Contemporary Literary Criticism

CLC 157

ISSN 0091-3421

Volume 157

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers

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PROJECT EDITOR

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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 157

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-5857-X
ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Contents

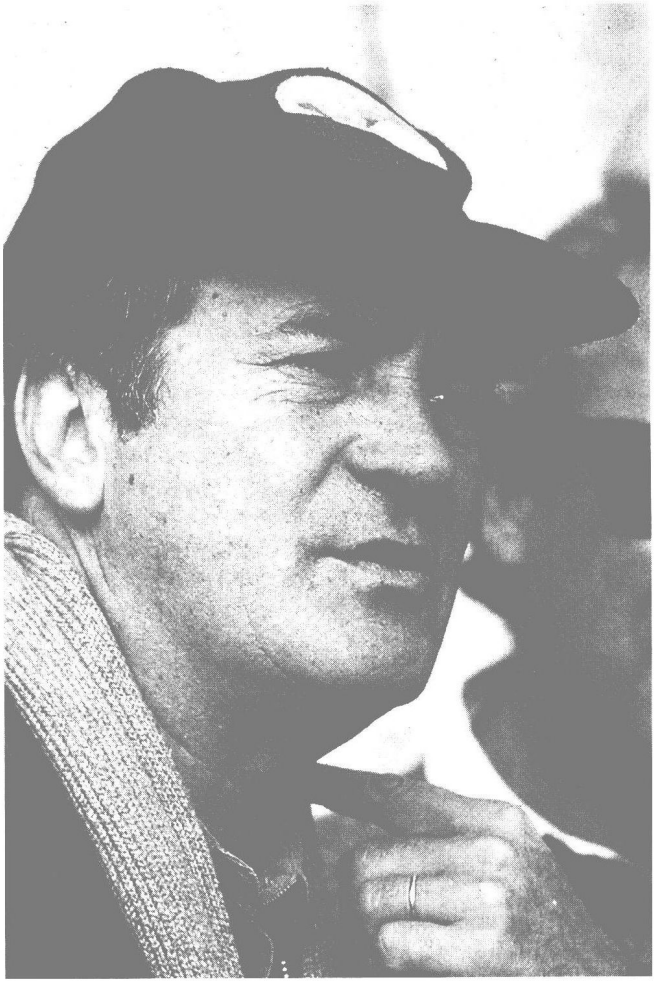
Bernardo Bertolucci
1940-

Italian director, screenwriter, poet, and autobiographer.

The following entry presents an overview of Bertolucci's career through 1999. For more information on his life and works, see *CLC,* Volume 16.

INTRODUCTION

Bertolucci is a widely acclaimed filmmaker who is known for the exploration of sexual and political themes in his films. His works are infused with his personal beliefs about Marxism and Freudian psychoanalytic theory, but rather than create political treatises with his films, Bertolucci strives to entertain and to engage his audiences. Bertolucci began his artistic career as a poet, and his filmmaking has been noted for its lyrical sense. He is best known for the controversial *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (1972; *Last Tango in Paris*), which stars Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider, and the Chinese historical epic *The Last Emperor* (1987). Despite a number of critics who have questioned the content of Bertolucci's films, most reviewers regard the cinematography and artistic direction of his films as skillful and visually stunning.



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bertolucci was born in Parma, Italy, on March 16, 1940, to an upper-middle-class family. His father, Attilio Bertolucci, was a renowned poet and film critic. Bertolucci often accompanied his father to the theater and developed a love for the cinema at a very young age. He began making 16-mm films when he was sixteen years old, but he was also interested in composing poetry like his father. Bertolucci's collection of poems, *In cerca del mistero* (1962; *In Search of Mystery*), won the Prix Viareggio award in 1962. In 1961 Bertolucci worked as an assistant on Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Accatone!* and soon decided to pursue a career in cinema. When Bertolucci was twenty, he directed his first feature, *La commare secca* (1962; *The Grim Reaper*). By the time Bertolucci was in his early thirties, he was considered one of Italy's most promising young directors. While making *La strategia del ragno* (1970; *The Spider's Stratagem*) Bertolucci began psychoanalytic therapy, and thereafter, the works of Sigmund Freud became a strong influence on his films. The controversial *Last Tango in Paris* garnered Bertolucci worldwide attention and won him an Academy Award nomination for best director. The film was viewed as pornographic by the Italian government and Bertolucci was charged with promoting obscenity. Bertolucci lost his right to vote for five years and chose to leave his native Italy. Following *Last Tango in Paris,* Bertolucci directed a string of less successful films before approaching the Chinese government about two projects—a film based on French novelist André Malraux's *Man's Fate,* which was denied, and a film about the life of Pu Yi, China's last emperor. The Chinese government not only sanctioned the latter project—*The Last Emperor*—but they supported Bertolucci with unprecedented access to China's Forbidden City, as well as supplying him with thousands of extras and authentic period costumes. The film won nine Academy Awards, including best picture and best director, and revitalized Bertolucci's career.

