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Pasolini and Third World hunger: an approach to Cinema Novo through *La ricotta*

Among the numerous connections that exist between Latin American and Italian cinema, the link between Pasolini's works and Brazilian films is one of the most evident and frequently analysed. This relation is so fruitful that, although it has been the focus of a huge number of works, it remains an endless source for cultural and formal analysis. In this article I will be focusing on a movie by the Italian filmmaker, the medium-length film *La ricotta*, and on certain shared features with Brazilian Cinema Novo of the 1960s. To that end, I will be considering the pairing of hunger-consumption, not only in order to place the films in a certain political and audiovisual context, but also to approach them aesthetically.

Simon of the Desert and consumption

At the end of Luis Buñuel's film *Simón del desierto*/*Simon of the Desert* (1965), the devil, played by Silvia Pinal, transports the fasting anchorite from his column in the middle of the desert, in the 4th century, to 1960s New York: after an aerial shot, the camera pans down from the buildings to the ground to simulate the landing of the characters, who have come from a distant place and time. Then we are taken into a night club packed with dancing figures listening to rock'n'roll music, where Simón has turned into a beatnik and the devil into a young girl who is eager to try the Final Dance, called *Carne Radioactiva*/*Radioactive Flesh*. After warning Simón not to go back to his column, because it has already been occupied by someone else, she gets up and starts moving her body, yelling frantically, and the camera returns to the mass of youngsters, losing itself amongst them, until the image freezes and the word "Fin" appears.

This final sequence isn't just a closing joke, it's also a counterpoint to the rest of the film. Until then, Simón 'is lost in the wild blue yonder, high on the pillar of delirium. He is the first astronaut, alone on a Space platform'; he is also reminiscent of a Robinson Crusoe whose imagination 'obsessively conjures up that worst of all possible Man Fridays, the eternal adversary of his ideal, garbed in femininity' (Durgnat 1968: 137-138). This isolation and silence are replaced by a discotheque full of noise and bodies that move tightly squeezed together, creating an informal multitude celebrating the youth of the flesh, as in a Dionysian bacchanal. The fast of the anchorite, both nutritive and sexual, is replaced by an explosion which is sensual and lively, but also perverted and contaminated: the *Radioactive Flesh*. There is, thus, an opposition created between hunger and consumption, between the lack of meat and the excess of flesh, and also an instability between repression and outburst which is common in Buñuel's filmography, both in his stories and in his visual approach.

In spite of its modest length (43 minutes) and its teasing tone, *Simon of the Desert* is a key film for the political cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Firstly, because it is the last Mexican film by Buñuel, a European filmmaker who would become a touchstone for the New Latin American Cinema. At that time, this continental movement was starting to garner international recognition, so Buñuel's film can be regarded, in a sense, as the last work of an old master passing on the torch to a new generation. In fact, Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha, who at that time had gained a certain prestige in Europe with his film *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol/Black God, White Devil* (1964), is said to appear as one of the dancers in the last sequence of the film. Maybe this is just an urban-cinematic legend, as he is indistinguishable in the seething mass of people, and I have been unable to find any bibliographical reference stating exactly when he appears. But the accuracy of the anecdote

isn't as important as its symbolic meaning: Buñuel returns to Europe and the Latin American new wave takes his place.

Furthermore, *Simon of the Desert* is a key film because it clarifies one of the main themes in the relation between modern Latin American and European cinema. The dialectics between hunger and consumption, which is Simón's conflict, had gained some importance in the early 1960s on both sides of the Atlantic, and it would become even more powerful by the end of the decade and the beginning of the next, with a long series of films on cannibalism. Throughout those years, hunger and consumption gained in importance from a narrative and aesthetic point of view, to become major themes in a political cinema concerned with the evolution of capitalism after the Second World War: above all, the consolidation of consumer society and the perpetuation of the misery of proletarians, both in rich countries and in the Third World. The economic and anthropological perversions of that time gave rise to a political cinema that was extremely interested in organic issues, following the path initiated by previous movements, such as Soviet cinema and Neorealism. In the case of Europe, numerous films could be cited: Jean-Luc Godard's *Week-end* (1967), Liliana Cavani's *I cannibali/The Cannibals* (1970) and Marco Ferreri's *La grande bouffe/The Big Feast* (1973), all of which approach film from this perspective in order to study how consumption is represented, and how representation is consumed.

