

The Conformist (1970) - Bernardo Bertolucci (1940 -)

P Michell, August 2015.

Our director this time is the Italian Bernardo Bertolucci. Though not many films, many have endured and become 'classics'. They are always stunning photographed and composed. Has a unique 'poetry' of film making. Possibly because of his work with Passolini. Notable other films include: Last Tango in Paris (1972), 1900 (1976), The Last Empror (1987).

Synopsis:

This story opens in 1938 in Rome, where Marcello has just taken a job working for Mussolini and is courting a beautiful young woman who will make him even more of a conformist. Marcello is going to Paris on his honeymoon and his bosses have an assignment for him there. Look up an old professor who fled Italy when the fascists came into power. At the border of Italy and France, where Marcello and his bride have to change trains, his bosses give him a gun with a silencer. In a flashback to 1917, we learn why sex and violence are linked in Marcello's mind.

Director: Bernardo Bertolucci

Screenplay: Bernardo Bertolucci, based on the novel by Alberto Moravia

Photography: Vittorio Storaro

Music: Georges Delerue

Principal Cast: Jean-Louis Trintignant (Marcello Clerici); Stefania Sandrelli (Giulia); Dominique Sanda (Anna); Enzo Tarascio (Professor Quadri); Gastone Moschin (Manganiello); Jose Quaglio (Italo); Pierre Clementi (Lino); Milly (Marcello's mother); Giuseppe Addobbati (Marcello's father); Yvonne Sanson (Giulia's mother); Pasquale Fortunato (Marcello as a child).

Producer: Maurizio Lodi-Fe

Running time/ratio: C-111m. Letterboxed.

Bertolucci:

Biography from Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernardo_Bertolucci

Bertolucci is an atheist. Bertolucci's films are often very political. He is a professed [Marxist](#) and like [Visconti](#), who similarly employed many foreign artists during the late 1960s, Bertolucci uses his films to express his political views; hence they are often autobiographical as well as highly controversial. His political films were preceded by others re-evaluating history. *The Conformist* (1970) criticised Fascist ideology, touched upon the relationship between nationhood and nationalism, as well as issues of popular taste and collective memory, all amid an international plot by Mussolini to assassinate a politically active [leftist](#) professor of philosophy in Paris. *1900* also analyses the struggle of Left and Right.

Source - Wkipedia

Excellent examination here, though most of the links at end of article:

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/great-directors/bertolucci/>

Brief quote:

In the '70s, Bertolucci had become a major international filmmaker through a combination of provocative content, visual expressiveness and a willingness to make films that could be engaged with on serious intellectual terms. At the same time, a desire for a more commercial direction peered through his work, from the more lush, melodramatic moments of *The Conformist* to the operatic spectacle and the A-list cast of *1900*. Even as he made some of his most challenging works, Bertolucci had always been fascinated by more popular movies: 1968, the year of his most "difficult" film, *Partner*, is also the year he shared a writing credit with the horror auteur Dario Argento on Sergio Leone's classic Spaghetti Western, *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Nevertheless, these were just dalliances; the director had resisted the greater temptations of popular filmmaking. In a very revealing 1995 interview, he recalled his earlier days of making politically charged, stylistically challenging films:

"Gianni Amico, Glauber Rocha and I called our films "Miuras" or "Young Bulls". The "Miura" is the Spanish name given in bullfights to the most dangerous, strongest and lithest bulls.... "I've made a 'Miura' film; not a single spectator will enter the theater", and we'd go on laughing to keep from crying.

"I was deliberately trying to create such "Miuras," and yet I suffered a lot when I thought of these packed movie houses of my childhood. I often wondered what I understood back then by the word "rigor", and I think I can say that it was principally a refusal to have anything to do with my audience, fearing to be seen or judged, a refusal to seek out an audience coupled with the fear of being ignored by them. It's like when you fall in love and you fear being rejected by the object of your love....Because of political moralism we refused ourselves the pleasure of any sensual contact between the author and his audience. This kind of pleasure struck me as belonging absolutely to right wing filmmakers.

"And so, little by little, I began to give up this idea of "rigor". I wanted to have contact, to embrace my audience."

Vittorio Storaro – Masterful Director of Photography "Writing with Light & Motion" (1940 -) – also filmed - *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Reds*, *The Last Emperor* (1987), *Last Tango in Paris* (1979)

Vittorio Storaro, the [award](#) -winning cinematographer won Oscars for "*Apocalypse Now*," "*Reds*" and "*The Last Emperor*," was born on June 24, 1940 in Rome, where his father was a projectionist. At the age of 11, he began studying photography at a

technical school. When he enrolled at Cinema school at the age of 18, he was one of its youngest students ever.

At the age of 20, he was employed as an assistant cameraman and was promoted to camera operator within a year. Storaro spent several years visiting galleries and studying the works of great painters, writers, musicians and other artists. In 1966, he went back to work as an assistant cameraman on 'Before the Revolution', one of the first films directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. which began their long collaboration. He also shot "The Conformist," "Last Tango in Paris," "Luna," "The Sheltering Sky," "Little Buddha," for Bertolucci.

He won his first Oscar for the cinematography of "Apocalypse Now," for which director Francis Ford Coppola gave him free rein to design the visual look of the picture. Storaro originally had been reluctant to take the assignment as he considered Gordon Willis to be Coppola's cinematographer, but Coppola wanted him, possibly because of his having shot "Last Tango in Paris,".