MAJOR WORKS

Bertolucci's oeuvre has ranged from intimate, personal dramas to large-scale, historical epics. One of his favored

themes revolves around his generation's struggle with appreciating their bourgeois lifestyle and simultaneously wanting to destroy it. In his early films, Bertolucci was heavily influenced by filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. However, beginning with *Il conformista* (1970; *The Conformist*), Bertolucci worked to consciously reject what he considered to be Godard's somewhat sadistic attitude toward his audiences. Bertolucci instead chose to engage his audience in a dialogue, and many of his films thereafter are considered to work in stylistic opposition to Godard's work. *The Conformist* is based on a novel by Alberto Moravia, set in 1930s Italy. Marcello is haunted by an incident from his childhood in which a male chauffeur tried to molest him. Marcello is convinced that he murdered the chauffeur, and in an attempt to escape the horror of this memory, he immerses himself in conformity and normality. He becomes a fascist agent and is ordered to murder his former professor, who acted as a father figure to him. In an ironic touch, the professor's phone number is the same as Godard's, signalling Bertolucci's metaphorical break from his own father figure. *Last Tango in Paris* focuses on Paul and Jeanne, who meet while looking at an apartment in Paris and begin an anonymous affair. Paul's wife has recently committed suicide, and he uses Jeanne to act out a series of violent sexual scenes in an effort to exorcise his grief over his wife's death. After the couple leaves the apartment for the last time, with both of them intending to go their separate ways, Paul follows Jeanne to her home and tells her his name. Feeling betrayed that Paul has broken the promised anonymity of their relationship, Jeanne shoots him in the genitals. *The Last Emperor* is based on *From Emperor to Citizen,* the autobiography of China's last emperor, Pu Yi. The film follows Pu Yi through the various stages of his life: his ascension to the throne at the age of three; his expulsion from the Forbidden City; his life as a playboy in Tientsin; his days as a puppet emperor of Manchuria under the control of Japan; his imprisonment and reeducation in a Communist prison; and finally his life as a working-class gardener. *The Sheltering Sky* (1990) tells the story of Port, a frustrated composer, and Kit, a New York socialite. The couple travels through Tangier in 1947 searching for spiritual fulfillment and a rekindling of the passion in their marriage. Their search is beleaguered by Port's infidelity and the harsh physical conditions in the desert which leads to Port's death. Kit suffers a mental breakdown soon after, and embarks on a trance-like journey into the desert alone, eventually becoming the concubine of a nomad. The conclusion is ambiguous with no evidence to confirm whether Kit will return home. *Besieged* (1999) is set in Rome and portrays Kinsky, a solitary pianist who hires Shandurai, a young African woman, as his housekeeper. Shandurai has fled the dictatorship in Africa to study medicine in Rome, and works for Kinsky to provide herself a room and money for her studies. Kinsky falls in love with her, but when he blurts out his feelings, she rebuffs him, telling him her husband is a political prisoner in Africa. Kinsky withdraws, but selflessly sacrifices his happiness and wealth to free her husband. Ironically, this selflessness causes Shandurai to fall in love with Kinsky just as her husband arrives in Rome to reunite with her.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have passionately disagreed regarding Bertolucci's body of work. Some reviewers have preferred the visual majesty of his large-scale epics, while others have appreciated his more intimate films that explore personal relationships. In his description of Bertolucci's move to epic filmmaking, Dave Kehr asserted, "Within a breathtakingly short period, Bertolucci transformed himself from an edgy sexual-political provocateur into a David Lean manque. . . . [M]ystery and lyricism soon disappear, giving way to a painterly appreciation of crowd scenes and landscapes devoid of any identifiable personal slant. Introspection yields to spectacle, and art yields to industry." Another point of contention among critics has arisen over whether the sexual content in Bertolucci's work, particularly *Last Tango in Paris,* should be viewed as pornography or as liberating eroticism. A few reviewers have actually complained that Bertolucci does not go far enough with the sexual content of his films, asserting that he only hints at homosexuality and incest without tackling the subjects directly. While most critics have agreed that Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* is visually impressive, several critics have found fault with the film. Certain reviewers have stated that Bertolucci does not make Pu Yi's reeducation plausible. Others have complained that Pu Yi's character is too passive, a portrayal that caused the film to lack the necessary drama. A number of critics have noted the historical inaccuracies in *The Last Emperor,* with some bristling at Bertolucci's insertion of fictional events, while others have lauded his artistic melding of fiction and history. His harshest critics have found Bertolucci's films incomprehensible and have asserted that they are fueled by the director's egoism. Several reviewers have commented on Bertolucci's seemingly disparate works. However, Harlan Kennedy has found a continuity in the director's films, stating, "From *La commare secca* (1962) to *The Last Emperor* (1987), every Bertolucci movie is a locking of horns between past and present. Every movie is about the quest for salvation, political-historical or private-spiritual. And every movie has a visual style based on concealment and revelation."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

