

## PIER PAOLO PASOLINI ‘ON THE PITCH’: DRAMA, PASSION, AND THE 1960 OLYMPICS

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to analyze three chronicles published by sports chronicler Pier Paolo Pasolini during 1960 Olympic Games in Rome for the magazine *Vie Nuove*. Through a unique writing style, combining drama, passion, and criticism, Pasolini reveals to us behind-the-scenes of the event, in his hometown, through unusual anecdotes and historical encounters. Much more than a simple spectator, the Italian author, taken by sports passion, discusses important issues, including: amateurism and professionalism, the spectacularization of sports, also the impacts of sporting events. They are chronicles filled with drama, which unfold in the professional transition of the intellectual literary to cinema. Through his writing, sports approach art and maintain close relationships with the social elements in which Pasolini was involved.

**Keywords:** Pasolini, 1960 Olympic Games, Sport chronicles, Rome, Mega-events impacts

## PIER PAOLO PASOLINI ‘EM CAMPO’: DRAMA, PAIXÃO E AS OLIMPIADAS DE 1960

**Resumo:** Este ensaio tem como objetivo a análise de três crônicas publicadas pelo cronista-esportivo Pier Paolo Pasolini no transcórre dos Jogos Olímpicos de 1960 em Roma para a revista “Vie Nuove”. Por meio de uma escrita singular, mesclando drama, paixão e crítica, Pasolini nos revela os bastidores do evento, na sua cidade natal, por meio de anedotas e encontros inusitados. Muito mais do que um simples espectador, o autor italiano, tomado pela paixão esportiva, discorre sobre questões caras, entre outras: amadorismo e profissionalismo, espetacularização do esporte, e impactos dos eventos esportivos. São crônicas recheadas de drama, que se desenrolam na transição profissional do intelectual das letras para o cinema. O esporte, por meio da sua pluma, se aproxima da arte e guarda estreitas relações com os elementos societários nos quais Pasolini estava inserido.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Pasolini. Jogos Olímpicos de 1960. Crônicas esportivas.

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## Introduction

Le sport est un phénomène de civilisation tellement important qu'il ne devrait être ni ignoré ni négligé par la classe dirigeante et les intellectuels<sup>5</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 32).

In tune with different human and intellectual passions, Pier Paolo Pasolini - born on March 5, 1922 in Santo Stefano (Italy); and assassinated on November 2, 1975, in Ostia (Italy); aims to understand and analyze the reasons and causes of sociocultural transformations in Italy in the 1960s. His articles and journalistic chronicles offer us the image of a 'different' Pasolini, more about an ordinary man than a writer, his paths of reflection beyond his artistic and aesthetic side, which, however, remains manifest. This is undoubtedly the case of these writings about sports: the reader finds Pasolini on the 'field' that is not strictly literary, thanks to his passion which accompanied him until his death. Reverse of neutrality, the author commits and engages himself in front of his concepts of a man and world.

Pasolini, an intellectual artist, was also a great sport lover - soccer, boxing, and cycling. From the end of the 1950s to his death in 1975, he published numerous texts on the subject in the Italian press, some of which are collected in the book *Les Terrains: écrits sur le sport*, published in 2005 in France and re-edited in 2012 by the publisher *Le Temps des Crises* (Paris, France). Pasolini nourished a passion for soccer, which he played almost every day, a passion that he lived not without contradiction, divided between his love for this popular game ('the only great rite that persists') and his fear of seeing it turned into a spectacle/business. Visionary, he condemns its 'decline', as sports in general, which had already invaded by the communication and advertising market, where players become the standard-bearers of 'neocapitalism'. He deciphers this 'phenomenon of civilization' about sports, which he highlights the essential function, sacred character, and underlying ideology, informing us about the great socio-economic and cultural transformations of an era.

'Sport', in English, means 'game', declared Bloch (1996: 123) in his text entitled 'V - Sport', thereby recovering the etymology that derives the English noun from Old English 'disport' or 'desport', both of which came from Old French 'déport', linked to pleasure and enjoyment. If Bloch (1931: 135) continues his reflection by questioning the meaning of the word 'sport' in the French language in the 1930s, on the other hand, we could ask what the meaning of sport is for Italians in the second half of

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<sup>5</sup> 'Sport is such an important phenomenon of civilization that it should not be ignored or neglected by the ruling class and intellectuals.'

the 20th century, through the writings of Pasolini on the modern Olympic Games. Pasolini reported his impressions of the Rome Olympics experience, which took place between September and October 1960, in the magazine *Vie Nuove*, linked to the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

Pasolini dedicates three columns to the Olympic event, covering various cross-sectional themes, which allow us to make the following inquiries: what is original about this essential issue when it is treated and analyzed by the man who was nicknamed the ‘sports commentator’? Is there a Soviet tropism present in his writing when we analyze his sympathy for the PCI<sup>6</sup>? As we will demonstrate later, if such an edge cannot be found in the first two chronicles, on the other hand, in the third, it seems evident to us: Pasolini chooses to evoke a meeting in a restaurant with the Soviet champions, Viktor Kapitomov<sup>7</sup>, the Russian cycling champion, and his coach, Leonid Scelesnev.

