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Fascism in the Contemporary Film

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Fascism in the Contemporary Film

The last few years have seen among serious young European directors like Bertolucci, Costa-Gavras and Saura a resurgence of interest in fascism, not as the arena for physical combat between absolute forces of right and wrong, but as a social phenomenon. These directors, and they include such older, established figures as Visconti and Petri, reveal a reawakened interest in examining its social structure and its psychological origins in the mass man who is most susceptible to fascist movements.

Films about fascism are, of course, not new. But the formula for the "antifascist" film as practiced in both Hollywood and Europe has always involved more apologetics than truth. With the exception of the neorealist examples, the Italian films, of which a recent example is Luciano Salce's *The Fascist* (1965), have shown the Germans as congenital brutes and those who joined the Italian fascists as misguided but good-hearted buffoons. The American films concentrated on violence and the show of strength, marking America's growing hegemony over Western Europe and indeed the world.

The entire period of radical upsurge to which the younger directors now dealing more seriously with fascism belong can be dated usefully with the death of Stalin in 1953 and the Hungarian revolution of 1956 on the one hand, and the Cuban revolution of 1959 on the other. The reassessment of the Soviet Union meant an intellectual liberation for Marxists (this is especially apparent in both of Costa-Gavras's recent films, *Z* and *The Confession*) and a new appetite for analysis of capitalism in disintegration, or what it often results in, fascism. Free from having to apologize for the atrocities of Stalin's Russia, young intellectuals could finally look at the fascist period from a socialist point

of view. Thus Costa-Gavras and the others began to trace the origin of fascism and to see a connection in countries like the United States between the tolerance of civil liberties at home and social exploitation and a fascist repression of dissent in its "colonies." The upsurge of revolution in the colonial world has meant for young intellectuals like Bertolucci an impetus for reassessing the recent political history of his own country. And the worker-student struggles of France and Northern Italy in the late sixties suggested an alternative to the capitulation to fascism of the twenties and thirties. It made the study of fascism no longer passé: directors are sensing the possibility of new fascist repression or even its rise to power in the advanced capitalist countries. It has made them feel the urgency of examining the history of fascism and see the study of fascism as relevant once again.

The new films exploring the fascist sensibility are among the most interesting and challenging work being done in the film today. When they are at their weakest, these films substitute melodrama for a sustained dramatization of the circumstances under which capitalist countries have resorted to fascism. Yet some quite unique examples of the political film have emerged from this new interest: Bertolucci's *Il Conformista* (1970); Visconti's *The Damned* (1968); Petri's *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (1970); Costa-Gavras's *Z* (1969) and *The Confession* (1970); and Carlos Saura's *The Garden of Delights* (1970).

These films (and even the feeble American example, Paul Newman and Stuart Rosenberg's *WUSA*) have integrated within their texture three major areas of exploration: the social dynamic and means by which fascism functions; the nature of the resistance to fascism;

and, most successfully, the dissection of the personality particularly susceptible to fascism, with its configuration of homosexual anxiety and sadomasochism. Pessimistic about the marshalling of forces to prevent a new rise of fascism, not one of these recent films can with confidence suggest a mode of resistance or the nature of a political alternative that would mobilize opposition to a power structure which abandons all democratic rights and then attempts to win people over through the use of charismatic demagogues. However, with ruthless and searing penetration Bertolucci in both *Il Conformista* and *The Spider's Strategem* (1969–70) condemns the default of intellectuals to devise and lead the necessary resistance to the rise of fascist power.

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National Socialism is out to create a uniformly sado-masochistic character, a type of man determined by his isolation and insignificance, who is driven by this very fact into a collective body where he shares in the power and glory of the medium of which he has become a part.

—Franz Neumann, BEHEMOTH

The fascist personality that emerges in the figures of Marcello Clerici in *Il Conformista*, the Police Inspector in *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*, Martin von Essenbeck in *The Damned*, and even the murderers Yango and Vango in *Z*, consistently reveal a latent or manifest homosexuality accompanied by a sense of frustration that finds relief only in continued acts of sadistic brutality. Searching for a theory to account for this type, Petri, Bertolucci, and Visconti subscribe to Wilhelm Reich's sense of the connection between vulnerability to fascism, and, as Reich put it, "the repression and distortion of the sexual life." This repression succeeded in distorting aggression into brutality. The implication is not that homosexuals all display such a pattern. Too many homosexuals are artists, rebels, and gentle people for that. Rather, it is that feared homosexuality results in a self-hatred derived from

scorn or unwillingness to accept such feelings; the defenses mobilized against it lead the personality to behave brutally. This mechanism is too widely known to warrant the charges against these directors that their relating homosexuality to fascism is simplistic. Petri chooses a policeman as cryptofascist type precisely because the police bully is so notoriously anxious about his masculinity. No less credible is Bertolucci's Marcello, covering up conscious homosexual tendencies aroused by a movement pronouncedly oriented toward feats of male strength. And most obvious a likely fascist recruit is Visconti's Martin, who, long abused by parental manipulation, can express his sexuality only in cruel ways. These particular manifestations of homosexuality, all characterized by self-hatred, seem to be fascist prototypes and very unlikely to be recruited to a movement with humanitarian means and goals.

Reich located the origin of sexual repression in the institution of the patriarchal family in which a father possessing absolute power engendered the subservience of his children to another absolute power, the state. He reproduced in his children his own submissive attitude toward the state's authority. Subscribing to this theory, Visconti, Bertolucci, and Saura treat the fascist sensibility in the genre of the family chronicle.

Visconti's much remarked upon (by Bertolucci for one) "operatic" expressionism in *The Damned* with its gothic interiors expresses as well the crushing of the sexual freedom of the young by an oppressive patriarch, Joachim von Essenbeck, whose ritual murder climaxes the first section of the film. The isolated, also gothic mansion of the Cano family in Saura's film visually expresses the same theme. In *Conformista* the hero, Marcello Clerici, pays a visit to his family mansion—old, decaying and now ruled over by his mother alone. The surreal and stifling evocation of the past visually explains Clerici's decision to join the fascists because he has a powerful need to be "normal." Thus too the sadism of characters like Petri's Police Inspector (he is given no proper name), Clerici,

and Martin von Essenbeck has at its root an overwhelming desire created in childhood for an all-powerful father. They search for an alliance to replace the one with their absent patriarchs. Clerici's father is in an insane asylum, having gone mad with guilt over participation in the torture of his own victims. Martin's father has died in World War I.

Ashamed of this need, feeling impotent before it, these potential fascists develop a contempt for the powerless. Martin scorns his mother's lover, Friedrich; the Inspector despises the student radicals who taunt him; Clerici is contemptuous of his former professor, an antifascist and would-be substitute father. A lust for power replaces responsibility for the homosexual aspects of the self the individual holds in contempt and wishes not to face. As revealed in the characters of the Inspector and Martin von Essenbeck, it is a lust that is insatiable. The compulsion to control a sexuality not sanctioned as "normal" sends these men into the arms of the fascists, whose doctrine that all things are permissible offers a club to the murderers of Lambrakis, an SS uniform to Martin von Essenbeck, a basement of secret files to the Inspector who takes charge of the intelligence work of a state not yet openly fascist, and a revolver to Clerici.