On the other side of the Atlantic, perhaps their most important interlocutor was Brazil's Cinema Novo. Supported in its beginnings by a left-wing government, it produced movies that denounced the poverty and starvation of the *favelas* and rural areas, particularly the drought-stricken north-eastern region of *Sertão,* as portrayed in Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas/Barren Lives* (1963) and Ruy Guerra's *Os Fuzis/The Guns* (1964). Later on, following the military coup of 1964 and the creation of a dictatorship, Brazilian cinema

became increasingly allegorical, often using cannibalism as a metaphor for political repression, as well as for cultural emancipation, as in Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1969), and Pereira dos Santos's *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (1971). In all these cases, Brazilian film became influenced by, and influential on European cinema, thus making it possible to weave a rich web of influences that includes Glauber Rocha and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade and Marco Ferreri, Ruy Guerra and Werner Herzog.

Pasolini, Brazil and *La ricotta*

Of all the European filmmakers who were interested in the cinema of the Third World, Pier Paolo Pasolini occupies a special place. In fact, all his films could be considered as being focused on this subject, because for him the concept of the Third World was flexible and could be applied not only to Africa or Latin America, but also to the Italian periphery, both the Southern regions of the country and the outskirts of big cities. In his view, 'Bandung is the capital of three quarters of the globe and it's also the capital of half of Italy' (Pasolini 1982: 121).[i] In the Roman sub-proletarians Pasolini detected what he would later search for in Palestine or Yemen: a particular culture which is marginalized from bourgeois wealth and, at the same time, menaced by its anthropological homogenization. Therefore, the extreme vitality and the sacralised figures of the suburbs of Rome shown in *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962) reappear in the figures and places of his films about the Third World, such as *Appunti per un film sull'India/Notes for a Film about India* (1968) and *Appunti per un'Orestiada africana/Notes Towards an African Orestes* (1970), as well as in movies such as *Edipo re/Oedipus Rex* (1967) and *Medea* (1969), where the discourse on myth is criss-

crossed by the remembrance of the city periphery and the factual presence of non-European countries.

As a result, Pasolini's works provoked great interest in the filmmakers from the Third World in general, and Brazil was no exception. The films of Glauber Rocha, leader of Cinema Novo, and Glauber Rocha himself, established an intense dialogue with Pasolini, starting with fact that each of their first features (*Accattone* and *Barravento* [1962]) were shown at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in 1962, and finishing with Rocha's *A Idade da Terra/The Age of Earth* (1980), a film that, according to the author, was inspired by reflections on Pasolini's murder in 1975. Thus, their careers share traits (the conceptualisation of the Third World, the political interpretation of Christ, the sacred approach to reality, the use of allegory), actors (Jean-Pierre Léaud and Pierre Clémenti), filmic relations (their fascination with Buñuel, their link with Jean-Luc Godard at the time of *Porcile/Pigsty* [Pasolini, 1969] and *Le vent d'est/Wind from the East* [Groupe Dziga Vertov, 1970]) and theoretical references: Pasolini gave Rocha as an example of the *cinema di poesia* theory (Pasolini 1995: 167-187), while Rocha wrote some insightful texts on Pasolini (Rocha 2006: 276-286). Therefore, the movies of the two filmmakers can be compared and contrasted, as several authors have done from different perspectives (Bentes 1996; Bamonte 2002; Pizzini 2005; Joubert-Laurencin 2014). Beyond this link with Rocha, Brazil had a direct impact on some of Pasolini's literary works, particularly in five poems in *Trasumanar e organizzar* (1971) and one in *Empirismo eretico* (1972) (Nepomuceno 2010). Meanwhile, the Italian filmmaker was a major point of reference for a whole generation of Brazilian directors: Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, for instance, felt shocked by *Il vangelo secondo Matteo/The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Pasolini, 1964), a film which would later influence his approach to supernatural phenomena in *Macunaíma*[ii].

Moreover, one of the central themes of Pasolini's cinema is precisely the relation between hunger and consumption, and the ways in which this pairing marks social and political differences. *Pigsty* might be the most significant example, as one of its two stories was at first conceived as a kind of second episode of *Simon of the Desert*, which Pasolini considered 'a stupendous film, perhaps Buñuel's finest' (Stack 1969: 140). In this film, eating is used to talk about political repression, social alienation and radical revolution. From the starving pimp in *Accattone* to the ingestion of excrement in *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma/Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), images and metaphors related to consumption pervade his cinema, representing sexual exploitation (*Accattone*), ideological integration (*Uccellacci e uccellini/Hawks and Sparrows* [1966]), popular celebration (The Trilogy of Life) or insurmountable cultural difference (*Medea*). The Brazilian approach to Pasolini did not overlook this issue; in fact, Glauber Rocha used it to speak about a certain moment in Italian cinema.

