

COUCH AND SCREEN

An Additional Lens

Bernardo Bertolucci in conversation with Andrea Sabbadini



The following is an edited extract from a public conversation between the film director, Bernardo Bertolucci and Andrea Sabbadini, a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society, at the Großen Festsaal der Universität in Vienna. This conversation, entitled 'Psychoanalysis: the eleventh muse', was organised by the Sigmund Freud Museum and took place on the anniversary of Freud's birth, 6th May 1997. A video tape of the complete conversation (which was in English) can be obtained from the Sigmund Freud-Gesellschaft, Bergasse 19, A-1090 Wien, Austria.

The cost of the video is 490 Austrian Schillings (£24.) and can be paid for by bankers draft or credit card. For further information telephone (+43) 1 319-15-960.

Bernardo Bertolucci

The sixties were extremely important for cinema, for myself and all my friends who started to make movies in the sixties. Our movies were an investigation about the nature of cinema. We were making movies that we were proud to know that the audiences weren't going to see. At the end of the sixties I started to think that there was something wrong. I thought my movies were like monologues because nobody went, just critics or friends or relatives, and I started to think I have to break this kind of curse. I wanted to have feedback from the people who see my movies. So my desire was to pass from monologue to dialogue. That is exactly the moment when I found myself starting my psychoanalysis, in 1969.

I started just at the moment when I was preparing Spider's Stratagem, which is a movie about a son who is investigating about his father figure - it comes from a Borges short story. The elaboration of the story was parallel with the beginning of my psychoanalysis. In the next seven years I made the Spider's Stratagem, The Conformist, Last Tango in Paris and then 1900. I found in this way that I naturally passed from the monologue to

a dialogue with an audience. My movies which in the sixties had been closed became popular, sometimes even too popular. Bernardo Bertolucci's films include: *La Commare Secca* (The Grim Reaper), *Prima della rivoluzione* (Before the Revolution), *Sosia* (Partner), *Strategia del ragno* (The Spider's Strategem), *Il conformista* (The Conformist), *L'ultimo tango à Parigi* (Last Tango in Paris), *1900*, *La Luna*, *Tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* (Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man), *L'ultimo imperatore* (The Last Emperor), *The Sheltering Sky*, *Little Buddha* and *Ballo di sola* (Stealing Beauty).

Andrea Sabbadini

Psychoanalysis is not quite a dialogue is it? It's a funny paradoxical situation which could really be described as a monologue in the presence of someone else, rather than a dialogue.

BB

A monologue with two voices.

AS

A monologue with two voices - it's an interesting form of monologue. It's an interesting form of relationship, it's rather unique in fact. But I was wondering if you were not using the fact that by then you were in analysis, to use your films as your analysis. You were elaborating, you were digesting, you were changing through making your movies, in a way in which perhaps you had not done before.

BB

During my sessions of analysis I was talking more about my dreams about the films, my fantasies about the films which weren't yet done than about myself. That meant that in these seven years there was a fantastic feedback from the analysis and personally I became a much more open and available person: like my movies - very closed like an urchin, and then I started to open myself, as my movies were opening.

AS

It sounds like a dream that one, a familiar one, 'seven years'.

BB

Since I started psychoanalysis I found that I had in my camera an additional lens, which was - it's not Kodak, it's not Zeiss, it's Freud. It is a lens which really takes you very close to dreams. For me movies, even before knowing Freud, have always been the closest thing you can imagine to a dream. First of all, the movie theatre in this amniotic darkness for me has always been like a womb, so we are all dreamers, but dreamers in the womb. We are there in the darkness. And it's very rare having a collective dream all together. We're dreaming with open eyes the same dream - which is the movie - which we receive in different ways. If you ask at the exit of the theatre what the story was, you will have many different stories. I always felt that the time in a movie is not the time of realism, it is not the 'real' time of the watch, but it is the same time that you have in dreams. We all

know that in dreams time does not exist.

That, for example, you have present, past, future, happening at the same time. And characters are not what they seem, or look: they are other, they represent other people.

That gives me freedom. To give you an example, in *Last Tango in Paris* at the beginning of the movie we see this middle-aged American old fart. He's desperate because he's ageing and desperate because his wife committed suicide. Then the meeting with the girl, Maria, and everything happens - the most irresistible thing for a middle-aged man, which is to feel attractive to a young woman, which is difficult to resist. You don't know how much time has passed, then he opens the door in the hotel where he lives and you see the dead body of his wife, but you thought his wife died a long time ago. In fact, only one or two days have passed. So to play with that I think it is very interesting. Too many times it is a pity that film directors merely illustrate a screen play when they make a movie: they don't really ride the freedom that cinema gives them.

AS

Your father is a very well known Italian poet, and I wondered if your films are a way both for you to stay close to your father, to express in a poetic way something about your internal world, and the other main figures in your life. But also a way of differentiating yourself from them, taking a distance from them, rebelling against them, or perhaps even attempting to destroy them, only to then build them up again inside yourself.

BB

Yes, what is very strange is that in many of my movies there is the murder of the father or the attempted murder of the father. No analyst - and I am at the third one after twenty-two years of an honourable career as a patient - was able to explain why: because my father is the most wonderful father. He is not only a poet, he's a great poet. He is 86 - he's very old. What keeps him alive? Publishing and publishing: his books are the only thing where he can recognise he still has an identity now that his bones are shrinking. I learn everything from him. When I was eight or nine there was a poem that I read of my father's called The Rose. It is dedicated to my mother. It says 'You are like the rose in the bottom of the garden. The last bees of the summer have visited the rose...'. After reading the poem I would run out of the house, run to the bottom of the garden and there was the rose. So I made no difference between the rose of the poem and the rose of the reality. He never taught me about poetry in an academic or didactic way, it was natural. My father has always written about the microcosmos, the very little landscape around our house. I could see that the material of the poems was coming from just outside our house. So there was a kind of natural living in the poetry in our daily life. And yet, with this wonderful father and mother I had to kill them all the time in all my movies. It is something this Oedipal thing, and I don't think it's coincidence that Freud chose Sophocles' Oedipus Rex instead of Hamlet because there is the perfect triangle. But my father always tells me a simple thing, 'this way you can kill me

without going to jail'. It's still a movement inside me which still feeds my movies.

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