Perhaps taking cues from the actual history of fascism, with its suppression of the rights of women (a correlative to the latent or overt homosexuality of its men) Bertolucci, Visconti, and Petri reveal the women under fascism to be either mainly promiscuous whores (Anna in *Conformista*, Augusta in *Investigation*, Dreyfa in *Spider's Strategem*) or "all bed and kitchen," like Giulia, the mindless girl Clerici marries in his campaign not to be different. "To be normal is to turn to look at the ass of a pretty girl, see that others have done the same, and be pleased," says Clerici's best friend, the blind Italo-speaking Clerici's thoughts.

IL CONFORMISTA

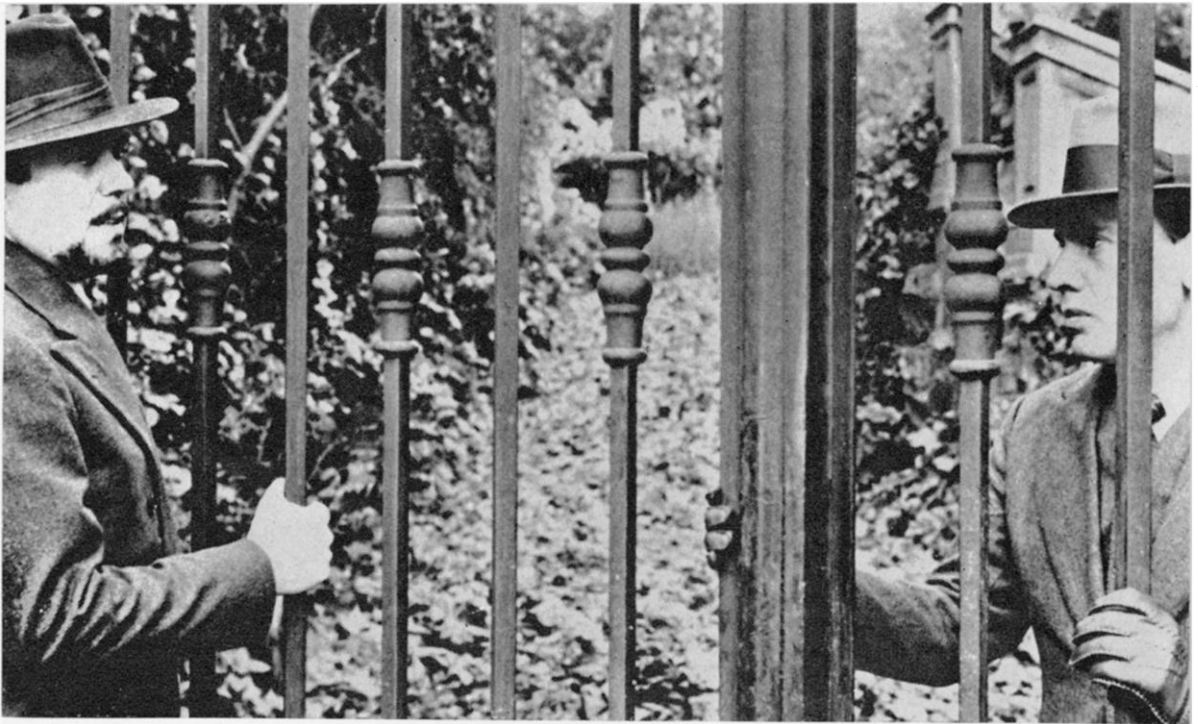
When Clerici (Jean-Louis Trintignant) has his decisive interview with the fascists, it takes

place in marble halls which dwarf him. The image reflects his sense of his own smallness and his fear: it is correlative to the panic in individuals who join the fascist mesh to escape from the sense of their inadequacies by identifying with an all-powerful force. The fascist leader asks Clerici why he wishes to join them. Many, he says, do it for the money, very few because they believe. Clerici says nothing, although the film reveals his motives as totally personal and psychological, having nothing whatever to do with the "cause." When the fascists are defeated in 1943, at the end of the film, Clerici denounces his former friends in hysteria and attaches himself to the antifascist side. Marching in triumph, the liberated crowd pays him no heed, sensing that his cause has not been theirs.

With fascism's defeat, Clerici abandons the pretense of normality. He finds refuge in the arms of a naked street urchin, thus completing the pattern of seduction that began when as a boy he was the seduced child. His seducer Lino (Pierre Clementi), a chauffeur like his mother's present lover, wore a uniform and high boots during the seduction, fondling his Mauser. So later Clerici joins the fascists in their high boots and proudly receives a pistol.

The origins of Clerici's homosexuality are located by Bertolucci in an Oedipal struggle. His seductive mother still receives her adult son half-naked in a flimsy negligee. She talks about her lover to awaken the jealousy of her son and ridicules his bride-to-be as "scrawny." She tells him baldly that she wishes his father dead. Reinstating himself as the sole man in her life, Clerici brutalizes her lover, who suddenly is not to be seen, surrealistically whisked away by the son's wish.

The easily awakened passionate attachment to his mother is combatted in Clerici's personality by sexual inhibition and powerful repression. Trintignant plays the part with a walk straight as a board, rigid, immobile. His mannerisms convey a compulsion toward control which, if relaxed, would expose him. This repression brings out in him as well an exag-



IL CONFORMISTA

gerated sense of honor and duty, and bravery (except when in his conflicted immobility he must finally shoot Anna Quadri) and self-control, all of which make him an ideal fascist agent. For the fascist personality the ideals of homeland and nation are transferences of the desire for mother and family. The fascist institutions themselves function to allow the pathologic individual a home.

Bertolucci's editing is Proustian, based upon the random association of ideas by an involuntary memory (most of the action of the film occurs in flashback as Clerici travels to the ambush of the professor). As he confesses to a priest before his marriage to Giulia, Clerici's mind returns to the scene when he was twelve and he and Lino were cavorting on the grass. The confession scene itself is recalled in a flashback while Clerici and his brutal fascist partner Manganiello pursue the antifascist professor. A child inadvertently steps in front of the car, introducing into the film the element of the fortuitous. Clerici immediately recalls himself as a twelve-year-old being seduced by Lino. The priest asks Clerici the crucial ques-

tion for the fascist state: "Are you a member of a subversive organization?" When he says that he is in the organization which hunts the subversives, the priest absolves him of all his sins; the church joins with the fascist state in manipulating the life of the individual. (Clerici's name itself expresses this unity in his person.) Even Clerici does a double take when he is so immediately set free.

It is as skillful of Bertolucci as it is significant that in the scene where he is given his orders for the murder, Clerici worries most over the loss of his hat: it is something he needs for cover, to conceal him from himself. In the moment of his initiation into fascism it depicts his reason for joining the fascists in the first place, reflecting desire to merge his identity within the bourgeois garb of respectability. Alienated from himself, he cannot summon the energy to make love to his new bride until he hears Giulia's account of how she was seduced by the paternal old family lawyer. Clerici tries step by step to reenact her loss of virginity. It is the story that arouses him, not her physical presence, just as it is the need to conceal

his homosexuality from himself that inspires him to join the fascists, and not a commitment to their ideology. 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.