In cerca del mistero [*In Search of Mystery*] (poetry) 1962

La commare secca [*The Grim Reaper*; director and co-screenwriter with Pier Paolo Pasolini and Sergio Citti] (film) 1962

Prima della rivoluzione [*Before the Revolution*; director and co-screenwriter with Gianni Amico] (film) 1964

**Partner* [director and co-screenwriter with Gianni Amico] (film) 1968
†*Il conformista* [*The Conformist*; director and co-screenwriter with Marilu Parolini and Eduardo de Gregario] (film) 1970
‡*La strategia del ragno* [*The Spider's Stratagem*; director and co-screenwriter with Marilu Parolini and Eduardo de Gregorio] (film) 1970
Ultimo tango a Parigi [*Last Tango in Paris*; director and co-screenwriter with Franco Arcalli] (film) 1972
Novecento [*1900*; director and co-screenwriter with Franco Arcalli and Giuseppe Bertolucci] (film) 1976
La luna [*Luna*; director and co-screenwriter with Franco Arcalli and Giuseppe Bertolucci] (film) 1979
La tragedia di un uomo ridicuolo [*Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*; director and screenwriter] (film) 1981
Bertolucci by Bertolucci (autobiography) 1987
The Last Emperor [director and co-screenwriter with Mark Peploe] (film) 1987
The Sheltering Sky [director and co-screenwriter with Mark Peploe] (film) 1990
Little Buddha [director and screenwriter] (film) 1994
Stealing Beauty [director and screenwriter] (film) 1996
§*Besieged* [director and co-screenwriter with Clare Peploe] (film) 1999

*This film was adapted from the novel *The Double* by Fyodor Dostoevski.

†This film was adapted from the novel *Il conformista* by Alberto Moravia.

‡This film was adapted from the short story "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" by Jorge Luis Borges.

§This film was adapted from the short story "The Siege" by James Lasdun.

CRITICISM

Robert Burgoyne (review date fall 1986)

SOURCE: Burgoyne, Robert. "The Somatization of History in Bertolucci's *1900*." *Film Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (fall 1986): 7–14.

[*In the following review, Burgoyne discusses how Bertolucci's* 1900 *portrays history from the perspective of both the individual and the peasant class as a whole.*]

History in Bertolucci's ***1900*** is fashioned much like a gestalt drawing, with two highly antagonistic versions of time and events unfolding within the same narrative space. From one perspective, the film purports to analyze the "poetic awakening" of the Italian peasant class to their own historical significance; from another, it appears to concentrate on what psychoanalysis calls the destiny of the individual subject. As Bertolucci says, "everything that happens in this film on a personal level is thus relegated to have a larger, historical meaning." (13) But in spite of this attempt to reconstruct the formation of individual subjectivity as an allegory of a broader history, these two narrative schemas—the imaginary history of the subject and the history of the construction of a revolutionary class—are largely contradictory. With the psychoanalytic subject installed at the center of the historical process, history acquires a predetermined outcome, conforming to a fixed pattern of positions and roles. Moreover, this type of narrative apparatus is capable of registering public events only where they impinge upon the individual character. Subordinating political history to the narrative *telos* of subjectivity, the film seems to willfully evade the material contingencies of historical transformations.

