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Beyond the words: Pier Paolo Pasolini and the language as spirit of life

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Abstract:

During his rich and varied activity, Pier Paolo Pasolini was very intrigued by linguistic theories, and he himself committed to many interesting dissertations about language. The reflection about the nature and the conditions of all different forms of expression has always been the core of his personal and artistic life, starting from his own experience as a dialectal poet (which he always motivated and commented in his theoretical linguistic essays), passing through his famous intervention of 1964 concerning the advent of a new, technological Italian language, until his last, desperate complain about the ruin of Italian dialects. This overview about Pasolini's contribution to Italian linguistic scene of last century may be useful to reassess the value of his penetrating insights, too often neglected by the critics because of his unconventional and provocative way of reasoning, which prevented him from being taken seriously from a theoretical standpoint. Since many of his intuitions have proved to be valid over time both from a social and a linguistic point of view, it may be interesting to consider Pier Paolo Pasolini's heritage not only in terms of his literary, critical or cinematographic work, but also, finally, under a linguistic perspective.

Keywords: *dialect, Italian language, modernity, sociolinguistics*

1. Expression is life: the history of a non-common linguist

Perhaps, among the many souls of Pier Paolo Pasolini, well known as a poet, novelist, journalist, screenwriter, director, critic and intellectual *corsair*, his vocation as a linguist does not seem to have enjoyed the deserved importance to date: in reality, the vital core of his production is his passion for the study of language in all its forms, his perception of language as a vital centre of personal and social existence. In the course of his life, he carried on a continuous experimentation of the most diverse uses of verbal language, from poetic to journalistic, from dialect to high and literary Italian language, from the language of songs to the scientific Italian of his essays, and again

the language of theatrical and cinematographic scripts, the judicial language, the political-ideological language of an active intellectual, and finally the lowest registers of neglected and colloquial Italian; moreover, he painted, drew, experienced music and above all he explored the great world of cinema, where various expressive channels converge (not just words but music, songs, moving bodies, etc.)

Simultaneously, he carried on a tight theoretical reflection on all linguistic forms he used, from the dialect of his first poems (his debut dates back to 1942, with his collection *Poesie a Casarsa* ('Poems from Casarsa') written in Friulian dialect) to the intense critic of contemporary Italian, which exploded in 1964 through his famous essay *Nuove Questioni Linguistiche* ('New linguistic questions') from the many accusations on television and political language to his broad reflection on the language of cinema, considered by Pasolini the only tool capable of depicting reality without using symbols, such as words, but through reality itself, allowing him to always live at the level, and in the heart, of reality.

According to Pasolini, linguistic experimentation therefore embodies a necessary condition of existence, as it reflects and at the same time guarantees his degree of participation to the surrounding reality: in fact, the poet's relationship with linguistic universe reflects his urgency of *having to express himself* in order to survive: indeed, according to Pasolini, different languages make up as many different forms of relating to others and to the world, as well as establishing a deep connection with different aspects of his identity (Friulian poet, narrator of Roman *borgate*, active intellectual, filmmaker and so on).

In Pasolini's view, in fact, it was precisely thanks to the accumulation and the reciprocal exchange between heterogeneous languages (as happens in cinema) that a sufficiently complex, vital and dynamic representation of reality could be hopefully achieved, since only "la complessiva interazione tra linguaggi diversi, come nella realtà, garantisce la massima continuità fra la realtà e le sue rappresentazioni" (the overall interaction between different languages, as in reality, can guarantee the best continuity between reality and its representations.) (De Mauro 1987a: 277).

And it's not only that, Pasolini also crossed every border between languages and materials, broke the laws of their normal conditions of use, rules and limits, and by juxtaposing them in such a number, he transformed, manipulated and even violated them.

Above all, however, Pasolini crossed the greatest border, the one separating the artistic sphere from the dimension of practice: in fact, he actually opened his own artistic writing to practical purposes, by writing verses and novels as well as news pieces, by talking directly to his readers or even reproaching them, by accusing or defending himself through his literary works.

For this reason, it's clear how Pasolini's linguistic research can be inscribed in a broader concept of artistic experience as a form of action, therefore inseparable from the figure of the author, who becomes integral part of all his work, with every gesture, word, stance and public demonstration.

Thus, Pasolini considered language as a concrete tool of investigation as well as action inside reality: following Gramsci's wake, he was deeply convinced that it is within the language that all turmoils of social and cultural change emerge, and that language is the place where the actual power of ruling class can be verified.