Giulia is as passive a victim to Clerici as she is to Anna Quadri (Dominique Sanda), who appropriates her as soon as they meet. The film treats their shopping trip as an idyll. The camera pans the shop windows as if through the delighted eyes of Giulia, seemingly unaware that she is being seduced. Primarily a lesbian, Anna gives Giulia their address in Savoie where "the beds are enormous," betraying not only her husband, but also Marcello, her would-be lover. By seducing Giulia, Anna would involve Giulia in a betrayal of *her* husband too.

Marcello is drawn to Anna despite his homosexual feelings because she is like him; while she responds to him, she is actually desiring

his giddy wife. Anna is attractive to Clerici precisely because she is a lesbian, the analogue to his own latent homosexuality. With her he can vicariously enjoy a physical closeness to her husband about whom his ambivalent feelings, stemming from student days, reflect both respect and a sense of betrayal. That she is not ultimately sexually accessible, although they do make love once, makes it possible for him to show feeling for her.

At the end Clerici reverts to the form of his original trauma. He meets Lino again (another surreal note) and frantically accuses him of the murder of the Quadris. Thus he locates the root of his own destruction, the motor that generated his acts and his deceptions.

The camera work in *Il Conformista*, designed to pick up the nuances of decadence coexisting with political fascism, is expressionistic. Mocking Clerici's wish to be normal, the camera reveals how abnormal is the world he so longs to enter. Clerici's introduction to fascism is accompanied by the camera's zooming in on a party secretary making love to a beautiful woman lying on her back on his desk. The camera zooms back and we see Clerici's expressionless face peering through the curtains. When Clerici is given his first assignment, the fascist in charge shells dozens of walnuts at his desk with garish sensuality. Not surreal, these images yet express at once the arrogance and preposterousness of fascism. Other such visual anomalies include the pathos of the blind Italo's wearing one black and one brown shoe twice in the film. Dominique Sanda appears as a redheaded prostitute in the house in Ventimiglia where Clerici is told he must murder Quadri, then later as the blond Anna Quadri. Her death, a hand-held camera following her stumbling through the woods until she finally falls, her face covered with blood, is the most horrifying image in the film and the most compelling for its startling insistence upon depicting what, after all, fascism is about. And the image is prepared for by the fragmentation of reality, in a Cubist manner, with which Bertolucci has ordered the visual aspects of his film.

IL CONFORMISTA



Bertolucci even feels free enough to employ a visual poetic justice at the end of the film: in 1943, no longer prosperous, the Clericis are to be found in a dreary tenement, reduced to a proletarian condition. A naked light bulb hangs prominently from the ceiling. For the first time in the film Clericis is dressed, not in a smart grey suit, but in a colored sport shirt, open at the neck. Looking perceptibly older, having become a tired housewife, Giulia vacantly tells him that she knows of his complicity in the murder of the Quadris.

INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION

Visconti and Petri concentrate on the psychology of the fascist in power. Like Bertolucci, they locate the source of the fascism of

their heroes in a feared homosexuality that finds release only in studied brutality.

Petri's Inspector is literally a sadist. He takes delight in photographing his mistress Augusta (Florinda Bolkan) in a variety of poses of murder victims: a German stewardess strangled in the toilet of a plane, a singing star with her tongue ripped out. "Does it excite you when you find them?" Augusta asks him—as excited as he, a masochist to his sadist. The sadism of the Inspector is rooted, in Petri's characterization, in an acute sense of sexual inadequacy, exacerbated by a mistress who mercilessly ridicules him and tells him that he makes love "like a baby."

The Inspector finally kills her. He is placed in charge of the investigation of the murder of his victim, whom he has killed in exactly the sadistic manner previously enacted by them in



sexual play. As she comes down on top of him to be penetrated, he cuts her throat—a depiction they had earlier observed in photographs and mock-performed. (That within a fascist-moving culture woman is treated as a sexual object alone is revealed in the characterization of Augusta herself, a glorified whore who holds court in a boudoir in negligees designed to reveal more than they hide, with low colored lights, stained-glass windows, and an enormous bed made up with black satin sheets.)

As the murderer-inspector proceeds to conduct his “investigation” he first wishes to pin the responsibility for the murder on a young, highly sensual, and potent revolutionary. The youth is not only the object of his hatred because he is a rebellious hater of authority and a licentious socialist, he is also the seducer of the Inspector’s mistress-victim and indeed the very lover in comparison with whom she ridiculed the Inspector’s love-making. It is also clear that the youth’s sensuality excites the Inspector himself. But simultaneously the Inspector proceeds to plant clues inculcating himself, forcing his department to see his own guilt while knowing he can evade the evidence he has himself supplied.

The murder of Augusta who exposed him to himself becomes the Inspector’s means of finding invulnerability within the neofascist ranks of the police department. Her murder coincides with his appointment as chief of the secret police. Like Clerici in *Il Conformista*, he sacrifices a vulnerable self (begging Augusta to consider him an adequate sexual partner) for an invulnerable one.

Like Bertolucci, Petri indicates in his fascist strong homosexual feelings. He caresses the necks of his subordinates and finds pleasure only with a whore for whose death he feels no remorse; cynically, he asks the examining physician whether she had an orgasm before she died. He has photographs of deep-sea divers and boxers in his ascetic, anally furnished apartment. And Augusta herself taunts the Inspector with his over-attachment to his mother, coaxing him to take off his undershirt

with the invocation that his “mother needn’t know.” Cutting off his tie, she acts out the role of a castrating mother.

Visually, *Investigation* is less interesting than the other films about fascism. Petri’s visual style is oriented toward creating a sense of the claustrophobia afflicting his hero. Augusta’s boudoir is dark and stifling, like the dungeons where the students are imprisoned and the cellar where the secret files are kept. The Inspector’s own office is a cubicle. Petri also focuses on images which reveal the Inspector’s illusions of grandeur about himself; huge reproductions of the Inspector’s fingerprints hung from the ceiling fill a room; the Inspector collects dozens of blue silk ties like the one he wore on the day of the murder; he expects 10,000 graffiti endorsements of Mao Tse-tung. He has proudly booked “600 homosexuals” and counted “70 groups of subversives existing outside the law.”

These images simultaneously suggest the Inspector’s paranoia as well as a lust for power satisfied only by the magnifying of his enemies. Volonte’s performance may be overstated in places, and he may shout too much, but Petri is looking for the truth behind the stereotype. For the first half of the film he is successful.

The film breaks down once the Inspector is devastated by the attack on him by his sexual and political rival Pace, who calls him “a criminal directing the repression.” The youth’s confidence and defiance are so powerful that the Inspector is rendered fearful before them. They make him feel inadequate and doubt the power of his office. Although the Inspector was well aware that every man becomes a child (vulnerable) when he is confronted by official authority, by laws, his power is undermined by his recognition of this fact. “I become the father,” he had said earlier, indicating Petri’s acceptance of the view that fascism makes use of individuals accustomed to subservience to a patriarch. “My face becomes the face of God,” he continued, indicating the complicity of the church with fascism.