1900 thus appears to flout the Althusserian dictum that "History is a process without a *telos* or a subject." (91) Somewhat scandalously, its mode of representation rests squarely on principles of narrative closure and human agency, with the individual subject explicitly foregrounded as historical agent. The novelty and potency of the peasants' claim upon history seems to be deflected into a standard, nineteenth-century plot design. The view of history it presents collapses the particularity of the peasant experience—a class which had arrived at the twentieth century, in Bertolucci's view, devoid of historical consciousness—to a metaphoric identity with the universalism of the Oedipal pattern. This is expressed in a concrete fashion in the film's climactic scene, which links the birth of historical consciousness in the peasant class to the symbolic execution of the Padrone—a moment which belongs equally to a political and a psychoanalytic scenario.

But a contrary and equally compelling argument is that it is precisely the narrative structuration of history in ***1900*** and its foregrounding of teleology that expresses its political message most fully. If we ignore, for the moment, the psychoanalytic content of the text, and concentrate simply on its overall narrative configuration, we find that its formal structure places it squarely within the Marxian tradition. Narrative form, and the teleological orientation intrinsic to it, may be seen as central elements, indispensable to a Marxian reading of history. As Hayden White observes: "Narrativity . . . represents a dream of how ideal community might be achieved . . . (It is) the narrativity of its structure that gives Marxian historiography its imaginative power." (2) The ideal of totalization that White refers to inheres particularly in the *telos* of narrative form, for it is through this feature that the identity of the singular moment with the scattered time of history is established. Without a teleological destination, as White comments, "Marxism loses its power to inspire a visionary politics. Take the vision out of Marxism, and all you will have left is a timid historicism of the kind favored by liberals." (5)

Now the specific target of Althusser's influential repudiation of narrative form in historiography is the traditional Marxist explanation of history as a sequence of modes of production, understood as a linear series extending from

the primitive clan, through feudalism, and leading up to a final stage of world communism. In a more general sense, Althusser's statement is emblematic of the turn away from diachronic forms of analysis in current Marxian theory, which are seen as flawed by their reductive, "periodizing" hypotheses. But with the abandonment of the "stages" theory of history, the very theme which provides Marxian historiography with its momentum is lost. That theme is its utopian orientation. Marxist historiography is organized like a perspective drawing around a temporal vanishing point, with the lines of force thrown off by the historical event in the past reorganized in the field of the future. By denying this aspect of its doctrine, it sacrifices its most compelling dimension, the source of its imaginative power. What Fredric Jameson calls the fear of utopian thinking in current Marxism makes it impossible to imagine a radically different social formation of the future.

It has therefore fallen to the arts, according to White, to rediscover and cultivate this theme. ***1900*** is a striking case in point: it restores this repressed, "forgotten" theme of Marxism to the forefront, staging an openly wish-fulfilling, utopian resolution to the historical tribulation of the peasantry. Furthermore, its "dream of ideal community" flows directly from the narrative form of the work, which links past, present and future in a patterned unity. In a surprising reversal of expectation, however, the very "romance of the subject" which at first appeared to contradict the wider designs of an authentic class history, now appears to convey the utopian message. Far from deviating from the Marxian topic of the film, the destiny of the individual subject proves to be essential to its articulation, for it is through the Oedipal patterning of the text that history in ***1900*** becomes invested with desire—a precondition for the emergence of the theme of the utopian. This admixture of history and desire goes well beyond the simple fashioning of maternal and paternal correspondences to the historical process: the utopian register in the film emerges through the kind of somatic drama generally encountered under the rubric of the history of the subject, but here applied to the collective body of the peasantry. Moreso, I will argue that the articulation of a collective synthesis is dependent upon the kind of fictional patterning which produces and organizes the subject's individual desire. The "dream of totalization" desire affords on a personal level—"the identity of the one with the many"—is here translated into a model of the historical process. We might say, echoing Jameson, that an older, Oedipal structure in ***1900*** is emptied of its original content and subverted to the transmission of an entirely different, utopian message.

