

Ernesto Tomasini interviewed by Serena Guarracino

I first saw Ernesto Tomasini on stage in 2003 in his show *True or Falsetto? A Secret History of the Castrati*. I was immediately taken by his imposing stage presence (heightened by the small venue of the Drill Hall, London) and by the famed four octaves extension of his voice. He treated the subject of opera with a mixture of lightness and commitment that was completely foreign to me as an Italian as well as a would-be scholar of the contested relationship between opera and gender politics. Six years later, I finally managed to ask him some of the questions that have riddled me over the years.

SG: You define yourself – you actually have been defined – as “a voice in drag”. What does this mean to you?

ET: Yes, *Time Out* said that, and I used to use it as a joke... But now it's not accurate any more. A voice in drag would be the falsetto voice: that's a voice that sounds female but is male; the vocal correspondent of a drag queen. But today I use all of my range, so it's not really a voice in drag; if you want it's like a quick-change artist of a voice, the Arturo Brachetti of voices!

SG: Still, I do believe your performances embody what Judith Butler wrote about drag, as something that makes the performance of gender identity conspicuous in any case. For her, the drag queen works only as a starting point for a complete rewriting of gender politics and performance.<sup>1</sup> Maybe in this sense the word ‘drag’ would apply to your work? Because I feel you play with different registers...

<sup>1</sup> In Butler's words, “I would suggest that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity”. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 174.[Notes by SG]

ET: Yes, not strictly as traditional drag... but yes. In a way, when I employ the high voice, the falsetto, I don't really – especially these days as my voice is darkening – I don't really play the ‘female essence’ any more. The disguises are much more subtle. So Butler is probably right, although... I actually find my falsetto is becoming very, very male...

SG: What is a male falsetto?

ET: You know, there are falsettos that are very bright, very clear in sound – which I can reproduce. These are experienced as very female sounding, more mezzosoprano. Then there are darker falsettos, which are perceived as male, and many countertenors tend to agree, although I'm not a countertenor...

SG: Why do you say you're not a countertenor?

ET: I'm not, because I haven't got the training of a countertenor, I haven't got the interest in music that a countertenor has, I don't dedicate

---

my life to my voice the way a countertenor does. A countertenor lives in a cotton wool world, he avoids this and that, and really his art is his life. I love going out, I love drinking, trashing myself... My body is not a temple; hence, I'm not a countertenor. Anyway, besides that, I think there are specific techniques to produce the countertenor voice, which I don't employ. I'm more of a falsettist, quite shrill, quite forward, so to speak. Countertenors tend to have a purer sound. I mean, it's debatable: there are books this thick on what a countertenor is, and after you read them you are even more confused. Michael Chance, one of the world's leading countertenors, was interested in working with a voice like mine and gave me lessons. Still, I am more of a punk-rock countertenor... I'd say that: I'm the Johnny Rotten of countertenors! And Chance was interested: I suppose in his perspective I was a countertenor after all. But, at the end of the day, I don't sing countertenor material in countertenor venues.

SG: So the point is not the techniques but it's the venues, the canon, the repertoire?

ET: It's just about everything. It's the repertoire, the technique, the circuit. I mean, I can impersonate the countertenor sound for effect, and I have, here and there. But what comes natural to me is a crazier voice. I do believe I'm damaging it in many ways, because of my lifestyle and because of where I take it to and how I take it to it. I'm not worried about that, I don't care, and if I stop singing high when I'm fifty I still don't care, I can use my other voices or, failing those, I'll write children's books – but at least I have lived. I don't feel like I am in custody of this amazing instrument that is talking to the gods. Although, in reviews, I am frequently described as Maria Callas combined with someone else, I feel more like Amy Winehouse (*he laughs*).

SG: Countertenors are now gaining public recognition as never before, they have entered the musical canon and grabbed everything they could...

ET: Yes, this is very true generally but not so much in Italy where I see a lot of resistance. In England it has been easier as they have a long tradition here and they survived in the church before being rediscovered by Britten. In Italy, where I guess they still remind the Vatican of the castrati 'incident', they have been swept under the carpet of history. Finally the vibrations of the revival in Northern Europe and the US are hitting even Italy, but on such religious/macho soil this is not easy.

SG: When I first heard you performing I thought, why didn't he become an opera singer?