The Inspector's downfall is completed at the end of the film with a dream in which he confesses to his superiors. His confession is not accepted, on the ground that any weakness revealed in the workings of fascist power weakens the authority of its entire structure—as, in truth, it does. The representatives of the ruling class who call on the Inspector are displeased with his sense of guilt. They wish him to continue his work without any sense that his act was a crime. Petri illuminates how the fear of inadequacy, of impotence, of homosexual “weakness” leads the Inspector to become a policeman, a sexual sadist, a voyeur, and a fascist. In pursuing others, the fascist is thus pursuing himself; in his fury to annihilate what is weak in him, he is returned to that very weakness. But those who use the Inspector, like those who used Clerici, are unconcerned by whether he is driven by a need for expiation and seeks punishment. Possessing privilege and power, but outnumbered by those they dominate, they need policemen who fear themselves and so would willingly serve a master.

Petri, leaving us with the dream, does not complete the scene. The Inspector's last act in reality is to bow to his chief, opening the door, convinced that he will be only “confessing his innocence.” Petri's illustration of the fascist personality in disintegration in the last third of the film weakens the earlier conception, suggesting as it does that the fascist is no serious threat, that the Maoist student need only expose him to himself as a criminal and he will fold up. The film degenerates into spoof with the dream sequence in which the Inspector is accused of a schizophrenia born of “the long and unrelieved exercise of power.” The Inspector is left as a weak and neurotic man who merely went too far and who can be absorbed back into the bureaucracy with little trouble. His criminality can be easily contained. The horror of the murder of Augusta in the first sequence of the film is palliated by the comedy of the last, in which Petri is more interested in showing the weakness of the Inspector than in the inherent danger of the type.

THE DAMNED

Visconti's *The Damned* takes the psychology of the members of the von Essenbeck family (in history, the Krupps, whose largest steel works was in Essen) as his focus. The opening scene visually introduces us to the high culture and wealth of the von Essenbecks—opulent furnishings, china, glassware, linen, paintings, chamber music: a culture, the film underlines, which rested upon wealth realized through arms merchantry. Visconti's visual style is most effective in his evocation of the old Germany, both in the von Essenbeck mansion and in the stylized funeral of Joachim von Essenbeck, complete with coach and horses. The factory, the dominant force in all the characters' lives, provides a “stable” background for the frame.

The film opens in 1933 when the social crisis endangering the old order has brought the Nazis to power and the von Essenbecks must sacrifice their cultured façade to the overt realities of power. Martin, grandson of the von Essenbeck patriarch Joachim, has become compulsively desirous of his mother Sophia (Ingrid Thulin). At Joachim's birthday party he performs for the family as a transvestite imitating Marlene Dietrich's Lola.

In the background of the film is the quest of the Nazis, assured of state power, for the von Essenbeck arms factories. And within this larger plot the SA and SS vie for hegemony within the Nazi movement, each needing control of the von Essenbeck arms for their survival. With the massacre of the SA in June 1934, the SS triumph is complete; in Visconti's film the SS then come to see in Martin a more reliable agent than Fredrich their “manager,” Sophia's lover whom they used to murder old Joachim on the night of the Reichstag fire. If Martin was enraged because the fire interrupted his transvestite performance, he is soon integrated into the Nazi movement. Ironically, it is Martin, the one von Essenbeck who was despised as a weak, perverse reject of the stern self-sufficient patriarchy, who finds in Nazism the perfect outlet for his psychosis. It is he



THE DAMNED

who personifies the merger of the old ruling group with the Nazi movement.

Heir to the steel works, Martin is a sadist, violator of children, transvestite, and matricide. Unlike Clerici who joins the fascists to escape from consciousness of the homosexuality he dreads, Martin finds with the fascists a legalized outlet for his sadomasochism and a form of homosexuality which would, in a nonfascist state, be treated as criminally deranged. Martin is ashamed of his dependence upon his mother and impotently jealous of Friedrich. He develops a contempt for the powerless that makes him eligible for the highest ranks of the SS. Visconti makes use of the known homosexuality of the Rohm clique (the SA) and shows how

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the massacre of June 1934 was followed by the ascendancy of another vicious homosexual, one more ruthless, within the highest ranks of the fascist state.

Recognizing that under fascism spontaneous sexuality repressed in the patriarchal family is imputed to a persecuted race (the scapegoat), Visconti has Martin become obsessed with and rape a Jewish child who then hangs herself. The incident is taken directly from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. In both film and novel it suggests a paradigm of depravity, heralding in the film an era in which, as Aschenbach, a von Essenbeck cousin and already in the SS, announces, "all things are permissible," again echoing Dostoevsky, this time Ivan Karamazov. (Visconti's literary sense pervades the film. His Aschenbach is of the next generation after Thomas Mann, who described in his novels the moral disintegration of the bourgeois order.)

It is a weakness in Visconti that he fails to treat the ambivalence of Nazism about homosexuality. The Nazis with their official cult of maleness scorned and persecuted homosexuals, reflecting fear of their own homosexual impulses. Yet Martin flourishes among them. Visconti is too facile in representing repressed motivation as overt behavior. Martin is himself made credible primarily in his ability to be at ease only with images of male strength and sexuality, less so in his sadism.

Unconscious of the distortions of his personality, Martin blindly acts out his Oedipal strivings. He rapes his little girl cousin on the night that is indeed "different from all other nights" in Germany—the dialogue ironically echoing the Passover Seder service of the Jews. Visconti cuts to Joachim in his bed awakened by the little girl's piercing scream, unnoticed by anyone else. His next cut is back to Martin under the table and from Martin to the Nazi SS arriving at the house to arrest Herbert Thallman, the liberal member of the family. The cutting from Martin's crime of violence to the SS which will provide a cover for such crimes both visually and conceptually comments on the morality of the Nazi takeover.

The portrait of Martin is a study in the dynamics of the personality most valuable for the implementation of fascist policies of terror and absolute control. Martin finally turns on his overpowering mother, raping her. Sophia von Essenbeck loses her mind and submits to a meaningless wedding followed by a suicide in which she and Friedrich are handed the cyanide by Martin himself. Visconti's epic melodrama is saved from sheer gothic horror by his conviction that fascism means an entirely new psychic order. Taut in his SS uniform, Martin observes the bodies of his mother and Friedrich, presses his heels together, and offers the "Heil Hitler!" salute: his loyalties have been transferred from the family to the Nazi state.

The opulence with which the von Essenbecks live sets the tone for the camerawork throughout the film. In contrast to the muted tones of *Il Conformista*, the colors are bold, the sounds unmistakable. But the flamboyance of the film visually tends to make of fascism a *Walpurgisnacht* of violence rather than a movement to which tacit consent, if not complicity, was given by many ordinary people. The ghoulish make-up and posture with which the mad Sophia is married to her lover Friedrich makes of Visconti's conception only a nightmare—from which one is confident of being saved by the return of reality. In this important sense Visconti's style works against his subject. Sophia is presented as witch-like harlot and manipulator with the camera focussing on her long fingernails. She can send the wife of Herbert Thallman to Dachau without a tremor and she is always ready to embrace her son if she must use him. The play of blue light on her through most of the film emphasizes her inhuman qualities. Its equivalent is the pallor of Martin.

