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Pier Paolo  
PASOLINI

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# Contents

vii	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
ix	CHRONOLOGY
xi	ILLUSTRATIONS
3	Introduction PATRICK RUMBLE and BART TESTA
14	Pier Paolo, My Cousin ... NICO NALDINI
22	Pasolini's 'Roman Novels,' the Italian Communist Party, and the Events of 1956 JOSEPH FRANCESE
40	Pasolini, Zanzotto, and the Question of Pedagogy JENNIFER STONE
56	Pasolini's 'Second Victory' WALTER SITI
78	Free/Indirect/Discourse PAOLO FABBRI

88	The Body of Pasolini's Semiotics: A Sequel Twenty Years Later GIULIANA BRUNO
106	Toward a Materialist Linguistics: Pasolini's Theory of Language SILVESTRA MARINIELLO
127	A Genial Analytic Mind: 'Film' and 'Cinema' in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Film Theory DAVID WARD
152	Manifesto for a New Theatre PIER PAOLO PASOLINI
171	<i>Accattone</i> and <i>Mamma Roma</i> P. ADAMS SITNEY
180	To Film a Gospel... and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger BART TESTA
210	Stylistic Contamination in the <i>Trilogia della vita</i> : The Case of <i>Il fiore delle mille e una notte</i> PATRICK RUMBLE
232	<i>Salò: The Refusal to Consume</i> NAOMI GREENE
243	Tetis PIER PAOLO PASOLINI
251	BIBLIOGRAPHY
254	FILMOGRAPHY
256	CONTRIBUTORS

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PAOLO FABBRI

In this essay, Paolo Fabbri addresses Pasolini's often unorthodox ideas concerning the semiotics of film. During the late sixties and early seventies, debates in film semiotics focused on the possibility of drawing analogies between literary and cinematic narrative models, and on the appropriateness of applying analytical paradigms derived from linguistics to the study of film. Fabbri takes as his starting point the argument between Pasolini, Umberto Eco, and Christian Metz concerning whether or not there was a 'double articulation' in film language, basing themselves largely on André Martinet's Saussurean analysis of the double articulation in spoken-written language. From this discussion Fabbri examines Pasolini's formulations concerning free indirect discourse (otherwise known as *oratio obliqua* or reported speech), and its importance for an understanding of Pasolini's approach to montage. Fabbri asserts that for Pasolini what motivated the montage or editing of his films was not narrative clarity, as in the classical style of Hollywood filmmaking, and its continuity system of narrative time or space. Rather, Pasolini was moved by a desire for a 'poetic' editing style designed to provoke an ambivalent reaction in the spectator.

During the late sixties, I recall attending a conference at Pesaro, in Urbino, and I remember a debate between Pasolini, Christian Metz, and Umberto Eco concerning the attempt to discover the cinematic equivalent of second articulation of language. That is, language can be divided into morphemes (or 'monemes'), units of meaning that form the 'first articulation.' These units can then be broken down into smaller but meaningless units of sound, or 'phonemes,' that form the 'second articulation.' It will be necessary to return to this issue in a moment.

This conference in Pesaro was held during a period that witnessed theoretical attempts to draw certain analogies between spoken-written language and the language of film, using semiotic methods derived from the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. One of the questions under debate concerning semiotic's 'linguistic metaphor' was whether or not film was a language at all, or whether film was always necessarily a *langage* (language) or *parole* (speech) lacking the equivalent of a *langue* (or language system). One of the most noted results of these inquiries was Metz's categorization of the basic syntagmatic structures of narrative cinema (see Metz 1974a). In Pasolini's 1966 essay, 'The Written Language of Reality,' he responds to an article Metz (1964) published in *Communications* ('Le cinéma: langue ou langage?'). The response takes the form of Pasolini's articulation of his own stylistic grammar of the language of cinema, and his application of this grammar in an analysis of two films by Ermanno Olmi and Bernardo Bertolucci (Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, 202-30; *Heretical Empiricism*, 197-222). However, while the wider debate among these theorists is itself of great interest, I will focus upon a few details in Pasolini's theoretical approach.

Pasolini worked in semiotics, or what he called semiotics, for almost ten years, from 1965 until his death in 1975. Most of his essays concerning semiotics were collected in the volume entitled *Empirismo eretico* (*Heretical Empiricism*). Pasolini's reflections upon semiotics were very close to his film work in this period.

There is no way to return to the debates of this period today unless you can find within them some problem useful for the analysis of the present, and this is what I will do here, by taking up the problem of prophecy. There are two kinds of prophetic attitudes. One, according to Maurice Blanchot, suggests that there is a voice speaking behind you, in your past, passing through you and going into the future. The present would be simply a point crossed by this language. There is another strategy of prophecy: the past is there to give space to the present, and the knowledge of the present is possible only in a simple way. You go to the future, you come back to the past because you do not read the past from the present (because you don't know the present). You need a hypothesis about your future, you read the past from the future, and from the past you come back to the present. That is, you have to return to the present from the future. What I am suggesting now is that the notion of free indirect discourse, so crucial for Pasolini, provides a way

to try to understand what is going on in the present, by thinking about strategies of signification in texts today.

