



## God's voice or man's death in May 68. À propos of two short films of Bernardo Bertolucci and Pier Paolo Pasolini

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**Abstract.** May 1968 meant for youth a turn in their ways of representing and acting. Likewise, it meant the complex transformation of cultural, political and economic discourses of which the representation of the divinity was not an exception. This article describes how Bernardo Bertolucci and Pier Paolo Pasolini represented the divine figure in the context of the Italian 68. As a song by Francesco Guccini states, God is dead but the desire for his resurrection still exists. The analysis focuses on two short films from the collective film *Amore e rabbia* (1969): *Agonia* by Bertolucci and *La sequenza del fiore di carta* by Pasolini. The analysis shows that far from wishing and declaring divinity's their death, both authors call into question the divine existence and its relevance in a world characterized by suffering and injustice as well as by solidarity and love. It is in the contradictory interstice between love and rage that the relationship of these directors with the divinity happens.

**Keywords:** Realism; avant-garde; trinity; Passion; cinema of poetry; Vietnam war.

[es] La voz de dios o la muerte del hombre en Mayo de 1968. A propósito de dos cortometrajes de Bernardo Bertolucci y Pier Paolo Pasolini

**Resumen.** Mayo de 1968 significó para la juventud un giro en sus modos de representarse y actuar. Asimismo, significó la compleja transformación de discursos culturales, políticos y económicos de la que la representación de la divinidad no fue una excepción. El presente artículo describe cómo Bernardo Bertolucci y Pier Paolo Pasolini representaron la figura divina en el contexto del 68 italiano. Como afirma una canción de Francesco Guccini, dios está muerto pero el deseo de su resurrección existe. El análisis se enfoca en dos cortometrajes del film colectivo *Amore e rabbia* (1969): *Agonia* de Bertolucci y *La sequenza del fiore di carta* de Pasolini. El análisis muestra que lejos de desear y declarar su muerte, ambos autores se cuestionan (cuestionándola) la existencia divina y su pertinencia en un mundo caracterizado tanto por el sufrimiento y la injusticia como por la solidaridad y el amor. Es en el intersticio contradictorio entre el amor y la rabia que la relación de estos directores con la divinidad acaece.

**Palabras clave:** Realismo; vanguardia; trinidad; Pasión; cine de poesía; guerra de Vietnam.

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## I. Introduction

In 1967, a Francesco Guccini's song declared that «dio è morto»<sup>2</sup>. However, this affirmation does not express only the disappearance of god but its desired transformation. On the one hand, human evil caused god's death: «nei campi di sterminio dio è morto, / coi miti della razza dio è morto / con gli odi di partito dio è morto...». On the other hand, the hope for a new world is present through the desire of a «rivolta senza armi». The resurrection of a different god is also believed since «noi tutti ormai sappiamo / che se dio muore è per tre giorni e poi risorge, / in ciò che noi crediamo dio è risorto». This song shows the intense desire of a renewed divinity that expresses the ideals of freedom and justice. Guccini's song shows the historical tension between a dead god and a god whose resurrection is desired. What forms did these gods take?

The 1960s meant, for the Italy of the economic miracle, the strengthening of the power exerted by the Social Democracy along with the Church and a consumer capitalism. Politics, society and the Italian culture of this period experienced a complex process of negotiation between the various values that these three powers represented. This process sought a harmony between traditional values (Christian family, heterosexuality, patriarchy, eternity) and the ones of a modern consumerist society (cult of technology, sexual «liberation», ephemerality). This harmony, however, was understood by various Italian artists as a convenient complicity between the politico-religious conservatism and the cynicism of market capitalism. In consequence, they described the ethos of this period as a cynical conservatism whose advertised modernization was not but a mock freedom that reaffirmed the most reactionary values and filled the pockets of the huge national and international capitals.

In this context, some artists adopted atheism as a critique of the values of Christian religion (Bernardo Bertolucci). Others, however, developed a tense relationship with the religious phenomenon (Pier Paolo Pasolini). Facing an Italian Church, established as an accomplice of the consumer society, these directors sought to represent personally the relationship of human being with the phenomenon of god. It is important to differentiate the Church as institution from the Church as personally experienced. The analysis will focus on the forms through which Bertolucci and Pasolini expressed their personal relation with this phenomenon as aesthetic experience. Helpful for understanding the forms of this experience is Jean Luc Marion's (2002) notion of saturated phenomenon (e.g. god) whose encounter with a person is conceptually irrepresentable, but aesthetically hyper-representable because this phenomenon is saturated with meaning and overflows subjectivity.

This notion emphasizes neither thought or language (subjectivity) nor god or the flesh (objectivity) but the tension between the two poles as *principium* individuationis; as Marion (2002: xvii) affirms, «what individualizes, personalizes, is neither thought nor body as extension but the tension between them that is played out in the flesh and that is given absolutely as a saturated phenomenon».

Throughout the analysis, the critical aesthetics of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno about the artwork will be useful for analyzing the saturated phenomenon. For these authors, the artwork interrupts the structures of power defamiliarizing us from an alienated society so that we can imagine the possibility of a different world, reconciled and redeemed. Throughout this article, the political potential of Christian

<sup>2</sup> In fact, the song was considered blasphemous by the RAI and was censored (Festuccia 2010: 23-32).

phenomenology interlaces with the aesthetic potential of critical theory forming an aesthetico-political constellation that takes the personal relation with the saturated phenomenon as the analytical focus of the short films by Bertolucci and Pasolini.

First, I will analyze Bertolucci's *Agony* as a critical representation of the impotence of an Italian people which cannot find a meaning that replaces the one that the historical Church used to give them and their agony with the same institution they reject. In the second part, I will analyze Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La sequenza del fiori di carta* which shows the entry of the voices of god in history and the inability of the contemporary individual to listen to it. Facing the alleged death of god announced on May 68, Bertolucci and Pasolini represented their personal relationship with the saturated phenomenon opening the possibility to reencounter with the aesthetic potential of religion or the religious potential of aesthetics.

It is relevant to see montage as an aesthetic form capable of portraying this kind of phenomenon. Montage as a form of composition is a technique used in Pasolini's short film. Montage is a form of editing that tells a story (or history) from a non-chronological point of view, it opens history to the proliferation of different temporalities through the juxtaposition of images. According to Peter Burger (1984: 73), «montage presupposes the fragmentation of reality and describes the phase of the constitution of the work». From the point of view of montage, and in relation to artistic expression, «it is no longer the harmony of the individual parts that constitutes the whole; it is the contradictory relationship of heterogeneous elements» (Burger 1984: 82).

For Benjamin, montage, as technical procedure, was necessary for the understanding of history:

the first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale construction out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary. (Benjamin 1999: 461)

For Didi-Huberman, montage, as juxtaposition of images and temporalities, is a *rend* (*déchirure*) since it questions any pretension of historical synthesis; instead, *the images of montage are always saturated with meaning*. Therefore, the analysis of images (Warburg-Benjamin-Didi-Huberman) finds a productive connection in Marion's notion of saturated phenomenon in the sense that synthesis or closure are not possible when dealing with that kind of phenomena. For Pasolini (through montage) and Bertolucci (through *rend*), the task of cinema (history, art history or a history of images) is not understanding historical ideas via images, but showing and portraying (the Adornian *Darstellung*)<sup>3</sup> history through the open work of (de)composing images.

