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FORTY-SEVEN SHOTS OF BERTOLUCCI'S 'IL CONFORMISTA'

Bertolucci was being interviewed for Sight and Sound, and was responding to rather general questions when he erupted with this unprompted complaint: 'You know, I have done thirty interviews and no one ever asks me why I moved the camera in a particular way, or why I used tracking shots, or how long they were', at which point he briefly describes some of the camera movements involved in the dance hall scene from Il conformista, and then continues: 'So these are the things . . . (sic) *découpage*, camera technique. It is only through technique that one arrives at doing things.'¹ He is quite explicit about his technical priorities: 'I am very meticulous and boring about camera movement';² and in reply to the question: 'Do you generally improvise your camera movements?' he was emphatic: 'No, no, no, they are very refined. They are very programmed.' 'All my pleasure', he says, 'is the camera. The movement is all my decision, and I think it corresponds to a certain idea of a visual music Cinema is much closer to poetry and to music than theatre';³ and elsewhere he has acknowledged the influence of Ophüls: 'La cosa straordinaria di Ophüls è la musicalità, la presenza della macchina da presa in mezzo a una realtà che sembra quasi uscire dalla cinepresa piuttosto che filmata da essa, quasi che la macchina da presa proiettasse intorno a sè personaggi, luoghi, spazi a misura sua, per muovercisi dentro. E questo modo di filmare mi sembra abbastanza vicino alla mia concezione del cinema, alla mia maniera.'⁴

We find the director being equally explicit about the development of his approach to film editing: 'I used to think very bad things about editing. I used to hate the idea of editing. Partner was really a minimum (sic) of editing because I wanted to make long shots. And then when I did The Conformist, Kim (Franco Arcalli), who was brilliant, a great editor, made me discover things in the editing. I discovered that editing can be a very dialectical movement' (American Film, 42). In his later films 'i rischi sono che gli amici cinéphiles troveranno una mancanza di piani fissi, perchè il piano fisso gli dà sicurezza; troveranno delle sequenze supermontate, e allora saranno pieni di panico perchè il piano-sequenza li tranquillizza e il montaggio li terrorizza; . . . dovrebbero ancora fare uno sforzo per vincere la paura, e scoprirebbero che il "rigore" che li ossessiona tanto si nasconde a volte nella frivoltà di una carrellata, nella sensualità di un dolly, nell'aberrazione di una sequenza doppiata.'⁵ When asked about Il conformista: 'L'idea di strutturare il

racconto a flash-back come le è venuta?', he replied: 'In sceneggiatura non c'era. L'idea mi è venuta mentre giravo e si è materializzata al montaggio' (Tassone, II, 74).

I am using the authority of Bertolucci's own words to explain in general terms what he meant in the Sight and Sound interview by 'it is only through technique that one arrives at doing things'. What this comes down to in practical, detailed terms in a single film is something I shall come to in a minute. We also find in his own words the basis for an interpretation of what are the 'things' he is doing in Il conformista. First of all there is the important role that psychoanalysis plays in the film. Strategia del ragno was made a few months before Il conformista, and of the former he says that it was born 'dopo 2 o 3 mesi che avevo scoperto l'analisi, nel momento cioè di grandissimo entusiasmo per la scoperta freudiana' (Casetti, p. 5). 'In the book the story of the conformist is a tragedy and, as in the Greek tragedies, everything is related to Fate. Here I substituted Marcello's unconscious - a psychoanalytic explanation, that is - for the presence of Destiny in the book Transforming Destiny into the Unconscious, of course, also affects the rapport between sexuality and politics' (Sight and Sound, 64-66). The film is not about historical fascism but about the 'rapport entre la bourgeoisie italienne des années 30 et celle d'aujourd'hui (je ne m'intéresse qu'au phénomène psychologique).' He has added to the material supplied by the novel 'l'ami aveugle qui travaille à la radio fasciste . . . qui m'était utile . . . pour déterminer . . . des rapports avec le fascisme qui (sont) plus symboliques qu'historiques'; 'c'est un film fait sur l'artifice, qui essaie de retrouver la réalité à travers l'artifice'.⁶

The director was conscious of using the lighting in this film as an expressive code: 'You know, this is the first film where I controlled the lighting myself in the old, truly professional, classical sense. Most of the young directors reject lighting as something cheap or kitsch, but on this film I really came to understand what you can do with light. You can get unbelievable effects which help the psychology, the narrative, the whole language of the film. When Sandrelli and Marcello see each other for the first time, there are those shuttered windows which refract the light, rays that pass. It helps a lot to establish the atmosphere of the house' (Sight and Sound, 65). He calls the lighting of the dancing school 'impressionistic' (I think he is referring to the painters), and that of the adjoining room 'expressionist': 'when she undresses she is going to the slaughterhouse; which is why I use that light' (Sight and Sound, 65).

One is reminded of Kracauer's contention that the 'sleuthing motif' is ideally cinematic (because in it you penetrate reality to get at the 'truth'),⁷ when Bertolucci

says: 'Diciamo che vorrei tanto adottare i metodi di Raymond Chandler nel parlare di nevrosi e di fatti esistenziali invece che di delitti.'⁸ Il conformista also uses stylistic characteristics of the crime movie genre, because this genre of film supplied the period model, as Bertolucci explained when he was asked why he had called it a 'film sulla memoria del cinema': 'Non ero ancora nato negli anni in cui si svolge la vicenda del film, quindi non avevo memoria di quel tempo. L'unica memoria a cui potevo rifarmi era quella collettiva dei film di quegli anni. Quei film (parlo soprattutto dei film di Renoir - Le crime de Monsieur Lange, La règle du jeu - e di qualche americano) mi sono stati molto più utili che guardare dei documenti o dei documentari' (Tassone, II, 74).