ET: Well, because I come from the wrong side of the tracks, I was never trained and it's not my milieu. I love the repertoire and I enjoy it as an audience member – I go to the opera, but I just don't see myself in it.

SG: I remember reading in an interview that you don't like characters that have not been shaped for you, characters you can't interact with. I

<sup>2</sup> In the theatrical staging of *Chicago* (as against the film version by Rob Marshall, 2002) Miss Sunshine is a travesty role, i.e. a woman character played by a male actor. Tomasini played it in a West End production at the Adelphi Theatre in 2004–2005.

<sup>3</sup> For a trailer of the show see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAdTU6E0hug>>, 19 January 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See Ernesto Tomasini interviewed on *The Electro Castrato* (from the Wild Iris documentary *The Amazing Tomasini*), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Q6N7fWAR7U>, 19 January 2010.



Fig. 1: Castrato in the snow, portrait of Ernesto Tomasini by Charles Severne, photograph, 2003.

believe it was about you playing Mary Sunshine in the West End production of *Chicago*.<sup>2</sup>

ET: When you create a role, that's interesting, because, with certain limitations, you put all of yourself in it and you shape it up; but if you have to recreate a standard role then that's not fun. In the West End that's what they mostly do: twenty-five years ago someone created *Phantom*, and all the following *Phantom*s must stick to the work of the first one and they are asked (forced, in my case) to reproduce the reproduction of a reproduction of a reproduction... Some performers seem to be programmed to do that, I need more freedom.

SG: Your activity has moved through characters that have all been created by you or that you have contributed to in quite a decisive way. *True or Falsetto?*, for example, was written by Lucy Powell but from an idea that was actually yours.<sup>3</sup>

ET: Apart from two exceptions I have always played characters that I originated. With *True or Falsetto?* I started writing it as a collection of cabaret sketches (which was what I knew, where I came from) but I soon realized that this could be a play and that I really needed a talented playwright to write it. So I called Lucy (whose previous work I had admired) and she wrote a layered, very strong comedy, obviously inspired and informed by me but ultimately her own play. When I took the show on the road I injected so many gags and jokes in it that it ended up lasting an extra twenty minutes. It was a huge winner with audiences and has paved the way for my own first play. That's why I enjoy the freedom.

SG: Still the castrato played a central role in your career before that – I remember one of your early works called *The Electro Castrato*, back in the 90s.<sup>4</sup> Now there is such a huge investment in the castrato repertoire in the opera world – I mean, Cecilia Bartoli has been doing it... Do you feel any empathy with the use of the castrato in operatic repertoires today?

ET: Well, no, I think it's two very different things. The whole repertoire has been neglected for a long time because of the difficulty of putting on these operas. Now they are restoring them to the stage (*he unthinkingly shifts to Italian, his Sicilian accent becoming quite apparent*), hence there is a commercial interest in widening the opera repertoire, which has been mostly limited to the nineteenth century. Moreover, in the baroque repertoire castrato roles have been traditionally played by women, who I believe cannot convey the gender ambiguity performed by a castrato or a countertenor –

either in male or female clothes. I really do not relate with this, because I don't think this is what the castrato is about...

SG: What is 'it', then?

ET: Well, plenty of things... I'm not driven by either commercial or purely 'musical' motives. I try to tackle more intimate and diverse needs (he goes back to English). One is surely the most represented aspect, the Extraordinary presented on stage: "come and see the monster". Some of them used to be these extraordinarily tall people who would plant themselves on stage and roar this stereophonic sound... This is something no countertenor today could ever represent and I did it in the *Electro Castrato* by adding to the equation a disembowelled stripper, a sow and a computer (don't ask!). But what for me is even more interesting is the opposite of this, which is something that I think has not been explored and I tried to dig deep into it in *True or Falsetto?* with the character of Moreschi, in other words the *normality* of an extraordinary condition.<sup>5</sup> The regular guy underneath the unbelievable performer. Once the make up comes off and the razz-ma-tazz is switched off, we are left with a real person – singing machine no more. Farinelli's letters to Metastasio are a wonderful example of this and you read many stories about the way the castrati were revered...

SG: ... and also demonized...