> Pasolini was for me the product of the Marshall Plan miracle in Italy. After the generation of hunger –the neorealists: Rossellini, De Sica, Visconti, Antonioni, Fellini– Italian cinema became an industry, *neorealism* completely lost its revolutionary and creative meaning. The moment of Pasolini represents the passage from hunger to gluttony and I think that the Pasolini scandal was a 'surplus value', a luxury for that Italy that wanted to be developed from an industrial and modern point of view, from an ideological point of view, but that was actually a disaggregated, archaic, wild, barbaric and anarchist Italy. (Rocha 2006: 283)

La ricotta, Pasolini's chapter for the collective film *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* (1963), which also included episodes by Roberto Rossellini, Jean-Luc Godard and Ugo Gregoretti, is a significant landmark in this trajectory. It tells the story of Stracci (Mario Cipriani), a sub-proletarian from the Roman periphery who works as a supporting actor in a film about the Passion of Christ. Shooting outdoors, on the outskirts of the city, the director (Orson Welles) tries to create beautiful images by imitating the mannerist paintings of Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino, while being forced to adapt his shooting plan to the demands of a diva, played by Pasolini's friend Laura Betti. Stracci plays the good thief, but his main interest is a more basic need: nourishment, firstly for his family and, afterwards, his own. After a series of problems, he is able to eat a large amount of curd cheese, as well as many other foods, but the feast has terrible consequences: he suffers an attack of indigestion and dies in the middle of shooting, right in front of the crew and the Roman jet set who are visiting the set. That is the film's story: it's a film about hunger, consumption and a particular idea of the Third World, that Third World which Pasolini had found on the outskirts of big cities.

At a time when filmmakers from places such as Brazil, Argentina and Cuba presented filmic manifestos that defied the dominant images produced in the United States and Europe, *La ricotta*, due to its clearly metalinguistic nature (its story is set during a film shoot), seems a feasible source of ideas for considering the alternative images that these small production centres could produce. Brazil is the case I've chosen to explore with regard to this connection. I do not intend to make a comparison between *La ricotta*'s themes or images and those found in *Barren Lives* or *Black God, White Devil*; what I plan to do is to analyse the key features in Pasolini's film and, finally, to understand how these ideas can be found in movies from the other side of the ocean. Hunger and consumption, of course, are the key concepts, but our

guide will be the cinema itself and its materials: in this particular case, time and light. In what follows, I plan to analyse the logic and images of *La ricotta* in greater depth in order to, at the end of the text, find similar examples from Cinema Novo: not as a direct influence, but as a shared interest in certain subjects and certain film mechanisms.

Time

The narrative development of *La ricotta* is built upon a series of oppositions: bourgeoisie and proletarians, the film set and the periphery, the film process and Stracci's story. These pairs construct a split reality which also evokes the separation between rich countries and the Third World, just as Glauber Rocha denounced in his article *O processo cinema*/'The cinema process' (1961): 'to live on lyricism, metaphysics, *pathos* (as the critics like), it is necessary in the first place to have three square meals a day, even if it involves the deaths of people in different parts of the world, where too much blood is shed' (Rocha 2004: 49). In Pasolini's film these two dimensions (artistic legitimation and the death of others to make it possible) are embodied in two different narrative itineraries, which interact and collide. First: a film crew is working on a movie about the life of Christ. Second: Stracci, who is acting in the movie as a bit player, wants to eat. The central idea here is that one of these two narratives can rule the other: as the film is a bourgeois machine and Stracci just a proletarian actor, his personal story depends on the big production where he is working. He must subordinate his personal rhythms and tempos, which are driven by hunger, to the rhythms and tempos of the film.

Let us focus first on Stracci's story. As Michele Mancini and Giuseppe Perrella explain, it is a story in which hunger acts both as the desire of the character and as the driving force behind the plot (Mancini and Perrella 1982: 487). Due to his social status, his hunger