In order to illustrate the 'technique' to which Bertolucci refers, and using as a basis for an interpretation of what he intended to achieve with that technique his own expressed intentions, I want to look fairly closely at a passage from Il conformista, very near the beginning, based on material which is not derived from Moravia's novel. We start from the shot which is the central shot of the film, and to which the narrative keeps returning after flashing back. I call it the seventh shot of the film, because it is around that; projectionists' tamperings with the first few feet of the reel have meant that I cannot be sure how many times shots of the sign for Renoir's La vie est à nous have been interpolated into the long sequence shot of Marcello in his hotel bedroom.

7. (7 secs) Close-up of Marcello's face through the windscreen, with a wiper out of focus in the foreground, Marcello looking just past camera. No background music. Manganiello's voice, off camera (and sounding close, i.e., not really as it would sound in a moving car with the engine going; instead he talks quietly): **Mah! Chi poteva prevederlo, dottore? . . .**

The sound of the whole film was post-dubbed, a device that Bertolucci does not like, but which he felt was necessary, given the nationality of the actors (though he claims to be the first director ever to have used Sandrelli's own voice for her role). This allows him to give these scenes in the car the acoustic intimacy that reinforces their function as confessional scenes, part of a sort of psychoanalytic session. The film is 'about' Marcello's unconscious, and therefore there needs to be an air of the fantastic about what we see and hear. As a result, the whole film makes much use of voice-off, and this becomes close (as here) to voice-over. Indeed, for a director who claims to be experimenting with montage for virtually the first time, there is a remarkable amount of non-synchronous sound, used to precise effect and entirely appropriately. We do not see the owner of this voice until well into the film, when he appears to be 'tailing' Marcello to his mother's villa - and even then, we do not know

who he is, and he is made more sinister by the fact that the sequence is shot with the camera rolled (by which I mean tilted sideways). The effect of shot 7 is enhanced by the fact that Marcello does not look at the speaker. We are instead immediately enticed into his reverie. The fact that we look at him through the glass of the windscreen may not at this juncture appear significant. Later, however, Bertolucci will give us the same shot with the camera lens rack-focused⁹ onto the windscreen, and he will focus back and forth during the shot. That Marcello is inside the car, behind glass, viewed from the outside is an important part of the mise en scène of this shot, and of the whole film, as I think will become apparent later on.

An aspect of this and other versions of this shot which is revealing is that at times rain is falling on the windshield, and the wipers are moving, and at times not (these times being sometimes a matter of seconds apart). For a film as meticulously made as I hope to show this one was, it is strange to find continuity errors of this kind (another one is in shot number 10 below). Bertolucci readily conceded that this was an area of technique that he had never paid any attention to (Dialogue on Film, 16 and 25). The montage that follows this shot establishes a rhythm which will frequently be used in the film, of cutting every two to three seconds. As for what Manganiello is saying, a viewer seeing the film for the first time is unlikely to understand what he is talking about, and indeed, experiments with students have shown me that some people seeing the film for the first time do not even remember having seen the opening shots. This would give rise to an enormous number of issues concerning perception of film narrative and redundancy in film language which I shall pass over, noting, however, that it does mean that the film Bertolucci made for Paramount to go the rounds of the mass market exhibitors actually presupposes a consumption that its packaging tends to disguise. You think you have seen the film, when you get up to leave at the end. In actual fact, to see it in even a rudimentary way requires several viewings, simply because the mind tends to see what it is looking for. Someone who had read the novel would need less viewings, and this, of course, raises the question of the extent to which the film as a communication is part of a larger unit of communication, because Bertolucci has taken a narrative that was pedestrianly chronological and painfully accessible (Moravia repeats his every 'point' many times), and has made it achronological, elliptical, and far less accessible than it at first appears.¹⁰

8. (1.9 secs) Shot from a low, moving camera of housetops and trees, from the point of view of the car window on Marcello's side (passenger's seat, objects outside appearing to move left to right). Manganiello's voice: . . . *Quando lui è uscito in strada . . .*

9. (2.1 secs) As no. 7. Manganiello's voice off: . . . **era ancora buio. Poi il portone s'è riaperto . . .**

10. (2.7 secs) As no. 8., except that the houses and trees are moving the wrong way, from right to left. Manganiello's voice off: . . . **e è uscita anche lei. Ho pensato: . . .**

11. (3.6 secs) As no. 7. Manganiello's voice off: . . . **sarà venuta giù per salutarlo. Invece, apre . . .**

12. (2.2 secs) As no. 8 (not 10). Manganiello's voice off: . . . **lo sportello, fa salire il cane, sale...**

13. (13.2 secs) Marcello, as no. 7. Manganiello's voice off: . . . **anche lei. Non m'ascoltate, dottore?** (Marcello twists his head slightly to camera right and then back to looking ahead). Marcello whispers: **Sì, sì.** As he utters these words, the introduction to a popular song of the time starts up quietly on the soundtrack, and gradually increases in volume. Manganiello's voice off slightly suppresses the music, as he says: **Mah! Una fregatura che non ci voleva. Bah, io per me mi sono tenuto alle istruzioni.** The music reaches full volume (still the instrumental introduction) for two seconds, while the camera holds Marcello.