THE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

Saura deals with the configuration of the fascist personality only in the abstract, and this is the central weakness of his imaginative use

of the surreal in depicting how living in fascist Spain immobilizes and laments the sensibility. The counterpart to Joachim van Essenbeck in *The Garden of Delights* is Antonio: middle-aged, once energetic director of a Spanish cement factory. Having lost his mind in an automobile accident which paralyzed him, Antonio can only grunt and recapitulate the grossest physical demands of early infancy. To restore him and retrieve the Swiss bank account number buried in his memory, his family seeks to recreate the events of his childhood, enacting scenes of his youth and childhood in a theater of the past. The ploy fails to work. Antonio cannot remember and the fortunes of the family are, as a result, destined to fall.

In the last scene of *Garden of Delights* Saura, abandoning even the very thin veneer of realism with which he has cloaked his allegory, has all of his characters moving in wheelchairs, not only the still paralyzed Antonio. Staring immobile into space, they cannot look at or see each other: each selfishly pursues his own ends. With Antonio at the center, an image of the failed hope for Spain's future, they pass like marionettes before the camera. Fascism has dehumanized and devitalized them, left them shells of human beings, deadened all capacity of each to feel for the other, just as none of his family felt sympathetically toward Antonio's accident.

Saura's central metaphor is that of the absence of self-knowledge, the paralysis of individuals who have been destroyed by fascism. This type appears in all serious films dealing with the psychology of fascism. It is evident in the Police Inspector of *Investigation* who has no knowledge of the infantile quality of his sexuality and can only murder his mistress when she taunts him with it. And it appears in the amnesia of Antonio, for what he wants to forget is the whole quality of his former life—his role as boss in the factory, as patriarchal heir to the family estate, as supporter of a church and state which were allied in the oppression of the populace during the Civil War. This is why Antonio is so fascinated by the

films he is shown of La Pasionaria's farewell to the International Brigades, why he watches the film over and over again, calling for *la película, la película*.

In the marvelous sequence which opens the film, half-surreal yet psychologically valid, Antonio is shut up in a room with a gigantic hog. He is being forced to experience a childhood event in the hope that by remembering this trauma, he will remember the number of the bank account as well. As a child he was threatened by the patriarch with castration. He was terrorized by being told that the pig would eat his hands and feet. Saura has the father literally assume the role of repressor of sexuality and provide the means by which the young male is made subservient. "What is important," says Antonio's father quite correctly, "are the symbols."

The trauma of Antonio is thus an unconscious rejection of his world by the only means accessible to him, a return to babyhood and the direct opposite of the aggressive behavior he manifested with the executives of the metaphorical cement factory when he was healthy and "normal." The only image that now appeals to him is that of his seductive "auntie" who took him to forbidden films. The aunt represents the very sexuality forbidden and repressed by the patriarchal family. The adult Antonio remembers very few things, but he does remember how his aunt repeatedly kissed him on the lips as a boy. At night he dreams of her.

Fascism has meant a total renunciation of individuality. Freed from fascism only as an amnesiac, Antonio must learn to write his name anew, define himself anew. Thus the accident which damaged his brain is also the sole means by which he can extricate himself from his role as ruthless industrialist. Lacking the heart to recover and resume his old role, Antonio must be declared "legally insane." In a fascist world there is no room for the rebel or the doubter who would reject a world and an imposed identity he despises. After the accident, Antonio's first words were "do what you want with

my body, but don't touch my head." His head is precisely the object of fascism and its first victim. The body is easily made to follow.

Saura's camera picks up the grotesquerie in the lives of his people, the ugliness of their self-centeredness: old Don Pedro tells the woman playing Antonio's mother in the reenactment to separate her mascaraed eyelashes with a pin; the hog led into the room to scare Antonio is enormous, grunting and squealing; at night Antonio is suddenly lying in a real cradle because he has regressed to childhood; Antonio, rebelling against learning to write his name, pedals his wheelchair across the law into the swimming pool—in his imagination.

Saura thus attempts to depict visually the unconscious impulses of his characters. He succeeds in this with a minimum of dialogue, relying upon our established sense of the motives of his people. Having seen Antonio dreaming of "Auntie" we accept the Buñuel-like moment when he refuses to drink his milkshake unless the maid bares her ample breast for him to stare at. While the camera is depicting the somber loveliness of autumn at Aranjuez, Antonio, rowing with his wife, suddenly begins to rock the boat, intoning, "an American tragedy, an American tragedy." Sympathizing with him in his flight from reality, Saura has us wishing him success.

Knights on horseback ride by, "Auntie" bursts into church in her nightgown to rescue "the saints," a mock-Eisensteinian battle has children throwing steel balls at each other with bloody results, over the music of Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*. These are the distorted images of Antonio's world. Saura leaves them as uninterpreted images for us to put together, and in part his film seems unsatisfying precisely because of its successful use of the conjunction of images alone for its meaning.

SOME AMERICAN EXAMPLES

American films which have dealt with the theme of fascism have attempted very little insight into the psychology of the fascist. Three

striking examples, Rossen's *All The King's Men* (the earliest and best), Kazan and Schulberg's *A Face In The Crowd*, and the recent *WUSA* see fascism as personal demagoguery alone, the lust for power of an individual who is intoxicated by his ability to manipulate masses.*

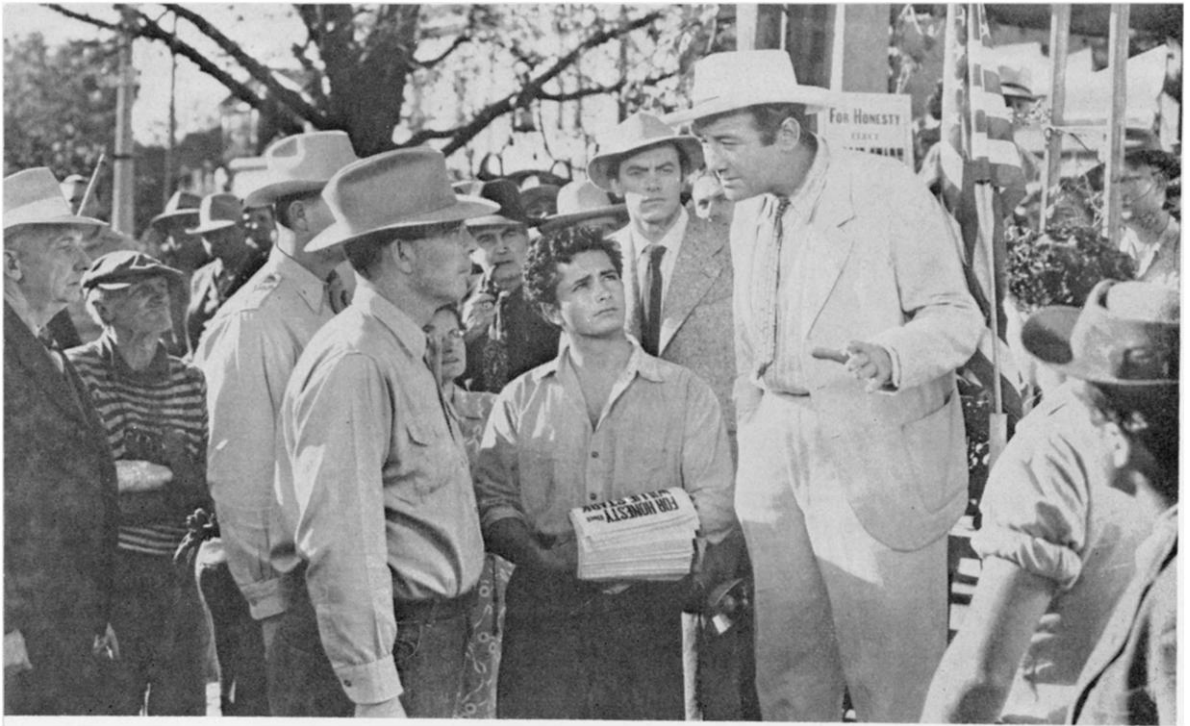
All The King's Men describes through the person of Willie Stark (Broderick Crawford) the pilgrim's progress of a genuine, popular crusader inflamed by rural misery and the callous corruption of wealth and political power based upon it. But his culmination as an authoritarian and cynically power-hungry demagogue is portrayed solely as a function of the corrupting force of power—an abstraction as circular as it is trite. For the film fails to explore why the need to be a leader of men which was fulfilled by speaking to their needs, and thus earning their support, should suddenly become equally fulfilled in the service of the oppressors of these people, using the illusions of people who still believe in him.