<sup>3</sup> «So we understand that the incapacity or *rend* functions in dreams as the very motor of something that will be between a desire and a constraint—the constraining desire to figure. To figure despite everything, thus to force, thus to *rend*. And in this constraining movement, *the rend opens the figure*, in all of this verb's many senses. It becomes something like the very principle and energy—incited by the effect of the rending, namely the absence—of the work of figurability. By hollowing out the representation, it *calls forth* the figure and its presentation (*Darstellung*), it triggers the infinite process of the tangent that is a fundamental characteristic of the very notion of figure» (Didi-Huberman 2005: 153-154).

## II. Bertolucci and Pasolini: the sterile fig and the good news

The sterile fig tree is an image that will appear constantly throughout this essay. This tree is the protagonist of one of the miracles performed by Christ; it is in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke. The version of Matthew reads as follows:

When Jesus was going back to the city in the morning, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went over to it, but found nothing on it except leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again." And immediately the fig tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed and said, "How was it that the fig tree withered immediately?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, if you have faith and do not waver, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive (Matthew 21:18-22<sup>4</sup>).

What is the meaning of this tree? This episode has been characterized as the most incomprehensible miracle of Jesus: why does Jesus curse a tree? On the one hand, the fig tree represents a past time that Jesus radically transforms; on the other hand, it expresses the experience of faith as an act of fertility. In the Biblical tradition, the fig tree was a metaphor of the people of Israel; thus, in Jesus' time, it alluded to the Temple in Jerusalem. Additionally, this miracle relates to the entry of Jesus to the temple and his violent reaction when he saw that it had become a «den of robbers»: the money, the exchange-value, had taken possession of God's house.

In this sense, the infertile tree is not but an image of the Church, representative of God in history, which has been rendered sterile because it has been disfigured by an insatiable greed. For that reason, Jesus curses the tree: he sees in it the falsification of religion that bears no fruit and which has become an instrument of power. Jesus's curse is an announcement of a new time, the time (of God) of love that *renders inoperative*<sup>5</sup> the laws of this world and brings humanity a new time. For this kingdom to come, one of the fundamental values for Jesus (together with hope and love as *caritas*) is faith in what is not yet seen, what is expected to be and that always exceeds human beings because it is irrepresentable: the saturated phenomenon.

## III. Bernardo Bertolucci: dark and white caverns

A poorly lit room, the doors closed. A man on the bed, a woman sat on one side of it accompanies him. We heard a monotonous sound, unrecognizable. We are, from the first time, in a closed space, within a dark cavern<sup>6</sup>, within an atmosphere of con-

<sup>4</sup> The same miracle appears in Mark 11, 11-26 and Luke 13, 6-9.

<sup>5</sup> On the notion of "rendering inoperative" in Paul Letters, see Taubes (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Dana Polan comments that «if Plato in *The Republic* gives central prominence to sight in the constitution of an epistemology, then we can say that cinema, modern cavern in which images parade before enraptured spectators, realizes a return to Plato's cave» (Loshitzky 1992: 60). However, in the case of *Agonia*, it is an *inverse return* because, instead of constituting a new meaning, it deconstructs it without reconstructing it; in this sense, both rooms in this short film, as dark and artificially illuminated caverns, are not but allegorical expressions of the impossibility of reconstructing meaning in the Italy of the end of the 60s.

finement. Suddenly, someone knocks on the door. The man in the bed is awake; the nurse sleeps; the man awakes her by tapping her with his foot. She opens the door and a priest appears: «I come to give him the saint oils». This interruption shows the second main theme of the short film: death. Then the man tells the woman to tell the priest to wait since he has already received the saint oils twice. The priest leaves revealing the third main element: agony.

At that moment, the woman looks herself in the mirror; she goes toward the man and makes a gesture with the face. She tells him to guess what the gesture represents; he says it is «a Chinese». She makes another gesture and asks the same thing; he answers it is «a sad Chinese». Immediately, she tells him the dream she had: «I dreamed that a Chinese gave me a telegram, I did not open it because I was afraid; however, then I opened it and there was nothing written». The man, in English, answers: «Perfect». The woman, then, asks him what he will do with the people who are waiting outside. He responds, this time in Italian, that he wants to be alone but that he eventually will let all in; and, immediately after, he emphatically says in English: «But now I want to be alone!» This enigmatic dialogue introduces history in the plot. In summary, this first scene is configured as an allegory of the contemporary world in which history appears as agony and ruins (Benjamin). Far from being a symbolic short film, *Agonia* is a shocking historical avant-garde image of Italy in the late 60s.

Two traits of the dying man introduce the contemporary history: the mention of the «sad Chinese» and the English language. In the context of the late 60s, the relationship between English and the face of a Chinese reminds of (the film was released in 1969) the Vietnam War. The Chinese sadness expresses the consequences of the war in which the United States had been involved unjustly. In this sense, it is very significant that the man, after seeing the sad face, says «Perfect», alluding to the interests of US international politics: the relation between Italian and English is emphasized through the moribund and bilingual body on the bed. When the priest goes away, we, spectators, find ourselves inside an allegorical cavern where the boundaries between dream and wakefulness, fantasy and reality, past and present, are lost and interlaced shockingly. Why does the man want to be alone? What is the point?

In the next scene, we see a room. Inside it, a group of young people is sat in circle. The monotonous sound that we heard at the beginning becomes more intense; it seems to be produced by the group. All of them are dressed casually with various colors of clothing. The lights come on: we are in a white and illuminated cavern. Then, the noise intensifies until it becomes deafening and disturbing. Simultaneously, the group builds with their bodies a strange figure. In the center, it seems that one of them wants to reach something that is out of the film itself; his extended arm is directed toward something that is out of the room, but we don't know what it is. The bodies of the other members of the group cover him almost completely; they form a figure that could be called a monstrous body. At the end, it is not possible to distinguish the hand of the first guy; it has been devoured by the mass of bodies.

This scene introduces the second protagonist of *Agonia*: the youth. This collective character expresses the situation of the Italy of the *miracolo economico* after May 68. We see how an individual (and not the group) longs for something that seems to be out of the artificially illuminated white cavern. However, it is the collectivity, as a mass of bodies, which makes invisible the eager arm of the first guy. Considering the clothes of the group it is possible to affirm that they belong to the children of the

petty bourgeoisie; they are not proletarians. As we will see along the short film, the young people represent the most industrialized countries in which capitalism has triumphed: United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy (as well as U.S.A.).