Well this may be very banal but, finally, if along the path you meet the monster Chumera and experience witchcraft, it would probably be most amusing – and this is what we will try to do.

#### Free, Indirect, Discourse

First, let us invert the order of the formulation 'free indirect discourse.' Begin with discourse, or speech. What was interesting and crucial in Pasolini was the complete refusal of Roland Barthes's idea that semiotics was a sort of 'trans-linguistics.' In this period, Barthes insists that we must extend to semiotics the strategy of linguistics. Metz argues that it was not possible to make this kind of extension in the case of cinema because a filmed image is always an *énoncé*, a large utterance that does not analytically dissolve into smaller units comparable to linguistic units, like monemes or phonemes. In his semiotics, Pasolini argues that the relation between film and the world is a relation of translation. I do not know if the idea of the semiology of reality (*semiologia della realtà*), as he called it, is a good one. Nonetheless, the fundamental idea is that, in a certain way, the signification – the meaning we receive from a film – is not based on reality, in the sense that you can count and name the objects reproduced in the image. This sort of analysis, based on Pasolini's formulation in *Empirismo eretico* concerning 'cinemes' (*cinemi*): the individual elements within the frame, which Pasolini asserted as the filmic equivalents of phonemes) and the second articulation, was common in this period. Indeed, I know some Pasolini scholars working in order to find all the objects inside the frame. This is amusing because they are what I would call the main victims of language. That is, by trying to escape from language you become the victim of language because what you can see in the picture, in the frame, is only what you can give a name to. You say: well this is a horse, this is a house, and so on. While trying to escape from the linguistic model by looking directly at the picture, at the frame, and while pretending that in that moment you are looking at objects, in the end you only see the objects for which you have names. You become a victim of what can only be called linguistic superstition.

More interesting was Pasolini's refusal of the metaphorical model. In the essay entitled 'Cinema of Poetry', Pasolini very clearly denounced the naive quality of all metaphor in the cinema. The idea of refusing to

look in the traditional linguistic way, refusing the model of metaphor, and posing the question of translation, is, in my opinion, an interesting way to approach the problem of meaning in a film.

#### Free, Indirect, Discourse

However, there is more than this in Pasolini's work (although in part implicit and in part explicit). I will now take into account the notion of 'indirection': discourse, *indirect* and *free*. The indirection in Pasolini's work is extremely interesting, because it is not, he would insist, involved only in metaphor. Pasolini was formed in a very traditional philological framework in Italy. Regarding free indirect discourse in particular, Pasolini drew freely from Hertzog's book *Stile indiretto libero* (indeed there are many direct quotations of this philologist's work in Pasolini's essays). What is interesting about indirection is the idea that in indirect discourse one is speaking unspeakable sentences. This kind of discourse does not take into account the objects or the words or the images, but rather the relationship between images. Implicitly one is indirectly producing an impossible viewer.

Let us consider an example, originally offered by Pasolini, of free indirect discourse: 'They arrived in front of the plane. They look at the plane. How beautiful.' Who is speaking? You don't know if the speaker is the actor (the character inside the story) or if it is the narrator. You are unable to assign a single point of view. The fact is that there is no complete theory in linguistics about the many speaking positions in the special kind of stylistic moment we call free indirect discourse. The very term free indirect discourse is a great problem for literature because it poses the question of unspeakable sentences: unspeakable in the sense that we do not know who is speaking.

And finally, what is the effect of free indirect discourse? The indirection takes off from the literal definition, the referential definition, exactly in the same way in which the metaphor is supposed to take off from the denotational and the referential feature of language. From a certain point of view, free indirect discourse has a metaphorical quality, but it is not a metaphor of a sign. Rather it is a metaphor of a speaker or of a viewer inside the text itself. This is not a discovery. You can find it clearly explicit in Weinrich's (1971) book about the *terminus*. He says very clearly that when you pass from one sentence to another sentence and you cannot locate who is the speaker speaking in the second sentence, you can suppose that you have a metaphorical



process, though in a very broad sense of metaphor. Here metaphor should not be taken in the sense of a sign substituting another sign (a man is a lion, and so on) but an impossible though necessary substitution in the sense of *meta - phor*, in the sense of 'after moving,' in which you cannot make a clear demarcation of who is speaking. The metaphor falls between the sentences, not inside the sentence itself. From this point of view, in cinema, the indirection of discourse poses the crucial question of *who is seeing?* In Pasolini's example, found in his 1971 essay on the edit or cut between shots, entitled 'Il rema' ('The Rheme') (Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, 293-301; *Heretical Empiricism*, 288-92), he speaks about presenting a shot of a woman looking at a plane followed by a subjective shot. He raises some questions about the relationship between the first image and the second one: what is going on? who moved there? and so on. Well, this is precisely the problem of indirection. In the first case, you have semiosis (which is not just translinguistics). In the second you have the problem of indirection: the fact is that you can produce metaphors of enunciation, and not only metaphors of images.