American films on the fascist theme have been far less interesting than the new European works. Visually, they resemble the tough murder melodramas of the 1940s—borrowing their clichés, which include the close-mouthed facial gesture and the cigarette dangling from the lips. *A Face In The Crowd*, *All The King's Men*, and even *WUSA*, now appear very studio-bound. They convey no sense of the reality of the world which the fascist demagogue seeks to transform. All seem low-budget enterprises, and the films bring with them a sense of the director's uncertainty about the marketability of his ideas. Thus there are few memorable visual illuminations in these films, certainly none to compete with the still, shimmering lakeside resort of the SA on the morning when the SS suddenly, inexplicably, appear from around a bend in the road in *The Damned*.

*Omitted from discussion here are those films which treat military coups by fascist-minded generals in the absence of a fascist movement. They include *Seven Days in May* and *A Gathering of Eagles*.

Nor with the snowy forest closing in on Professor Quadri and Anna in the climactic scene (both visually and thematically), which *The Conformist* makes so telling an evocation of the vulnerability of all to fascist terror. Only two shots of *All The King's Men* serve Rossen visually in a like manner: that in which Willie Stark (Broderick Crawford), flushed with his first victory, stands high upon a platform looking down upon the dwarfed mob of his supporters and the moment when Willie comes to the window of the capitol during his impeachment proceedings and in the dusk, in silhouette, raises his arms to the screaming crowd in a "Sieg Heil" moment of communication. Rossen contemptuously makes his point explicit by heavy-handedly cutting to an engraving on the side of the building: "The people's will is the will of the state." The American films are as visually insular as are their ideas: we watch Lonesome Rhodes in *Face In The Crowd* through the device of his television program, twice removed from the illusion of a real presence.

Thematically, American films about fascism fail to differentiate between power in itself and fascism. They concern themselves with the pragmatic struggle for power as an end in itself, offering little psychological nuance. The association between patriarchy and susceptibility to fascism in the European film appears only subliminally in the American. The sexuality exuded by Broderick Crawford in his role as Willie Stark does suggest that Huey Long may well have appealed to a forbidden longing for an all-powerful, accessible father. But Rossen seems unaware of this level of meaning and attributes the appeal of his womanizing demagogue to a mystical charisma and the ease with which naive Americans are duped. Kazan and Schulberg do the same thing with Lonesome Rhodes. Americans are presented as vulnerable to fascism, not because they have no fathers, but perhaps because they have no sense of history. The farmers in overalls and rimless eyeglasses who champion Willie Stark are presented with *tabula rasa* minds, ful-



ALL THE KING'S MEN: *Cardboard demagogue, cardboard followers.*

filling the American myth about our own innocence—which by 1970 couldn't be more unconvincing. It is too easy to have the cardboard demagogue followed by his counterpart, the cardboard follower. The American films about fascism do not convince us that the Europeans are exaggerating in their use of Reichian psychology nor that this psychology is inapplicable to the American scene. They insist that Americans too can, in certain circumstances, be raw material for fascist cadres. But they omit to tell us why. They fail to distinguish sufficiently between the party stalwart and the member of the "silent majority" who goes along with the fascist program without understanding what he is assenting to. Given the American director's contempt for the "mass man," it is probably because he does not credit this distinction. Stylistically, it is inappropriate to his technique of the broad stroke. In these films the "crowd scene" is too frequently a substitute for sustained dramatization of the process toward fascist beliefs.

Finally, only the contemporary European

directors, Saura, Visconti, Bertolucci, and Petri are concerned seriously with the formation of the fascist personality. In this sense, Costa-Gavras both filmically and thematically is much closer to the American directors who portray the power plays of fascism without looking into the origins of its hold on the individual personality. This is why he utilizes the techniques of the crime melodrama. As a study of how fascism makes its appeal to the population, transforming the alienated and impoverished into a mass of angry men, *All The King's Men* is the finest example of the genre. Yet without delving into the formation of the personality of the potential fascist, his childhood and his sexuality, the American film cannot account for his appearance nor for the transformation of the ordinary man into one of his blind adherents.

What all of these films make clear is that the fascist leader draws his strength from the unorganized, those who don't vote or belong to any existing party, or if they belong to one, are disenchanted. They draw upon the isola-

tion of the mass man and they show how the fascists recruit for their leadership, as in the case of Petri's Police Inspector, men who lack normal social relationships. This is equally true for Vango and Yango of *Z*. Among the elite, Hitler appealed to the decadent elements of the bourgeoisie, essentially antirational elements. Questing for extremes of sensation at all costs, they saw as values in themselves total indulgent license in violence and power. The Police Inspector's act of defiance satirizes the hypocrisy of bourgeois culture with its reluctance to blame those in power for their criminal acts. Augusta, the Inspector's sensualist victim, is no better than he; she reflects the bourgeoisie which used fascism to act out vicariously its sadistic impulses. The recent American film *Joe* illuminates the structure of fascism from a similar point of view with its alliance of alienated, cynical bourgeois (the advertising man) with right-wing worker, Joe. The latent sadism of both culminates in vigilantism: the slaughter of the hippies at the end. That fascism with its terrorism is self-destroying is revealed in the image of the advertising man killing his own daughter in his hysteria.

But the image of the worker as a mindless bulwark of fascist movements is a reactionary interpretation, shifting responsibility for fascism to its deepest victims. Superimposed over the credits of *The Damned*, in purely visual terms, Visconti dramatizes the victimization of the working class by industrial capitalists like the von Essenbecks. With the red-hot furnaces of the Krupp steel works glaring in the night as background, the shadows of workmen stand behind the credits. They stretch and cover their eyes—suggesting both their strength and their blindness to how decisive their rebellion could have been to a defeat of the fascists. The sequence is punctuated by the boiling up of black smoke heralding the imminent destruction of both Germany and its victims. Visconti's including this working-class image effectively intimates a fundamental truth about fascism—its use of the terminology of Marxism and the inequalities of capitalism as a means of neu-

tralizing the left and achieving the support of the disenfranchised.

Yet this hint at the beginning of *The Damned* is never developed in the course of the film. Neither Visconti nor the other contemporary directors exploring the theme of fascism delineate which sectors of the working class respond to fascism, which do not, and why. Nor do they suggest why the anticapitalist theme had to pervade the fascist appeal to the masses.