In order to analyze the details of the author's Olympic chronicles, we will use the French edition of 2012, titled *Les Terrains: Écrits sur le sport*, as a reference. It is complete and more comprehensive and has been translated by the specialist and university professor Flaviano Pisanelli. Footnotes will be provided with English translations made by the authors of this article. We will investigate three sports chronicles dedicated mainly about the 1960 Olympic Games, where Pasolini describes, criticizes, and dissects sports field and its transformations. His three articles, originally published by the *Vie Nuove* magazine, were then revealed in the first volume *Romanzi e racconti* (Pasolini, 1998), under the titles: *Um mondo pieno di futuro*, *Dramma sul filo*, and *Tradi i pattini per la bicicletta*<sup>8</sup>. The proposed discussions will not follow a pre-established chronological order and will be portrayed in a free manner, addressing themes and adverse situations experienced by our protagonist, Pier Paolo Pasolini.

### **Professionalism in sports during the Cold War**

In the article titled *Il trahit les patins par le vélo*<sup>9</sup>, the writer first relates the fabulous destiny of the Russian champion skater who became an Olympic champion in cycling, and then explains the ethical amateurism dictated by the Olympics. One could say that it is a pro-Soviet manifesto, such as we find in Calvino's writings about 1952

<sup>6</sup> Although Pasolini was expelled from the PCI due to moral issues in 1949, he remained close for a long time, which can be proven by the fact that he collaborated with the magazine *Vie Nuove* years later.

<sup>7</sup> Viktor Kapitonov (1933-2005) was a Russian cyclist who at the 1960 Olympics won the gold medal in the individual event and the bronze medal in the time trial for the Soviets.

<sup>8</sup> In the French edition, the titles were translated as follows: *Un monde plein d'avenir*, *Il trahit les patins par le vélo*, and *Drame sur le fil*.

<sup>9</sup> ‘He betrays the rollerblades for the bicycle.’

Olympics?<sup>10</sup> (Granat-Robert, 2019: 334). We would say no, because Pasolini, by the opposite, is much more moderate in his observations, above all, more inventive from a literary point of view: he is less ideological and attaches more into a reality of the scene. He even attacks the problem of amateurism, defending a position ahead of his time by asserting the quality, beauty, and passion of sports which should take precedence over the distinction between dilettantism and professional sportsmanship. This penetrating spirit undoubtedly comes, as noted by Granat-Robert (2019: 340), ‘from a more independent position in relation to the PCI, as already witnessed by the first part of his triptych of civil poetry, *Le ceneri di Gramsci* of 1957’ (Pasolini, 2015), where his conflicting bond with PCI and his sincerity along with exacerbated sensitivity to the complex social problems experienced so far. Furthermore, one can correlate it to his personal experience in sports. Pasolini was a passionate athlete and spectator: these are assets for reflecting more deeply, which put him in a different and critical position in analyzing Soviet propaganda through sports. Shortly, the sports theme does not detract from his writing style. The sports theme and the issue of amateurism are treated as an event to be relived directly in the reading: they are dramatized. Related in a free indirect style, which allows him to sketch the attitudes of his interlocutors on the spot, it is a conversation whose actions are directly reproduced by the characters, as in a drama, a mimetic form of history, where the narrator fades and advances at the same time as the debate. A writing game is perceived which allows him to blend narrative and reflection: a lightness, a smoothness, is observed that equally grants proximity between the object and the reader.

‘*Mais en Union Soviétique n’existe-t-il aucune forme de professionnalisme sportif ?*’<sup>11</sup> (Pasolini, 2012 : 67), Pasolini continues after tracing the history of this champion, ‘*et dans ses yeux il n’y a que de la modestie, presque d l’humilité [...]*’<sup>12</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 67), a mini-drama made of coincidences and passion. Pasolini shows himself particularly skilled, from the dramatic and ideological point of view, in making the report of this conversation. The fact that happens ‘between comrades’ and for a Communist magazine, his pen is not subject to interference or the desire for unrestricted truth: Pasolini is not afraid of either controversy or contradiction, because there is a kind of confidence between peers in the scene. In search of a real solution to his questions about the ethical amateurism that is lost and the inevitable professionalism, he questions his interlocutors even if he is disappointed with their considerations. Pasolini can express his opinions without being dogmatic, given to careful use of conditionals in his writings. This is a sincere thought, that feels and would like to maintain, in its written form,

<sup>10</sup> Italo Calvino, an Italian writer, also wrote about the Olympics, but, unlike Pasolini, Calvino was greatly influenced by the Italian Communist Party in the context of the 1952 Olympics, held in the city of Helsinki (Finland).

<sup>11</sup> ‘But is there no form of sporting professionalism in the Soviet Union?’

<sup>12</sup> ‘And in his eyes, there is only modesty, almost humility.’

the spontaneous format of a thought in formation : *‘Je pense que ce sont les athlètes les plus performants, professionnelles ou non, qui devraient participer aux jeux Olympiques [...] la qualité, la beauté, la passion sportive, devraient surmonter cette distinction entre amateurisme et professionnalisme’*<sup>13</sup>. (Pasolini, 2012: 68).