Ogni volta che affiora, in un modo o nell'altro, la questione della lingua, significa che si sta imponendo una serie di altri problemi: la formazione e l'allargamento della classe dirigente, la necessità di stabilire rapporti più intimi e sicuri tra i gruppi dirigenti e la massa popolare-nazionale, cioè di riorganizzare l'egemonia culturale.

(Every time that the language issue reappears in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems is also emerging: the formation and the widening of the ruling class, the need for establishing more intimate and safer relationships between leading groups and national-popular masses, that is the need for reorganizing cultural hegemony.)

(Gramsci 1976: 2346)

Furthermore, language is, and must be, an effective instrument of intervention on reality, and for this reason he is the first to use it to the best of its abilities, overturning it, shaping it, altering it, constantly testing language as an instrument capable of conveying what he considers as the meaning.

2. Pasolini and the heart of reality: the discovery of the dialect

The analysis of the complex linguistic sphere within Pasolini's work must start from its essential link with dialect, symbolizing the deepest core of his artistic experience, being set at the beginning and end of his intellectual and spiritual path.

The vision of dialect in Pasolini is inextricably linked to the ideal of the Friulian world, the immaculate land of his summer holidays, the place where he wished to belong with all his might: however, at the very moment he moved permanently to Friuli, during the war, therefore coming into a deeper contact with that archaic and pastoral world, he also became aware of his painful intellectual, sexual and socio-cultural estrangement, thus dialect would have always remained, in his perception and poetry, the language of *others*, the language of his mother and of Friulian boys, the language of a pure and perfect world where he was not allowed to belong completely.

Pasolini approached dialect for the first time in 1942, the year of publication of *Poesie a Casarsa*: with this collection he made a strong and revolutionary choice, as he chose as his poetic and literary language the Friulian dialect from the right bank of Tagliamento river, which lacked any previous written tradition, a language he learnt using the vocabulary of Abbot Pirona, which he modified and partly invented; it was a strong choice, against the tide, a clear refusal in regards to the Italian language of the time, that same literary Italian he considered a worn out instrument – exhausted by the extreme poetic tension – and which he also condemned as the language of the bourgeoisie.

Within the *Nota (Note)* in the addendum to *Poesie a Casarsa*, the writer claimed to have written “i primi versi in friulano a Bologna, senza conoscere neanche un poeta in questa lingua, e leggendo invece abbondantemente i provenzali” (‘the first verses in Friulian in Bologna, knowing not even a single poet who used this language, and instead reading the Provençals abundantly.’) (Pasolini 2003: 193).

At that time, in fact, to Pasolini Friulian was a language that “non aveva nessun rapporto che non fosse fantastico col Friuli e con qualsiasi altro luogo di questa terra” (‘had no relationship which wasn't fantastic with Friuli as well as any other place in this land’), as it wasn't the actual dialect spoken by the people, but rather some kind of “invented tale”, “da usarsi con la delicatezza di un'ininterrotta, assoluta metafora” (‘to be used with the gentleness of an uninterrupted, absolute metaphor’) (Pasolini 1999a: 174).

The *Poesie a Casarsa* were accompanied and followed by an accurate theoretical definition of Pasolini's poetics, published several times in the Friulian magazines of those years and consecrated by the foundation of the *Academiuta di lenga furlana* (‘Friulian Language Academy’) an institute with the precise purpose of promoting Friulian (until then an exclusively oral vernacular language) to a literary language of the same level as Italian.

After the years spent in Friuli, Pasolini's texts that in 1954 made up *La Meglio Gioventù* (‘The Best of Youth’) sanctioned the evolution from an invented language to a learned language, that is, a code more faithful to reality, reflecting the characteristic elements of local speech; the founding idea was that of a path which passed through the retrieval of the language, through the conscious mastery of dialectal *words-things*, allowing him to draw from that same reality in which he wished to immerse himself, not just ideally but physically.

It's with this in mind that, from the early compositions of Pasolini, a vision of the dialect / language relationship begins to take shape, founded on the extreme desire for transparency and sincerity, as well as the will to establish a relationship that is as direct as possible, nearly physical, with reality. Faced with an elected and exquisite literary language, dominated by elusiveness and reticence, Pasolini instead looks for a powerful Word, a tool for touching the world, and in this sense “le parole del friulano sono tanto più utili quanto più sono strumenti che al loro interno hanno una forza espressiva che contiene già il mondo” (‘the Friulian words are all the more useful instruments as they have an expressive force within them that already contains the world.’) (Bazzocchi 2014: 21).