Desire in this expanded sense thus comprises the principal vector of historical events in ***1900,*** determining their course. It constitutes what narratology would call a core semantic structure, unifying different narrative actions. Consequently, it not only operates in the service of the utopian theme, but also conveys the destructive, annihilatory forces of history. Both are generated from the same dynamic of plot. Counterposed to the clairvoyant history of the peasants, with its invisible yet structuring domain of the utopian, is the type of history associated with the Fascists, which is manifested in ***1900*** as sadistic spectacle. The persecutory figure of Attila, for example, the leader of the Fascists, whom Bertolucci calls the "summary concentrate of all the aggressive forces in the film," (18) clearly represents the inversion of utopian values: yet his very destructiveness shares the features of the erotic which we have associated with the utopian aspect of the text. What emerges is a pairing familiar from psychoanalysis—a history turned by erotic and destructive forces. The film thus seems to demonstrate that the patterning of history obeys a deeper logic, a deeper classification system, that it is mediated by what Jameson calls the "codes and motifs . . . the *pensée sauvage* of the historical imagination." ("Marxism and Historicism," 45) The history of class antagonism and the imaginary history of the subject here interpenetrate, unfolding within the unity of a shared code an unconscious "master plot" of struggle, domination, and rebellion.

The initiatory events of the plot can be read in terms of this dual significance. Bertolucci describes the scene which opens (and closes) the film in the following fashion: "It's a day, the 25th of April, the Italian Day of Liberation, and it includes the whole century. We took it as a sort of symbolic day on which is unleashed, on which flowers this peasants' utopia. . . . This day of utopia contains the century . . . the premise of this day lies in the past, but the day also contains the future . . ." (16) What Bertolucci calls the "stratification of time elements," the simultaneous projection of different temporal frames, is thus one of the signifiers of the utopian. Most importantly, this simultaneity condenses the historical and the psychoanalytic dimensions of the text. In the opening moments of the film, a partisan youth is shown breaking into the villa of the landowner and surprising the Padrone in his rooms, holding him captive with a rifle. When the Padrone asks him his name, the boy replies "Olmo," adopting the mantle of the absent revolutionary hero. When asked if he knew who Olmo was, the boy partisan says simply, "He was the bravest." The aging Padrone responds in a wry fashion, for he is here made to confront a kind of youthful incarnation of his boyhood friend, who was born the same day as he in 1900. The opening images of the film thus immediately intersect two moments in time, skewering the past to the present. The revolution, the text implies, has become young again, while the old regime of the landowners has faded. The corrosive effects of temporal processes seem to register only on the body of the Padrone, while the peasant class is seen as perpetually young, perpetually engaged in struggle. The confrontation of the Padrone and the youthful rebel, however, also carries a strong psychoanalytic connotation. Two messages are superimposed in this scene: it represents both the culmination of the historical process—the end of history—with all moments compressed into one, and a rehearsal of the psychoanalytic pattern of Oedipal repetition, the inevitable recycling of generational conflict.

It is through this double narrative *telos* of subjectivity and history, which crystallizes around the image of the body and its subjugation or renewal, that the text projects an alternative history, in which the course of empirical events is transformed into the "possible world" of the utopian. History is in effect "somatized" in ***1900,*** embodied and represented in a way that recalls Marx's observation that even the senses have become theoreticians. (352) At the film's dénouement, for example, Olmo's daughter Anita stands atop a haywagon and proclaims that she can see, off in the distance, the routing of all oppression and the restoration of a harmonious world. The libidinal and erotic aspect of the utopian is explicitly rendered here, as the character puts her hands between her widespread legs as she looks off into the distance and joyfully describes the advent of a new age, conspicuously associating desire with a transfigured world. The erotic connotations of the utopian are rendered in an equally explicit fashion in an earlier scene. As Olmo and his pregnant wife make love, the camera focuses on a primitive drawing on the wall behind them featuring a red banner being carried aloft to a rising yellow sun. This lamination of images associates revolution with the natural processes of conception and birth, a notion which is reinforced by the fact that the child here in the womb will grow into the adolescent girl who stands atop the haywagon at the end of the film, legs wide in a gesture of fecund pleasure.