ET: Yes, by detractors at some point, but you also read a lot about other stuff... I mean, in Italy they were called *musico* instead of, say, 'weirdo', and this says a lot. Then there is also the sexual ambiguity of this figure which is deeply anarchic, which fractures our given perception of gender and sexuality, a vision which of course is more metaphysical than real... And, I would add, the ambiguity of the sound is not so much female/male but more boy/grown up man, a twisted angel kind of creature. As you may know, in those days, the sex of the singer didn't really matter in many cases, the range of the score was more important. Many women were employed in male roles even at the time of castrati... There were practical reasons. I actually think it was not a very arty-farty world in those days, early on especially; it was all very practical. A company had to produce an opera and there are all sorts of technical details which are not written on the manuscripts ... There must have been a lot of ugly stuff underneath all that beauty.

SG: What has always fascinated me about the castrati, when you re-stage or recreate an opera that was written

<sup>5</sup> Alessandro Moreschi (1858-1922) was the last castrato to perform at the Sistine Chapel. His voice was recorded on wax cylinders by Fred and Will Gaisberg in 1902 and by W. Sinkler Darby in 1904; these are to date the only (rather faded) testimony of the tradition of the castrati singers: see *Alessandro Moreschi. The Last Castrato. Complete Vatican Recordings*, Opal, 1984, vinyl; and 1997, compact disc.



Fig. 2: Ernesto Tomasini in *True or Falsetto? A Secret History of the Castrati*, Drill Hall, second London run, 2003, photo by Charles Severne.

---

for a castrato, is how you translate the idea of castration after Freud, after the castrati disappeared and castration assumed the role it has in psychoanalysis, in a context where gender is assumed to be either masculine or feminine. What would be the impact of thinking back to the castrato today in these terms?

ET: Today he's more of a ... well, there is a lot of investment in the idea, of course. I mean, there was an online forum I used to go on, called "Castrato History" or something, and there was a minority of people there who actually wanted to bring back the practice! Many endocrinological castrati used to participate in the forum and when I went to Mexico I met the wonderful Javier Medina Avila, who is an endocrinological castrato.<sup>6</sup> I am not sure about the medical details here, and probably Javier and others wouldn't like the definition, but these people keep the soprano voice, speaking and singing. When I talked to Javier over the phone for the first time I believed it was his mother! Anyway, he's a wonderful singer but – well, this is a bit of a gossip but I'll tell you anyway – he went to Germany to meet a very famous countertenor, to study with him, get some advice. The guy made him sing and at the end of it he threw him out of his office, calling him a weirdo, a freak, and he's disgusting and revolting and all this stuff. Now, my reading of it is because he thinks 'oh my God, here there is this guy who can sing the repertoire I am popularizing and he's the real item – I mean, he sings extraordinarily, he does need some training but ... So what am I going to do? Am I going to embrace him and give him a career? No, I throw him out and call him a freak'. And as a result, Javier being a very sensitive guy, never sang again for about seven years. He has begun again recently and has been in a beautiful show called "Angels and Monsters", if I'm not wrong. So... I forgot your question now!

SG: Well, you are actually answering it... What I am wondering about now, from *The Electro Castrato* to what you do today, with Fabrizio Modenese Palumbo or with Othon Mataragas, is what has remained of the castrato in these later experiments of yours.

ET: I think *The Electro Castrato* was me *trying hard*; now I feel like I have somehow become the electro castrato, not trying at all but just being. In this new phase of my life, both words – "electro" and "castrato" – have sort of lost their original meaning; or rather they have acquired others. As I said before, I use all the range – I actually have very deep, low tones, (*his voice goes down quite a bit*) I can sing bass (*goes middle range again*) and this is more of a castrato in modern monster mode, as when I go ahhhhhhh (*he vocalizes from a deep bass range to a shrill falsetto*)...

SG: I was listening to "Anhedonia" by Andrew Liles, where you do the vocals, and there is a line there: "these are no angels, these are..."

ET: ... "hovering flies".<sup>7</sup>

SG: Yes! And in the context of your other works of the last few years, I

<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8XXF52ToXw>> (Javier Medina Avila sings "L'ideale" by Francesco Tosi), 15 January 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Opening track from the album *Black Sea* (Beta-lactam Ring Records, 2007), the sixth in a series of seven called *The Vortex Vault*.



feel maybe there is an ‘angel’ imagery that cuts across all your different projects – something you bring with you. I mean, *Digital Angel* is the title of a three-part song (although maybe I would call it a miniature symphony or opera) by Othon Mataragas, where you feature as singer; and you have also created a performance – part soundtrack, part theatre – for Derek Jarman’s *Angelic Conversation*.<sup>8</sup> Would you say the castrato actually reverberates in this sexual, or a-sexual, ambiguity of angels – angels who are quite different from the ones we were taught of in the Catholic church?