The character whose face we are watching is on his way to murder Quadri and his wife, the woman with whom he is in love. This being so, the reverie flashback to the time of his marriage to Giulia, and in particular, the girls in bright light singing 'Chi è più felice di me?' are entirely appropriate as part of a wish-fulfilment repressive activity in Marcello's mind. He remembers the time when he embraced a respectable 'normality', and repressed his own 'abnormality'. This is important, because it is part of what makes for the unity of impact and the integrity of the film. Moravia's story is a tragedy in the classical sense, guided inexorably by destiny, ending with a deus ex machina. Bertolucci has replaced destiny (and the nemesis) with Marcello's unconscious. He has then built his narrative structure out of that Freudian premise: things are linked by the urgings of the unconscious in a chain of association of ideas, fantasy wish-fulfilments, and repression. (At a more obvious level, the scene that immediately precedes the murder is one where Marcello recounts to Manganiello a dream in which his wishes are fulfilled and his anxieties allayed.) In shot 13 attention is drawn to the fact that Marcello is in a reverie, day-dreaming, by Manganiello's attempt to penetrate it. The transition to that reverie, the flashback, is carried out in a characteristic way: gradually. Here it is the music which makes the transition gradual. Elsewhere, as when Marcello gets out of the car, it will be a sort of match cut, and in many cases there are repeated brief entries into a flashback before it is definitely established in the narrative. The precision with which the song, its sections and its rhythm are used is an important indication of the care with which the sound editing has been carried out. Critics view Bertolucci as a

visual director, emphasizing his affinity with painters. In this, and with most of his films, the soundtrack is an integral part of the effect. Indeed, the slick professionalism of the use of the song for the editing is a mark of television technique, which is the 'flavour' Bertolucci needs for the use he will make of the fascist radio station.

14. (8.8 secs) Shots 14-19 are a series of reverse angle shots. The middle horizontal third of the screen is filled with a window that looks from a very dimly lit anteroom into a brightly lit radio studio. Just to the right of the centre of the screen, with his back to the camera, almost in silhouette, as he stands looking through the window into the studio, we see Marcello in threequarter shot. In the studio, raised up a few feet, three women are singing the song in front of a microphone.¹¹ doing a sort of choreographed swaying and handwaving to the music. Musicians can be seen to the right, a conductor just the other side of the window from Marcello, and part of a piano at left. Italo's voice off: **Sei proprio deciso, allora?** (his voice slightly suppressing the music). Marcello slightly turns his head to the left.

15. (2 secs) Italo, head and shoulders facing camera almost, seated at a desk: **Che t'aspetti dal matrimonio?**

16. (3.9 secs) Similar to no. 14, the camera a little closer to Marcello, who has turned round to face Italo, who is behind camera a little to right. Marcello: **Vedi, un'impressione della normalità.**

17. (5.6 secs) A no. 15. Italo: **La normalità, ah!** Marcello's voice off: **Sì. La stabilità, la sicurezza. La mattina mentre mi vesto . . .**

18. (20.8 secs) As no. 16. Marcello: . . . **mi guardo nello specchio, e** (he puts his hands on his breast) **mi sembra che la mia immagine sia diversa da quella di tutti gli altri.** Italo's voice off: **Ma che ti piace in Giulia?** Marcello: **Non so. Forse è il suo corpo, la sua sensualità.** Italo's voice off: **E lei?** Marcello **Tutte le volte che ci troviamo soli insieme** (laughing) **mi salta addosso** (folding arms). Italo's voice off: **E poi?** Marcello: **Finiamo sempre sul tappeto, a rotolarci.** Italo's voice off: **E la servetta con i tettoni?** Marcello: **Mah! Fa parte del corredo.**

19. (7.2 secs) Italo as no. 15, with his hands together on his blotter, which he moves apart as he leans forward and says **Così tu ti sposi e io perdo il mio migliore amico. Ma sono . . . contento.** (Somewhere in this or the preceding shot an abbreviation is introduced into the song, to adjust its length; the volume is too low for me to tell exactly where.)

20. (9.1 secs) Threequarter shot of the three girls singing at the mike and swaying; the one in the middle comes a little forward and the other two turn slightly to one side as the middle one sings solo part of the bridge of the song: **L'amor gioca sempre col cuore l'eterna partita** (slightly rubato).

The pattern of sound off camera, begun by Manganiello's voice, is continued with the music before the flashback, and then Italo's voice in shot 14, and then forms part of the pattern of reverse angle shots for the dialogue between Italo and Marcello (shots 17 and 18), while the song sung by the girls in the studio is another voice-off.

Since the singers are part of the narrative, their singing never functions as background music; on the contrary, Bertolucci uses a device throughout this episode in the studio to give a particular status to the singing of the girls and later the speech by Italo. Modern radio studios sometimes use a voice-operated compressor, so that when the disc jockey speaks while a record is playing, his voice causes the volume of the sound from the record to decrease, but only for as long as he speaks. When Italo speaks in shot 14, this is the effect on the song, and the result is that the song returns to the 'foreground' in the spaces between the dialogue. In shot 20, on the other hand, the song comes totally to the foreground.