Then, a table with a lot of medicines; immediately after, the face of the man in the foreground; the emotion of the face is enigmatic: agitation, surprise, suspense, longing? Likewise, we see the members of the group doing various activities: one of them is making noises with the knob of the door and, simultaneously, he scratches the wall producing an irritating sound; other two embrace; others are just doing nothing (are they waiting for something?). One of the guys dressed in black walks along the room and seems to kill other young people, it is a simulacrum.

This scene shows the contemporary conflict between expression and communication as a trait of art and youth; the latter desperately wishes to talk to somebody but it cannot communicate their expressions to anybody; they only have their massive bodies and their simulacra. This trait is reaffirmed when each one of the group, when trying to stand in front of the man, is interrupted by another guy. It is a succession of interruptions which prevent any communication.

In the next scene, the group is on the floor listening to a young man of African roots who tells them to relax their bodies. This episode is central, as it introduces clearly the Christological element connected with the revelation of god, the saturated phenomenon. The young man tells them a story based on the miracle of the sterile fig tree that is found in the Gospels: «a man took and planted a fig tree, but he never found fruits; he waited for three years, but it does not produce anything; his employees tell the owner to give the tree one year more, and if it does not produce any fruit in a year, they will cut it down». This story introduces the fourth main feature of Agonia: sterility. It expresses the loss of meaning of the relationship of contemporary man with what he is not (Adorno's non-identical): divinity, love, ideal (all of them saturated phenomena). This loss is painful but not strong enough, decisive, to kill the sufferers. For this reason, it manifests not only as the agony of the man but also as the one of the youth: it is a collective agony.

Then, each of the group says his or her name and they express who they are, what they are doing, as well as their wishes or desires: they are witnesses, they want peace, they are calling for an end to the war, they ask for sympathy. As stated in previous lines, this people express in several European languages and represent the children of the petty bourgeoisie of the postwar period. At this point, we see another trait of the man: silence. Communication with young people does not occur; he only looks impassively but also physically emaciated, tired. Instead of communicating, he shouts in English «Go home» and then, ambiguously, said «Come back». Immediately after, the desecration of the body of the man occurs; some of the guys put his body upside down, stretch his arms out while the others observe impassively; then, they make as if they were flogging him; finally, all raise his body and move it from one side to the other.

After this manipulation, they put on the floor some of their accessories and clothing (lenses, belts, shoes, etc.); already without these garments, they continue talking. However, the man does not respond. This gesture of abandoning the articles of consumption (which reveals their belonging to the capitalist society) seems to be an act of purification which is performed so that the man communicates with them. However, they will not succeed. Who is this character whose body is manipulated by this group? One possible answer seems to appear in the final scene: in it, we see the

man lying in a bed like at the beginning. Soon, four religious man arrive to the white room, clean the man's body and dress him as an ecclesiastical authority, perhaps a bishop or a cardinal. The dying man is the allegory of historical valued that are dying and the impossibility of its renewal because of the communicative mismatch between the old death of god and the young desire of its resurrection as a renewed divinity. The aesthetic depth of *Agonia* lies in its allusive nature that prevents any unequivocal interpretation.

If in the past religion gave consistency to history and an order to the aspirations of individuals, the man of *Agonia* expresses the process that Christian religion in its historical manifestation, the Church, is experiencing. In the contemporary world, this institution has lost many of the functions that it had in the past. The fact that this is represented in a closed but illuminated space (white cavern) gives an account of the impossibility of the Church, but also of the young people, to find an alternative outside a world that has lost meaning: The Church is not left but with silence and death; the youth, with irritating noises and agony.

The interdependence between Church (dying man) and contemporary world (mass of young people) is expressed in the mimetic relationship they experience towards the end of the film: while the man dies, the youth seems to experience a similar pain. It is also very suggestive the connection of this representative of the Church with the American interests seen at the beginning of the film. In consequence, the man seems to be an allegory not only of the Church as an institution but also of the international politics of the US; it is not difficult to see in this conjunction of tradition (Church) and modernity (US) the policy of the Christian Democracy for the Italy of the *miracolo*.

This death of the past should be good news, a Gospel; however, it is not. This skeptical standpoint expresses the contradictions of an event as May 68. We have seen the inability of the youth to develop a form to express and communicate their desires; we have seen also their performative mimesis of the agony and death of the past. Hence, in the last scene, all the young people endeavor to get closer, crazed and desperate, to the man. Is it perhaps that the sons of the petty bourgeoisie, protagonists of the May 68, are not but accomplices of the interests of the Church and the US foreign policies? Is the freedom they claim for nothing but a vain freedom of consumption, whose most eloquent image is their agony in a room from which they cannot escape? However, we have talked also about the possibility of a time to come, of hope. Is there any hope within agony?

In the Gospel, the fig tree is condemned by Christ due to its infertility, since Jesus claims that we must not be like this tree that bears no fruit. On the contrary, he emphasizes the necessity of faith, because this virtue is the only way for the impossible to be possible. Faith, however, does not exist in this film due to the lack of an alternative that makes it possible to recognize where human beings are going after May 1968. *Agonia* shows a skeptical (if not pessimist) standpoint about Italy at the end of the 60; it is an allegory of the infertility of the historic Church, incapable of reformation, and the young people from the May 68, who cannot develop (yet?) a plan of action.

In *Agonia*, the relationship of men and women with the saturated phenomenon has been inverted. The Church has lost all meaning and young people do not know what to do with that infinite freedom they have not won: noises, screams, bodies, agony in a closed space seems to bet their historical answer. The rhetoric economy

of this short film intensifies the message that Bertolucci's film seems to express: in the contemporary world, nothing happens; history has been detained in a room (symbol of the self-social-prison) from which it seems impossible to escape.

Even though it goes beyond the scope of this article, it is interesting to see a rent cavern<sup>7</sup> (*déchirure*, 'rend') in *Agonia*; the notion of rent cavern interlaces Aby Warburg's critique of Platonism when reading images<sup>8</sup> and Didi-Huberman's rent-image as one whose openness resides on the impossibility of reducing its senses to a synthesis. In fact, for Warburg, human beings and their societies dwell in an *Atlas* of images which do not refer to an exterior Idea. Instead, his method can be described as a return to the cavern (calling radically into question the existence of an essential world) to understand the work of images/history through their juxtaposition, their montage<sup>9</sup>.

Likewise, for Didi-Huberman, the rent of the image is that excess of meaning that is always already out of our hands; through the incessant attempts to grasp it, the *historical operations* of images are shown. In this sense, *Agonia* shows a rent cavern as the impossible search for a synthetic/harmonic historical meaning during the years of 1968-1969; the search for (the image of) God becomes thus the painful hermeneutic quest of its characters who cannot find another place to inhabit than a rent cavern.

#### IV. Bertolucci and Pasolini: filming agony or filming death?

In *Agonia*, many kinds of shots are used; however, the long shot is the most common. For example, a straight cut takes us from the dark room where the agonic man is to another dark room where we see, in the right half of the screen, a group of young people sitting on the floor. In that moment, a long shot pans slowly all the dark room where the group is until the camera shows all the group that is sat on the floor in a circle; while this happens, the noises made by the group (diegetic sound) becomes more and more intense. Suddenly, the room is illuminated (we don't know by whom). During this transition, the speed of the film is introduced to the spectator: it is a slow rhythm whose principal function is to follow, usually from a fixed standpoint (fixed camera), the actions of the characters: it is the slowness of a spectator who watches the agony of a living being.