Far from taking sides in one field against the other or setting up a system of some partisan, as the logic of the Cold War would go over, Pasolini witnesses not only a certain curiosity, but a keen awareness of the political system questioning sport in the USSR in terms of financial reward. By suggesting that professionalism should be recognized in sports, he raises questions about the Olympic spirit as it had been promoted by Baron de Coubertin, but also the Olympic spirit defended by the Soviets, whom established, through state sports, a logic close to the Olympic spirit itself (Goldblatt, 2016: 287-288). After praising the Soviet model through pride and modesty of the winners, they are combined (the Soviet team has a modest triumph at the 1960 Olympics and, in the USSR, a simple reception is organized upon the arrival of the athletes), the sports writing weaves a discreet criticism of the model: it does not spare the underlying positions to the implemented system, where the state levels take the same benefits for any work activity, which, for Pasolini, is an unfair and discriminatory view towards athletes. In the words of his interlocutors, to a "une vivacité vive et euphorique"<sup>14</sup> (Pasolini, 2012 : 69) in perfect harmony with the Olympic spirit "le sport doit servir au physique, au développement de la compétition pacifique, et à rien d’autre"<sup>15</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 69), Pasolini opposes a series of pressing issues which are indeed provocative insinuations: *‘Mais, alors, les grands acteurs, les écrivains, ne tirent-ils aucun bénéfice matériel de leur activité ? Et n’est-il pas juste qu’il en soit ainsi ? Pourquoi cette discrimination envers les sportifs.’*<sup>16</sup> He does not ignore the harsh language of the Russians, which disappoints him in the elaboration of their responses, nor does he hesitate to affirm: *‘Avant, à d’autres questions, ils m’avaient répondu avec plus de rigueur’*<sup>17</sup> (Pasolini, 2012, p. 69).

The debate must have been tough. In the face of the weight of the Soviet discourse designed through the language barrier and political conformity, the choice of the free indirect style allows for a fast and light rhythm to this scene of discussion. Proof of this is Pasolini's quick reversal at the end of the conversation, pointing out the abandonment of the controversy over ideas and the abrupt cut off of the topic. Pasolini

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<sup>13</sup> ‘I think that the most performing athletes, whether professional or not, should participate in the Olympic games. [...] quality, beauty, and athletic passion should overcome this distinction between amateurism and professionalism.’

<sup>14</sup> ‘Lively and euphoric liveliness.’

<sup>15</sup> ‘Sports should serve the physical, the development of peaceful competition, and nothing else.’

<sup>16</sup> ‘But then, the great actors, writers, do they not receive any material benefit from their activity? And is it not right that it should be so? Why this discrimination against athletes.’

<sup>17</sup> ‘Before, to other questions, they had answered me more rigorously.’

keeps on underlining a detail of an embarrassing attitude from the Soviets, lacking arguments in the face of the writer's implacability; a *mise en abysme* by the literary reference to the characters of Dostoevsky, characters who are themselves tormented, to qualify the conscience in crisis of his interlocutors.

Mes amis croient qu'en quelque sorte je prends le parti du professionnalisme, et ils défendent l'amateurisme avec une ferveur digne des personnages de Dostoïevski lors de leurs longues conversations nocturnes. Je les observe : j'aime bien chez eux leurs raisonnements, leur dialectique enflammée.<sup>18</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 70)

This is a concession made by Pasolini to ease the argument in the discussion and break out the impasse. Nevertheless, in the course of a subsequent discussion about the Olympic spirit, an ideological confrontation about the need or not for a physical and material engagement, beyond the conflict between amateurism and professionalism, arises a more personal consideration, of the emotional order, scenic drama, a mimetic form of history. The tension of the characters and their ideals were directly evoked as dramatic representations. The tension of the ideological discourse gives way to a note of a concrete detail about the bodies and souls of the characters, which serves as a sort of stage direction for the reader of the chronicle. Pasolini takes up his role as narrator, observer, and organizer of the scene narrated: '*Dans leurs yeux revient la sérénité et leur chaud sourire adolescente*'<sup>19</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 71).

For Pasolini, the athlete's body goes beyond the silhouettes covered in attire; it is a place with emotional details captured in the moment of analysis, intimately subjective. Its representation is linked to drama through its appeal to sensitivity and imagination. He doesn't look for an infinity of interviews with athletes, quite the opposite, he seeks quality in the few established encounters. He prefers bonds and contacts which are less academic and more real<sup>20</sup>. He transcribes the conflict of interests between athletes who want to become champions without complacency, in a dialogue that is neither thought out beforehand nor academic. He demonstrates a personal awareness of sports games and puts into conflict, like a playwright, various speeches: the verbal speech of the characters who struggle with their contradictions and that of their bodies

<sup>18</sup> 'My friends believe that I am somehow taking the side of professionalism, and they defend amateurism with a fervor worthy of Dostoevsky's characters in their long nighttime conversations. I observe them: I like their reasoning, their passionate dialectics.'

<sup>19</sup> 'In their eyes the serenity returns and their warm adolescent smile.'

<sup>20</sup> These characteristics are present in the documentary made by Pasolini in 1965, entitled *Comizi d'amore*, about sexuality in Italy in the 1960s. Through an informal and direct style, the director travels through cities and countryside of Italy from north to south, questioning people about what they think about sex, eroticism, and love. (Comizi, 1965).

which reveals their discomfort, but cannot deceive an attentive observer like Pasolini. In addition to his actor-characters, he is not afraid to expose himself. Parallel to his desire to overcome the contradiction between amateurism and professionalism, he suffers from a spell for these young people whose ideas he does not share. He will also not hide, in the account that follows this discussion, his fascination with the working-class population, represented by certain Roman boats.

