
JEAN-LOUIS TRINTIGNANT (11 December 1930, Poilenc, France) provided the voice in _The City of Lost Children_ 1995, which M. Faust presented in the MAFAC Sunday Classics a few weeks ago. He was also in nearly 120 other films in a career that began with four films in 1956, the best known of them Roger Vadim’s _And God Created Woman_, the film that made both him and Brigitte Bardot international stars. He appeared in _The Conformist_ and three others with Bertolucci: _The Sheltering Sky_ 1983, _Viscous Dismance/Confidentially Yours_ 1983, _My Night at Maud’s_ 1969, _Is Paris Burning?_ 1966, and _Un homme et une femme/A Man and a Woman_ 1966.

STEFANIA SANDRELLI (5 June 1946, Viareggio, Tuscany, Italy) began acting in films when she was 15, with three films in 1961, one of which still turns up regularly on cable tv, _Divorzio all’italiana/Divorce—Italian Style_. Her most recent film was _L’ultimo bacio/The Last Kiss_ 2001. She’s been in nearly a hundred films in all, _The Conformist_ and three others with Bertolucci: _Stealing Beauty, 1900_ and _Partner._


ALBERTO MORAVIA (Alberto Pincherle, 22 November 1907, Rome, Italy—26 September 1990, Rome), according to his entry in _Books and Writers_, “explored in his books sex, social alienation, and other contemporary issues - he was a major figure in the 20th-century Italian literature....

“Moravia was born in Rome into a well-to-do middle-class family. His mother was Teresa (de Marcanich) Pincherle, and father, Carlo Pincherle, an architect and a painter. At the age of nine Moravia was stricken with tubercular infection of the leg bones which he considered the most important factor in his early development. He spent from 1916 to 1925 considerable time in sanatoriums. During these years Moravia started to write and published his first major novel, _GLI INDIFFERENTI (Time of Indifference)_ in 1929. It was perhaps the first European Existentialist novel....

“Generally Moravia regarded women as being superior to men. He saw sex as the enemy of love. Variations on the women of _Gli indifferenti_ are found in _LA ROMANA_ (1947, The Woman of Rome), in which the protagonist, Adriana, is a prostitute, _LA CIOCIARA_ (1958, Two Women), which recounts the war experiences of a middle-class businesswoman and her daughter who flee into the mountains to escape Allied bombings. The daughter is raped by Moroccan soldiers; she becomes a prostitute and her mother a thief. Moravia’s criticism of society in presented on an allegorical level - proletariat is raped by capitalism.

“In the 1930s Moravia worked as a foreign correspondent.... His works were censored by Benito Mussolini’s fascist government, and placed by the Vatican on the Index librorum prohibitarum (Index of Forbidden Books). Moravia criticized sharply the dehumanized, capitalist world. He was
especially influenced by the thoughts of Marx and Freud.

In 1937 appeared Moravia's L'IMBROGLIO, a collection of short stories, which included L'Architetto, La Tempesta, and La Provvidenza. Several of his stories were first published in newspapers. RACCONTI ROMANI (1954), Roman Tales and NUOVI RACCONTI ROMANI (1959, More Roman Tales) include some of Moravia's best sketches of working-class characters in everyday situations.

From 1941 to 1943 Moravia lived in Anacapri (Capri). In 1943 he fled into the mountains of Ciociaria. He had written in 1941 a comic parody of the Mussolini government, LA MASCHERATA, attacked fascism in his articles in Il Popolo di Roma, and was in danger of being arrested. He went into hiding in the peasant community in Fondi near Cassino, until the Allied Liberation.

“Moravia’s autobiography ALBERTO MORAVIA’S LIFE, was published in 1990. He was elected in 1984 Italian representative to the European Parliament. Moravia died in Rome on September 26, 1990. He lived most of his life in Rome; the city played an important role in his fiction.

[For the full entry, suggestions for further reading, and a list of most of Moravia’s books, visit http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/moravia.htm.]

from World Film Directors v.1 ed. John Wakeman, 1988

“Even though there were only a few short months between them,” [La strategia del rango and Il conformista ] Bertolucci says, “my psychological situation was different, and that is why these two films are so different. I made Stratagem in a state of melancholic happiness and great serenity and Conformist in a tragic state of great psychological upheaval. . . I know that The Conformist is my most difficult film. . . because it is the simplest one. One enters it on a first level of ‘reading’… and poses no further problems to himself. Instead the film is full of other levels. . . In Stratagem we used very little light, and simply as colors, the tones are much more violent. The Conformist is lighted like 1930s studio film; even when we were on location, there were a lot of lights and lighting effects, something which is very Sternbergian. While in Stratagem I was more influenced by life, in The Conformist I was more influenced by movies. One could say the point of departure was cinema: and the cinema I like is Sternberg, Ophuls, and Welles.”