In this sense, the camera becomes a spectator who has the power to see all the room-landscape but who also can do some close-ups when an expressive emphasis is needed (e.g. the face of the agonic man). What is important to recognize in the behavior of the camera is that, although it is portraying a desperate agony, it preserves the fixed serenity of the spectator that does not get involved (moved) in the action: we, spectators, see the action and, when necessary, we can get close to certain details; we see and examine but don't get involved. The dynamics of the camera shows

<sup>7</sup> See note 5.

<sup>8</sup> Warburg's *Atlas* «proposes an activation mechanism for ideas and relationship. Warburg understand ideas, not as 'found forms' but as 'forms in constant transformation' or 'migrations' (*Wanderungen*), suggesting an uprooted and nomad knowledge» (Tartás and Guridi 2013: 230).

<sup>9</sup> «History of knowledge in western culture is largely set on the platonic ideal of supremacy of the concept or idea over image (the *falsifier shadow of reality*, as shown in Plato's allegory of the cavern). It is not surprising that Plato banished artists from his ideal republic. However, the 20th Century sees the apparition of several trends of thought which question such hierarchical principles» (Tartás and Guridi 2013: 230)



thus two features of *Agonia*: first, the distant and critical standpoint of the spectator regarding what he or she sees; and second, the intensification of the poetic elements which can be seen by the spectator thanks to the first feature. These two elements make of *Agonia* a meta-filmic production that puts into practice critically Pasolini's cinema of poetry.

The two features mentioned make of this short film, probably, the most avant-gardist work of Bertolucci. The short film shows a formal experimentation where the shots are in tense relationship between two poles: plot (narrative) and expressionist moments (poetry). The rhythm of the camera is slow and the long shots make it possible to be aware of the details (of the form) of the agony. In other words, the short film performs an intensification of the avant-garde techniques to shockingly question, if not to destroy, the temporality of bourgeois or socialist realist art. What is interesting in the case of *Agonia* is that despite its experimentalism, it does not reject narration *in toto*; instead, the narration of agony is intensified through technique.

In this sense, *Agonia* is an avant-garde artwork in an Adornian sense since its form challenges reality portraying the loss of meaning of contemporary society. In *The fear of naturalism*, Pasolini says that Bertolucci, instead of reproducing a porter as the porter is, he would say «Why must one make a porter say what he, the porter, would say? One must take his mouth, but in his mouth, we must put philosophical words (as Godard does, naturally)» (Pasolini 2005: 244). While Pasolini portrays a porter as he really is, Bertolucci puts words that do not belong historically to him; in this sense, the porter becomes an incarnation of philosophical ideas given by a bourgeois author: this seems a subtle critique to Bertolucci.

However, some years before, in *Cinema of Poetry*, Pasolini had affirmed the following about Bertolucci and his *Prima della rivoluzione*: 1) the realistic (narrative) character of his films where «the immobility of the frame of a piece of reality testifies to the elegance of a deep and uncertain love, precisely for that piece of reality»; 2) a mutual contamination between the character's worldview and the author's: «these views, being inevitably similar, are not distinguishable —they shade into each other»; and 3) the insistent pauses and the insistence on particulars; for Pasolini it is the «presence of the author, who transcends his film in an abnormal freedom (...) detoured by a sudden inspiration which is, finally, the latent inspiration of the love of the poetic world of his own vital experience» (Pasolini 2005: 180). These were favorable critiques.

It seems that, for Pasolini, there are two coexisting Bertoluccis: 1) the abstract and political (close to the avant-garde) Bertolucci of 1967 (closer to *Agonia*) and 2) the poetic Bertolucci of 1965. I think that *Agonia* is a unique example that express that tension that Pasolini found in the work of Bertolucci between 1965 and 1967, just before *Partner* (1968), his most Godardian film<sup>10</sup>, and *Agonia* (1969), his most experimental one. We can see in the short film a desire of experimentation that does deviate (without contradicting) what Pasolini found was the best of Bertolucci's art: the poetic. *Agonia* gave Bertolucci the possibility of experiencing the limits of experimentalism that Pasolini rejected as petty bourgeois. Bertolucci was aware of

<sup>10</sup> «For Bertolucci, the liberation from the repressive influence of Godard so evident in his early films —*Partner* in particular— implies the rejection of the austere and critical Godardian style in favor of spectacular and even visually indulgent cinema. Bertolucci accepts his role as 'autore di film-spettacolo' (spettacolo means 'a demonstration for a public, a notion situated somewhere between entertainment and spectacle')» (Loshitzky 1992: 130-131). As we will see, in *Agonia*, Bertolucci struggles with Pasolini's influence, his father figure.

the critiques of Pasolini to the American New Cinema whose experimentalism he regarded as ideological (i.e. Stan Brakhage).

Regarding the New Cinema, Pasolini affirms in *Is being natural* the following:

In my opinion the authors of the New Cinema do not die enough in their works: they fidget in them, they writhe in them, or, better still, they agonize in them, but they do not die in them; therefore, their works remain as witnesses to a suffering of the absurd phenomenon of time and, in this sense, they can only be interpreted as an act of time. In the final analysis, the fear of naturalism keeps one within the limits of the document, and subjectivity carried to the point of producing either endless sequence shots which horrify the spectator with the irrelevance of his reality, or a work of editing which subverts the illusion of the development of time, always (subverting) his reality, finishes by becoming the mere subjectivity of psychological documents". (Pasolini 2005 241-242)

It is really tempting to see, in this text, Pasolini's warning to Bertolucci against the danger of the horrifying and psychologizing techniques of the most radical avant-garde.

But it is also tempting, and historically possible, to see in *Agonia* an answer to Pasolini's text-warning: Bertolucci would have said to Pasolini something like this: I don't need to die in my works because agony is another way to die, another way of being (and not being) Pasolinian. In this short film, Bertolucci makes use of all the audio-visual techniques and takes them to their maximum development without falling, however, in what Pasolini so strongly rejects. Bertolucci balances fragily in the almost invisible line between cinema of poetry (in its Pasolinian sense) and the exacerbation of technique of the American New Cinema. *Agonia* can be interpreted thus as Bertolucci's own agon with his filmic father-figure. This short film is the expression of his own May 68 towards which he shared the skepticism of Pasolini. However, the techniques he used to express this skepticism, as we will see in the next section, were different<sup>11</sup> but not alien from Pasolini's.