Beyond Kapitonov's fabulous story, summarized by the title of the third chronicle, what Pasolini tries to tell us, starts with a simple '*Je n'ai rien d'autre à raconter qu'un simple dîner. Banal, plutôt [...]*'<sup>21</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 63), and ends like this: '*Ah, combien de choses il y aurait à dire...*'<sup>22</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 73). Serving as a framework, these phrases are indicative of a unique writing that places itself under the sign of sensitivity and the need to frame what is a hybrid literary form, a dramatized story. The highlight of this column does not seem to be the discussion in the restaurant, nor the ideological and dramatized debate about amateurism/professionalism, but the improvised and silent encounter that Pasolini provokes by promptly responding to Scelesnev's curiosity who asks him for a walk to see '*quelque chose de Rome*'<sup>23</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 71). The last paragraph of the article shifts the chronicle to a completely different record from the topic of the Olympics.

In turn, Pasolini succeeds in bringing together, in the nighttime silence, the most famous champions (the Russian Olympians) and the most modest inhabitants living in the suburbs of Rome, in Gordiani. He provokes the meeting of the Olympic champions, representatives of a federation of socialist republics where the proletariat has taken power, with the losers of capitalism, the sub-class of the young Italian republic, which had just entered the economic miracle of neoliberal capitalism, favored by the Marshall Plan (Granat-Robert, 2019). Could we analyze such an anecdote as a provocation in relation to the PCI, or only as a moment of poetry offered by the circumstances? A coincidence and opportunism of Pasolini who, instinctively, brings Russian athletes to the suburbs of Rome where he loves so much. The irony of fate is an intense moment of emotional truth what confuses literary genres with political and ideological aspects. Pasolini offers the champions the opportunity for a singular meeting with those forgotten ones in Italian history, in the Olympic context, because, as warned by the author himself in his first chronicle, these are the individuals who were not invited to the Olympic festivities. It is a privileged moment of discernment and admiration at two levels: the suburban population celebrates the champion who, in turn, recognizes them as subjects, and the writer reiterates his fascination with this marginalized world. Pasolini brings together different worlds, it is a moment of discovery and reciprocal wonderings, a fleeting moment.

<sup>21</sup> 'I have nothing else to tell than a simple dinner. Banal, rather [...].'

<sup>22</sup> 'Ah, how much there would be to say...'

<sup>23</sup> 'Something of Rome.'

The title of the chronicle already sounded like a dramatic event announced by the verb 'betray' (*trahir*); it's a scandal, at the level of distant and rarely associated sports modalities. But at the end of the chronicle, we are led to another mini-scandal. A scandal in the literal sense of the term, which erupts in the midst of the silence of the miserable dwellings: Pasolini shakes all the conformisms that would like this '*quelque chose de Rome*' to be seen as a beautiful monument, a beautiful square, a Renaissance sculpture/painting. An ideological, political, and sociological scandal. Pasolini had already evoked, in his second chronicle, another peripheral world, turned into the bourgeois intelligentsia, represented by Alberto Moravia<sup>24</sup> and Elsa Morante<sup>25</sup>: ordinary people who organized a mini-tug-of-war ('*tir à la corde*') competition on a beach in Ostia. The author prefers these two 'tableaux vivants' from simple people to the spectacles of the Olympic Games, which, on the other hand, impresses the writer Elsa Morante, a novice in the field of sports spectacles.

Pasolini doesn't tell us if the characters' recognition and enjoyment in their meeting in the *borgata* were mutual, but there is no doubt that it was a moment of great emotion. The use of ellipses at the end of the third chronicle denotes that there was still much to be related. The writer concludes his last column with an original, unprecedented, and personal scene. The tribute to the Olympic champion is not officially rendered through the hoisting of the flag or national anthem, the applause of a carefully selected audience, but by the lifting of the curtain on an unprecedented and unique stage composed of characters whom the author feels close to: these Olympic champions of the day and this small unofficial crowd of outcasts, as if they had emerged from nowhere on that night, behind which the author/director disappears, captivated and secretly proud, undoubtedly, of the small anthropological catastrophe he had caused, since through his narrative the poet had made it possible for everyone to experience an intense moment.

How could we interpret Pasolini's choice to lead the Russians to the suburbs of Rome? The author sacrifices first of all, praising the simplicity and humility of the Russian champions, a pro-Soviet spirit. He appears to conform with the doctrine which defends the exemplary nature of communism that abolishes classes, bringing together, for instance, in a moment of apparent joy and sympathy of the '*petites gens*' (the '*serveurs du restaurant*'<sup>26</sup>) and the Olympic champions. He even credits (ironically) the ingenuity of the Soviets with a mysterious beneficial influence on the Italian *café* waiters:

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<sup>24</sup> Alberto Moravia (1907, Rome – 1990, Rome) was an Italian writer and journalist, born in Rome in 1907, who accompanied the 1960 Olympic Games alongside his wife, Elsa Morante, and his friend Pasolini, as portrayed in the analyzed chronicle.