#### Free, Indirect, Discourse

We arrive now at the third problem, what I would call the problem of freedom (*free indirect discourse*). Most of us remember that in the beginning of the sixties Eco wrote a very influential essay about the open work or *opera aperta* (Eco 1962). Eco insists that there is a sort of tyrannical hold of the reader able to attack the open work from everywhere and to construct or execute for himself the final meaning of the work. This is not Pasolini's position, and furthermore this is not Eco's current position on the matter (see Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation and Interpretation and Overinterpretation*), and his novels (*The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*) differ from his earlier notion of an open work. In this period, Pasolini was seeking another kind of freedom: the freedom inside the text itself. He asks himself: how to build the text? He was able to introduce, inside the text itself, a simulacrum of Eco's freedom of interpretation. How is it possible to give voice, to give the answer, to the addressee, to the reader inside the text itself? He answered: by way of the *cinema di poesia* (cinema of poetry). He asserted that the cinema of poetry is like a Persian carpet (the analogy is Pasolini's) in which the soul of the author and the soul of the character blend. The problem can be confronted through a description of the form

of knots. Perhaps the soul can blend but what is the form of knots? The knot takes on many forms. The *oratio obliqua*, which is in fact the old name of free indirect discourse, permits different kinds of strategies. Irony for example - violent irony - is one of the effects of *oratio obliqua* (see Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, 98; *Heretical Empiricism*, 91).

How is 'violent irony' possible for Pasolini? Pasolini took the idea of linguistic contamination very seriously, but in this period the problem of contamination, as in all periods, was difficult to make explicit. In Gilles Deleuze as well you will find a great idea which is very modernistic: the idea of the 'purity' of the image. An image is pure as a substance of expression having its own quality. But there was also, during this same period, what we will call the 'De Mauro obsession' (see De Mauro 1985). Tullio De Mauro was a strong and very faithful member of the Italian Communist Party, and in this period he had very strong attitudes concerning the question of regional dialects (the old Gramscian hypothesis). But, in fact, what Pasolini did through the contamination of dialects in his writing gives an idea of the direction in which modern Italy is going today. The Italian individual today is constituted by a contamination of dialects, certainly not by a purity of dialect. Pasolini's idea is interesting insofar as freedom, for him, is ensured by the various linguistic levels mixed together; by the chaotic motion between levels of discourse which is not just a level of language. But this chaotic motion, which I will call the indirect unspeakable motion, using a temporal metaphor, is a kind of mixing of contamination, not just a contamination of Italian and different kinds of languages. This is what the novelist Carlo Emilio Gadda did so well, and certainly did better than Pasolini. I would assert this notion of indirection is the key to understanding the problem. In fact I would change slightly the order of the terms, and suggest that it is *indirect*, free discourse with which I am mainly concerned.

But what is the quality of this 'precious form of contamination,' this chaotic movement of languages? The idea is an aesthetic one. Pasolini writes,

On such material is enacted a violent and brutal laceration, a cut, from which erupts the other material which composes the objectivity, the real fabric of things which escaped the intellectual poet and also escaped, by and large, man. (Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, 99, my translation; *Heretical Empiricism*, 92)

And further:

the language is no longer that of the *character* but that of the addressee. The quotation of the laceration indifferent to this language – which is monstrous with respect to the work.' (ibid.: my translation)

I announced that we were looking for monsters. The monster is coming. What about this idea of laceration? Generally the aesthetic experience can be defined as follows: you have to work until you arrive at the shifting moment, the splitting moment, in which a new kind of reality appears (Heidegger calls it *der Stoss*). What is interesting here are two points. The first one is that Pasolini does *not* insist that there is a reality to reproduce in a film, but that it is necessary to work on the image until the reality appears. All around us we have no reality; this is simulation, we are 'fabrics' – we create reality. Reality can appear sometimes with the Medusa face, the Gorgon face. This is the reality Pasolini saw, appearing as a brutal laceration having the traditional definition of the aesthetic experience. The reality appears (though not all the time), yet we do not see reality; and we don't see appearances, since we are used to them. When you look at reality there is a brutal laceration of the world and the reality appears and disappears immediately (fortunately for us, but also unbearably for us). In this moment of laceration, what is the reality, for Pasolini? The reality of the addressee (see Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico* 99; *Heretical Empiricism*, 92).