## V. Pier Paolo Pasolini: the metonymy of innocence and the voices of God

Sunny day in Rome; in the center of Via Nazionale, in the Fountain of the Naiads, a young man sat, dressed casually while he claps his thighs with their hands; above, the nymph of the Seas mounted on a horse. Suddenly, a map of the contemporary world appears. Immediately, we returned to the plaza; the young man is walking; behind, we recognize the nymph of the Rivers, lying on a river monster. The young guy, carefree and fiddling with a cigar, walks among the people and a multitude of

<sup>11</sup> Bertolucci's «effeminate style (ornamental cinematography, composition in depth, romantic/decadent imagery, and indulgence in nostalgia) indeed creates the impression of depth and complexity associated, as Henderson suggests, with the bourgeois world. Yet this impression of depth is the result of Bertolucci's conscious acknowledgement of a 'bad conscience' peculiar to those middle-class artists ('delicate flowers of the bourgeois' as Pasolini calls them) who are committed to a radical cause. This conflict between attachment to the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie and the urge to destroy the bourgeoisie is absorbed and elaborated upon in all of Bertolucci's films» (Loshitzky 1992: 129-130). This «conflict» seems to be the consequence of the struggle with Pasolini's poetics of which *Agonia* is an avant-garde instance.

cars surrounding the plaza. Only the sound of the street is heard. The young man goes towards a group of workers and asks them if they have a match to light his cigar. One of the workers replied «Certainly!». The young man asks what is the purpose of the holes they are doing in the street; the worker responds, «To pull through». The young man is already walking on Via Nazionale; dimly, appears before us the image of a flag with the symbol of the Communist Party: the hammer and sickle.

All this happens in the first minute of *La sequenza del fiore di carta*. The first motif of the short film appears in the title: *succession*. In the first few seconds, there are two elements that reaffirm the sequential character of the plot: the Nymph of the Rivers and the Via Nazionale. The first being that we see is a man sitting in a water source. When the young Riccetto stands up and walks, the camera shows a very suggestive point of intersection between nature, myth and culture: Riccetto is successively walking along the Via Nazionale and his tutelary goddess is the nymph of the Rivers located at the source of the square of the Republic. Also, this sequential character in nature must be seen not only in spatial terms (the Via), but also in terms of temporality. The characters of the story seem to exist immanently (horizontality) since transcendence (verticality) has lost its meaning. Man, represented by Riccetto, dwells in the horizontality of a spatio-temporal succession; consequently, throughout the short film, Riccetto does not change of direction. These elements make it possible to say that this short film is, unlike *Agonia*, a metonymic work<sup>12</sup>.

However, we are still in the first minute. The second motif that gives the short film its characteristic atmosphere is the apparent feeling of lightness and openness: we are in Rome, open city to capitalist modernity; it is also a sunny day full of technological life whose eloquent voice are the horns of the cars. In this same sense, the image of the world map interrupts the walk of Riccetto and places the spectators immediately in the context of the contemporary international history. Suddenly, an image of the flag of the Communist Party appears juxtaposed to the carefree walk of Riccetto. The image of the flag is in black and white (it is the return of the past) while the city is colorful and bright. At this point, two elements are contradictory: on the one hand, the metonymic rhythm of Rome and the legendary Nymph of the rivers as

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the metonymic character or cinema/reality, Pasolini affirms, in «Quips on the cinema» (1966-1967), that «cinema is therefore without a doubt —Barthes is correct, in an enlightening way— a metonymic art. And with good cause: the nature of its language is not predicated on signs but on images —the stylization that leads us to writing as alphabet is not stylization of signs but of syntagmas, that is, montage (editing). If I wanted to bring Barthes's clever intuition back to my theory (so barbarically sketched out), I would say: *It is not cinema which is a metonymic art, it is reality which is metonymic*. The 'phenomena' of the world are the natural "syntagmas" of the language of reality. Cinema, 'in reproducing such phenomena', that is, in presenting itself as the written language of the living language of reality, is in its turn metonymic» (Pasolini 2005: 203). And, in the «The End of Avant-Garde» (1966), he declares that «there is a tendency, in short, to exclude the metaphorical nature of language in favor of its metonymic nature, but the metonymic figures of syntagmatic type which are born of it embrace passages of the 'sense' of reality in the same way in which insignificant chalk volutes embrace them. They are, in fact, metonymical figures born simply of the deliberate loss of their metaphorical nature, so that they present themselves in the end without shadows, without ambiguity, and without drama — like impersonal formularies or academic texts» (Pasolini 2005: 128). How to understand this complex characterization of metonymy? For Pasolini, reality is metonymic in the sense that it is an infinite sequence of events, a *continuum*, but what happens when reality (as metonymy) becomes only a grey orgy of cynicism, irony, brutality, compromise and conformism? Reality, and cinema, loses its metaphorical possibilities and becomes *empty* metonymy (consumerism: Riccetto's Via Nazionale or the radical avant-garde). It is in this context that editing (as "death" and author's style) gives cinema an aesthetic and critical meaning: a poetic (metaphorical) and narrative (metonymic) reproduction of reality.

tutelary divinity of Riccetto; on the other hand, the irruption of history embodied in the image of the world and in the communist flag.

The last element in the first minute is the dialogue between Riccetto and a worker. Since the first moment, the young man is presented as an incomplete consumer because he owns the object of consumption, the cigarette, but he cannot use it because he has no matches. For this reason, he asks the workers for the energy he does not possess. Riccetto's question portrays petty bourgeoisie's offspring as innocent children, away from history and attached to the small pleasures that the consumer society can offer them. In Marxist terms, it is labor what makes men enter history, offering them the possibility to transform their material reality. Hence, the workers are historical beings (such as the juxtaposed images of the past); although their power of emancipation has been reduced because they must work to survive. The first dialogue portrays the protagonist as a symbol of a consumerist Italy which does not remember the struggles of the past that have made possible its carefree «freedom» of consumption.

In this sense, the Via Nazionale becomes the symbol of consumerism as a pretend freedom which consists in the infinite movement of the desire, satisfied ephemerally only through the constant acquisition of commodities. The dynamics of consumerism is configured thus as the metonymic displacement of desire which atomizes the subjects and makes them external to their own history, enchaining them to the straight line (Via Nazionale) of the infinite, and apparently inevitable, progress of capitalism. It is very suggestive, moreover, that the first image of the short film is a combination of three mythological instances related to the infinite flux of water: the fountain of the Nymphs, the Nymph of the Seas and the Nymph of the Rivers. It is possible to see in this juxtaposition a symbol of the insatiable desire which has become the mythical ethos of Riccetto. In this sense, the Rome of the Republic Square and the Via Nazionale (monuments that refer to the official Italy, the one of the Social Democracy) is configured as a pagan city. Until here, the first minute.

While Riccetto is walking, and encountering diverse workers, he suddenly jumps into a bicycle and sits on its front-part carrying a giant paper-rose in his hands. With this object, he runs through the streets; he even kisses an unknown young woman. Unexpectedly, we hear a voice that seems to come from heaven (verticality). The voice, which identifies itself as God, expresses through three voices: one of an older man, the other of a man of middle age and the last one of a child (or a woman); they ask Riccetto for his «first fruits»; he does not do anything. After this scene, we see the last encounter with a worker. At the end of this encounters, the voices claim that, in today's world, «innocence is a guilt» and say that they will punish all those who, surrounded by suffering, want to remain innocents because they are like the «sterile fig tree», unable to give any fruit. After that, the voices are constantly asking for a signal that confirms that they are heard by Riccetto. He, surprised and confused, finally, says «What?!»