At this point, it is useful to make a list of the elements that make up the episode we are watching. For the purposes of the narrative, this scene informs the viewer of the nature of Marcello's quest for normality, and thus explains the title of the film. As the episode progresses, the viewer is invited to see an implicit parallel between Marcello's conformism, and fascism's search for a stable world view - and to see the empty and illusory nature of both quests. On a psychoanalytical level, it goes much further. It establishes part of Marcello's neurosis: 'La mattina, mentre mi vesto . . . ' (shot 17) to ' . . . diversa da quella di tutti gli altri' (shot 18) are spoken while he puts his hands where his breasts would be if he were a woman, a gesture which is then repressed, as it were, by his tightly folded arms.¹² In shot 19, Italo's 'perdita' can only suggest some kind of 'opposite' to the marriage that Marcello is undertaking. In other words, the homosexuality of the relationship between the two men is being suggested in a fairly subtle way (and the epilogue to the film reinforces this). The marriage to Giulia is set up straightaway as a formality for Marcello (the interest in the 'servetta con i tettoni' will be used to further this suggestion in the scene in Giulia's mother's flat), and Bertolucci will create a binary pair, Marcello-Giulia, functioning as opposites, each acquiring significance by being opposed to the other (see the discussion of play below, and in particular the scene in the dance hall).

For the *mise en scène*, the window that separates the studio from the anteroom adds to a list of sheets of glass that both let light through and reflect it, and which help to organize the meanings of the film.¹³ In this episode, the glass separates Marcello from the world of make-believe that the singers represent. In shot 14 we see him looking through the glass, from a dimly lit room into a brightly lit one, with the girls singing 'Chi è più felice di me?' and reproducing the clichés of romantic love (shot 20). In fact, in shot 20 we become the voyeurs, and this has already been partly set up by the shot over Marcello's shoulder in number 14. The life he is trying to establish with Giulia has the status of the show that is going on behind him. The girls

are choreographing their song to a non-existent audience (a microphone cannot pick up a visual message). The brightness of the light and the dancing of the girls contrast with the darkness and immobility of Marcello, and the effect is to endow the world beyond the pane of glass with greater intensity, an object of desire (indeed, it corresponds to Marcello's heaven, as will be shown below). But it is, in fact, a show, an illusion, and the pane of glass 'says' that (an entirely similar effect is used when Giulia goes shopping for an evening gown, and goes ecstatic before the brightly lit windows of a Parisian store - one could call it the shop window effect, and it would then become entirely clear how Bertolucci wishes to suggest that the radio broadcast is bourgeois capitalism's way of 'selling' an ideology to the masses; Marcello is a particularly eager and self-conscious 'buyer' who will, ultimately, see through the product to the reality which it is trying to hide). Our memory of what we see in shot 14 will enable us to make sense of what we see when Marcello is photographed from a camera position the other side of the glass (shot 27 below): his face is partly obscured by the reflexion of the music stands - his image is partly effaced by the accoutrements of the 'show'. The adjustment to the soundtrack (done while the girls are off camera) allows for the immaculate synchronization of soundtrack, image, and dialogue that follows. First of all, Italo's lament at the loss of his 'migliore amico' is glossed by 'L'amor gioca sempre col cuore l'eterna partita', secondly, in shot 24 below, Marcello's story and the song end together, and thirdly, the cut away from the flashback is against the instrumental 'break' in the song (just as the entry into the flashback was).

21. (5.5 secs) Marcello in the car, as no. 7. On the soundtrack the instruments go into the turnaround of the song, and the camera cuts on the first beat of the next chorus.

22. (4.3 secs) The three singers full length, dancing a little as the instruments take eight bars.

23. (13.5 secs) Camera at 90 degrees to 18, looking from a position to camera left of 18, Marcello shown in profile on left of screen looking to right. A studded leather door in the background opens, and a man in a white coat puts his head and shoulders into the room and says, looking to camera right: **Due minuti, signor Italo.** Marcello to Italo (who is off camera to right): **Sei sicuro che verrà?** Camera pans to right to bring Italo into frame. Italo: **Chi? Il colonnello? Ma sì, verrà. Vedrai che verrà. Me l'ha promesso. È molto interessato. Ma cerca di stare calmo.**

24. (48.3 secs) As in no. 16. Italo's voice off: **È strano, ma lo sai, tutti vorrebbero sembrare diversi dagli altri, e tu invece vuoi somigliare a tutti.** As Italo speaks, Marcello turns 90 degrees to camera left, and walks along the window, with the camera tracking parallel with him. As he gets near the edge of the window, he turns and walks in the reverse direction, with the camera tracking along still. Marcello:

Una decina d'anni fa mio padre era a Monaco. M'ha raccontato che spesso la sera, dopo il teatro, andava con gli amici in una birreria (he has now gone beyond the edge of the window to the right, and has a black background. He turns 180 degrees and continues walking, with the camera still tracking parallelly), e c'era uno squilibrato un po' buffo . . . (the girls in the studio are doing a choreographed swaying left and right to the song) che parlava di politica. Era diventato un'attrazione. (Turns to retrace his steps left to right.) Gli davano da bere, recitavano, e lui saliva su un tavolo, e faceva dei discorsi da pazzo furioso. (He has now reached the centre of the window, turns to face Italo behind camera, with the girls in the background over his shoulder on camera left.) Era Hitler. As he says 'Hitler', the girls end their song with a flourish of their arms. Marcello turns his back on the camera and faces the studio, with his hands in his pockets (though we only see as far down as the elbows). The girls file elegantly down from behind the microphone, smiling in the direction of Marcello (i.e., straight ahead, to them) even though it seems clear that they cannot see him through the window, and they turn to camera right to file past the window out of the studio, very close to Marcello, behind his shape. The musicians start collecting their instruments and leaving too. A female announcer's voice, off camera, says: Abbiamo trasmesso 'Chi è più felice di me? di Cesare Andrea Bixio, as the girls are filing out. Marcello turns 180 degrees to face Italo (i.e., facing the camera, more or less). Announcer's voice off: È . . .

