Holy See finances, finally establishing Pius XIII as an unveiled celebrity.

To conclude, we must return to the square of veridiction and recall the insertion of objects belonging to fashion and therefore to earthly pleasures, because of which the sacredness of Lenny is first rendered a lie. At this point we can state that in *The Young Pope* religious celebrity desecrates itself through two types of isotopies: one euphoric of appearance, of luxury, of pleasure – like cigarettes, typical vice of ecclesiastics –, the other one dysphoric due to caducity and mortality. The secret masks the lie, but, due to the process of celebritization, lies and secrets are put on the same level to be enslaved to the only thing that matters, the truth, the only great beauty of life, the way to go to reach the immortality counteracting the transience of what is condemned to destroy itself.

## Conclusion

The papal figures, analyzed through the sequences of their staging, show different “desecration” forms of the solemnity of their religiousness, interpreted as excluding and useful to the strengthening of a mythology based on the creation of an unbridgeable distance from the common man. We can ask ourselves if we can establish similarities with a series of behaviors of the actual Pope, that is Pope Francis, whose new style of communication at all levels is highlighted unanimously. Certainly this Pope never falls into the profane in his path of holiness, indeed, letting his human dimension emerge helps him to explicitly assume the role of leader. Above all, aware of the dynamics of celebrity, he does not disdain the need for contact, even medial, required by his “followers”. His medial body, though overexposed, recovers a dimension of “normality”, far from any spectacular excess: his body is a body between bodies, which weaves relationships and does not arise as an icon to be worshiped. Conversely, the Popes of the fictional world are focused on the unsaid, on the secret, on how much a figure that embodies the perfect crisis of the sacred and the profane could experience in its most intimate and private sphere, in its hidden thoughts, especially in a society founded on continuous temptations. Both Pius are characterized by semantic marks of *dogmatism*, *hieraticness* and *ritual traditionalism* (Pozzato 2017), denying *human sympathy* and *meekness*, main prerogatives of Francis. Lenny Belardo would only need his beautiful face to please, but he does not show it, depriving the believers of such aesthetic satisfaction because he knows his skills at “strategically managing the media” (Pozzato 2017, trans. mine), so much to be called “diabolic” by the Prime Minister interpreted by Accorsi. Francis, unlike his colleagues in the filmic universe, has repeatedly refused to wear luxurious clothes, jewels and red shoes, all canonical figuration of clerical power, making even the simple purchase of a pair of glasses – strictly modest – a means of affirming his truthful *being*, far from the dimension of the *seeming*. As Maria Pia Pozzato (2017) points out, Francis, with his black and ill shaped shoes, his hopping gait, baldness and corpulence, embodies the comic figure of the *august* analyzed by Paul Bouissac (1979-1982, as cited in Pozzato 2017), while Lenny is the perfect transposition of his opposite, the *white-face clown*, well dressed and

"mannered", way too culturalized. Pope Francis is accessible because he is natural in his spontaneous being – at least apparently – he denies any type of construction of his image, preferring the "non-bearing" (Pozzato 2017) of a *body-meaning* (see Landowski 2004, trans. mine), which causes meaning effects, determines a feeling, to the detriment of the hypercodification of a *body-sign*, where the dress *is* the monk. The affirmation of sacredness occurs through desecration, it lies in the veridical simplicity of everyday life, and this probably applies to any type of celebrity.

## Biographical note

Isabella Pezzini, full professor in Philosophy and Languages Theory at the Department of Communication and Social Research (CORIS), at Roma Sapienza' University, Italy. Teacher of "Semiotics of Fashions" in Fashion and Costumes Sciences Course. Member of the PhD Program in Communication, Social Sciences, Marketing of Roma Sapienza' University. On the board of *Versus. Quaderni di Studi Semiotici*, and many others, nazionale and internationals. Main research areas: semiotic theory, text semiotics, semiotics of culture. Her research into examines contemporary forms of expression, imaginary and spaces of consumerism, fashion, museums, urban creativity, and strategies in efficacy. Recent publications include: *Semiotica dei nuovi musei*; Roma, Laterza, 2011, *Introduzione a Roland Barthes*, Roma, Laterza, 2014; (co-ed. with V. Del Marco) *Nella rete di Google*, Milano, Angeli, 2017.