Only within dialect, in fact, is it possible to find words that can really evoke the original images, since the dialectal lexicon seems to be able to establish a direct, unmediated connection with the referent, thus putting the speakers in direct contact with the out-of-themselves. Francesca Cadel (taking up a beautiful definition by Giacinto Spagnoletti) speaks in this regard about a “lingua dei desideri” (‘language of desires’) (Cadel 2002: 19) and indeed, for Pasolini, it's only through that initiatic, almost mysterious code, that it is possible to access to the objects and subjects of the universe he was so strongly longing for.

Pasolini's dialectal turn was particularly relevant as it marked the beginning of what Franco Brevini has defined as *poesia neodialettale* (‘neo-dialectal poetry’), in which

il dialetto diventa uno strumento d'introversione lirica, ricalcando gli idiomi privati, i *patois de l'âme*, le lingue che più non si sanno, circolanti nella letteratura post-simbolista.

(dialect becomes an instrument of lyrical introversion, following private idioms, the *patois de l'âme*, the languages no longer known, circulating in post-symbolist literature.)

(Brevini 2014: 3)

Lorenzo Coveri then cited Pasolini's work as the starting point of *neo-dialectal* literature (Coveri 2011: 510), which represents today one of the places where dialect re-emerges, within mainly Italian-speaking contexts, as a form of survival, resurgence, as a fragment, that is, as a second language, in previously untrodden and precluded areas of use. It is therefore thanks to Pasolini's dialectological commitment that the once shameful use of dialect as a “language of poetry” is now a widely accepted fact.

Pasolini's choice of founding a new poetic tradition was neither obvious nor simplified by the spontaneity of spoken use, at a time when Italian language truly began to be utilized in daily communications after centuries of crystallization as institutional and literary language.

Through his experimental operation on Friulian dialect (which he aimed to remove both from vernacular level and from the flatness of the *koinè* which was accepted at a regional level), Pasolini looked for a real translation from the literary language, intended as a transfer of poetic material from one floor to another, from one dimension to another, but always at the same level; Pasolini's awareness of the revolutionary nature of his linguistic operation would have led to his interpretation, “necessariamente polemica” (‘necessarily controversial’) of dialect as *anti-dialetto* (‘anti-dialect’), that is, as “un'ideale traduzione” (‘an ideal translation’), or rather “una metafora” (‘a metaphor’) of language (Pasolini 1999a: 256-257).

Behind the text written in dialect, he always allowed Italian language to emerge, both in the inevitable translations of poems – both present in *Poesie a Casarsa* and in all texts of *Meglio Gioventù*, up to *Nuova Gioventù* (*The New Youth*) in 1972 – and in the titles of compositions – both in the text and in the index, with only two exceptions – of *Poesie a Casarsa*.

The dialectal and dialectological interest of the author, however, didn't end up here: in the Roman novels of the 1950s¹, the Italian narrative was a counterpoint to the Roman dialect of *borgate*, as to underline once again the gap between the abstractness of the official language and the authenticity of dialect which, appearing on the scene through dialogues and the use of free indirect speech, allowed for sudden glimpses of reality, revealing the existence of a suspended, hidden humanity which was unknown up until that moment.

Furthermore, again in the 1950s, Pasolini carried out a deep study to rediscover Italian dialectal tradition; in 1952 *Poesia Dialettale del Novecento* ('Dialect Poetry of the Twentieth Century') was published by Guanda, an anthology gathering the work of the greatest dialectal poets of Twentieth Century, followed in 1955 by *Canzoniere Italiano* ('Italian Chansonnier of Folk Poetry'), an anthology dedicated to popular poetry instead, and from essays, critical contributions to magazines of the sector, and even some peculiar reports, conducted in first person by the writer and focused on the status of poetry in dialect and / or popular and on the perception contemporary authors had of it (the greatest exponents of dialectal poetic scene answered to Pasolini's questions, from Aldo Spallicci to Edoardo Firpo, from Domenico Naldini, to Ferdinando Palmieri, and then Eugenio Cirese, Biagio Marin, Antonio Guerra and Vann'Antò – Giovanni Antonio Di Giacomo).