<sup>25</sup> Elsa Morante (1912, Rome – 1985, Rome) was an Italian writer, novelist, poetess and essayist, born in Rome in 1912, who accompanied the Olympic Games alongside her friend Pasolini, as portrayed in the analyzed chronicle.

<sup>26</sup> 'Restaurant waiters.'



Les soviétiques neutralisent cette ironie par je ne sais pas quel puissant réactif chimique propre à leur personne. Les visages des serveurs, habitués à n'importe quel type de sourire, à condition qu'il ne soit pas ingénu, arborent spontanément autour d'eux des sourires d'enfant.<sup>27</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 71).

The visit to the inhabitants of 'Gordiani' breaks the partisan illusion: because it is them, seen as the way to go back to the sacred dimension of humanity, in a way Pasolini wanted to show the champions. It is for them, who do not really fit into the Communist representation of the class struggle, as he is enthusiastic without directing himself towards the representatives of communism. Located at the moment of his personal and ideological crisis, the highlighted sports chronicles reveal the signs of his world views: scandalous, ant conformist, politically engaged, and literary, as we will point out later.

With this last text, we can verify, contrary to appearances, Pasolini's writing is not purely ideological and pro-Soviet, nor it is just moralistic or reflective: the use of journalistic discourse, which is prone to controversy, does not contribute to the creation of a wise or philosophical discourse, unlike Calvino's writings about 1952 Olympic Games (Granat-Robert, 2019), without really discussing Coubertin's principles. Pasolini addresses the issues raised by the Olympics driven by his need to express a more personal, dramatic, and existential experience. The last scene has something of a reversal in the series of chronicles and abruptly changes the atmosphere: from the light and outgoing joy of a noisy terrace of a restaurant in Rome to the darkness and drift of the outskirts of his mysterious and secret Rome.

Pasolini conveys a text that has everything of a theatrical drama: frequently dramatized descriptions in a succession of micro-scenes and palpable tensions between different characters. In the end, the content is interspersed with comments from the writer who weaves a report of the debate on the issue of sporting professionalism: his observations are a kind of "asides" that could serve as art direction, if it were the script of a scene in theater or cinema. It seems to us that he plays with his dual dimension of character/author to cut off from the content and confide his feelings about the quality of the recreated scene before our eyes: '*Quelle joie de les voir tellement enflammés, tellement engagés, tellement candidez pour défendre un élément de leur vie civique [...]*'<sup>28</sup>. Thus, the writer, on the verge of becoming a filmmaker, brilliantly combines in this third chronicle and in moderately lyrical, above all, observant writings, his attention to the environment, the characters and a necessary reflection on professionalism. He does not hesitate to inquire the Olympic

<sup>27</sup> The Soviets neutralize this irony with I don't know what powerful chemical reactant that is specific to them. The faces of the servers, used to any type of smile, as long as it's not naive, spontaneously wear child-like smiles around them.'

<sup>28</sup> 'What a joy to see them so passionate, so committed, so candid in defending an element of their civic life.'

spirit and the Soviet/communist spirit, while hybridizing genres: the sports journalism chronicle, offering the portrait of the winner, turns into a report on the discovery by the champions of an unknown class to them.

### **Spectacularization of sports from the perspective of Pasolini**

If sports activity with a focus on high performance ceases to be free for those who practice it and, therefore, the notion of play is lost, becoming a true profession, what would be the meaning of sports for spectators? In the era of consumer society and spectacle, it is not only the athlete who is concerned with sports. The second Pasolini chronicle addresses, more explicitly, the issue of sports from the perspective of drama and play, through the spectator much more than the athlete himself:

Je me suis rendu compte que je suis un très mauvais spectateur de compétitions d'athlétisme. Je sais que cela peut déplaire. Et, d'ailleurs, je le regrette aussi. Je veux dire que je suis un très mauvais spectateur de compétitions d'athlétisme pur, idéal, pour lequel on organise les vrais jeux Olympiques.<sup>29</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 75).

Therefore, Pasolini states this position in his second chronicle, following the same method of self-analysis. Athletics can be seen as another issue, after amateurism, in a way Pasolini is concerned about. For him, athletics does not awaken any greater feeling, nothing more than indifference, although it is understood as the 'mother-discipline' of the Olympics. However, we cannot be mistaken in first analysis. The passion, even if expressed against it, is well presented in Pasolini's discourse, both in facts and in writing. This cleavage in appearance will prove to be much more complex.

In addition to the episode which links a breathtaking victory in an athletic competition that deeply moved him, the unity of this chronicle from the writing perspective is expressed through a proposal for reflection on sports as a spectacle. If the spectacle of sports is still linked to sports as a game, can it only be professionally practiced? This is the question we propose to answer in the analysis of the second chronicle. Elements for elaborating a reply can be found in the title: '*Drame sur le fil*' (*Drama on the wire*). The drama does not refer to the theatrical space and is not the place where human passions spread out, from which the characters can share emotions with the spectators? The sports spectacle must envision distraction, entertainment, pleasure, and this, beyond the issue related to physical health, as Pasolini seeks to demonstrate. This is the first meaning that the writer emphasizes in sports, if actively practiced or simply "watching" it: the game and pleasure – '*je me suis amusé*' (*I had*

<sup>29</sup> 'I realized that I am a very poor spectator of athletic competitions. I know that this can be displeasing. And, in fact, I also regret it. I mean that I am a very poor spectator of pure, ideal athletic competitions, for which the real Olympic Games are organized.'