Shot 21 continues the pattern, that will be maintained throughout the film, of constant returns to the moment of the reverie, so that only the scenes in Paris are allowed to have some kind of narrative autonomy. It is true, those Parisian scenes are also, strictly speaking, flashbacks, in relation to the car drive, but they are given the status of 'real' events, whereas the episodes leading up to the honeymoon are held at the fantasy level, by this continual return to the dreamer, or rememberer. Shot 23 allows us for the first time to have some idea of the topography of the anteroom (though not enough for the orientation of shot 25 below to be immediately clear on a first viewing). Perhaps it is a characteristic of all post-nouvelle vague film to eschew establishing shots; certainly it is characteristic of Bertolucci's technique (he will often use the soundtrack instead of a shot to 'establish' a scene as in this episode, with the music, and in the epilogue with the radio announcing the fall of Mussolini's government, and as with his striking use of the sound of toast being eaten at the beginning of the sequence in the Douglas' apartment in New York in La luna; spaghetti westerns made a conceit of the reversal of the order: from establishing shot to detail shot, and Bertolucci scripted one of the most famous of these films, C'era una volta il West, which in his version had the more Bertoluccian title of Ricordati di Abilene, with its projection of the story into the memory).

In shot 23, Italo's reassuring Marcello is a sign of his fatherly role, and is part of the structure motivating the mise en scène of the studio anteroom: cocoon-like, where one confesses to father-figures in soft voices and dim light - like the car with Manganiello and Quadri's study; the Colonnello will subsequently take Italo's place.

Shot 24 is very carefully calculated from the point of view of mise en scène. I am not entirely clear on the logic Bertolucci intends in the exchange at the beginning: I interpret Marcello's story as an answer to the question of why he wants to be the same as everyone else: people who try to be different are like Hitler. I find the level of connotation more easily interpretable than the level of denotation, and this is not unusual with Bertolucci's films, to the extent that he is much criticized for indulging in mise en scène virtuosity at the expense of a profound and well thought out surface message. In this shot, however, the moving camera is used to telling effect. Marcello is describing a 'show', that of the squilibrato, pazzo furioso Hitler. He does so in front of a seemingly equilibrato 'show', the girls' song, but the fact that the girls' 'show' has only illusory status is emphasized by the way the moving camera brings to our attention the edge of the window (the 'shop' window) which contains it. Marcello moves from the bright window to the black wall several times, and the effect is of the bright light going on and off. Lights going on and off are a leitmotiv throughout the film, and are part of the articulation of the opposition between appearances and reality, an opposition that will include the cinema itself, and this very film. This will become clearer later, when we discuss the scene in Quadri's study. For the moment we can say that Marcello describes a show while standing in front of a show, while being himself part of the show that is the film we are watching. The density of connotation and the corrosion of the cognitive status of the cinematic image is achieved by Bertolucci through a process of superimposition, a process he will use time and time again in this and in all his films. The very fact that he uses sound often non-synchronously is already a device of superimposition (a famous example in an early film is his use of Verdi's Macbeth in the opera house scene in Prima della rivoluzione). What he means when in interviews he talks about the moving camera being more than a recording machine is precisely this ability it has to move the attention of the spectator from one thing to another, and superimpose one visual stimulus over another, one layer of meaning over another. To return to shot 24, Marcello's story has its punchline, which destroys the mystery in it, the identity of the squilibrato. This punchline is delivered simultaneously with the finale of the show in the background, the girls' song. They then approach to within inches of Marcello's face, which is looking at them, but without either of the two parties' acknowledging the other's presence: the window lets light through in one direction and reflects in the other; it is the barrier between illusion and the something else that Marcello represents and wishes to escape.

25. (13,3 secs) The camera, from a position between the studded door and the right hand edge of the window takes Italo as he walks from behind his desk to a reference

point on the wall near the desk, where he turns to walk towards the right hand edge of the window, walking past the camera, which pans to follow this manoeuvre, and coming to a halt beside Marcello, between him and the edge of the window. Meanwhile the announcer's voice off is continuing: . . . **terminato il programma di musica leggera con l'Orchestra Arcangeli. Hanno cantato Silvana Fioresi, Oscar Carboni, Lina Termini e il Trio delle Rondinelle**, after which, immediately, there begins the sound of a bird-call imitated (which is the station identification signal of EIAR), though we do not yet see who or what is producing this sound.