Having reached the watershed of the Sixties, however, the writer considered the time of commitment to be over, as well as the time of dialectal research "per un'improvviso stingimento dei dialetti come problema linguistico e quindi come problema sociale" ('for the sudden fading of dialects as a linguistic issue and therefore as a social problem.'). (Pasolini 2000a: 12).

Therefore, he turned resolutely to the sociolinguistic reflection on contemporary Italian language, while dialect was destined to stay in the background until his last, painful, poetic season, marked in 1972 by the publishing of *Nuova Gioventù* (a bitter remake of the poems of *Meglio Gioventù*).

3. Pasolini and the Italian language: a socio-linguistic point of view

3.1 Nuove questioni linguistiche: analysis and predictions about the technological evolution of Italian

In the early Sixties, Pasolini found out he had survived an ideological and cultural world that no longer existed, since traditional Italian cultures, so rich and diverse, seemed to be bound to destruction by a *nuovo Potere* ('new Power'), that's to say the empire of goods and consumption, conforming everyone to the same standards: no more different cultures for people to belong to and no more reasons for the mimetic use of the dialect, which many no longer even knew.

In these years of personal and ideological crisis, the writer turned his gaze towards new horizons of research, new sciences, new techniques of analysis, with which he decided to challenge himself.

While in the 1940s the young Friulian poet had been fascinated by the glottological and dialectological studies by Ascoli, to later deepen, through Gramsci, the link between language, writing and social life (with particular attention to the socio-economic mechanisms underlying

¹ The first novel, *Ragazzi di Vita* ('Street Boys') was published in 1955, while the following, *Una Vita Violenta* ('A violent Life'), in 1959.

cultural and political dynamics), with the advent of modernity Pasolini (who had already read in the 1950s the *Cours de linguistique générale* by Saussure, as well as the works of Giacomo Devoto) ventured into the uncharted territories of structural linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, social sciences, that provided him with new incentives and fascinations capable of renewing his dialogue with the surrounding reality.

1964 was the year that marked Pasolini's resolute immersion into contemporary socio-linguistic scenario: the main theme of his essay *Nuove Questioni Linguistiche* is well known by now, that is a harsh accusation addressed to the so-called *italiano medio* ('average Italian')², a language which was both artificial and not really national, as it was in fact split into two irreconcilable entities: instrumental Italian and literary Italian, neither of them mastered by the whole population. According to Pasolini, this false and misleading language had never reached the status of national language since it was the heritage of a single social class, the bourgeoisie, which had been unable to spread it to the whole population and had always used it as a tool to defend its own privileges instead.

However, after this harsh analysis of Italian language – which he considered unserviceable even from a literary standpoint – Pasolini expressed a famous prophecy, concerning the imminent birth of a true national language, a technological product created by the centers of bourgeois and industrial power of Northern Italy, an eventually unified language capable of conforming all pre-existing layers in the name of technical instrumentality.

It may be useful to remark the importance of the connection established by Pasolini between language and socio-economic factors, not in terms of sheer determinism (as it was sometimes seen), but of much wider and deeper correlations between socio-economic, anthropological, cultural and linguistic changes; in the early Sixties, in fact, in the wake of the capitalistic evolution of European economic systems, a new neocapitalistic and technocratic bourgeoisie appeared in Italy. This social class held an enormous economic power and dominated the media of mass communication. According to Pasolini, it was precisely thanks to this political and cultural dominance that this ruling class, unlike the old clerical-fascist bourgeoisie, seemed to be finally able to impose its own aseptic, technological, anti-expressive language onto the whole nation, an idiom capable of conforming the great variety of existing languages.

The writer also went as far as to outline the traits that would have been specific features of the new Italian language, such as syntactic simplification (with reduction of its polymorphy), the end of its osmosis with Latin and the prevalence of the communicative spirit over the expressive one. Concerning this last point, Pasolini underlined how Italian had always been conservative and expressive during its history, being capable of absorbing new stylistic layers to preserve them and reuse them for expressive purposes; according to him, this was due to its extraordinary richness and variety, bound to drastically decrease in the face of the prevalence of a new technological spirit, which aimed instead to make the language simpler and more efficient by abolishing competing forms and flattening them into few functional models.