The erotic overtone is not restricted, however, to the lyrical moments in the film. It also surfaces during scenes of political and sexual persecution. In a sequence that parallels the carnal encounter described above, the aristocratic couple, Ada and Alfredo (the future Padrone) are shown making love in the rough, "jocular" style of the peasants as it has been traditionally imaged: tumbling in the hay, with his aggression answered by her laughter. Meanwhile, through a series of intercuts, we witness the burning of the peasant meeting hall. Over the shots of the fire, Bertolucci superimposes the faces of the three peasant elders who have just perished in the conflagration. The conventional association of passion with flames is here given a diabolical twist, as the sense of agency communicated by this intercutting is unmistakable. While the Fascists may have lit the blaze, it is the self-absorption of the aristocracy that permits it. Underscoring this point is the sound of a fiddle being idly played by a child in the background.

The historical compact of the Fascists and the aristocracy is rendered in sexual terms as well. As the new Padrone, Alfredo's first act is to empower Attila to be his "watchdog." It is a contract which is immediately acted upon. At the wedding of Alfredo and Ada, soon after their session in the hay, the two arch-villains, Regina and Attila, stage their own, parallel wedding, consummating it with the sex murder of a young boy. They emphasize the mimetic aspect of this ritual by calling the young victim, a child of the aristocracy, their "best man." The crime is then blamed on Olmo, the communist leader of the peasants, who is promptly set upon by the Blackshirts. Alfredo is witness to this brutal beating, and although he is now in a position of power, he allows his friend to be used as a scapegoat. A kind of blood bond is here established between Attila, Regina and Alfredo. In a sense, the "marriage" that has taken place has occurred between the aristocracy and the Fascist party, a union which is literalized in the bestial coupling of Regina, the aristocratic cousin of the Padrone, and Attila, leader of the Fascists. Throughout the film, the historical role of the Fascists will be associated with criminal acts of sexual aggression.

Desire in these scenes is thus immediately translated into a kind of historical force. These three moments of erotic exchange, between three different couples, all communicate a message about history, providing a carnal enactment of historical causes. The utopian and the malignant undercurrents of the historical process are made visible through this motif; moreso, libido here appears as the driving and motivating basis of historical events, the mainspring of collective change and class oppression.

The body itself thus becomes the principal site of the historical conflicts focused by the work, the junction of the utopian and the repressive tendencies implicit in its unfolding. The somatization of history in the film is concretely expressed not only in scenes of erotic interaction, but also in the foregrounding of the body as a figure of collectivity. This takes the form of the psychoanalytic drama of the whole body versus the body in bits and pieces. On the one hand, a sort of phantasmatic circulation of lost objects, part objects, runs through the film: a missing ear, an absent father, a runaway wife, a stolen pistol. . . . On the other, a sense of a collective body, infinitely extensible, emerges from the utopian message of the text. The conflation of the individual body and the collective body in the domain of the peasantry provides a positive reworking of the somatic crises typically enacted within an Oedipal framework. It's a history, like *Finnegan's Wake,* in which the individual body becomes the projective ground for the unfolding of a national history.

One passage illustrates this opposition quite clearly, commingling the images of the continuous body and the body disaggregate. It begins with Olmo and Alfredo as boys, waiting out a storm in a loft where they cultivate silkworms (a scene reminiscent in setting and imagery of the "silken kimono" sequence in ***The Conformist***). Olmo takes off his wet clothes, and the two boys compare penises—Alfredo is circumcized, while Olmo is not, and they remark upon a penis's similarity to the silkworms. When the storm breaks, a radiant city is suddenly made visible on the horizon. As Olmo describes the unfamiliar steeples and smokestacks in terms of ships' masts and tall trees, with Alfredo correcting him, a strong sense of wonder and possibility arises. The scene as a whole suggests a kind of prelapsarian existence, with the individual body, the natural world, and a kind of utopian landscape woven into the same configuration.

This mood is dramatically altered, however, in the ensuing scene. As the two boys run into the fields to tell of their vision of the city, they encounter the Padrone, berating the

peasants for the damage the storm has caused. Estimating that half the crop has been destroyed, the Padrone decides to cut the peasants' share in half. In a gesture of defiance, one of the peasants—a minstrel—takes his knife and cuts off one of his own ears, handing it to the Padrone. The Padrone strides away with the ear firmly clenched in his hand.