cannot be satisfied with a big meal on a table, so he is constantly looking for food; as these authors say, Stracci's tables 'are in fact pure itineraries, trajectories which are designed and accelerated by "hunger", thus they constitute and support all the narrative process of *La ricotta* itself' (Mancini and Perrella 1982: 504). We can itemize this itinerary, a story which involves guile, transvestism and economic exchange: Stracci collects his food as a worker in the film, gives the food to his family, dresses up as a woman, collects a second ration of food for himself, hides it in a kind of cave, returns the costume to its original place, discovers that the diva's dog has eaten his food, a journalist seems interested in buying (and eating) the dog, and he pays Stracci a thousand Lire. Stracci then goes to buy some curd cheese and, finally, returns to the cave to eat it. When his hunger becomes more intense, even the image speed is affected by it: during the character's round trip from the cave to the cheese stall, the images and the music (a version of Verdi's *La Traviata*[iii]) are speeded up, as if his impatience (and the hunger growling in his stomach) set the very tempo of the movie. This is also a homage to slapstick comedy and Chaplin, whose movies dealt frequently with hunger and playing tricks to get food, and which Pasolini would acknowledge later in the cook episode of *I racconti di Canterbury/The Canterbury Tales* (1972).

This chain of action, all food-oriented, structures the first part of the film. However, as we've said before, this narrative trajectory clashes with another: the demands of the film process. Just as Stracci is about to start eating the curd cheese, his presence is required on the film set to play the good thief, and he is tied to a big cross laid on the ground. Immediately, his narrative trajectory is interrupted by filming/filmic obligations, and the satisfaction of his hunger must be postponed. This is the most important turning point in the development of *La ricotta*: from this moment on, his personal tempo, driven by hunger, will be determined, ruled, and even enslaved, by another tempo, that of filmic production. From then on, Stracci

will have to live either in a temporal dilatation, shackled to a painfully slow speed, or in a kind of frenzied acceleration, whereby his actions become compressed into a very small portion of time.

In what follows, I will focus on these two phenomena in order to find different representations of the character's hunger. First, as I have said, Stracci is tied to a cross lying on the ground, and forced to look at the sky. If, in previous sequences, hunger had been the motor for a certain movement, here this motor is abruptly forced to stop and the character must remain still. Hunger, here, becomes a matter of pause and paralysis. This change is emphasized when some of the workers make fun of Stracci by showing him a sandwich or a bottle and then taking them away, not letting him enjoy either the food or the drink; or when they watch an actress doing a striptease, which he observes by craning his neck and licking his lips (an evidently voracious movement), but his position on the cross makes it impossible for him to keep his head raised and to watch the show. In all cases he remains immobilized, hungry and thirsty.

Figure 1: Stracci on the cross.

Initially, Stracci has to stay in this position because the crucifixion sequence is about to be filmed, but, while the crew is setting everything up, the diva asks for the shooting

schedule to be changed, and to film her sequence first. The crew obey her wishes, and the three men tied to the crosses are left there, waiting. They aren't untied again until a cloud covers the sun and shooting is brought to a complete halt. Here we can reach an initial conclusion: that while Stracci's personal time is literally chained to the shooting, this same shooting can be modified to accommodate the personal time of the actress, according to her wishes.

But there's more: in fact, here both the shooting and Stracci are defined by their paralysis. They are paralyses, of course, of a different nature. One is intended to imitate the mannerist paintings by Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino, while the other is the wait while the sequence is filmed. The former is legitimized by the cultural reference and limited to the moment the camera rolls, while the second seems to be an instrument of torture and is potentially eternal. What is striking is that both paralyses, and both tempos, are integrated into the same production process; in fact, Stracci's paralysis is the condition of the Other, who remains behind the scenes, like the hidden part of an iceberg. In this way, *La ricotta* draws a political border between social classes, and suggests that the artistic pleasure of the wealthiest is maintained thanks to the hunger of the poorest, just as Glauber had denounced in his text.

In the images of Stracci tied to the cross, his narrative's personal tempo is thus affected by temporal dilatation and a slow pace. This is the first mutation in the representation of hunger in *La ricotta*: at first it was a searching movement, but here it becomes an unbearable wait. The other mutation, as stated above, has to do with frenzy: when the shooting is interrupted due to the cloud that covers the sun and Stracci is untied, the movie regains the character's acceleration. Now he rushes back to the cave to eat the curd cheese, devouring it in front of other members of the cast and crew, who laugh at his voraciousness

and throw him some fruit and other food to make him eat more. While Stracci's shot is speeded up, the shot of his audience is left at normal speed, as are their guffaws. This contrast underlines Stracci's frenzied, violent swallowing, turning him into an individual infantilized by food (Mancini and Perrella 1982: 488), and creates a sadly comic gag, which is dubbed 'The Stracci Show' by the cruel spectators who throw him more food.