ET: One of the first pieces I sang for Othon was in Enochian so there you are, one more element.<sup>9</sup> I think it’s all in what I have just explained, this concept of the modern castrato as monster-asexual/pansexual angel-normal guy (and more), because whatever I do, in all these different projects, I remain myself; these are all parts of myself, hence the ambiguity is stretched and multiplied. In the songs that I sing (those by Othon or co-authored with Fabrizio and others), right now, I am following two main

<sup>8</sup> For Tomasini’s work (in collaboration with Peter “Sleazy” Christopherson, Othon Mataragas and David Tibet) on Derek Jarman’s *The Angelic Conversation* see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aA3ccnrdVOo>> (part I); <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYmv8V9rkWM>> (part II); and <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pH3FR-Z0tXs>> (part III), 19 January 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Enochian, or “angelic” language, was created in the late 16th century by John Dee and Edward Kelley, who claimed that it had been revealed to them by angels: the track can be found in the **Multimedia** section of *Anglistica*.



Fig. 3: Othon Mataragas and Ernesto Tomasini on stage, 2007, Art House Ekvasisa, Athens, photo by Mr. XIII.

formats. In one I play one character throughout one song, in spite of using many different voices. It’s a dramatization of inner turmoils. In Othon’s pieces, for example, all the different colours of the voice, which we are not afraid to take to extremes, exasperate the moods of the same character and warp them with vehemence and schizophrenia. In the other format I play different ‘characters’ within the same song and the layers are of a different nature. For example in a piece I created over original music by Fabrizio, “Trattato sulla natura delle stelle per voce ed harmonium”, there is an introduction that is spoken by one character, a scientist, and then you hear the sound of breathing that takes a man away from earth; he

<sup>10</sup> “Trattato sulla natura delle stelle per voce ed harmonium” is the opening track of the album *Canes Venatici* (Blossoming Noise, 2008): the track can be found as above in the **Multimedia** section.

goes off in space and meets planets and constellations and they say their names, the planets tend to talk in deeper tones and the stars are more soprano.<sup>10</sup> So, you see, there is the attempt to give voice to various characters, most of which are not human in this case. They sing their own Latin names, which is a very human thing – astrology, naming stars to give them a human identity, attributing powers to them that can affect humans – and after that there’s a sort of sound loop that goes (*sings*), and then the voices get distorted, and that’s when we lose the human element and we go beyond it: human words and concepts lose meaning to finally disappear altogether.

SG: Is this where the title of the album, *Canes Venatici*, comes from?

ET: Yes, it is a constellation...

SG: But also an animal.

ET: Yes, it means *cani da caccia*, hunting dogs. I have often dealt with the human reading of things that are incomprehensible. The universe – from whichever school of thought you look at it – is not based around the human but all we have is our own local, sense-generated experience of it, hence we give names to stars and give them powers relevant to us, but they do not *have* names and, in all honesty, I do hope that they are there for more vital purposes than to determine whether some hairdresser from Essex will be full of positive energy between March and May! (*he pulls a funny face*) As Carmelo Bene used to say (albeit in a different context): “What does life know about life?”. There’s an extra-human perspective, which for me is not super-natural in any way; on the contrary, it’s very natural... but I digress. I don’t know if this answers your question and I have no better way to explain it than to invite you to listen to that track and get your own emotions out of it.

As for the gender thing: I started from it, and it was extremely important to me when I started as a person and as an artist: gender for me was *it*, and the use of the voice was all about gender, about redefining, or mocking, or misplacing sexuality, just about that. Now, being a little bit older (*laughs*), I tend to be interested in more than just gender.

SG: It sounds to me as if you were actually broadening the scope of the ‘gender issue’ here; it does not have to do just with sexuality anymore, but also with different aspects of life, with religion, the body, performance, and eventually with politics.

ET: I think you cannot get away from gender. I mean, I’ve just spoken about the gender of stars and planets! So, try as I may, I can’t; but I really want to try other avenues and even get away from the human if you want. My next projects might expose the ‘non-human’ on stage, who knows? I do enjoy the human element, though, and that is why I bring flesh and blood to my concerts, I’m always over the top (*starts to mark and modulate vowels*), always enjoying the flesh of my body moving as I am communicating.