Most of the recent films treating fascist power expose an absence within the fascist state or even the would-be fascist leader of any declared political or economic principles short of a ruthless opportunism. In practice, fascism, to serve its own interests, could even ally itself with the official communist movement, if that movement is nonrevolutionary. Thus Costa-Gavras indicates in *Z* that the Bolshoi ballet is in Salonika on the evening of the assassination of Labrakis—a comment on the complicity of the Soviet Union with the fascist colonels; it reminds one of Stalin's telling German Communists that their true enemy was not Hitler, but the Social Democrats. Neither Willie Stark, Lonesome Rhodes, nor Bingamon of *WUSA* are shown to have any theory of government or coherent program of change. Illustrating the directors' awareness of the transitory impact of fascism is their disappearance at the end of the films they dominate. And at the end of *Il Conformista* in 1943 the fascist party disappears as if it had never existed.

The recent films about fascism are often at their best in depicting the behavior of fascism in power. Once fascism has concentrated all political power in the hands of the police, its inherent lawlessness can come to the surface. The violent impulses it has mobilized are now free to be expressed.

Z, *The Damned*, and *Investigation* illustrate how the more secret the workings of an organization, the greater is its power. If the Inspector has a basement of files where he even checks up on "my pals on the homicide squad," so does Aschenbach, the SS officer of *The Damned*. Each of these films dramatizes Han-

nah Arendt's point about the role of the secret police under fascism: "Not only is the organization *not* beyond the pale of the law, but, rather, it is the embodiment of the law, and its respectability is above suspicion." From this insight Petri takes his central conception.

The best cinematic representation of the cruelties of fascist power occurs not in the films dealing with actual fascism (the rounding up of the students in *Investigation* is more comic than frightening) but in Costa-Gavras's *The Confession*, set in Communist Czechoslovakia. Its hero, Artur London, is subjected to round-the-clock interrogations and condemned to dank cells for nearly two years. In a brilliant courtroom scene all of the defendants in the Slansky trial are made, without looking at each other, to confess to crimes they haven't committed. They don't even wince when eleven of the fourteen are designated "of Jewish origin." The anti-Semitism of London's torturers ("You and your filthy race are all alike") is as virulent as that of the Nazis. Costa-Gavras describes in Stalinist Czechoslovakia a fascist mentality which ruthlessly and systematically dispenses with even the rights of its privileged own.

Once fascism is in power, it can use any means necessary to retain its hegemony. Borrowing from the Germans, the fascists of Z use the theme of the betrayed homeland. Their leaflets read: "Restore our country to its rightful place." Dissent is brutally stifled, as Costa-Gavras, Petri, Visconti, and Bertolucci all reveal. In Z the generals call the students "bacteria" against whom an "antidote," their own lumpen thugs, is required. Using the same metaphor, Petri's Inspector shouts, "Revolution is like syphilis. They've got it in their blood." The Inspector even uses a computer—albeit programmed with a fascist mentality, since it selects as the murderer of August the student revolutionary Antonio Pace! As the Generals pointed to Greece as a "democracy," the Inspector disingenuously points out to the students that they are "democratic citizens" with

the privilege of reading Mao and Lin Piao.

A film treating the origins and methods of fascist power should concern itself with the social and historical milieu in which the charismatic leader convinces the masses of people to follow him. Psychological aspects of twentieth-century man (his feeling of impotence nurtured by family, church, and educational structures which work to repress rebellious impulses, either sexual or social, and his alienation from exploitative institutions in an impersonal society) still do not entirely explain why fascism occurs in some historical circumstances and not in others. Unfortunately, most of the recent films about fascism are much more successful in describing the conjunction of psychology and fascist methodology than they are in exploring the qualities of a historical period which make a fascist coup particularly likely. Thus the weakest aspect of these films which analyze the roots of fascism is this ahistorical quality. Concentrating on the susceptibility of the modern sensibility to fascism, Petri, Bertolucci, Costa-Gavras, and, to a large degree, Visconti ignore the entire question of under what circumstances capitalism resorts to fascism and finds it necessary to employ severe repressive means to maintain its political hegemony. Nor do these films account for the failure to resist fascism by the social forces who had most to lose by the rise of fascism. Their fascists are, rather, presented as *Übermenschen* whose power it is not possible to question.

The problem is that these directors, avowed Marxists all, nevertheless in their films see fascism as a monster sprung full blown from the head of Zeus. Accepting fascism as a given, they then analyze the personality most likely to carry out its program: morbidly anxious, latently homosexual, lusting for power, hiding sexual inadequacy and guilt over one's sexuality, and fear of being exposed as weak and "different." Remarkably enough, in none of these films is there a representation of a conscious resistance to fascist power, although, historically, in all the countries represented (Spain, Italy, Greece and Germany) the fascists had to crush, syste-

matically, sizable opposition by the organized labor movement before it could be certain of its power. Hysterical psychologizing in the worse moments of *Investigation*, for example, is, in part, a result of the failure of the director to examine the historical relation between the parties of the working class and a capitalism approaching a fascist solution to its problems.

It is with a curious despair and pessimism that these directors point to the default of resistance to fascism. From the point of view of meaningful resistance to fascism, the true hero of *Z* is not Lambrakis, but the skeptical Prosecutor played by Jean-Louis Trintignant, who quietly refuses to be incredulous in the face of the monstrous and who is willing to attack the entire structure of the Greek government if need be.* The attractiveness of Yves Montand as an actor to the contrary, the figure of Lambrakis is made so weak and so empty of ideas in *Z*, his point of view so easily reducible to a flabby pacifism, that it is difficult to assess what difference he could have made to the power of the colonels had he remained alive, (Costa-Gavras is, of course, capable of political irony, on this point as on others; but it is a passive irony.) Like Herbert Thallman in *The Damned*, Lambrakis underestimates fascist power and what it will do to perpetuate itself. He calls his soon-to-be murderers, whose ranks ascend to the highest officials in the Greek government, "a few extremist police." His refusal to resist and his illusion that the police must be forced to "face their responsibilities" prevent any effective opposition to the fascists from emerging. In minimizing the danger to himself, he is minimizing the danger to the collective. "Why should our efforts provoke this raging violence?" asks *Z* naively. The very creaking of the shoes of the generals should have told him all. Their newly assumed power will not be easily wrested from them. *Z* never once

*That the person upon whom this character was based was arrested for his role in the Lambrakis case in Salonika last year comments on the inadequacy of individual resistance to fascist power.

looks to the sectors of the population who might have been mobilized to defend him and what he stands for. He is easily defeated.

In his refusal to deal with the politics of fascism, concentrating as he does on the evocation of milieu, Visconti too abstains from the question of resistance and why it failed. The cause lies in his lack of interest in dramatizing the history of the period. The brilliance of the voluptuous scene of the SA camp abruptly interrupted by an SS massacre is breathtaking, viewed as it is from the point of view of its victims; but Visconti gives only the barest suggestion of the origin of the argument between SS and SA, or why Hitler found it necessary to exterminate the very SA which brought him to power. He treats the default of those who could have provided an alternative to fascism only briefly in the weak and pathetic figure of Thallman. In giving this man a name reminiscent of the leader who was head of the German Communist Party in the Nazi period, Ernst Thaelmann, Visconti at once conveys the failure to resist of one group from whom serious struggle might have been expected. But the nuances of the German CP's insistence upon regarding as their real enemies the Social Democrats and not the fascists, and therefore offering literally no resistance to Hitler, is nowhere brought out in *The Damned*. That it is legitimate for effective resistance to have been expected from these forces is painfully revealed in the election figures of July 1932, for example, when the Social Democrats and the Communists together received 13,241,000 votes; 65% of the workers and salaried employees voted for them.