This acceleration constitutes the second alteration of the character's narrative trajectory. At first, it would seem that there's nothing new under the sun: we have seen this acceleration previously, when Stracci was hungry and speeding up the image was a way to reflect his desire visually. However, there's an essential change. In the sequences that separate one acceleration from the other, Stracci has experienced paralysis, and we know that shooting has the power to immobilize his motor of hunger. This change is crucial, because it modifies the nature and intentions of the second acceleration: this acceleration is the product not only of his desire, but also of a concern about a new paralysis. Right now Stracci is free because of the cloud, but maybe in just a few minutes the sun will be unveiled, the shooting will resume and he will be tied up again; now his goal isn't just to eat, but to eat within a certain time, that of the break in filming, and to eat as fast as possible.

In a sense, the situation is similar to the Lumière film in which a child, sat on a laid table, feeds two little girls with grapes, putting them into their mouths, alternately. In the compilation movie *The Lumière's Brothers' First Films* (ed. Frémaux, 1996), Bertrand Tavernier comments on this scene, highlighting the speed of the feeding: the child is so fast in giving out the grapes that the girls hardly have time to swallow them all. The reason for this is that those first movies had a limited length, just 52 seconds, so action had to be compressed into that time and, thus, accelerated. In *La ricotta*, Stracci, after being untied, is in the same situation: the production conditions of cinema, the filmic process, force him to

compress his time and to eat faster. Thus, his acceleration is not only a product of organic desire, but also of certain production conditions. While the first acceleration resembled a kind of homage to Chaplin's hungry trajectories, here the images are more like the crazed movements of the blue-collar worker in *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936).

This is, in fact, a terrible frenzy: while in Pasolini's *Il Decameron/The Decameron* (1971) the acceleration of Giotto, an obsessive worker, is transmitted to his disciples, who imitate him and make a good team, here the character is left alone, isolated. Here the difference between speeds remains clear, as they are contrasted with the formula shot/reverse shot: while the shot of Stracci is accelerated, the reverse shot of the crew members watching him is not. This separation of shots expresses a social dominance and a submission: they laugh because he is eating very fast, and they give him more food to generate more laughs. The shot/reverse shot, and the contrast of speeds, creates a kind of political control: the crew members are highlighted as the privileged ones who can feed Stracci and, at the same time, enjoy and laugh at his coarseness. Meanwhile, Stracci is the dominated object which is fed and watched, controlled both by food given as charity and by a sarcastic gaze.

Figure 2: The Stracci Show.

In the second part of *La ricotta*, therefore, Stracci's hunger narrative has been dominated by another: that of the film production. While the shooting process proceeds at its normal speed, the proletarian is either immobilized or accelerated due to production conditions, from the production plan to the demands of the diva. As a character and as an actor, he is enslaved by the film, so his tempo and the tempo of his hunger will be either paralysed or accelerated, always unstable, unbalanced. As he exists on the periphery of capitalism (and the periphery of the cinema industry), the system is not built for him, and there is a divorce between organic need (hunger) and the structure into which the character is inserted (labour responsibilities).

However, at the end of the film this oppressive logic is turned upside down. The Calvary sequence is about to be shot in front of a quite select audience, comprised of Roman intellectuals, journalists and authorities who are visiting the set. Stracci is tied to his cross, already risen, and he remembers his lines, but he doesn't feel well, because of his previous, accelerated feast. When everything is ready, Welles shouts: 'Action!' But nobody moves. 'Action!' Everything stays quiet. Just before the scene, Stracci died due to indigestion, and the big spectacle before the audience is suddenly interrupted.

Figure 3: Stracci's death.

This is not only the end of the film, but also a violent and powerful counterpoint to the images analysed above: in the view of Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, Stracci plays here a still life, precisely that immobilized image that the filmmaker played by Orson Welles had tried to attain through pictorial reconstructions; the corpse, thus, would be the absolute limit of his creative quest (Joubert-Laurencin 1995: 93). It's a logical interpretation of this end, as Stracci becomes a part of the production process that enslaved him, but it isn't the only one. In fact, if we listen to the last words of the film, this death takes on the form of a posthumous rebellion. It is Welles who speaks these words, saying 'Poor Stracci, dying was his only way of telling us that he was alive, too'. However, the original line, later censored, was much more radical and political: 'Poor Stracci, dying was his only way of making revolution'. It seems, therefore, that through his death Stracci can live and make a revolution. But what is this revolution? Why is his death, caused by a prosaic indigestion, so important and significant?