Pasolini's witty remark into the official world of linguistics was greeted by professionals with a certain astonishment, actually almost with annoyance, caused by such an amateurish

² Pasolini called *italiano medio* a variety which had a diastratic connotation, being fundamentally used by the bourgeois class. Some years later, the linguist Francesco Sabatini used the expression *italiano dell'uso medio* ('Italian of average use') in a different sense, referring to a variety of Italian which differs from the standard one for some particular features, which are typical of spoken language and common to the different regional varieties of Italian (Sabatini 1985: 55); in this sense, the *italiano dell'uso medio* by Sabatini may be comparable to the *italiano neostandard* ('neo-standard Italian'), as defined by Gaetano Berruto in 1987 (Berruto 1987: 23, 54-103).

initiative and for the recklessness of an analysis devoid of scientific foundations. Many of them considered Pasolini's statements not as intuitions to be taken seriously from a theoretical standpoint, but only as declarations on his own poetics.

Thus, the outraged replies of linguists and writers focused on highlighting Pasolini's approximation and absence of objectivity, but also featured a generous amount of self-reference and sensationalism; above all, the writer was contested in his unwary and conceited appropriation of ideas, concepts and categories belonging to a knowledge which he didn't master, just to bend them to his own stylistic purposes.

Undoubtedly, as we approach the figure of Pasolini as a linguist, it's impossible to overlook how his analyses in the linguistic field are a result of the fusion of his personal interests (so varied and numerous), his personal biographical story and his vast literary experience: however, the crushing of his linguistic reflection based on the single, predominant aesthetic / literary dimension appears inappropriate, especially considering how many of his intuitions proved to be absolutely valid and correct over time, despite being initially misjudged by much of the criticism he received.

In fact, if on one hand it is true that the following evolution of Italian sociolinguistic panorama did not match the predictions made by the writer in 1964 – mainly because the changes in the language and dialects, or the effects of the overwhelming power of mass media, actually needed a much longer time to be put into effect – on the other hand there is no denying that the writer understood very well, and sooner than others, many of the trends that would have driven the evolution of national language, which was undertaking a process of definitive detachment from its humanistic-literary tradition.

Pasolini should in fact be recognized for having identified, well before specialized studies, all the vital cores around which the changes in the language would revolve – what De Mauro defines as *zone calde* ('hot areas'), such as the decline of dialects and the parallel formation of regional Italians, the role of mass media as promoters of standardizing elements, the change in the internal balance and prestige of the different varieties of Italian, the flattening of the standards into a model of *italiano medio*, the profound interference between sociological and cultural changes triggered by mass society and the parallel linguistic evolution.

Over the years, Pasolini's sociolinguistic analysis has proven to be valid in various aspects, from the progressive intrusion of technical languages, whose terms nowadays show a deeper penetration in common language than in the past (see for instance the language of information technology or that of economics) to the decrease in richness of competing forms in Italian and the emergence of "una sintassi di sequenze progressive, profondamente nominale" ('a profoundly nominal syntax of progressive sequences') (Pasolini 2000a: 34).

In this regard, it may suffice to observe how Gaetano Berruto, in his description of the characteristics of *italiano neostandard* ('neo-standard Italian'), spoke both of a marked tendency towards nominal style in contemporary Italian, as well as of a "semplificazione e omogeneizzazione dei paradigmi" ('simplification and homogenization of paradigms'), with a consequential "riduzione e diminuzione delle irregolarità" ('reduction and decrease of irregularities.') (Berruto 1987: 83).

Another relevant aspect of Pasolini's reflection was the fate of dialects in a rapidly evolving socio-political context: in fact, the writer observed the deep crisis of dialects following the shift of linguistic prestige from the Romanesque-Neapolitan dialectal area to the industrial centers of the North, whose technical languages were a symbol of social progress and advancement.

From this point of view, Pasolini's prophecy envisioned the idea of an imminent language shift, an overwhelming transition from a substantially dialectophone Italy – where the general

condition was still that of prevalent diglossia – towards a more widespread knowledge of Italian, which would have been adapted according to the linguistic repertoire of geographical areas. With an ever-increasing number of regions, with few exceptions, language would have shifted towards a context of bilingualism with *dilalia* – *bidialettism* in Tuscany – and only in a few residual areas the achievement of *italophony* wouldn't have led to the overcoming of diglossia.

Although this path has actually come to an end, the actual timing has been considerably slower than the one predicted by Pasolini (with a marked slowdown since the mid-Seventies) and results today appear much more complex and unstable than his forecasts. The transition from *dialectophony* to *Italianophony* has in fact only partially occurred and with many variables and exceptions, above all the diffusion of forms of “mixed” behavior (alternation of Italian and dialect, code-mixing and code-switching, interferences and crossbreeds).