These two parties were unwilling to counter fascism's use of the rhetoric of Marxism in a vague anticapitalist appeal ignoring the need to struggle against the ruling class or replace it. This phenomenon is explored most interestingly by Bertolucci in his portraits of the antifascist Athos Magnani in *The Spider's Strategem* and of the antifascist Professor Quadri, in *Conformista*. In a brief sequence in *Conformista* a bedraggled flower girl and

two little urchins sing the *Internationale*; the motif is repeated in the last sequence, the parade of antifascists singing the *Internationale* along with *La Bandera Rosa* as they march through the streets of Rome. The flower girl, as she sings, follows Clerici and Anna, fascist and fascist collaborator. Following them, she is appealing in image and song to a higher code of values than the ones Clerici and Anna pursue. That her call for the solidarity of those oppressed by fascism goes unheeded foreshadows the destruction that will come to both characters by the end of the film.

The echo of the *Internationale* is meant as well to be contrasted to the particular mode of accommodation with the fascists that Quadri himself has made. What keeps Clerici to his course of killing his former professor is his unconscious anger at the betrayal of young men like himself that he senses in the professor's *de facto* acquiescence to fascism. Safe in Paris, Quadri looks "with alarm" at the defeat of the Republicans in Spain and the success of the fascists in Italy. But his moral pose never translates itself into action. Anna and Giulia giggle as they operate his mimeograph machine in an erotic scene, turning out reams of ineffectual leaflets. The vignette subtly points to the ineffectuality of the course Quadri is pursuing.

In repeating the professor's own earlier words to him, "The time for meditation is past; the time for action is now," Clerici articulates his own sense of having been betrayed by a second father. Just as the professor fails to see that Clerici is really a fascist, so he cannot perceive how his own accommodation to fascism is a façade hiding his inaction. This Bertolucci underlines in metaphor in the myth of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, the topic of Clerici's dissertation had the professor remained in Italy to advise him. Bertolucci is also suggesting that had he not been abandoned by this spiritual father, Clerici might have gotten behind the shadow of his own past, the homosexual encounter, and so not have become susceptible to fascism. By admitting to the professor that

he is a fascist, Clerici is accusing the professor of having abandoned him to fascism by going into exile.

Filmically, Bertolucci employs the myth of the cave as a governing image. In the first encounter with the professor, he and Clerici see each others' shadows reflected in windows behind them. The professor can see only the shadow or appearance of Marcello. Moments before the murder of Quadri, Marcello has a dream in which he is blind—as opposed to seeing only shadows, he is not able to see at all. Manganiello is taking him to be operated on by the professor. The blindness as a symbol of Oedipal castration harks back to the blind fascist Italo's statement: "We are friends because we are different." Clerici, however, longs to return to a community of men, to abandon his fascism and no longer to be alienated from his feelings; his commitment to fascism is superficial and reversible. Unlike Oedipus, Clerici is blind *before* he murders his father. He murders Quadri because Quadri has refused to restore him to sight, dooming himself, Marcello and the hopes for renewal in the society itself. Finally, the theme of the cave is translated into the film in the last sequence when the flames throw shadows outlining Marcello's head against the bars adjacent to the cavern in which the boy whom he will seduce sleeps: the professor's default has ultimately left Marcello only to reenact his original trauma.

Anna has justified the professor's course by arguing that "with what is happening in Spain, we dare not leave Paris." Bertolucci, of course, uses "Spain" as the symbol of the choice to fight, and the necessity of struggle. Quadri's refusal to ally himself with the victims of fascism recalls Visconti's characterization of Thallman and he becomes the object of the film's bitterest satire. When Anna denounces the torture in fascist prisons at dinner, the professor silences her for "bad taste." He even tells Clerici that "a short time in jail would do you good." His ignorance of the true nature of fascism, reflected in his half-joking willingness to abandon a former pupil for whom he feels

some affection to one of its torture chambers, is a just prelude to his murder. In this relationship between Marcello and Quadri, Bertolucci thus merges his social and his psychological insight. Just as the fear of his sexual impotence led Marcello to the fascists, so too did the political impotence of his professor. That the professor is finally murdered in exile is yet another means Bertolucci uses to suggest that, no safer outside of Italy than in it, he would have done far better to have remained to resist.

Of all the directors dealing with fascism, Bertolucci is most preoccupied with the failure of an adequate resistance. This is revealed as well in *The Spider's Strategem* with its theme of the lie of the antifascist. In their little town Athos Magnani and his group of friends plot to assassinate Mussolini in the new theater opening to a performance of *Rigoletto*. His son returns, years later, to find that although Magnani is acclaimed in the town as the most revolutionary of all the antifascists, it was he who betrayed the plot, telling the police where to find the dynamite. Then Magnani had himself murdered ostensibly by the fascists, but really by his own comrades so that he could go down in history as an antifascist hero rather than as a coward and a conspirator. That he is murdered during the same performance of *Rigoletto* is Bertolucci's way of implying that he is no better than Mussolini. The progress of the film is Magnani's son's initiation into how little coherent resistance to the fascists there was in Italy. "We were antifascists," says the salami taster, one of Magnani's friends, "and didn't know what it meant. We had no program. None of us were intelligent. We understood nothing."

We never learn why Athos Magnani turned informer, but what comes through is Bertolucci's bitterness about the default of the past. It is with an intensity of purpose that he makes a victory of the son's discovering the strategem of his father.

All The King's Men, *Face In The Crowd*, *WUSA*, *The Spider's Strategem* and *Z* suggest

that only individual strong men, *Übermenschen*, can combat fascism, whereas, in reality, only the organization of large numbers of antifascists could have accomplished the purpose. These films thus take on an elitist quality, unconsciously akin to the very doctrine those who took power in the name of fascism applied to themselves.

In an important sense *The Conformist*, *The Garden of Delights*, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* and *The Damned* are not about fascism alone. They are as much concerned with the interaction of man as a fundamentally neurotic being with a world of institutions which, almost mysteriously, have been created in support of his neuroses. Men like the Inspector and Clerici find too much opportunity to accommodate the needs of their weak and unsteady egos. The quest for psychological health in these films is rendered almost hopeless by a society created in the image of man's deepest frustrations.

"Fascism" thus becomes a metaphor for man's need to set first his own internal house in order; the failure of this crucial process of self-examination explains why these films point with such bitter irony to the absence of coherent resistance to fascism. Bertolucci and Saura especially are convinced that self-consciousness must precede attempts at activism. With this, given the painful image of our history which they have set before us, we must partially agree.

Yet it is no less true that because the distortions of the personality make people both susceptible to fascism and poorly equipped to transcend it, man is not absolved of the important task of creating a social environment which will produce saner human beings. It is this dimension which we miss in the recent antifascist films.