“Like most Communist intellectuals in Europe I am condemned to be divided. I have a split personality, and the real contraction within is that I cannot quite synchronize my heart and my brain.”

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Bertolucci has often said that the end of a film is the most difficult part.

It is another open end by Bertolucci, preferred in a cinematic postmodern style that offers no systematic telling of a story but that challenges the viewer to a dialogue. The ‘message’ of the film is in fact an invitation to interrogation.

“If anyone can be called a born moviemaker, it’s Bertolucci,” says Pauline Kael. “Thus far, he’s the only young moviemaker who suggests that he may have the ability of a Griffith to transport us imaginatively into other periods of history—and without his talent movies would be even more impoverished than they are.” But the same critical states in the same attitude: “I don’t think The Conformist is a great movie. It is the best movie this year by far, and it’s a film by a prodigy who—if we are all lucky—is going to make great films. But it’s a triumph of style; the substance is not sufficiently liberalized, and one may begin to feel a little queasy about the way the movie left luxuricates in Fascist decadence.”

In Fascism in Contemporary Film, Joan Mellen writes: “Bertolucci’s editing is Proustian, based on the random association of ideas by an involuntary memory…. Bertolucci’s point about the psychology of the fascist is that individuals pursue the compulsions of their sexuality in conflict with their social freedom and self interest, that in a culture encouraging sexual repression, fascist power finds its most likely supporters.”

The virtuosity of Bertolucci’s approach to images is pointed out in Off-Hollywood Movies: “Visually. The Conformist is a masterwork. Shot from odd camera angles with strange lighting by cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, and accented with Georges Delerue’s haunting soundtrack, several scenes in the film have the feeling of a Kafkaesque nightmare.”

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from Bernardo Bertolucci Interviews Gerard, Kline & Sklarew. U Miss 2000

(“... In the book the story of the conformist is a tragedy and, as in the Greek tragedies, everything is related to Fate. Here I substituted Marcello’s unconscious—a psychoanalytic explanation, that is—for the presence of Destiny in the book. And that’s why I also changed the end of the story; in the novel Marcello and his wife are killed, and this is presented as God’s justice. Marcello is really a very complex character, searching to conform because of his great, violent anti-conformism. A true conformist is someone who has no wish to change: to wish to conform is really to say that the truth is the contrary. But what is tremendous in the novel is the intuition about the character of Marcello: his monstrosity has tragic dimensions. Transforming Destiny into the Unconscious, of course, also affects the rapport between sexuality and politics.

“I’m sure that some young occidental Maoists will reproach me for The Conformist because it’s beautiful to look at and because I mix dirty things like sex with anything like politics. But I think that’s Catholic, moralistic reasoning, and I find that the great foolishness of young Maoists in Italy is their slogan, “Serve the People.” My slogan is “Serve Myself,” because only by serving myself am I able to serve the people—that is, to be a part of the people, not serve them.”

“I believe that in the world I present in the film, no one is saved.”

There is still some nostalgia in Italy for the Fascist period, isn’t there?

“Yes! That’s why I say The Conformist is a film on the present. And when I say that I want the public to leave with a sense of malaise,
perhaps feeling the presence of something obscurely sinister, it’s because I want them to realise that however the world has changed, feelings have remained the same. Feelings, that is, about normality and abnormality.... For Italy, the film is really very savage.”

(A Conversation w/ BB Joan Mellen 1972)

“The Conformist is first a film about the bourgeoisie, the middle-class, not about fascism. I was speaking about the middle-class, and fascism is a moment in the history of the middle-class, a means by which the middle-class protects itself from the working class. Whenever the working class is coming up, up, up, at this moment fascism makes it appearance. . . .I absolutely don’t want it to be a question of fascism equaling homosexuality. This is really too simple. Homosexuality is just an element in Marcello’s character. Marcello feels himself different because of his secret homosexuality which is never expressed, yet always inside of him. And when you feel ‘different,’ you have to make a choice: to act with violence against the existing power or, like most people, to ask for the protection of this power. Marcello chooses to ask for the protection of this power. He becomes a fascist to have this protection that he needs.”

(Bertolucci: The Present Doesn’t Interest Me, Gian Luigi Rondi, 1983)

“In America a strange thing happened to me. I met a young, widely reputed architect who told me: The Conformist was a fundamental film for young American architecture. We have heard a lot about Fascist architecture; we read books about it and saw documentaries on it, but it was only in your film that its real face was revealed.” He was referring specifically to the sequence of the EUR, and those great walls of white stone, to the backgrounds like theater sets. Mostly he was amazed by the whole visual idea of the film and found it hard to conceive how a director of my age could conceive of it. I explained to him that even though I wasn’t old enough to have a direct memory of these years, I was greatly aided by the collective memory that was filtered through the films of that period.”