---

SG: What do you mean by “the human element”?

ET: Well, for example the human incarnation in “Trattato” is a scientist, the heir of Enlightenment thinking, from which humanism springs next to the equation human-rational, inherited from Aristotle: so he is the portrayal of man ‘the rational animal’. Yet, later in the piece this ‘human’ dissolves in another idea of human, which infers an element that is physical in a radical way – and ultimately biopolitical. This kind of human is finally able to get lost in a human-less region and condition. On the other hand, when I talk about ‘non-human’ I mean a variety of different things strongly influenced by Artaud and other authors, which interest me right now.

SG: Moving to another topic, we talked about electronic music, rock’n’roll, opera ... I’ve read many reviews of your work and your work is defined as either “experimental music” or – well, the weirdest one was “modern classical music”. Do you endorse any of these?

ET: Well, there’s also “classicadelic”, and Othon and myself have endorsed that, it makes us laugh. I deal with the different genres that come my way and that I choose to embrace. I guess they all fall under the umbrella of ‘experimental’ music – in one case ‘post-rock’ – but I’m not really interested in categories or genres, I experiment first of all with myself. You know, interviewers always assume that I come from this milieu of music, which I don’t! I mean, I spent my childhood and teens secluded in another kind of music completely – even the Beatles were too outrageously modern for me! I was locked up in everything old. I was really resisting it, consciously; I never wanted to listen to ‘modern’ music.

SG: What did you listen to?

ET: Well, classical, easy listening, soundtracks all of that, everything that was old-fashioned, show tunes, opera, early recordings... The singer who opened the door to modern stuff for me was Marc Almond, because a friend of mine made me hear his music, and there was a *chansonnier* quality in him that I could relate to. Through Almond I got out of my cocoon and was excited to discover so many wonderful different genres but even today I’m not a pop music expert. When years later Almond told me how much he liked my voice I was ultra-chuffed! It all came full circle for me.

SG: Experimentation seems to me central to all your works, as I noticed in your recent show in Naples with Ron Athey.<sup>11</sup> I mean, the Neapolitan theatre audience is generally very bourgeois, and the “Napoli Teatro Festival” is no different. And I do remember the house was full, and all these people looked so horrified, I mean, I don’t know if you could see their faces...

ET: I could and I couldn’t as we, the performers, were behind a curtain of beads most of the time but then I bet that that’s what the organizers

<sup>11</sup> Ron Athey has become (in)famous in the early 90s with his “Torture Trilogy”. His shows, which explore the relations between the performing body, pain, and the cultural politics of HIV/AIDS, include public scarification and other self-harming practices: queer theorist Beatriz Preciado dedicates one chapter of her *Contra-sexual Manifesto* to Athey’s work. The show mentioned here, *History of Ecstasy*, opened the Napoli Teatro Festival in 2009.





Fig. 4: Ron Athey and Ernesto Tomasini in *History of Ecstasy*, Museo MADRE, Naples, 2009, photo Museo MADRE, courtesy of Ernesto Tomasini.

wanted: to open the festival with a shocker, something that was going to make people talk. It actually worked, the entire programme was sold out but I don't think it was one of Ron's more extreme shows because he's not interested in shock value. What he does is deep, intense and personal; I see it as poetry in action. Making ladies squeal in their fur coats is most definitely not on his agenda. Eugenio Viola, the programmer at the Museo Madre who wanted the show for all the good reasons, is a young man with vision and I cannot but cringe at the thought of all the obstacles and difficulties he must be confronted with on a daily basis. That's one of the reasons why I left Italy.

SG: I must say I was surprised that they decided to have the show in Naples.

ET: Actually somebody said that this was such an important show for Naples, to open up the scene or something...

SG: Although they has been doing this stuff for twenty years or something now.

ET: Ron? Maybe more and he has pushed the boundaries, forever changing the idea of performance art, taking it to a totally different level.

SG: One last question: it has been coming up in my head all the time, I keep thinking of the word 'queer', in the terms I am acquainted to coming from gender and cultural studies, and I was wondering if you would say it applies to you and your work.