It is clear that Stracci's corpse emerges as a kind of symptom of the reality behind the movie, of the hunger that was necessary to make the whole project possible, and his rebellion, therefore, denounces an unfair situation at the very moment when the project is publicised in front of all the Roman jet set. But there's more: this death not only speaks of an uncomfortable truth, it also introduces waiting time into production time. In this show, the desire of the invited audience and the commands of the filmmaker played by Welles demand actions and lines from the characters: both the spectators and the artist ask for changes and novelties in the situation on display. And at that precise moment, Stracci's immobility and his image (the last shot of him is a freeze frame) interrupt this flow.

That is what Stracci's revolution consists of: introducing paralysis into the core of the show. His death entails an assault on the bourgeois world: now the filmmaker and all the

audience are forced to watch immobility; their narrative rhythm (the shooting plan, the jet setters' visit) is cut off by another narrative, that of the corpse. If previously Stracci's story had been interrupted by the filming process, here the filming process is interrupted by Stracci's story. Finally, one narrative has reacted against the other: his immobile corpse and immobilised image imply an attempt, even a coup d'état, against the political, social and narrative rules of the film set.

Light

Together with time, light plays an important part in the development of *La ricotta* and its representation of hunger and social differences, because it is inextricably linked to the nature of film itself and has an important presence in the images of paralysis. In addition, it is one of the most direct correspondences between Pasolini and Cinema Novo.

Light is fundamental for Pasolini. In fact, it plays an important role not only in his films, but also in his literary works. Let us take one significant example. In his first 1955-novel *Ragazzi di vita/The Ragazzi*, references to an intense and unbearable sunlight describe a certain context (the Roman periphery) and have a precise narrative function. We read in the beginning of the novel: 'It was a very hot day in July […] the periphery already burnt by the early morning sun' (2002: 5). Afterwards, this sunlight takes on an active role in its relation to the characters and it is associated with sickness and hunger: while Riccetto is looking for food in the garbage, we read:

> The hours passed by slowly, slowly, and before it became definitely grey and windy, the sky had just enough time to clear up, there, over the Borgata Gordiani, so as to allow the burning nine o'clock

> sunshine to hit the stooped backs of the two workers. Riccetto was completely bathed in sweat, and sometimes his eyes dimmed: he watched green and red stripes in the surrounding darkness: he was about to faint from hunger. (2002: 130-131)

Five years later, when Pasolini switched to film-making, the impact of this sun became real, not mediated by words. His Roman Trilogy, comprised of his first films (*Accattone*, *Mamma Roma* and *La ricotta*), is characterized by images pervaded by a merciless sun. When analysing these images, Hervé Joubert-Laurencin makes an important point by associating this light with food: 'The trilogy begins with the risky association of solar heat and the exaggerated swallowing of food (the bet in *Accattone*), and ends with its tragic consequences (the hiccupping death of Stracci exposed on the cross)' (Joubert-Laurencin 1995: 54). Light and consumption, then, should be closely linked. However, I prefer to stick to the ideas proposed by *The Ragazzi*, and to associate light with void, lack and hunger, the forces that make Accattone faint under a stifling sun. Indeed, the director said that, at the time of his first movie, he had nightmares of

> a radiant, intense sun, which was even more macabre as its light was more intense. […] This sun whitened the faces of Accattone's friends (Pepe the fool, the German, Luciano) with a whiteness which had something of the mortuary, of the funereal… It was the same whiteness of disinterred, abandoned bones on a summer afternoon, covered with dust […]. (Pasolini 2011: 13)

The role of sunlight in Pasolini's works is included by Marco Antonio Bazzocchi in his dictionary of Pasolinian motifs, in which he devotes an entry to the sun. He recalls poetry (*Le ceneri di Gramsci/The Ashes of Gramsci*, *La religion del mio tempo/The Religion of My Time*, *Poesia in forma di rosa/Poetry in Form of a Rose*), novel (*The Ragazzi*) and film (*Accattone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Medea*). For him, the sun in Pasolini's works acts as evidence of the impact of reality on the creative process, as the author himself suggested in his text *Essere è naturale?*/'Is it natural to exist?' (1967), in which he wrote that cinema is 'to write on the burning paper'; Bazzocchi adds here that 'The film is the paper written with solar light and that is why, in contrast to the simple written paper, it allows a leap into life which goes beyond writing. At a certain point Pasolini feels that the signs of the sun might be stronger than those of ink' (Bazzocchi 1998: 182). Not by chance had the filmmaker written in the book of *Mamma Roma* that 'Cinema is maybe nothing more than a matter of sun…' (Joubert-Laurencin 1995: 92).