Kathleen McInnis, “Vittorio’s Secret”, Moviemaker
Bernardo Bertolucci describes Vittorio Storaro’s work as “the physical intervention of light; he paints with light.” Francis Ford Coppola called him “the prince from Sienna” during the shooting of Apocalypse Now. Warren Beatty sums him up as “...simply the best in the world.” The Oscar-winning.... He is the standard to which other cinematographers aspire; a cinematic hero whose legendary use of color defines his form of expression. He describes his art as “life visualized with light,” and calls cinema “a language of images formed by light and darkness, and by the internal elements of color through which stories must be interpreted.”

... “In the beginning when I was doing photography, twenty five years ago, I was trying to deal with two main elements; trying to show these two elements that were separated but which were supposed to be united: light and shadows. I was using the symbols of light and shadows in trying to tell many different stories: between two different poles; two different energies; two different human beings - like a man and a woman; the conscious and unconscious. After several years, I was trying to go even deeper on this discovery, this research. I tried to analyze which elements are composing the light itself. Different moments of life can be visualized with different aspects of the light which is color. So I went through the first stage of my life dealing with the research of light; the second part of my life going inside of the light itself and doing the research about colors; and when this project [The Little Buddha] arrived I was already trying to come into the third part of my life - searching for balance. The only way I was able to visualize this research for balance was by going back to the Greek philosophical theory about the four basic elements of life, which were recognized as water, earth, fire and air. Life is based on the balance between these four elements. The conflict and the harmony between these four elements creates life. And only balance between them can create balance in life....

“Anyhow, you go only in one direction in your life. Sometimes you meet, or you cross the path of another life and you share a section of your own journey with somebody else. No doubt Bernardo is not only a friend in this journey, but to me he is also a guide. When you start a relationship with a new director, you almost start from the beginning. You have to redo part of the journey together. There is no need for that with Bernardo. We continue from our last step, which was the previous project, so we have the chance to go even further. There is something very personal in what I am saying. Bertolucci needs to put in front of the camera - not only consciously but also unconsciously - all his thoughts, all his feelings. I think it is my need to put forth harmony or conflict, a dialogue anyway, between the two elements of light and shadows, which represents Bertolucci’s unconscious way of telling the story. That’s why, probably, there is so much balance between us. That’s my personal feeling.”

COMING UP NEXT WEEK IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, TUESDAY NOV 20: Nicolas Roeg’s DON’T LOOK NOW:
Nicolas Roeg, cinematographer for François Truffaut’s Fahrenheit 451 and David Lean’s Dr. Zhivago, directed 20 films, three of them memorable: The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976), Walkabout (1971) and Don’t Look Now. Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie are grieving parents of a drowned child. They go to Venice, where Sutherland works on the restoration of a Byzantine church. Something happens to them there. This horrific and erotic film, almost perfectly misunderstood by critics when it was released, is now regarded as a masterpiece. For notes and links for each film, visit our website: www.buffalofilmseminars.com.

THIS COMING SUNDAY IN THE MAFAC SUNDAY CLASSICS: DIABOLIQUE (1954)
In this French terror dassic by director-screenwriter Henri-Georges Clouzot, the wife of the headmaster of a school for boys tires of his violent treatment of her, along with his philandering, and teams up with his mistress (Simone Signoret) to drown him and make it appear as a suicide. When the body goes missing and sightings of the supposedly dead man are reported all over town, the two mismatched women must uncover what happened to the body before it’s discovered what they’ve done. Upon its release, Clouzot urged all who saw the film not to reveal its surprise ending— one which still stands as one of the original ‘shock’ endings. The restored version includes 16 minutes of recently found footage. This was boringly remade in 1996, starring with Sharon Stone, Chazz Palminteri, Isabel Adjani and Cathy Bates. Nov 18, 3:00 p.m. in this very room.

BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS: GOLDENROD HANDOUTS NOW ON LINE! All the Tuesday night goldenrod handouts for the current series are now on line. Go to the web site and click on the appropriate line. We’ll continue posting them the Sunday before each Tuesday screening and eventually we’ll add the notes for the previous series.

Email DIANE CHRISTIAN at engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu email BRUCE JACKSON at bjackson@buffalo.edu. For BFS SCHEDULES and information, with notes and links for each film, visit our website: http://www.buffalofilmseminars.com

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