*fun*) , Pasolini observes numerous times in his text, whether at the beginning when he describes the boxing match he watched on television in a pizzeria, or, at the end, when he describes the "tug of war" opposing a team of Roman and Hungarian women on the beach in Ostia. Beyond the hedonism circumscribed in the sketch of the scene, Pasolini incites us to face other viable prisms in the sports field."

If the famous philosophical doctrine makes the pursuit of pleasure the main human fuel, according to Pasolini, sports is a game, a true entertainment, that implies, in addition, a real emotional participation of the spectator in the efforts exerted by the athletes, without ever directly experiencing them in their bodies, the spectator may experience, directly and mentally, an infinite number of instincts and passions whose the spectacle of others' efforts awakens in him:

De nos jours, peu à peu, rien de ce qui est physique n'est plus nécessaire, tout a été remplacé par la machine : et le sport est lentement devenu, vis-à-vis de la nécessité, un pur et simple fait hygiénique ; il ne survit, dirais-je, que parce qu'il évacue certains instincts agressifs et compétitifs, de suprématie, qui chez l'homme moderne ne se sont pas encore éteints. (Pasolini, 2012: 78).

This spectacle and its resulting projection are joined with theater because they do not only awaken the feeling of pleasure. This is how '*la merveilleuse colère*' (*the marvelous anger*), a feat performed by German athlete Carl Kaufmann, does not awaken pleasure or admiration in the last meters of his race, but a feeling of pity and revulsion in Pasolini:

[...] mais l'Allemand a couru comme un fou, a rejoint l'adversaire et il est tombé à terre, à demi mort, comme si son corps lui avait échappé, ou que son âme s'était enfuie, traînant un corps délaissé à l'arrière comme une guenille ou un automate. Une rage incroyable. Mais moi je pensais aux généraux allemands et à Erhard, et je n'ai pas pu du tout l'admirer. Sa passion obstinée, sa fureur désespérée, m'ont fait peur.<sup>30</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 83)

In the following paragraph, the writer opposes this repulsive view with another photograph, taken outside of the stadium, where he extols the ideal sport from a paradoxical and, one might say, healthier perspective, based on his positive perception of ordinary people: the wild joy of the people from Ostia beach, who expend all their energies in organizing a playful confrontation that nevertheless reminds him, despite everything, of the Olympic Games. This madness and determination are distinct from the Olympic athlete because they are connected to spontaneous joy and the pleasure of an unofficial, improvised

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<sup>30</sup> 'But the German ran like a madman, joined the opponent and fell to the ground, half dead, as if his body had escaped from him or his soul had fled, dragging a discarded body behind him like a rag or an automaton. An incredible anger. But I was thinking about German generals and Erhard, and I couldn't admire him in any way. His stubborn passion, his desperate fury, frightened me.'

competition. We find, in this difference in appreciation, a specific understanding in Pasolini's gaze: a purity in what is archaic and primitive in the popular realm, even among the proletariat, compared to the bourgeois (and Olympic) realm, which organizes, aesthetizes, invents, or ignores what is raw and spontaneous in the rural world and in urban peripheries. If this ethnographic gaze is partly influenced by a Marxist perspective, something noticeable and highlighted previously, Pasolini let himself to be carried away by his paroxysm when he disconnects from the Olympic theme, acting as a 'guide' with the Soviet champions in the popular neighborhoods of Rome.

Upstream of this meeting, there is, therefore, another and a more colorful encounter between Hungarians and Italians, this challenge on '*la petite plage, entre les deux files de cabines jaunes et rouges*'<sup>31</sup> (Paolini, 2012: 84), considered as '*une véritable scène*'<sup>32</sup>, more cheerful, according to Pasolini, than the frozen spectacle of the Olympic athletes and referees, as well as the pitiful performance of the German athlete Kaufmann. Pasolini, on his real controversial nature, declared himself unable to recognize the truth '*Drame sur le fil*' - undoubtedly experienced by the German athlete. But was he really insensitive? No. He invites us to experience the Olympics as he did, as a spectator concerned with the spectacle, feeling all kinds of emotions and contradictions. This allows him to formulate personal reservations from an intellectual point of view, a kind of poetic license, and to draw a line of demarcation between so-called popular sports and elite sports. Pasolini gives sports the sense of play, as long as it comes from or it is practiced in a specific environment.

The emphasis on negative or positive emotions (fear, pity, antipathy, sympathy, admiration) that Pasolini borrows from the theatrical sphere is something original in the sports scene: it expands the reflection on sports and elevates it to the level of the great artistic fields, which is commonly assumed to be unrelated to art. Theater and sports come together through the passions arisen by the performance or stage. To the first meaning of sports as an activity for health, we must add this other common meaning for both fields, which is recreational and salutary gaming through passions that touch and sensitize bodies, also spirits of the spectators. Pasolini draws the possibility of this association from his experience as an athlete, spectator, and intellectual. The entertainment sought by the sports performance awakens the spectator's cathartic emotion, as in the theater. The inflationary use of the adjective "stupendous," evoking a particularly strong emotion, the stupor, confirms the intensity of the personal emotion that Pasolini wants to present to describe sports and its consequences for the spectator (Granat-Robert, 2019: 351). It is through this way that the spectator of sporting events is joined to the theater spectator, and sports is joined again into literature. Stadiums and rings are the new '*palcoscenici*'. This comparison is not just a literary effect; it is a substitution that is part of

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<sup>31</sup> 'The small beach, between the two rows of yellow and red cabins.'