26. (23.1 secs) The sound of the bird-calls. The camera is looking directly at the wall between the studio and the anteroom, with the right hand edge of the window going down the centre of the screen, so that the left hand portion of the screen contains the image of the brightly lit studio, with a man bending slightly towards a microphone, whistling into it the bird-calls, while the right hand portion of the screen is more or less masked by the dark wall of the anteroom. The camera holds this image for $4\frac{1}{2}$ seconds, and then begins a slow track to camera left, bringing into view the following: firstly Italo, seated on a stool in the studio, brightly lit and in focus; then Marcello's head and shoulders from behind, as he looks into the studio, and out of focus; as the track proceeds, the camera rack focusses from Italo in the studio to Marcello in the anteroom, and as this happens, the image of Marcello's back covers the image of Italo, who is now out of focus. At this point the announcer's voice off says: **Mistica di un'alleanza. Conversazioni di Italo Montanari**; at which point Italo starts speaking. Meanwhile, the track has continued, and Italo's out-of-focus image has reappeared from behind Marcello's back, whereupon the track stops, leaving the frame filled with a large, dark, focussed image of Marcello's head and collar at the right, and a bright, unfocussed, almost full image of Italo in the studio. This is the point at which Italo starts to speak, and as he does so, the lights in the studio go down, until the room is lit in a dim blue-green light, with highlights on Italo's head and on his hands, which are holding papers on his knee. Marcello goes into almost complete silhouette, with a little highlight on his hair. The camera rack focusses from Marcello to Italo who, because he is blind, is reading his script from braille sheets with his hands, and speaking into a large microphone in front of his face, his head tilted so that he seems to be looking a little up towards the ceiling roughly in Marcello's direction. Italo, in a declamatory tone: **Italia e Germania: capisaldi di due civiltà. Nella vicenda dei secoli ogni loro incontro imprime . . .**

The radio studio is broadcasting, and we get to see the source of all the sounds that are broadcast from the studio. The effect of this is to make it clear that while we are present in the studio, what we are hearing is in fact what is broadcast; we do not see the source of what is broadcast from elsewhere. We think this will be the case also for the sound of the bird call station identification signal at the end of shot 25, but then shot 26 shows us the source of the sound. This has comic overtones for an Italian. It is a bit like being shown a man with a penny whistle making the six bleeps of the BBC time signal. With reference to shot 14 I suggested that behind the window lay Marcello's 'heaven', and here the voice of the announcer identifies the musicians as the Orchestra Arcangeli. At the end of the film Bertolucci will use a similar code to express Marcello's striving for an ideal, when he photographs the Clerici's young daughter saying her prayers against wallpaper that is sky-blue with

clouds painted on it. Italo's move from his desk to the window emphasizes his blindness. Shot 25 leaves him beside Marcello in the left hand side of the frame, with the edge of the window to his right, after which point the right hand side of the frame is black. In other words, we see Italo, together with Marcello, against the window, but this side of it. Later, in shot 26, he will be the other side of the window, in Marcello's fantasy ideal world. But first the bird-call imitator: an illusion which we see through. If material reality in Plato's scheme is but the shadow of an imitation (as we are told in the scene in Quadri's study, of which more later), then this image is the illustration of it. The edge of the studio window goes down the centre of the screen, and the camera holds this image for a deliberate period. In an Antonioni film this would be a device for masking the frame so as to produce a frame ratio that was higher than it was wide, and so appropriate for photographing a single figure. This is not the purpose of this shot. On the left of Italo is Marcello, both are looking at the window, and both hear the bird call. In the beginning of shot 26, Marcello sees the brightly lit illusion on the left half of the screen, and Italo sees the nothing that is on the right side of the screen. It is a shot that is a sort of authorial comment. As the camera moves, it produces a superimposition of the image of Marcello over that of Italo. The double rack focussing invites the viewer to keep looking from one to the other. Devices like this have become a characteristic of Bertolucci's cinema, and a short digression on this point is in order.

Similar devices are frequently used in connexion with the relations between father and son, or men and their father-figures. They are used when Fabrizio and Cesare are sitting in front of each other on park benches in Prima della rivoluzione. The most famous case is in the film made a matter of months before Il conformista, Strategia del ragno (famous partly because a still from the sequence is evidently the standard publicity handout for the film). In this example, at the end of a long tracking shot, the camera rejoins Athos junior who has moved ahead of the tracking shot, and we see him looking at a bust of his father, and as he moves his image covers the bust; he then moves past the bust, and the camera tracks to one side until the bust covers his image in the background.

The other interesting example of superimposition in Il conformista is when Manganiello is loudly addressing an invisible Marcello in a park in Paris. An elderly Parisian lady is outraged that he should think that Parisian birds spoke Italian. Manganiello is eventually reduced to singing a song under his breath in frustration, and sprawls on a bench, whereupon the camera tracks to one side so that a tree in the foreground totally obscures his image, though we continue to hear his voice. This

scene is amusing, and is probably partly a joke. But it is more than that. Marcello, the 'normal' married man is an illusion, and he has begun to grow unwilling to have Quadri killed. It is therefore entirely appropriate for him to be invisible to Manganiello. The latter is, himself, a manifestation of a fantasy superego ideal which is in turn an illusion. The tree merely makes the point. Moreover, the superimposition of the tree on Manganiello suggests an identification: he has the solidity, the ideological subtlety, the down-to-earthness of a tree (the scene in the restaurant kitchen where he tells Marcello that when he feels himself failing he lights up a toscana and tells himself to get on with it is an illustration of this strength in simplicity). But trees hide, and it is from behind trees that the assassins appear to murder Quadri. Superimposition for the purpose of hiding is what repression is about, and is what Marcello is trying to do with his marriage and with the murder of Quadri. His marriage is to hide his homosexuality, the murder of Quadri is supposed to superimpose itself on the murder of Lino and so expunge it. Marcello is frequently covering women's bodies, to hide their nakedness and the erotic associations that go with it (he covers Giulia's naked body in the opening sequence shot, and he covers his mother's thighs). As Giulia starts to tell him of her childhood sex life with Perpuzio, Marcello pulls the blind on the compartment window, as though to hide something he does not want to see. The 'illusion' that is Marcello the fascist secret agent is playfully illustrated when at Ventimiglia he walks behind a painting, and the camera dissolves through the painting of the seafront to the real seafront behind it in which Marcello is present (immediately afterwards the sailors guess straightaway that he is an official, and salute him). In this scene Bertolucci is playfully superimposing Magritte on his film.