"All great films are a resolution of a conflict between darkness and light," Storaro says. "There is no single right way to express yourself. There are infinite possibilities for the use of light with shadows and colors. The decisions you make about composition, movement and the countless combinations of these and other variables is what makes it an art."

According to Storaro, "Some people will tell you that technology will make it easier for one person to make a movie alone but cinema is not an individual art." Storaro disagrees. "It takes many people to make a movie. You can call them collaborators or co-authors. There is a common intelligence. The cinema never has the reality of a painting or a photograph because you make decisions about what the audience should see, hear and how it is presented to them. You make choices which super-impose your own interpretations of reality."

Storaro believes that, "It is our obligation to defend the audiences' rights to see the images and to hear the sounds the way we have expressed ourselves as artists,".

During the 1970s, the metaphor of cinematography as 'painting with light' took hold. Storaro, however, adds motion to the mix. Cinematography, to the great D.P., is writing with light and motion, the literal translation of the word cinematography, which derives from Greek

"It describes the real meaning of what we are attempting to accomplish," Storaro says. **"We are writing stories with light and darkness, motion and colors. It is a language with its own vocabulary and unlimited possibilities for expressing our inner thoughts and feelings."**

He created the "Univision" film system, which is a 35mm format based on film stock with three perforation that provides an aspect ratio of 2:1, which Storaro feels is a good compromise between the 2.35:1 and 1.85:1 wide-screen ratios favored by most filmmakers. Storaro developed the new technology with the intention of 2:1

becoming the universal aspect ratio for both movies and television in the digital age. He first shot the television mini-series "Dune" with the Univision system.

Storaro is the youngest person to receive the American Society of Cinematographer's Lifetime Achievement Award, and only the second recipient after Sven Nykvist not to be a U.S. citizen.

Jon C. Hopwood

Trivia:

When Clerici asks the operator to connect him with Prof. Quadri, the telephone number he gives is the (one-time) telephone number of Bertolucci's idol Jean-Luc Godard. When Quadri answers the phone, Clerici recalls one of his lectures in which Quadri said "The time for reflection is over. Now is the time for action." This is the opening line in Godard's film *Le Petit Soldat*.

The hospital that Clerici's father is at is actually the Teatro Libera (Free Theater) at the Palazzo dei Congressi in EUR, a massive complex on the outskirts of Rome that was begun as a monument to the Fascist Government. This massive, modernist white marble complex and theater have appeared in several other films and television shows.

The Latin phrase recited by Clerici on his way to kill the Quadris was "Animula, vagula, blandula, hospes comesque corporis", the first line of a poem attributed to the Roman emperor Hadrian.

Criticism:

Edited Extract from *Senses of Cinema* – Bernardo Bertolucci –

Exorcising the Father: Early Works

This is something that I dream about: to live films, to arrive at the point at which one can live for films, can think cinematographically, eat cinematographically, sleep cinematographically, as a poet, a painter, lives, eats, sleeps painting. Bernardo Bertolucci

Very few international directors in the past four decades have managed to remain at the "critically successful" as consistently as Italian filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci, whose career has straddled three generations of filmmaking, four continents, and several movie industries. Alongside his provocative explorations of sexuality and ideology, his highly kinetic visual style – often characterised by elaborate camera moves, meticulous lighting, symbolic use of colour, and inventive editing – has influenced several generations of filmmakers, from the American "movie brats" of the 1970s to the music video auteurs of the '80s and '90s. Perhaps the most

important reason for Bertolucci's continuing relevance has been the intensely personal nature of his movies: although he makes narrative features, very often based (albeit loosely) on outside literary sources, Bertolucci's films over the decades reveal distinct connections to their creator's private dilemmas and the vagaries of his creative and intellectual life. In other words, he has been able to fulfill his dream of being able "to live films" and "to think cinematographically" – to lay bare his inner life through his work.

Bertolucci was born to a prosperous family in Parma, Italy. His father, Attilio, was a well-known poet and writer. He exerted a considerable influence on the young Bernardo, who became an award-winning poet himself at the age of 21 and spent his teen years enamoured with the cinema, thanks to his father's work as a film critic. At around the same time, Bernardo entered the world of filmmaking as an assistant to another Italian poet, Attilio's friend Pier Paolo Pasolini, on the writer's first feature, *Accatone* (1961). A five-page treatment by Pasolini led to Bertolucci's own first feature, *The Grim Reaper* (*La commare secca*) (1962), an episodic, *Rashomon*-style investigation into the murder of a prostitute seen through the points-of-view of the dispossessed denizens of a Roman park. The impression of youth shows: *The Grim Reaper*, despite showing some early signs of Bertolucci's personal style (expressionistic lighting, a highly mobile camera, and an inventive, time-hopping narrative structure), feels more like a Pasolini film, not the least because of its subproletarian milieu.

Many of Bertolucci's early films work simultaneously as homages and exorcisms. Pasolini and Jean-Luc Godard were the filmmaker's twin spiritual fathers in the 1960s, and the latter's influence is clearly evident in *Partner* (1968), Bertolucci's third feature, an attempt at the elliptical, playful, highly symbolic, and politically active style of Godard's post-*nouvelle vague* filmmaking. A loose adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Double*, *Partner* is the story of a young idealist (Pierre Clementi) who is faced with his politically revolutionary, socially active, and possibly psychotic *doppelganger*. Full of attempts at Brechtian distancing (onscreen text, direct address to the camera, etc.), the film today retains a certain fascination for the ways in which the power of Bertolucci's burgeoning lyricism and cinematic confidence clash with the fragmented, highly declarative style of Godard's more political films.