<sup>32</sup> 'A true scene'

a sociological order, a mutation of contemporary society which acutely analyzes the sportswriter. Against all odds, the sport had become a spectacle and, therefore, to some extent, a consumer good is not the target of harsher criticism by Pasolini.

From Pasolini's sensations, we can assert that his reflections are extremely deep and nuanced because they are based on his direct and passionate experience as an intellectual and athlete, and are nurtured by his experience as a *tifoso*, as a player, and as a *letterato*. In short, it is about his existence and his passions that his reflections on the world are forged. As suggested by his nickname of *journalist-athlete*, Pasolini portrays his abilities as an analyst and intellectual on a subject about which he speaks with propriety: sports. Pasolini doesn't limit himself to the bodies in action or the unforgettable images of the Olympic Games. He develops a true reflection on sports starting from the Olympic discipline by definition, athletics, for which he has no particular inclination. His thoughts, his judgment, is built from external and objective information, with a journalistic bias, with more subjective data amalgamated, without hesitation, as in the previously highlighted description in front of the screen in the pizzeria. Almost embarrassed, Pasolini admits his preference for boxing and football, to the detriment of athletics. The author finally declares : '*La pelouse des stades et le ring sont des scènes de théâtre : qui ont carrément remplacé les véritables scènes de théâtre*'<sup>33</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 77).

The practice of athletics and its corresponding spectacle has lost its strictly existential essence, the criterion of central interest. In particular, because the challenges related to athletics events have transformed between antiquity and the 1960s: a foot race, except for the marathon, takes place in a relatively short amount of time, with no real wager. In other words, Pasolini does not see any significance in the modality in motorized times, in the era of the automobile. Pasolini makes a comparison : '*la compétition athlétique pure est un poème, plus au moins bref*'<sup>34</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 77). According to the covered distance, it would be no interest to the public, as a race is no longer necessary or interesting, according to him, than a poetry reading in a theater. '*Seul un petit groupe d'initiés supporterait un spectacle théâtral composé des lectures poétiques*'<sup>35</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 77).

Why this dissatisfaction? Is Pasolini associating the chance of the game, the match, the confrontation between two people or teams, as the pivotal reason that triggers the entertainment of the spectator who could dare to participate in the confrontation by proxy, in the conflict of the characters? The approach to the theater has a proper meaning: any sport which is based on a confrontation between two or more people, a boxing

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<sup>33</sup> The stadium lawns and the ring are theater stages, which have completely replaced the real theater stages.'

<sup>34</sup> 'Pure athletic competition is a poem, more or less brief.'

<sup>35</sup> 'Only a small group of initiates would support a theatrical performance composed of poetic readings.'

match or a soccer game, therefore, retains the challenge for both participants and spectators, as the outcome depends, in part, by chance. The comparison with the ‘verses of a poetry’ to represent the disinterest of people towards athletics is effective because it is no more theatrical than reading a poem on stage. One could assume that there is no room for improvisation. These references to the literary field broaden the perspectives and enhance his writing work on sports. Moreover, they are in perfect harmony with the evolution of the writer and poet who, from 1960s, will turn into cinema, a dynamic art, that unfolds over a fairly long period, and gives the illusion of a temporal thickness propitious to adventures.

In his column, Pasolini addresses the theme of sports from a particular angle. His approach is more efficient, more focused, and more independent when we analyze other manuscripts of intellectuals who ventured to write at this time on the sports theme. Pasolini, with his proximity to sports as a reference, shows a good understanding and comprehension of the theme, always relying on literature in order to explain and unveil the involved aspects. Sports, whether practiced or watched, is a game based on dramatic motivations, just like a play: it calls for emotions from those who place themselves as spectators or practitioners, as well as the fact that it must correspond to a search for entertainment. The pursuit of distraction from consciousness, the ‘pleasure’ that needs to be sublimated under psychoanalytic auspices, refers us to certain instincts of domination of modern man. Pasolini is no longer content with accepting the hygienism *cliches* present in Coubertin's discourse many times, as the writer's lack of inclination towards athleticism that reflects his unconventional view of the Olympics, demonstrating rebellion and courage, since it is the ‘key mode’ of the Games and whose exhibition does not sensitize him.

In the conclusion of his article, Pasolini, shrewdly but without illusions, turns into another Latin saying, less glorious, to qualify the Olympics: ‘*panem et circenses*’, the motto of ancient and decadent Rome, revealing the need for mass spectacles; he, therefore, endorses an evolution in the sense of the sports spectacle that thrills the crowds and stirs their inclination - or a regression if we consider the millennial time. In this context, he signals that changes should not be regrettable because ‘*il est inutile regretter le passé: il faut courageusement affronter les situations nouvelles, amenées par de nouvelles nécessités.*’<sup>36</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 77).