In the scene where Quadri is murdered, Bertolucci 'superimposes' the scene of the assassination of Caesar from Joseph Mankiewicz's Julius Caesar. This case of cinematic quotation is, however, more complex than that, because Bertolucci is, by allusion, quoting himself. The killing of Athos senior in Strategia del ragno is full of allusion to the killing of Caesar in Shakespeare's tragedy. Athos junior must acquiesce in the killing of his father, must become, despite himself, a conspirator in his father's 'martyrdom'. Marcello is in a similar position with regard to his father-figure, Quadri. Perhaps this is going too far, but I should like to list the textual superimpositions that result from that sequence of the stabbing of Quadri: Plutarch and Tacitus, Shakespeare, Mankiewicz, Borges, Strategia (made from a Borges story), Moravia, Il conformista. There may be others . . .

A different kind of superimposition is that of thematic superimposition, when a number of themes come together in one episode. An example is at the house of

Marcello's mother. The rolled camera sequence of Manganiello 'tailing' Marcello introduces Manganiello in a 'gangster' vein, and we later learn that he is a fascist 'heavy'. He is then used to suppress the mysterious and ambiguous Alberi. His Japanese name, Chi, translates into Italian as 'alberi', meaning, in English, 'trees'; the word chi in Italian means 'who?' - and much punning play is made on this. We know 'who' Chi is in Marcello's psyche: Lino, that other chauffeur. The suppression of Alberi is the suppression of Marcello's mother's libido, and in turn of his own - in other words, repression of his own unconscious impulses. (Incidentally, Quadri's assassins appear from behind 'alberi', and an 'albero' obscures Manganiello in the park in Paris.) His mother deserves this suppression for the suggestion that they let Marcello's father die. The father is the superego (indeed, the cut from the soft, warm-coloured ambience of the mother's villa and its windblown leaves to the hard angles and the dazzling white of the father's abode is a classic case of what Eisenstein would call the creation of meaning through collision in tonal montage¹⁴). The mise en scène of the villa juxtaposed with that of the asylum creates the opposition that signifies id and superego, pleasure and guilt. The fact that Marcello's father's straightjacket is black is the superimposition of fascist blackshirt onto medical straightjacket. Finally, as we shall see in the scene in Quadri's study, the cinematic image is the superimposition of a shadow onto a screen that is not what the shadow would be. This brings us back from the digression, because Bertolucci casts the problem of illusion and reality in terms of seeing. Marcello sees awry. Italo does not see at all, and yet he is the ideologue. His confident, declamatory tone is marred in shot 26 by the pause he needs to find his place in his braille script with his fingers. His speech, 'Mistica di un'alleanza', attempts to suggest a fatal joining between the Italians and the Hitler whom we have just heard described (to no protest from Italo) as squilibrato, pazzo furioso. Once he is on the other side of the window, however, he becomes part of Marcello's fantasized ideal of 'normality'.

27. (17.8 secs) The camera, from a position in the studio not far from Italo, looks at Marcello through the window, whose head and trunk are about two thirds of the way to the right of the frame, and who is leaning with his hands on the window-sill. Behind him and to his left can be seen the lamp on the desk at which Italo had been seated at the beginning of the scene. Reflected in the glass of the window, to camera left of Marcello's image, is the image of Italo, and his hands reading the braille, and also down in the bottom left hand corner of the frame, the reflexion of the music stands that the musicians had been reading from. Italo: . . . **una svolta** . . . (here he pauses while he raises the top sheet of paper against his chest, and with his hands searches for the first line of the next sheet - all of which we see in reflexion) . . . **al corso della storia. Oggi, che** . . . (Marcello starts to sit down in a chair that is out of sight behind the wall beneath the bottom left hand corner of the frame, and so turns to profile facing camera right, and lowers himself into the seat, his head coming into

the space in the window occupied by the reflexions of the music stands in the studio) . . . **per virtù, dei capi, i due popoli ritrovano in sè le virtù profonde, ecco, in questo ritrovamento riscoprono altresì** (Marcello, now seated facing camera right, turns his head - not quite all of which is visible - to look through the window at Italo) **ie dimenticate e reciproche simiglianze: quello che Goebbels chiama . . .**

28. (5 secs) More or less reverse angle, of Italo speaking into microphone, and music stands visible in bottom right of frame. Italo, in threequarter shot: . . . **l'aspetto prussiano di Benito Mussolini, e quello che secondo noi è l'aspetto . . .**

29. (3.8 secs) Reverse angle, an enlarged portion of no. 27: Marcello's head, now resting in his fist, and looking as though he is dropping off to sleep, filling the left half of the frame, with Italo in reflexion in the upper right portion. Italo's voice off: . . . **latino di Hitler. Italia e Germania! . . .**

30. (4.5 secs) Close-up of no. 28, Italo's head and shoulders and the large double ribbon microphone, suspended in a frame, filling the screen. Italo: **Portatrici di due grandi rivoluzioni antiparlamentari e antidemocratiche!**