Bianca Terracciano is research fellow at Sapienza University of Roma and adjunct professor of "Digital Cultures and Social Media" at the University of Tuscia (Viterbo). She writes for *Doppiozero*, with which she published in 2016 the ebook *Mitologie dell'intimo*. Her latest book is *Social Moda. Nel segno di influenze, pratiche e discorsi* (Franco Angeli 2017).

## References

- Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. Paris: Seuil; tr. it. (1974) *Miti d'oggi*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Bertrand, D. (2000). *Précis de sémiotique littéraire*. Paris: Nathan; tr. it. (2002) *Basi di semiotica letteraria*. Roma: Meltemi.
- Bolton, A. (ed.). (2018). *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*. New York: MET.
- Bondanella, P. (1992). *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; tr. it. (1994) *Il cinema di Federico Fellini*. Rimini: Guaraldi.
- Boni, F. (2002). *Il corpo mediale del leader. Rituali del potere e sacralità del corpo nell'epoca della comunicazione globale*. Roma: Meltemi.
- Boykoff, M., Curtis, I., & Goodman, M. (2009). The Cultural Politics of Climate Change: Interactions in the Spaces of the Everyday. In M. Boykoff (ed.), *The Politics of Climate Change* (pp. 136-154). London: Routledge.
- Bouissac, P. (1979). Le Cirque: opérations et opérateurs sémiotiques. *Etudes Françaises*, 15, 1-2 (57-78); (1982). The profanation of the sacred in circus clown performance,



Paper presented at Symposium on Theatre and Ritual, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research; both tr. it. (2007) *Analisi semiotica dei numeri di clown*. In M. Del Ninno (ed.). *Etnosemiotica. Questioni di metodo* (175-192) Roma: Meltemi.

- Casetti, F., & Di Chio, F. (1990). *Analisi del film*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Couldry, N. (2004). Theorising Media as Practice. *Social Semiotics*, 14(2), 115-32.
- Driessens, O. (2013). The celebritization of society and culture: understanding the structural dynamics of celebrity culture. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16 (6).
- Fabbri, P. (1991). Sul capo: figure, scambi, maniere. In M.M. Sigiani (ed.), *Cosa ti sei messo in testa? Storia e geografia del cappello*. Milano: Mazzotta.
- Jolles, A. (1930). *Einfache Formen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer; tr. it. (1980) *Forme semplici*. Milano: Mursia.
- Landowski, E. (2004). *Passions sans nom*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lo Vetro, G. (2015). *Fellini e la moda. Percorsi di Stile da Casanova a Lady Gaga*. Torino: Mondadori Pearson
- Lorusso, A.M., & Peverini, P. (eds.). (2017). *Il racconto di Francesco. La comunicazione del papa nell'era della connessione globale*. Roma: Luiss University Press.
- Marrone, G. (2018). *Prima lezione di semiotica*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Morin, E. (1957). *Les stars*. Paris: Seuil; tr. it. (1995) *Le star*. Milano: Olivares.
- Morin E. (1962). *L'esprit du temps. Essai sur la culture de masse*. Paris: Grasset; tr. it. (2002) *Lo spirito del tempo*. Roma: Meltemi.
- Morley, D., (1992). *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Perniola, M. (2001). *Del sentire cattolico. La forma culturale di una religione universale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Pozzato, M.P. (2017) Dono e ironia. Aspetti paradossali nella comunicazione di Papa Francesco. In A.M. Lorusso & P. Peverini (eds.). (2017). *Il racconto di Francesco. La comunicazione del papa nell'era della connessione globale*. Roma: Luiss University Press.
- Rojek, C. (2001). *Celebrity*. London: Reaktion.
- Stout, D.A. (2012). *Media and religion: Foundations of an emerging field*. New York: Routledge.
- Turner, G., (2004). *Understanding celebrity*. London: Sage.
- Violi, P., Cosenza, G. (2008). Papi, madonne, rockstar: dal sacro al profano, e ritorno. In N. Dusi, G. Marrone (eds.), *Destini del sacro. Discorso religioso e semiotica della cultura*. Roma: Meltemi, 173-202.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> [www.wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/the-young-pope-costume-designer-talks-jude-laws-red-shoes-armani-10754451/](http://www.wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/the-young-pope-costume-designer-talks-jude-laws-red-shoes-armani-10754451/)