Theoretically, this is very interesting during a period in which the avant-garde, working on reality, does not attempt at all to make the addressee appear in its own discourse. Let us recall how it was possible, during the sixties, simultaneously to disrupt traditional language and yet at the same time also make the audience adhere to your discourse. For Pasolini, the real problem was how to produce the monster of the addressee. The real addressee, not just the empirical one (which is, exactly like reality, a product of statistical definitions). For Pasolini the problem becomes: how is it possible to produce an addressee, a Medusa face, speaking to you?

This is a huge problem, but you cannot obtain the desired result through poetry. Poetry in the double sense of the word: poetry speaks about something and also speaks about more than that. A very simple definition of poetry could be something like this: a man or woman says to you I like you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I am dying, I am dying, I am dying. But by the same means, and at the same time, you are saying other things to another addressee. With a minimal level of ambiguity, poetry produces a split between the subject speaking, some-

thing speaking inside us, and something speaking to another addressee. The point is that poetry is not just a doubled language presupposing a split in the doubled sender and a split in the doubled receiver. The problem of poetry is to make this receiver appear. We have to look to the split addressee. In Italian I would say, hopefully in a funny way (recalling Freud's metaphor), the *super-tu* ('super-you') and not just the *super-io* ('super-ego'). In my opinion, what is interesting in the psychoanalytic metaphor of transference is the idea that finally there is a real poetic quality in the psychoanalytical relationship between analyst and analysand. From the sender (analysand) you have a 'floating speaking,' an indirect speaking. The psychoanalyst will never believe in the surface level of the analysand's discourse, but the analyst uses a sort of indirect free way of hearing the analysand. There is a poetic communication in the pre-transferred activity, which is very close to Pasolini's ideas as quoted above. That is, not only is the subject free and indirect, but also the space is free and indirect in cinematic representation. Moreover, time is really indirect and free. Let me give an example from Pasolini. In 'Observation on the Sequence Shot,' written in 1967, he speaks about the multiplication of the 'presents' in montage (Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, 241–5; *Heretical Empiricism*, 233–7). Pasolini asserts that the 'multiplication of the 'presents' in reality abolishes the present' (242, 234). What is necessary for us is to look to the coordination or the relation between sentences or sequences (segments if you prefer), the coordination that 'renders the present past' (243, 235). According to Pasolini, the narrator transforms the present into the past,

a past that, for reasons immanent in the cinematographic medium, and not because of an aesthetic choice, always has the qualities of the present (it is, in other words, a historical present). (244; 236)

The historical present is the absolutely crucial feature created by the montage, by what Weirich in linguistics would call the metaphorical mode of time.

Let me give an example of free indirect time. I will quote from a Sicilian story, which goes as follows. The Normans arrived in Palermo (*arrivarono*, using the preterite form) in the twelfth century and their king will be the best king of Sicily (*will be*). This narrative raises a series of questions. 'Will be' until when? Until you speaking now? 'Will be' in the immediate future in this past of this past? Up until the period when the Normans disappeared from Sicily? Or 'will be' forever,

passing through my present until forever? As you can see, we cannot make a decision there. This is the strict internal ambiguity of the montage between the time 'they arrived' and the time when the king 'will be.' This is specific free indirect discourse. This is specifically a metaphor of time.

One of the great strengths of Pasolini is to point, by way of the idea of free indirect discourse, to this monstrous combination, the Chimera, possessing different qualities of time. He speaks about the 'rhythme' (*ritmo*), a unity of rhythm, and he suggests that it is a sort of monster of amphibious nature, of space and time, producing non-existent meaning. This is a quality in Pasolini's work that is useful for our present.

I agree, along with many others, that for us Pasolini is part of a very distant past. What is incredible for an Italian today is how much the world of Pasolini, the Roman *borgata* (the subproletarian ghettos as found in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*), is really a prehistoric experience. Italians today look upon this historical moment as they do the *Risorgimento* (the period of nineteenth-century Italian unification struggles) – that is, as a distant period of our history. From this point of view, Pasolini is for us part of a very, very distant past. Also part of the past is the idea of a semiology of reality (*semiologia della realtà*). However, the crucial idea of the semiosis of the unspeakable sentence, of out-of-sight segments, and the project of freely creating, inside the discourse, the effect of a future addressee, is an aesthetic project that is not concluded or closed. It remains open for us.

This is why Pasolini is not just a medium, in the sense that, by his own genius, he chose the medium of film, before many others, because of the internal quality of modern language. Rather, he was a medium in the sense that the medium is a sort of witchcraft evocation. (I promised monsters and witchcraft, and they have arrived.) I think there is a quality of the medium speaking to our present in the right way of prophecy: going to the future, using the hope of the future for reading the present, coming back to the past, in order to return again to an ambiguous present.

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