ET: I would have been extremely proud and keen for it to apply to me some twenty years ago, when I was very, very oriented towards the gay movement, that was the time when gender switching was central. Then it kind of faded away from me, because I just think the whole MCA queer community has betrayed anything that was queer, and I lost interest. I see organized groups, but even queer people, everyday people, craving for conformity. To me 'queer' was important because it was radical, it was a bomb in the middle of people's prejudices and boring lives, it was a chance for some human beings who were given some kind of difference from the norm to show alternatives. Instead no – now they want to get married and have children, be legal with it, and what's the point? If anything, you should fight for the right of straight people to get rid of that. I would actually want a campaign to prevent straight people from getting married, so that they can choose their own individual life and have the political right to live together (if they really must) without any ritual, contract or

---

bond. I think that is the campaign, not to fight to get the opportunity to be caged in the same mistake that has been made for two thousand years. Because of that, I kind of dissociate myself from 'queer' as a political entity – again, 'political' can be something you take in your hand and use, or an ambition that is beyond you. I guess that somehow I might for some fall into the 'queer' category. Whatever, I'm not bothered!

SG: I thought that as a performer you wouldn't be bothered...

ET: Not any more, but as I was saying I used to, because of course it had to do with... I mean, for me to be accepted as myself (as gay, I used to say) in my family, in my everything, was so important, as a fourteen-fifteen years old. I began performing very early, so my early shows were all about queer, *ante litteram*...

SG: I remember that episode, your being kicked out of the church choir at about ten, because of the way you sang...<sup>12</sup>

ET: Yes, of course, that was really *ante litteram*! It was all in there: the "boy singing like a girl" issue; again, gender, sexuality, what is legitimate and what is not, with the church above it all. I think that anecdote covers it all. But then when I became a cabaret artiste the queer element was ninety percent in it, all my shows were all about gender and sexuality... It was also the early-mid eighties, so it was really difficult and even dangerous at the time. I think I was the only one, in my milieu, tackling these issues, certainly in Italy. There was no queer Italian artist in those days – mainstream or underground – maybe Leopoldo Mastelloni.

SG: There were some artists that sort of *were* there, but one didn't know it, they didn't say it.

ET: Apart from Ivan Cattaneo (he was out, wasn't he?) and a couple of other pop stars, who were closeted anyway, I would say the two queer celebrities of yore in Italy were Mastelloni and Paolo Poli, who were not saying 'we are gay', but obviously, I mean, Paolo Poli and his "Santa Rita"... Actually I've seen some contemporary interviews and we seem to agree on many things, he doesn't want to go off to Gay Pride, this thing about the right of being gay – what does this mean? "Being gay is natural, it's not a right", Poli says.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to Poli I *would* go to Pride but certainly not to give any cheek a pat. The problem is, all of this *could* happen because it was born under the shadow of consumerism. The whole thing had a chance of becoming 'almost' legitimate because of economic reasons, because of investments, because of money, the 'pink pound' as they called it in the 90s. So that triggered some kind of liberation, but I don't think the process has also been political, on the contrary resistance for the human and political aspects is still very strong, but because these people are an economic asset then there has been some kind of opening.

SG: But only when they conform?

<sup>12</sup> See Tomasini's interview for the documentary *Film Fever: Julie Andrews Changed My Life*, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0cOm44v-Zc>>, 8 February 2010.

<sup>13</sup> See "Paolo Poli: 80 anni da regina", interview for the Italian TV show "Magazine sul 2" <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXXK0azrr-W0>>, 19 January 2010.

---

ET: Yes, only when they can become like their mama and papa, when they are a caricature of...

SG: Didn't we want to get rid of that?

ET: I don't know, people should do what they want to do and, when all is said and done, uniformity is better than the unconditional hatred of the old days. Yet, I don't want to have anything to do with that, I don't want to succumb to external pressures. I've always deluded expectations, I'm used to doing that: people have always told me 'one day this is going to happen to you' – it's never happened! I do believe humans come from primates, individual simians who were organized in clans, not in families, so I believe in the clan of whatever nature and the freedom of individuals within it, not in the family. I believe that the family as we imagine it – especially in Italy – is a strong imposition from the outside which is unnatural. Italians in particular have a drive for uniformity, they need it, they want to belong, they are terrified the moment they are alone, or different.

SG: Montanelli once said Italians are fascists at heart, they want a leader, they want to be part of a crowd...

ET: Yes, it is very true. But in the end it doesn't really matter, we'll all go to the devil anyway.