Immediately after this, we see Riccetto's body lying (dead?) on the floor next to the paper-rose. Someone whistles the song that accompanied him during his walk along Via Nazionale. Up to here a summary of the film. The analysis of *La sequenza del fiore di carta* will focus on 1) the juxtaposition of the historical images in black and white with the walk of Riccetto along the street; 2) the significance of the various conversations that Riccetto has with the passers-by; and 3) the meaning of

the introduction of the voices of God in the film in relation to the idea of the saturated phenomenon and the miracle of the sterile fig tree.

The black and white images belong to events of the first half of the twentieth century: the Communist Party flag, a political rally of the Fascist era, the photograph of “Che” Guevara killed in Bolivia, machinery of the German company Krupp-Ardel that became manufacturer of weapons for the army of the Third Reich and that benefited from the forced labor of many people, aerial bombardments, explosions and shots that bring to mind the memories of the Second World War. This first series of images is the *visual return* of the past. Moreover, the second series of images shows the democratic, but vain, attempts to stop the violence and destruction of the world: a United Nations conference, a group of ladies with bourgeois appearance; probably alluding to the inability or disinterest of the ruling classes to find concrete solutions to the problems of the world.

After this second visual series, a fragment of *The Passion according to St. Matthew* by Johann Sebastian Bach is heard; composition that is set as the background sound of the immediate past that Riccetto neither sees nor recalls. While we hear (it is not possible to know if Riccetto hears or not), a third series of images represent Chinese characters and photos of the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong. Moreover, two images of the same historical period are juxtaposed: 1) Vietnamese soldiers and 2) the youth, probably European or American, protesting the war in the streets with posters that say «Withdraw U.S. Troops» and «Escalate the mind / not the war». These images express the urgency of the immediate past, the urgency of remembrance. The Bach’s composition intensifies the experience of suffering in the world whose body is going through its passion, disintegrating inevitably in wars and, above all, in the oblivion of the past due to the imposition of a false idea of freedom exercised in the eternal present of consumerism.

Note that it is exactly in the middle of the short film, in its center, that the Christian-evangelical element is introduced through sound. This music, which evokes the pain of Christ on the cross, is introduced in the storyline as an interruption of the metonymic-consumerist time: a theologico-political constellation shows how the suffering of Christ’s body is analogous to the suffering that *crosses* (goes through) the body of the contemporary world and the bodies that inhabit it. In other words, if the first constellation occurred between myth and metonymy (exchange value, fetishism of the commodity, petty bourgeoisie) embodied in the Fountain of the Naiads and Via Nazionale; in the middle of the short film, the suffering of the historical body of Christ-World (the saturated phenomenon) burst in through the music of Bach.

In this sense, the story gets the quality of an event that cannot be appropriated by capitalism and its laws. Due to the connection with the saturated phenomenon of Christ’s passion, brought to presence through sound, the story becomes an event that breaks constantly into the present as the inapprehensible that must be remembered (black and white images). Thus, Pasolini introduces what he calls his «religious vision of the world» (Biagi 1971); this vision, of Christian undertones, espouses with history, in a Benjaminian turn, to offer the viewer an audiovisual experience of historical injustice.

Riccetto encounters six people during his walking. The first one has already been mentioned. The second encounter occurs with a white-collar worker waiting for his girlfriend. Riccetto stops and talks to him because the scent of the man attracts him. He asks, then, why the man has that smell; the man answers that «it is

because I am waiting for my girlfriend»; Riccetto asks where the flowers for her are. The worker replies that she will bring them. The third encounter occurs with an old man; Riccetto tells him «so old and still working!» The worker responds that «if not, who takes food to home». This second encounter makes the young remember a biological need («Oh by the way, I am hungry!») and the elderly remembers his youth and the passage of time: «it seems like yesterday when I was like you».

The fourth encounter occurs with a young man who drives a motorcycle taxi; Riccetto gets playfully inside it; he does not want to go to a specific place; the young worker tells him that it is his duty to work since he has a family to maintain (he even tells Riccetto the satisfaction that he feels when it is five o'clock in the afternoon and he must return home). Riccetto is surprised that the man must work to maintain his children because they, believes the petty bourgeois, should naturally be fed with the milk of their mother. Finally, he says that he does not have a job. The fifth encounter occurs with a girl that he finds on the street and of which we don't know anything; Riccetto gives her several kisses on the cheek affectionately; he asks her if she likes it; to which she responds affirmatively; then he leaves. The last meeting is analogous to the third one: Riccetto tells a worker, «I thought that you were close to death »; the man replied negatively since «there is still very much garbage to collect». While expressing the tension between petty-bourgeois consumption and working-class labor, these encounters, however, visibilize another dimension of the symbolic constellation that Riccetto incarnates: the biological.

In other words, consumer capitalism treat humans as beings whose desire is at a biological level. For this reason, the ephemeral satisfaction of a desire during the first encounter moves toward a more primary drive: the one of human beings as species. In the five encounters, Riccetto expresses the life cycle: the death of the elderly, the smell as sexually attractive (pheromones), the impersonal encounter with the opposite sex (since we do not know the name of the woman) and the reproductive process (belief in the spontaneous satisfaction of children's necessities thanks to the breast milk); as in the first scene, all the individuals he encounters are workers. Riccetto, on the other hand, is a mythological animal and, at the same time, the symbol of the anthropological mutation that Pasolini believed capitalism had produced.

Special mention deserves the relationship with the female gender, since, if it is true that Riccetto is attracted by the smell of the worker, when he discovers that he is waiting for his girlfriend, a traditional gendered-comment immediately appears in the mouth of Riccetto: «Where are the flowers?» The worker offers an answer that Riccetto didn't expect and which exposes him as belonging to the set of traditional values (patriarchal) that have historically been accomplices of capitalism. The relationship with the young woman is impersonal: kisses without any interest in a more personal contact, just enjoyment of the moment. This encounter portrays the devaluation of personal relationships among the petty bourgeois youth of Italy of the 60's.

The last part of this section focuses on the religious element in the plot. Note that, in the context of the Gospels, the passion of Christ, that is, the suffering of his flesh that purifies the world without destroying it, is a necessary step to the advent of a new world, one of love and reconciliation. Pasolini's films are not Christian films *per se*; what he expresses is a religious vision of life that he activated as an

element of his audiovisual poetics. In this sense, for Pasolini, the Gospel is not but «a huge intellectual work that reintegrates and puts in motion my films» (Biagi 1971). In rhetorico-poetic terms, it is possible to say that it is the message of the Gospel, as an intellectual and human *labor*, what gives a sense of unity to the late work of Pasolini; unity not as an overcoming of the differences (*Aufhebung*), but as a tension of opposites. In *La sequenza del fiore di carta*, this stress occurs between, on the one hand, the symbol of the consumerism and, on the other hand, the allegory of the suffering world<sup>13</sup>.