But it's nevertheless true that Pasolini's accusation and firm stand for the defense of dialectal heritage have undoubtedly contributed to the raising of awareness of civil conscience on the preservation of those ancient codes, which were threatened with extinction by an overwhelming and standardizing Italianization.

Finally, concerning the prevalence of the communicative spirit in the characterization of Italian language, it is interesting to observe the development of Pasolini's thought in his reflections following the 1964 essay; in his later works, in fact, he reiterated that by then, in his opinion, the communicative core was the dominant one within the language, although on several occasions he lingered in the explanation of all its manifestations (especially in youth language): he observed how the Italian population was gradually losing its linguistic ingenuity, flattening into a language so poor as to border on actual aphasia or, on the contrary, on a non-sensical speech made only of empty talks and lies, devoid of any real content.

According to the writer, in fact, the ability of using language as a rich and effective tool of communication was lost: if on one hand it was used (mainly by politicians) to trick and deceive the interlocutors, capturing them in a web of empty formulas and deceiving expressions, on the other hand speakers went as far as to lose every ability to express themselves verbally, reaching an actual aphasia, and communicating through incomprehensible noises and mumbles.

Compared to Pasolini's descriptions, today's scenario shows much greater variability and multiformity: there's no undisputed domination of a flat and standardizing communicative spirit, because alongside the manifestations of a brutally pragmatic language there are others instead revealing an extraordinary communicative and functional richness (especially in technical-scientific idioms); besides, if in some contexts the tendency to use an exaggeratedly expressive, false and even vulgar language has actually been established, the expressive vitality of Italian in the literary and humanistic sphere didn't fail at all.

However, by paying attention to some borderline aspects of contemporary linguistic scenario, we can easily acknowledge the same impoverishment of speakers' linguistic-expressive potential which was so bitterly described by Pasolini, manifesting itself in extremely limited and stereotypical (often youthful) linguistic productions, as well as through verbal productions hiding an absolute lack of content behind a fake, flamboyant expression (it would suffice to think of the many examples offered by the language of television).

Even today, as in the years of the advent of the *new Power*, these linguistic phenomena seem to be rooted in a deteriorated cultural background, what Pasolini feared as a future scenario “*senza particolarismi e diversità di culture, perfettamente omologato e acculturato*” (“without particularisms and diversity between cultures, perfectly conformed and cultured.”) (Pasolini 2000b: 12).

Pasolini described such scenario as a “mondo di morte” (‘world of death’) (*Ibidem*) generated by the action of an invisible *Power* which, by violating the unique cultures still present in Italy, would have subjugated the masses of the nation depriving them of their intellectual, moral, as well as linguistic identity: this *Power* would have been his obsession, both from an ideological and – pre-eminently – from a linguistic standpoint, during the last season of his life.

3.2 Pasolini and the apocalypse of modernity: investigating the linguistic reactions to the socio-economic revolution

With the coming of the Seventies, Pasolini devoted himself with great force to sociological criticism, both through a series of extremely relevant journalistic writings, subsequently collected into two fundamental volumes, *Scritti corsari* (‘Pirate Writings’) and *Lettere Luterane*, (‘Lutheran Letters’) and by releasing interviews or partaking in television debates.

In the last years of his life, the writer dedicated himself to raising the alarm against the *new Power* of consumption and goods, “ultima delle rovine, rovina delle rovine” (‘last of the ruins, ruin of the ruins’) (Pasolini 2009a: 19).

For this purpose, Pasolini felt the need to coin a specific expression when referring to the new consumption empire, so terribly insane and destructive, and chooses to operate a semantic redefinition of the term *power*, establishing a precise connection with the new system of ideological and economic domination.

This theme also represents an interesting interpretation from a linguistic point of view, since starting from the 1960s Pasolini had focused repeatedly on the very close link that language has with the dimension of power. This is a link of pivotal relevance, spreading its echo upon the theoretical field - in a crescendo that will lead to his last, desperate proclamations of cultural and moral decay of modern society – and upon his linguistic choices, since it’s by starting from the dimension of power that Pasolini will then create a real personal lexicon, capable of providing a key, as univocal as possible, to interpret and react to the new reality.