This gesture of self-mutilation inscribes the body directly into political discourse. The oppression of an entire class is signified by the maiming of a single body. It is the definitive reversal of the sense of somatic unity established earlier. Olmo's point-of-view is again emphasized, as his grandfather expressly tries to keep him from witnessing the act, to no avail. Again, the figure of the Padrone explicitly condenses the notions of the punitive father and the class tyrant.

The severed ear in the possession of the Padrone may be said to signify the captivity of an entire class. The somatic level at which this class discord is expressed, however, is described by Bertolucci as a prepolitical moment: "It's a very individualistic protest gesture, still, which synthesizes, however, the desperation, the misery of a whole group of peasants, and which in the next scene is immediately carried further as I show how the idea of the strike is born." (16) The body thus inaugurates a trajectory which leads to the peasants' full embracing of the historical process. The body in pieces becomes an analogue for the enslaved social body, while the aggregate body of the strikers becomes a figure for an ever widening kind of unity.

Directly after this pre-political moment of self-mutilation, however, the film invokes the utopian theme which, we have found, subtends and precedes the overtly political actions of the peasantry. It is signified here by the production of music, which will prove to be the emblematic expression of the utopian throughout the film. After returning to his family, minus an ear and nearly bereft of food for the day, the peasant begins to play a tune on his ocarina. The soothing music seems to be addressed to the missing ear, and beyond that, to the peasants' condition of servitude and loss in general. The association of music with the recovery of a lost plenitude is indicated here, and made explicit at the end of the film, when various peasants demand that the Padrone make restitution for their missing fingers, husbands and teeth. These demands are all followed by musical interludes, as if the peasants were invoking a domain in which injury and deprivation did not exist.

Music is associated throughout the film with moments of political significance. Its function in ***1900*** can be compared to Jacques Attali's idea of music as a herald of social change, presaging a new social formation in a "prophetic and annunciatory way." In Attali's view, change manifests itself in music before it is reflected in social institutions. Music may thus be interpreted as a prefiguration of future social formations. This is borne out in ***1900.*** The convulsive transformations of the social order in the twentieth century are literally announced by the death of Verdi, an announcement which introduces the body of the film beginning in 1900. The music of Verdi rises ominously on the sound track, together with the lament of the jester Rigoletto that "Verdi is dead!" as a bridge between the overture and the main part of the work, coupling the ringing statement of the boy partisan in 1945, "There are no more masters!" with the first cries of the newborn Olmo in the year 1900.

An even more powerful sense of music as a herald of social transformation emerges in the domain of the peasants. Peasant music in ***1900*** represents not only the collective channeling of misery into a form of festival, it also signifies the imminence of political change. The two peasants' strikes, for example, are strongly marked by music. In the strike of 1908, there is a lone accordionist who follows the departing train which carries Olmo and the other peasant boys off to school, a train which is decked out in the red banners of the striking peasants. The martial component of the music is escalated in the second strike of 1918, as a full-scale chorus issues from the massed strikers. Music is played at the climax of the film as well, especially during the trial of Attila and the Padrone, which takes place in a graveyard (as Attila intones: "I am that cruel time . . .") and which is literally organized around its musical interludes. And in the film's final sequence, an epilogue featuring Olmo and Alfredo on the day of their deaths, a lone musician is again heard as the film shifts into a new temporal mode of simultaneity, in which past, present and future are compressed into one. In this visualization of the unity of separate instants of time, music comes to replace speech, as if the utopian offered a different mode of communication as well as a different order of time.

One could analyze the "sedimentation" of musical styles in the film—the peasant sonorities, the Verdi passages, the minimalist abstractions of Ennio Morricone—as representative of specific social formations co-present in the film. But the only significant *diegetic* music originates with the peasantry. Music in this context is directly related to the theme we have been elaborating here—the individual body as an image of the social body. It serves as an agent of transformation in the film, fulfilling the promise of a social utopia. It thus recodes the agony of the body, which is so prominent a feature of peasant life, into an instrument of political expression.