In the short film, God appears through the sense of hearing. Unlike the pagan world, representative of capitalism in the film, which is presented to us through metonymic images (exchange value), the saturated phenomenon (God) gives himself as a plurality of voices which tries to communicate to Riccetto the suffering of the body of the world (Christ and workers). This God appears not as a unified entity but as a polyphonic one (like Bach's music) whose voices could represent the Trinity: The Father (voice of an older man), the Son (voice of middle-aged man) and the Holy Spirit (voice of a child or a woman). Moreover, these three voices relate to the three values of the Gospel: faith, hope and love.

This God is different from the jealous and vengeful God of the Old Testament which emphasizes its uniqueness saying to Abraham «I am who I am». The God(s) who speak(s) to Riccetto, on the other hand, emphasizes its/their plurality. The voices call human beings, they decide *to* manifest themselves, reveal in history as voices. However, Riccetto is incapable or perhaps does not want to hear them, he has become a sterile fig tree. Unlike the institutional god of Bertolucci, the Pasolinian god acts and reveals himself in the history as voices appealing personally to human beings, to Riccetto; it is a God who is saying, almost begging, that human beings must change their mode of existence, that they should stop walking along Via Nazionale tutored by the nymphs who disappeared to Hylas forever, isolating him in the time of myth; the voices tell Riccetto (and us) that he can no longer be «innocent» if he does not want to be «guilty».

But, what does it mean to be innocent? And why is all innocence guilty? Innocence is not but the oblivion of history as the suffering body of the world; it is to live in the eternal present (myth, symbol) of insatiable consumption of commodities/signifiers (metonymy) setting aside any material possibility (labor/flesh/eroticism) to transform radically contemporary society at a personal and collective level. Being innocent is not but subordinate the saturated phenomenon (God, love, person, religious experience of life, etc.) to pure exchange value, debasing the freedom which ends up being a fleeting paper-rose. This innocence is the guilt for which the tree sterile is cursed violently and abruptly by Christ, since subordinating everything to the progress of the Via Nazionale is to live in a time in which nothing happens, in which all things have been thrown in the abyss of sameness, without history or tradition.

In a metapoetic turn, one of the voices of God mentions that what he asks Riccetto is perhaps a contradiction (Pasolini's oxymoron). Then it tells Riccetto that it wants his «first fruits», his knowledge and his will within history so that he ceases to be an innocent accomplice. The voice of God tells him: «Is contradic-

<sup>13</sup> For the difference between symbol (which reflects history as eternity) and allegory (which portrays history as transience and ruins), see Walter Benjamin (2003).

tory, I know. It may also be something insoluble, because if you are an innocent person, you cannot not be so, and if you are innocent, you can't have conscience nor will». These "divine" words express succinctly Pasolinian poethics: we are innocent because we have not done individually anything to produce the society in which we live; however, we are guilty if we are not always already doing something to change the world to which historically we belong and with which, consequently, have a responsibility here and now («March-spring»). For this reason, Pasolini asserts that his films are not dialectical (*Aufhebung*), but oxymoronic (Biagi 1971), that is, they live in the tension of opposites, in contradiction, without generating a final overcoming of these contradictions. Pasolini's God tells Riccetto that he should not wait until the end of his life («September-autumn») to do something, thinking that he must first live without responsibility (without history), to worry about the suffering of the world.

The voice states that all those who are unable to carry out this transformation in their existences are sterile, therefore, cursed: they must die. While we hear a lively song (*Fruscio di foglie verdi* of Ennio Morricone), Riccetto runs through the city with its paper-rose, symbol of the fetishism of the market; it is the possibility of death which makes Riccetto react and said «What?!» However, it is already too late. God has decided to punish him: death is the "divine" punishment of consumerism. However, though dead, we hear someone whistling the melody with which he walked along the street. Who whistles? Is it the world that insists on being innocent? Or maybe are we, the ones who see, innocently accomplices, *La sequenza del fiore di carta*? In this short film, the relationship of the individual with the saturated phenomenon (what is not appropriable by the exchange value) is posited as a form of being neither innocent nor accomplice.

The end of the story is "apparently" pessimistic. However, as Pasolini said, «a great pessimism always involves a great deal of optimism, this is true, and vice versa» (Biagi 1971). The death of Riccetto is not a symbol of inevitability (the impossible escape of exchange value). On the contrary, the voices of God(s) (which summon the person and demand to be heard) and the death(?) of Riccetto (his inability to communicate with the saturated phenomenon) appeal directly to the viewer who must decide here and now no longer to be innocent if he does not want to die. Likewise, the death of Riccetto is not the death of man as person (saturated phenomenon); it is the death of the atomized consumer that has forgotten history and enters the false freedom of consumerism.

The end of Riccetto must be viewed from this double perspective: as sterile fig tree, it is the death of the consumer (the innocent accomplice) and, at the same time, is the possibility of another time (for the viewer). This possibility does not mean the overcoming of contradictions (*Aufhebung*); it means, instead, being able to exist in them and, from that contradictory and insoluble experience, not to be accomplice. If for Bertolucci, the saturated phenomenon, dissociated from the historic and agonic Church, exceeds the youth that cannot relate (communication) to it; for Pasolini, to interact personally with this phenomenon is the possibility of no longer being innocent. The Pasolinian position until 1969 is already pessimistic; however, the hope still exists: it is the personal decision to listen to the plurality of voices which are nothing but a metaphor of what has been called the saturated phenomenon or, in Adorno's terms, the non-identical.



## VI. Pasolini and Bertolucci: Why is death so important?

*It is only thanks to death  
that our life serves us to express ourselves.*

Pier Paolo Pasolini

In *La sequenza del fiore di carta* many kinds of shots are used; however, the most common is the front tracking shot which follows Riccetto. While the tracking shot from behind creates a closer but impersonal relationship between the spectator and the character (because we are close to him but we cannot see his face), the front tracking shot, instead, creates a closer and personal relationship with Riccetto since it produces the illusion that he is getting each time closer to us, spectators. While the tracking shot from behind establishes a third-person relationship, the front tracking shot creates a second-person relationship with the spectator. In this sense, we are addressed each moment throughout the film. But, at the same time, we are not accomplices with Riccetto (tracking shot from behind, as when the camera, us, follow a character that will commit a murder); we are, instead, judges. Let me explain this.

From behind, spectators don't establish a personal relationship with the character; in fact, we «become» (identification) him but through a faceless identification; in political terms, we could say that the character becomes us: our identity remains. However, with a front tracking shot we are within a personal relation with the character because we see his face, we are not him (a total identification is not possible) but also, we have the power to talk to him as a person. This feature gives the narrative of *La sequenza del fiore di carta* a critical tone and intention. This first judgment of Riccetto is made from a horizontal and perspective, in other words, the juxtaposed photos of the terror of the past and the impotence of the presence accompanied by Bach's music are human artistic materials that address us, spectators, to remember and try to change our present lives.