Sunlight is thus frequently associated with hunger and starvation, and it constitutes both a natural excess (it burns) and an artistic source (it leaves an impression on the film). This is the key duality we find in *La ricotta*. On the one hand, it is a boundless natural power from which the characters need to protect themselves: Stracci wears a little cap, while the diva, who rests in the shade, needs the assistance of a boy with an umbrella when she walks in the sun; it establishes, in fact, a social and political difference between them. On the other hand, light is the element that makes the film possible: the shooting is outdoors, so when the cloud covers the sun, the crew is forced to pause. The sun, therefore, is the burning energy over the Roman periphery, but also the principle ingredient of the film to come.

The treatment of this sunlight creates two different spaces within the film: a bourgeois, intellectual one (the pictorial reconstructions), and the space behind the scenes,

bustling with workers. In fact, although both spaces coexist through editing, they seem quite disconnected, because the pictorial reconstructions were actually filmed separately, in Cinecittà, while the rest of the film was shot in real locations (Joubert-Laurencin 1995: 92). What is important is that in each of these spaces, sunlight appears in a different way: on the set of the pictorial reconstruction, it is filtered and used to make a cultural reference; outside, it radiates an uncontainable energy and roasts spaces and bodies, particularly Stracci's when he is tied to the cross. In the bourgeois space the light is softened, outside it burns.

Light is, then, both an artistic procedure and an instrument of torture. This is the same thing that we saw regarding time: cultural legitimation depends on the control of a raw material which, when isn't controlled, mortifies proletarians. In this case, Stracci is forced to suffer the roasting sunlight, while only a few metres away, this same light is used by the cinematographer to get the best possible film shot. We find just one difference. In this case, contrary to the narrative struggle we saw before, there's no final revolution using that raw, enslaving element to break into the bourgeois world; there's no equivalent of the frozen image of Stracci appearing at the end of the film, in the core of the shooting. However, it is quite easy to imagine how this revolt could be carried out with light: a suicide bombing by Stracci would give back all the light that he had previously suffered.

Stracci in Brazilian cinema

La ricotta, due to its metalinguistic nature, can be viewed as a theoretical movie. In it, the bourgeois film is counterpointed by another film, the film of the proletarian, the Stracci-film, we could say: this film, marked by hunger as its narrative itinerary, is subject to paralysis, acceleration and excessive light, and becomes marginal in relation to the big film. However, at the end, with Stracci's death, this enslaved film will use one of its conditions - paralysis -

to assault the other film, to invoke violence against its audience. From a subordinate state, it gains power: the image of Stracci immobilized on the cross and burnt by the sunlight leaves its marginal position and moves to the centre of the representation. This image, which is the result of a domination process, is now the symbol of a revolt.

In 1965, Glauber Rocha presented his anticolonial manifesto *Estética da fome/Aesthetics of Hunger* (Rocha 2004: 63-67). In this, he championed Brazilian film and stated that hunger as a theme had to be shown through certain aesthetics of violence, though he didn't specify the nature of this violence. He didn't mention *La ricotta*, but some of the aesthetic procedures we have seen in Pasolini's works seem suitable for examining some of the most important Cinema Novo features. Films by Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Ruy Guerra contain a number of long shots covered by an intense light, shots which make the audience feel like an immobilised spectator under a burning sun.

Although Jean Collet defined Pasolini's light as 'Mediterranean' (1969: 566), as early as 1955 the director had spoken of an 'African sun' over Rome (2002: 11), and Gianfranco Contini traces a link between his first films and *Los olvidados/The Forgotten Ones* (Buñuel, 1950), shot in Mexico (Joubert-Laurencin 1995: 54-55). So the light in his movies can be found also in other places, and Brazil is by no means an exception. The examples in Cinema Novo are numerous. A burning sun appears at the beginning of Ruy Guerra's *The Guns*, and it progressively occupies the whole screen, while a mystical voice relates the story of how God punished men with drought. In the establishing shot of *Barren Lives*, a deserted landscape is shown for some minutes, while in the background we see nothing, just a 'white wall that hits the eyes and closes off everything and any horizon' (Avellar 2007: 46); in another sequence, when a child asks his mother what hell is, she answers that it is a place full of bonfires and hot spits, so the child starts walking around, repeating words like 'hell' or

'hot spit', while everything he sees is illuminated by this merciless light, like a hell over the earth; it is not strange that in a previous sequence this same child has fainted due to the sun. In *Black God, White Devil*, the sun doesn't have such an active role, but all the actions of the characters are surrounded by a white landscape which seems to isolate them, reinforcing the theatrical, Brechtian nature of the whole movie. Some years later, in the urban film *Terra em Transe/Land in Anguish* (Rocha, 1967), this intense light wouldn't be forgotten, and would characterize the city, causing the characters to seek shelter in their palaces or apartments to avoid it.