## Conclusions

Pasolini, in a way, combines a lyric and critical view simultaneously unconventional to the Olympics. The ‘[...] *cette vision jeune et colorée du monde réuni dans un défi pacifique, cette évocation de*

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<sup>36</sup> ‘It is useless to regret the past: we must bravely face the new situations brought about by new necessities.’

*moments historiques détachés du bien tu du mal, ébauche d'une conscience plus grande et sereine, celle-là même que les jugera demain*<sup>37</sup> - the beautiful message that Pasolini wants to convey from the opening ceremony of the Olympics at the conclusion of his first column, appropriately titled '*Un mondo pieno di futuro*'<sup>38</sup> - does not surrender to his disillusioned conscience, where yet in his second chronicle, we see a more forceful criticism by stating that Modern Olympic Games have much more in common with the opaque concept of 'bread and games', or the new 'bread and circus'. Passionate about sports, mainly its popular aspect, Pasolini charges the Olympics, through athletics, with fervent adjectives that he does not recognize in the games, the boxing or football matches, his great passions, probably because they are modalities attended by simpler people. Not gratuitously, in his third chronicle, the Roman author heads towards the outskirts of Rome, where those citizens who were deprived of the show are located. Almost necessity of detachment from the spectacular event, the Olympic grandeur, is checked in the nighttime tourist walk, or in the scene of the tug of war on the beach of Ostia. Pasolini does not limit himself to his Communist militancy, but presents himself as an independent and dissatisfied subject. He does not allow the deviation of sports from its original meaning related to play, game and simple pleasure. There is a search for its primary meaning, for its primitive root. The moments of celebrations, in Ostia or around Rome, are more genuine and spontaneous than subversive. Pasolini summarizes his coastal experience as '[...] *Ça, c'était une véritable réunion sportive : le sport idéal a ces dimensions-là*'<sup>39</sup> (Pasolini, 2012: 85).

The analysis of Pasolini's chronicle titles show the flourishing of his thought in an undeniable climax. In the chronicle entitled *Le Monde Plein d'Avenir*, there is still a conformist view of sports in the Olympic Games, but through this quite consensual title, in *Drame sur le Fil*, we see a sharper, spiky look through an original approach to the sports spectacle. The grand finale, in the column *Il Trahit les Patins par le Vélo*, culminates with a kind of '*political modesty attack*', as Pasolini proposes a tourist visit to the less privileged neighborhoods of Rome during the Games. The image of sports conveyed is implicitly closer to a complex truth, in constant tension, as directly happens with the characters of the theater – intersubjective or intrasubjective conflicts, awakening in those who watch opposite passions (or catharses), as we can see in the desperate rage of the German athlete Carl Kaufmann who provokes "disgust" in Pasolini, or in the spontaneous joy among men and women on the beach of Ostia. By its nature and experience, Pasolini has the required tools to understand sports as a game, an existential drama.

<sup>37</sup> 'This young and colorful vision of the world united in a peaceful challenge, this evocation of historical moments detached from good or evil, a sketch of a greater and serene conscience, the one that will judge them tomorrow.'

<sup>38</sup> 'A world full of future'

<sup>39</sup> '[...] That was a real sports meeting: the ideal sport has those dimensions.'

It isn't probably a coincidence that Pasolini's chronicles were revisited and republished when his complete works appeared at the end of the 1990s, while the texts of sports written by other authors, such as those by Calvino about the 1952 Olympics, which were more verbose and partisan, were not published (Granat-Robert, 2019: 360). Pasolini's chronicles can be analyzed as literary works and reveal, simultaneously, an artistic transition from the young author whom, after few years, would migrate to cinema. In his sports writing, as in all his works, Pasolini puts his skin, gives himself, does not separate subject and artist. His three works deserve to be translated and reread. In various aspects, these are timeless texts, especially when we analyze the current state of the art in the field of sports mega-events (Horne, 2007; 2018; Castilho, 2016). The criticisms pointed out by Pasolini in the 1960s can be relocated to any contemporary mega-events. The sports chronicler had already warned about the media excess, the structural changes imposed by responsible bodies for the Olympic Games, gentrification, the loss of the sports' playful elements, among other aspects. Pasolini's non-subservience to the PCI, a sign of maturity, is crucial in his chronicles, somehow, he prioritizes the strength of his passion for life and the confrontation of all its forms and manifestations, whether sports or popular. Having made his existence, the soil of his works, the terrain of his reflections, Pasolini quickly adopted an attitude of independence, not without risk, in relation to the press organ he was collaborating with. Taking this perspective, his reports were much more impactful.

The interest in the various human manifestations and adventures, established in real events and embodied by flesh-and-bone sports heroes, reveals to us Pasolini's intelligence, who does not disdain this type of exercise - sports chronicle - an area considered to be a little literary and modest, although, it is one of the most important social and cultural aspects of the 20th and 21st centuries. An explosive temperament oriented towards the pleasure of the game, confrontation and exploration of all his passions, however, one of his favorite sports, cycling, is not exempt from 'suffering' bodies, which is known that author chooses to write his column in the 'resting' body of the Russian cyclist, leaving the report 'in motion' or strict of the Olympic feat for other journalists.

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