In the early 1960s, Pier Paolo Pasolini started his rewriting of Dante’s Divine Comedy, La Divina Mimesis. The aim of the project was to make it a new contemporary Comedia, including circles, sins, and characters inspired by Dante. Yet the project was never completed as originally planned. In Fall 1975, Pasolini decided to publish the notes he had written over a decade as a ‘document’. The final text was published by Einaudi in November, a few days after Pasolini’s death. What has been considered for decades as a minor and ultimately failed work in Pasolini’s career is probably the most significant retrospective testimony the author left us on his concept of realism and his authorial subject. La Divina Mimesis is in fact the outward sign of a sustained dialogue with Dante on representation, whose roots reach down into the early 1950s. In that period, Dante’s influence took the form of a certain ‘Dantean realism’ in his prose and poetry, after the reading of Dante’s objective language, experimentalism, and plurilingualism by the Italian philologist and literary critic Gianfranco Contini (1912–90). In the early 1960s, it took the form of a certain ‘figural realism’ in his cinema, after the German philologist and comparative scholar Erich Auerbach (1892–1957) and his concepts of Dante’s ‘figura’ and ‘mingling of styles’.

In this talk, Emanuela Patti will explore some examples of Pasolini’s appropriation of Dante’s realism and how they relate to postwar Italian debates on the ‘questione della lingua’ (the language question, i.e. what is our national language?), impegno and ‘otherness’ (Gramsci), experimentalism, and intermediality.