The light in these Brazilian films isn't just a recorded natural phenomenon which defines a particular geographical reality, it is also a narrative and aesthetic element that is wild, unregulated and burning, and which acts as an aggressive tool against both the characters and the spectators. In Brazil this light is called *luz estourada*, a kind of photography typical of Cinema Novo that prioritises capturing reality without filters, and a high contrast between figures in the shot. Without using this specific expression, this aesthetic procedure was highlighted for the first time by Jean-Claude Bernardet in his seminal text *Brasil em tempo de cinema/*'Brasil in the time of cinema' (1967), in which he explained that 'Brazilian light isn't sculpted, it doesn't valorize the objects or the colours: it flattens, burns'. This light dominates the representations of the city and the countryside, and, although it is a key feature of Brazilian cinema, it is also present in other countries: 'This aggressive white isn't a Brazilian property: we can find it in the rocky and half-deserted landscapes of Greece in *Electra* (Cacoyannis) and Sicilia in *Salvatore Giuliano* (Francesco Rosi)' (Bernardet 1967: 141-142). Pasolini's Italy, here, would be another possible example.

In addition, some of the most memorable sequences in Cinema Novo deal with bodies that remind us of Stracci's: they are trapped in a certain place, without the possibility of

moving (or only being able to do so with great difficulty), and here, in contrast with Pasolini, their shots are quite long, defying the spectator's patience and comfort. In *Os Cafajestes/The Unscrupulous Ones* (1962), the first feature film by Ruy Guerra, a naked young girl is photographed on the beach from a car which drives around her; the camera is on the vehicle and films her in a single circular shot lasting more than three minutes, creating an image that merges the visual obsession with a woman with laying siege to a victim. In *Barren Lives*, the camera observes, for a long time, a hungry, wounded dog that cannot move and will surely die. And in *Black God, White Devil*, the shepherd Manuel climbs the steps of Monte Santo on his knees carrying a big rock, as a sort of sacrifice, following the commandments of the religious leader Sebastião. He can hardly move, and the camera shows him from a frontal angle, in different shots with the same image, for four and a half minutes; there's only one interruption, which is an establishing shot of the stairs. The spectators seem forced to look at this image of burden continuously, and end up feeling as paralysed as the shepherd. In all these films, the characters are as immobilized as Stracci on the cross, but the audience is also paralysed: unable to move, forced to look at a permanent image.

Light exacerbation and temporal dilatation are aesthetic mechanisms which seem to fit very well into Glauber Rocha's claim for a violent Brazilian cinema. In both cases, the excessive treatment of film raw materials (light and time) forms a technique of aggression against a relaxed, anaesthetised spectator. In contrast with the majority of narrative cinema, where time and light are reasonably measured to attain certain effects of surprise, suspense, laugh or pity, or even a cultural reference (as in the pictorial reconstructions in *La ricotta*), in these Brazilian films they are shown in a raw state, almost out of control, creating a kind of imbalance at the core of the movie.

Conclusion

The importance of *La ricotta* goes beyond its value as a satirical portrait of the film industry or as a joke about mannerist aestheticism. It is a key film in the political cinema of the 1960s because it conceives the film shoot as a space for labour exploitation and a (tentative) desire for revolution, and both exploitation and revolution are articulated through the exacerbation of basic film elements: time and light. At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, Brazilian films were working with these same elements to build a cinema based on excess and a particular aggression directed towards the spectator. This coincidence isn't proof of a direct influence, but of a shared interest in certain political topics, narrative procedures and aesthetic mechanisms.

Finally, we can say that the Brazilian case is the most revealing, as it corresponds quite well with certain images and ideas from *La ricotta*, but it's definitely not the only one. In fact, the metalinguistic nature of Pasolini's movie makes it an endless source of ideas for thinking about film and politics. Stracci-cinema, then, could be a kind of manual for a sub-cinema, a counter-cinema, an anti-cinema: a cinema which, coming from exploitation and submission to an economical system, reacts with the same elements that shape its order and balance. Going beyond Italy and the 1960s, it represents an essay on how industry, film and aesthetics can be turned upside down, and its images are brimming over with suggestions on how to rethink, remake and invert all the sides of the filmic prism.

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[i] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original are mine.
[ii] Face-to-face interview to Eduardo Escorel (editor of *Macunaíma*). Rio de Janeiro, 8 August 2011.
[iii] Premiered in Venice in 1853.