In fact, if on one hand Pasolini carried out an examination of the general social crisis that he knew was spreading right from the language, despairing of the expressive impoverishment afflicting all individuals in the modern era (above all, the common people who were once so creative from a linguistic standpoint), on the other he utilized language as a useful tool to restore semantics of reality in order to make it understandable and interpretable in some way, and act effectively on it.

According to Pasolini, the subjugation of individuals to consumer goods would have caused a real anthropological mutation within the people, proclaiming the triumph of unreality and fiction over the social scene, and operating a distortion of reality whose language he could no longer decipher.

In his last season, then, the writer tried to fight the rampant dehumanization of society by acting on the language, which is mirror and emanation of society itself, in order to restore its lost transparency: where falsehood reigns, emptiness and inability to establish a real contact with the objects of the world, he tries to find words (by inventing them, or changing their meaning) able to restore the essence of things.

Thus, from his last season a series of *keywords* was born, all closely linked to the dimension of power: Pasolini speaks of the empire of consumption as a dangerous *nuovo fascismo* (‘new fascism’), responsible for intellectual and cultural homologation of individuals through a furious and brainless economic *sviluppo* (‘development’), not matched by a parallel moral and civil *progresso* (‘progress’) and which is responsible for the destruction of previous traditional *culture* (‘cultures’) that made Italy so rich in countless and precious diversities.

He speaks of a reality ever closer to hell made up of monstrous individuals, about a world in ruins and the end of time. And he speaks of all this from every stage he is allowed to get onto, whether it be the headlines of a national newspaper, television programs, debates or cinema productions, in an unrelenting, obsessive and desperate attempt to launch an appeal to his compatriots, and to establish any form of contact with them.

The importance of such work of lexical renovation, whose key elements still circulate in the lexicon of contemporary Italian, cannot go unnoticed: we're dealing with a linguistic operation clearly linked to the pedagogical mission so evident in the late production of Pasolini, which had the purpose of sending a message to the widest possible audience, hoping (predictably in vain) to make Italians aware of their state of human and civil degradation.

It is a last act of trust in the Italian language, so often harshly criticized by the writer for its inability to be an instrument in service of the community, a language which had never been that ruined before, by being subjugated purely for material purposes: he tries to restore its pristine purity by creating new words, by giving them meanings that may finally correspond to reality, eventually trying to return to the Word its ability to shape what is real by *naming* it.

Nonetheless, at the end of his life, when the writer will be overwhelmed by a world he feels profoundly a stranger to and which now appears to him as being made only by "insignificanti e ironiche rovine" ('insignificant and ironic ruins') (Pasolini 2009a: 86), it will be again the language of soul, the bright dialect of his youth, to finally offer him a last, un hoped-for utopia of salvation.

4. *The final cut: back to dialect*

Right at the end of his last season, Pasolini decided to return to that code which, back in 1942, he had chosen as the language of poetry; thirty years later, with the rewriting of *Meglio Gioventù*, the writer returned to dialect almost with bitterness, to talk about a world that no longer exists, hopelessly twisted and ruined by the ferocious tide of modernity. Still, a few days before his death, the poet spoke again of dialect, this time with renewed energy, during a debate with professors and students held on October 21st, 1975 in Palmieri high school in Lecce.

On this occasion, the writer began by reading the final monologue of his drama *Bestia da Stile* (*Style Beast*) focused on the praise of *volgar'eloquio* ('vulgar speech'): this term, which gave title to the meeting, is at the same time a Dantesque and a Poundian quote, and refers to a dialect that is still alive in some places of rural and provincial Italy, and which must be seized before it's too late, with care and benevolence, before its final demise.

This invitation, addressed by Pasolini to his public, must be clearly contextualized in the historical-cultural scenario of the mid-Seventies, when the collapse of Italian cultural and anthropological tradition by the hand of the new civilization of consumption is at last dramatically evident, and the variety of linguistic particularisms of the nation, together to the values of tradition, have all been eradicated.

In fact, if since the mid-Sixties Pasolini had pledged to denounce the parallel – and apparently irreversible – decline of dialects (going as far as to declare their imminent death) due to the cultural genocide carried out by the ruling class, at this moment he instead focused on devising and proposing some form of recovery of his "language of desires". Thus, just at the time of his greatest desperation, when consumerism has flooded, corrupted and falsified everything, and on the linguistic scene no longer seems to exist any alternative to an increasingly homologated Italian (even surviving dialects, in fact, are gradually being italianized), Pasolini's provocative proposal is to turn dialects into revolutionary tools, real weapons at the service of the struggle for the defense of cultural particularisms.