Functioning almost as a musical extension of the film itself—like the closing ballet of Renaissance comedy—the ending of the film represents an explicit staging of the utopian dimension. Here the two antagonists, the now elderly Olmo and Alfredo, are transformed into youthful versions of themselves, as the film cuts between their past and present manifestations. Here too, the characters have aged so as to become virtual doubles of the grandfathers. Many of the features we have associated with the utopian—the multiplication of temporal frames, the renewal of the body, the presence of music—are manifested

in this lyrical coda. The cancelling of the negative effects of temporal processes, a theme which had been encoded in the music, emerges here directly.

But there is an inconsistency here as well, which I believe can be resolved only by returning to our original problematic of desire and history. The utopian theme has been associated throughout the film with the peasants. The division between the peasant world, with its structuring domain of the utopian, and the quotidian world of the aristocracy has been so pronounced—distinguished expressly by the absence of temporal and physical decay in the peasant world—that we may speak of the narrative universe of ***1900*** as a split narrative world, with very different "systems of regularities" governing each world.[1] Nevertheless, Alfredo, the Padrone who presides over the persecution of the peasantry, is part of the utopian resolution of the text. Bertolucci, indeed, speaks of the two principal characters of ***1900*** as if they were equivalent: "In the end, I find that these people are the reverse faces of the same personality, that each represents one part of a complex character. Thus they are not only representatives of a dialectic of a social nature, but they can sort of help us to peep into the inner structures of the century." (15)

The language of voyeurism which Bertolucci here employs suggests that history, focalized through these two class representatives, has something in common with erotic display. The music which accompanies the utopian reunification of the two antagonists at the close of the film reinforces this interpretation. As Attali writes: "Music, directly transacted by desire and drives, has always had but one subject—the body, which it offers a complete journey through pleasure, with a beginning and an end. A great musical work is always a model of amorous relations, a model of relations with the other, of eternally recommendable exaltation and appeasement, an exceptional figure of represented or repeated sexual relations. . . . Any noise, when two people decide to invest their imaginary and their desire in it, becomes a potential relationship, future order." (143) The "codes and motifs" of the historical imaginary are thus placed on open display in ***1900.*** The history of the twentieth century is seen to result from a kind of traumatic splitting, as in psychoanalysis, of an original unity. Thus the somatic expression of history in the film receives its final figuration in an image reminiscent of Plato's androgyne: an emblem of sexual unity and division translated into class terms.

Note

1. Briefly, the idea of the *narrative domain* proceeds from the observation that the narrative world projected by typical texts is not singular or unified, but that it contains different and contradictory semantic features, which partition the text into separate "domains." These semantic domains operate under totally different "systems of regularities." As Thomas Pavel writes: "plot-based texts do not necessarily describe homogeneous (imaginary) worlds. It rather appears as if each narrative structure is divided into several *domains* centered around one or several main characters. These domains may display a great variety of properties. Notably, the domains of a single literary work need not be governed by the same regularities." (Pavel 105)

   Taking the idea of narrative domains one step further, Lubomir Dolezel posits the category of the invisible narrative world. Using Kafka's *The Trial* as his principal example, Dolezel argues that an invisible narrative domain structures the universe of Kafka's fiction, a domain which operates according to a rather strict partition from the world of quotidian narrative reality. The world of Josef K, for example, is strictly partitioned from the invisible bureaucratic machinery of the courts in *The Trial.* This difference can be described in terms of four propositions. Epistemologically, very little can be known about the courts, with even the lawyers who litigate cases ignorant of its workings. The courts remain shrouded in mystery. Ontologically, the invisible domain of the courts operates under a very different set of presuppositions, in which even the dimensions of space and time (the infinite spaces and temporal randomness of the courts) appear to be markedly differentiated from the world inhabited by Josef K. Axiologically, too, the world of the courts is a world of topsy-turvydom, with the values of good and bad, better and worse, seemingly capriciously and whimsically assigned. Finally, the action propositions which obtain between the two worlds in Kafka are strikingly asymmetrical—the invisible world can effect changes and advance actions in the visible world, but not vice versa: the visible world has no access to and no possible impact on the invisible domain.

   In a narratological reading of *1900,* we could extend the concept of the invisible world to the notion of the utopian—seen as a kind of invisible force-field, a structuring yet inaccessible domain. Like the invisible world in Kafka, it can be signified only indirectly. It is inaccessible to direct vision, yet there are characters who seem to have partial access to it.

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