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From “satire” to “insult”.

For a phenomenology of film slating from the post-war period to the web

«Slatting is a critical art»: from this recent lapidary consideration of Alfonso Berardinelli (2018) the present intervention starts, in order to remedy the unjustified absence of the “negative review” formula from the official history of film criticism. Certainly curious removal of the slitting within the vast theoretical speculation on cinema, all the more if you think that, in the test of the facts, a considerable part of the film criticism consists precisely of slating, attacks, condemnations to oblivion or mockery. Our analysis therefore intends to reconstruct precisely the most significant evolutions and declinations of the cinematographic slating from the post-war period to the present day, in an attempt to outline the physiognomy of our main object of study, by its nature oscillating between the information request, the interest commercial and the definition of “taste”. Inevitable starting from the critical demolition carried out to the detriment of neorealism by a large majority of the Italian Catholic front, to then move on to one of the most famous “ideological slits” in the history of film criticism, or the extremely harsh accusations made on the pages of «Cahiers du Cinéma» from Jacques Rivette to *Kapò* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1960). The same fate will be suffered by a film such as *Tiro al Piccione* (Giuliano Montaldo, 1961), equally “ideologically” stigmatized by most of the Italian critical front due to the re-enactment of a still too recent and burning past such as the Republic of Salò. From ideological criticism we will then move on to the analysis of other possible variations of slating, such as those of an “aesthetic” and “content” nature, without neglecting finally the most recent related drifts, which often see slating becoming a commonplace, an aprioristic slogan, not infrequently touching the boorish level of insult, defamation and, especially in the last few years, of the “forum quarrel on the internet”. Finally, some acute reflections on slotting conducted by the same film critics will be somewhat significant: emblematic in this sense the position of refusal of any «easy and free slating» in favor of «reasoned slating without acrimony», expressed by Paolo Mereghetti (2018) about his modus operandi in his eponymous Dictionary of films. Equally significant is the meaning of slitting as a formidable epistemological field of proof of the changing trends and critical fates, according to the theorem admirably highlighted by Aldo Grasso: «Now you criticize me but, one day, you will be forced to weave my praises, as happened with Totò» (2019). Without neglecting the salutary character of necessity inherent, in hindsight, in the very nature of the slating: «today the media tend to downgrade any controversy to the rank of personal offense: but this means denying one of the functions of criticism, which is also political passion, aesthetic and civil» (Alberto Pezzotta, 2015). What emerges from this large body of reflections and critical contributions is a transversal, protean and interdisciplinary portrait of the “slating form”, in which the characters of cultural satire, sarcastic deformation, insinuation, insult and appeal to one’s subjective taste are inseparably mixed. All this further demonstrates how the harshness contributes in no way secondary to the delineation and study of the more general “review form”, intended as a crucial test bench for intellectual production and artistic-cultural reception.

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