Therefore, the dialect arises as a symbol of a near-desperate cultural and anthropological survival, so that its recovery becomes a challenge which is both difficult and problematic, but at the same time gives new hope, however absurd and abstract it may be: then, just when Pasolini declared the dialectal world to be actually dead, together with the values of its foundations, its unexpected and un hoped-for proposal of a revolutionary utopia promising its salvation seemed to provide a mirage of rebirth, mainly to the poet himself, becoming the seal of an artistic and existential path trodden all along in the name of the most obstinate, and scandalous, contradiction.

From the author's perspective, then, the dialect seems to survive in a posthumous dimension, holding up beyond what Pasolini sees as the death of history, and thus becomes "codice di sopravvivenza" ('survival code'), "ciambella di salvataggio a cui restare tenacemente aggrappati" ('life preserver we should tenaciously cling onto'): whereas, in fact,

l'italiano corrisponde a una pratica di distanziamento, responsabile non di identificazione ma semmai di isolamento dell'individuo rispetto al proprio habitat di riferimento,

(Italian corresponds to a practice of distancing, not responsible for the identification but rather for the isolation of individuals from their habitat of reference)

(Binazzi 2019: 258-259)

the dialect survives even in the most hostile and barren reality as a code of humanity, memory and unreflected practice that brings back "all'immedesimazione nel contesto più familiare e consueto" ('to the identification in the most familiar and usual context') (Binazzi 2019: 8).

And then, just as everything seems lost, "le radici appaiono di colpo come una risposta al fragile cosmopolitismo della merce" ('the roots suddenly appear to him as a response to the fragile cosmopolitanism of goods') (Brevini 2014: 14), and dialect, although only as a residue, as a form of survival, *resurgence*, is once again offered to him as an instrument of comfort, capable of restoring the individual to his deepest self, thus carrying humanity away from the siege of an alienating and mystifying *Power*.

4. Conclusions

What emerges from this overview of Pier Paolo Pasolini's linguistic reflection, spanning through his entire life and artistic production, is what De Mauro (quoting Contini) calls "intelligente diletterismo" ('smart amateurism') (De Mauro 1987a: 110); amateurism may be seen through the improper, or even incorrect, use of terms and technical concepts, drawn from the various scientific fields in which the writer ventures from time to time, as well as from the audacity of many of his statements and conclusions that are not always scientifically based. And yet, to get to know the deepest and true core of Pasolini's linguistic experience, it is necessary to go beyond his often inaccurate and provocative wording to appreciate his ability to grasp any hint of change within the linguistic and cultural fabric throbbing around him, and its profound interrelation with the socioeconomic and anthropological substrate of collective life.

As Gian Luigi Beccaria observes in his review of *Empirismo Eretico* ('Heretical Empiricism'),³ within the "fluire furioso e anarchico" ('furious and anarchic flow') of Pasolini's pages, where certainly "ambiguità, contraddizioni, paure, errori" ('ambiguities, contradictions, fears, mistakes') emerge, everywhere "un traboccare di osservazioni finissime" ('an overflow of all the subtlest

³ Published on *La Stampa* on September 29th, 1972.

observations') is revealed, the result of a linguistic and sociological sensitivity which certainly was out of the ordinary, and allowed the writer to read beyond the linguistic phenomena so that he could see – before others – turmoils and socio-cultural tendencies of great importance. And for this, Pasolini can truly be seen as a prophet: not as a man blessed with real divination skills, but rather as someone with the rare ability to read and interpret the signs of his time, and therefore capable of deciphering not so much the future as his present time, upon which he's determined to act concretely.

Thus, Pasolini proves to be able to read the signs of parallel socio-cultural changes in the language and vice versa (not only in the Sixties, but throughout his entire life), often translating his intuitions into a very personal and unconventional language – which doesn't affect its substantial validity in any case – which has become ever more evident during the progressive development of national sociolinguistic context.

Without a doubt a linguist *sui generis*, who made language, in all its manifestations, the center and the driving force of his entire artistic and personal experience, always faithful to the ideal of language being "la spia dello spirito" ('the telltale sign of the spirit') (Pasolini 1987: 53), and as such the fundamental and most authentic manifestation of the human being.

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