However, spectators don't know, they can't be sure, whether Riccetto sees this juxtaposition of sound and music during his metonymic walk. It seems that Riccetto is blind to the photos and deaf to the suffering of the music (which relates to the suffering of the body of the world, Christ). The avant-gardist techniques seem to be inoperative when trying to call the attention of this alienated petty bourgeoisie's offspring. The counterpoint of a front tracking shot (critical second person) and the avant-gardist juxtaposition of image and sound (unnoticed by Riccetto) are not but the eloquent expression of 1) the failure of secular reason to reject critically a life dominated by the exchange value and the most basic animal principles of self-preservation sublimated by the acquisition of commodities and 2) the failure of the avant-garde techniques to make the petty bourgeois (us-spectators?) remember the suffering of the world in the past and in the present.

For this reason, we need a different, incommensurable by the market (saturated phenomenon), point of view, a divine one: towards the end of the short film an intense low-angle shot pans the light blue sky from where a three-dimensional voice emerges. It is interesting that it is not an aerial shot (God's point of view) but a low-angle shot that is a human standpoint which relates to a verticality: the sky, God, the saturated phenomenon. Until the end of the film, the point of view is human;

what changes is the directionality of the gaze and the hearing, it is not horizontal anymore, but vertical. Once again, the ambiguity is that it is not clear whether Riccetto cannot hear (image of the alienation or Pasolini's anthropological change) or whether he does not want to hear (petty bourgeois evasion or indifference).

The three-dimensional voice, in this sense, not only addresses Riccetto, but us too, the spectators. Riccetto is one example (hence, his death is exemplar) of the consequences of the inability of human beings to hear what they are not: verticality, nature, God's voices; instances of the saturated phenomenon. After the failure of reason and radical avant-gardist artworks<sup>14</sup>, Riccetto is begged to listen to the voices. At the end, human vision and music has failed; what remains as hope is the nude and simple voice of God seen from the world, within the world. Riccetto's death(?)<sup>15</sup>, consequently, becomes exemplar for us, spectators, as the consequence of our inability to relate to the saturated phenomenon.

However, it is important to differentiate between the violence of God and the violence of man which are incommensurable<sup>16</sup>: for that reason, we see a juxtaposition of images of war violence and cruelty. The Pasolinian God is not an authoritarian dictator; it is, instead, the violent Christ of *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*<sup>17</sup> who throws away the thieves of the temple of his Father. Riccetto's death should be understood in a ternary form: 1) it is a portrayal of the present and future of the petty bourgeoisie: they are living deads, the future of a so extremely alienated collectivity cannot be but death; 2) it is an exemplum that reinterprets Christ death, making of Riccetto a Christological figure, in other words, it is the parable of the fig tree, whose death, as Christ's, in an exemplum that must show us, spectators who are addressed directly by the film (second-person shot), what we must do to survive in this world: not being innocent; 3) it is a meta-filmic reflection that can be seen as a manifesto-introduction of Pasolinian film poetics of the 70's.

<sup>14</sup> Pasolini (*Is being natural?*) is strongly critical with the avant-gardist techniques (of editing) of the New Cinema because it «has as its first character that of showing, openly, the falsification of real time (or in the case of eternal sequence shots of which I spoke earlier, its intensification through the overturning of the value of the insignificant). Are the authors of the New Cinema correct? That is, should real time be destroyed completely in a work, and should such a destruction be the first and most obvious element of its style? Therefore, completely taking away from the spectator the illusion of the development of the actions in time —as used to occur in past and recent narratives?» (Pasolini 2005 242). For Pasolini, the fear of naturalism is the symptom of the petty bourgeois' bad conscience of the authors of the New Cinema.

<sup>15</sup> The contrast cut at the end the short film (Riccetto's disappearing saying «Ah?!») and his reappearance lying death on the floor) is an instance of what Pasolini (2005: 244) called, in *Tetis* (1973), a *non-audiovisual* form which is «nevertheless a form of the film»; for Pasolini, «the spectator does not apprehend this passage from surprise to death as a form: he relates to it exactly as if it were a phenomenon of life. (...) We thus arrive at the conclusion that the spectator, faced with the film's 'inclusions' (that is, its *audiovisual forms*), acts as an "addressee", yet he knows that it is an illusion. However, faced with the 'exclusions' (that is, the film's non-audio-visual forms), the spectator acts, all the same, as an 'addressee': the scheme he adopts to formulate his interpretation of, or arrive at his deductions and conclusions regarding, the comportment of a character in the film is the same scheme he uses to interpret the comportment of a person in reality» (Pasolini 2005: 244-245). In consequence, Riccetto's death (or he has just fainted?) addresses the spectator in reality; hence, its critical and exemplary sense.

<sup>16</sup> As Testa (1994: 186) affirms, «the violence of worldly power and the violence of divine eschatological power are incommensurable».

<sup>17</sup> Pasolini «explains he chose Matthew because of the harshness of the Savior's words, the abruptness of the evangelist's narration, and the 'absolute' fashion with which Matthew stages Christ's confrontations: in short, because of the 'violence' of Matthew's Jesus» (Testa 1994: 185); see Greene (1990).

For Pasolini, cinema is an infinite sequence shot, metonymic; film is, instead, editing, and editing is death<sup>18</sup>, it is how the reproduction of reality becomes an aesthetic reproduction and from there emerges its critical and revolutionary potential. In this short film the carefree wandering of Riccetto is not but a symbolic reproduction of a reality that was being taken completely by the most regressive values of the petty bourgeoisie, it is a reproduction of reality. Riccetto's death, as Pasolini's metaphor or allegory for the process of editing<sup>19</sup>, makes the short film a critical artwork: *La sequenza del fiore di carta* is thus an aesthetic-political manifesto on what does it mean to make films after May 68; it establishes clearly who is the enemy (petty bourgeoisie, metonymic and radical avant-garde) and who the work-friend<sup>20</sup> (poetic editing, saturated phenomenon, the non-identical).

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<sup>18</sup> For Pasolini (2005: 250), «editing is thus like the choice which death makes of the acts of a life, placing them outside of time».

<sup>19</sup> In *Observations on the sequence shot*, Pasolini affirms that «it is therefore absolutely necessary to die, because, so long as we live, we have no meaning, and the language of our lives (with which we express ourselves, and to which we therefore attribute the greatest importance) is untranslatable; a chaos of possibilities, a search for relations and meanings without resolution. Death effects an instantaneous montage of our lives: that is, it chooses the truly meaningful moments (which are no longer modifiable by other possible contrary or incoherent moments) and puts them in a sequence, transforming an infinite, unstable, and uncertain —and therefore linguistically not describable —present into a clear, stable, certain, and therefore easily describable past (exactly in the context of a General Semiology). It is only thanks to death that our life serves us to express ourselves» (Pasolini 2005: 236-237). In this sense, if reality has become a brutal orgy of metonymic consumerism, death (as a metaphor of editing) is of supreme importance.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=work%20friend>

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