A pattern is followed in the editing in which shots 29 and 30 are closer shots of 27 and 28 respectively, just as shots 35 and 36 will be closer shots of 31 and 32 respectively. This is characteristic of a concern with rhythm and symmetry in his films which supports his claim to be striving towards a music, and which is a powerful current in the Petrarchan tradition of Italian poetry which Bertolucci inherited.¹⁵

Shot 27 is basically a reverse angle to shot 26, but while reverse angle filming is generally a montage of diametrically opposed images, shot 27 in this example, contains the image of shot 26. Finally, one could say, Bertolucci actually makes the pane of glass the protagonist of his shot: we see its transparent and its reflective qualities simultaneously. It would be easy to say at this point that Italo is given the connotation of illusion by virtue of the fact that his image is merely a reflexion, whereas Marcello's image comes through the window-pane. But as Marcello sits down, the objects pertaining to the 'show' we have just seen, the music stands, partly efface his image. This is deliberate, because the studio from which Italo is broadcasting is now in dim light, with highlights on parts of it, particularly Italo - in other words Bertolucci chose to light the music stands in such a way that they would interfere with the image of Marcello. The superimposition of Marcello and Italo in shot 26 is followed by a 'critique' of their images in shot 27, parallel to a speech on the soundtrack that expresses empty rhetorical conceits, delivered by a man who can see neither what is real nor what is illusory. In the speech, Italo claims that the meeting of fascism and nazism produces a synthesis, 'le virtù profonde' (not really precisely defined anywhere in the speech); and this quest for a solid, profound 'norm' is equivalent to Marcello's quest. The juxtaposition of Marcello with the reflexion of

Italo equates the two. The 'plane' of their meeting is the pane of glass of the 'shop' window. The message of the film is quite clear: Marcello is chasing an illusion. In fact, in no time at all he discovers that his wife's 'normality' was illusory. By the same token, fascism is an illusion - the projection of values by a bourgeoisie seeking an anchor in a reality that is nothing more than an ideological construct. All of this is made explicit in the scene in Quadri's study, and a digression on that scene is in order here.

The scene is introduced by a verbal link on the soundtrack: as Marcello is escorted to Quadri's study, Anna says to Giulia: 'Sono curiosa . . .' (and asks her whether she and Marcello made love before getting married). On the cut to Quadri's study, Quadri says to Marcello: 'Sono molto curioso, Clerici . . .' (to know why you have come to see me . . .). Quadri's and Anna's curiosity is the sign of their openness to a reality which Marcello sees as a threat. In the name of that openness, Quadri will criticize Marcello's reality, and as a punishment for his doing that, he will die. His critique is that Marcello's 'reality' is an illusion made of light and shade. It is encapsulated in Plato's myth of the cave, where what the prisoners see is merely the shadow of statues held by the 'real' people they think they are seeing. The dialogue takes place in a dark, cocoon-like room, and when Quadri opens the shutters of more than one window (i.e., introduces more than one source of light, curiosity, if you like) the shadow of Marcello on the wall thrown by a single light source disappears. This, says Quadri, is the situation of people in fascist Italy, they see only 'le ombre delle cose' which they 'scambiano per realtà'. The episode is also an allegory of the cinema; the telephone number and address of Quadri are those of Jean-Luc Godard. If you turned on the house lights during the projection of a film, the image on the screen would disappear; the images are shadows, and require darkness for their creation, and cannot coexist with reality and curiosity (a multiplicity of light sources). Godard's quest has been to engage the viewer in a discussion of the nature, status, and meaning of the film image, and to teach the viewer not to mistake it for reality. Bertolucci's reluctance to follow Godard completely down that path (which, Bertolucci maintains, would mean sticking to minority films for a restricted audience - as opposed to 'militant' cinema accessible to the masses, like Renoir's *La vie est à nous*, whose title is part of the mise en scène of *Il conformista*'s opening sequence) (Tassone, II, 65) is similar to Fabrizio's 'nostalgia del presente' in *Prima della rivoluzione*, and explains Bertolucci's oft repeated 'joke' that, in killing the man who lives at Godard's address, he is killing Godard in *Il conformista*.

On another level, Quadri is a father-figure, married to the woman with whom Marcello is in love (a woman who is, in turn a projection of Marcello's fantasy, as is

illustrated by the fact that the actress who plays her, Sanda, plays two other fantasy-projection women in the film). His criticism of the ideal for which Marcello is so desperately striving is intolerable. In this scene with Quadri we have the 'opposite' father figure to Italo in the scene in the radio studio which we have been analysing. At the end of the film, when Marcello discovers that his 'rejection' or 'denial' (his killing) of Quadri was unnecessary, he 'denies' the 'opposite' father-figure, Italo, who is appropriately carried off by the popolo (now truly virtuous) whom he still cannot see. (Note that Marcello is NOT carried off by that 'reality'; he has still to face his inner reality, which he does in the last shot as he turns and looks at the naked male prostitute behind the bars.) Quadri-as-Godard is also Bertolucci's artistic model, who must be discarded for Bertolucci to achieve his own identity as an artist - indeed, I think that Bertolucci's films are really 'about' this search for a personal artistic identity in the presence of the models from whom he learnt his art. Half in jest, I wonder when he will kill Verdi.

31. (16.2 secs) Approximate camera set-up of no. 23, i.e., perpendicular to a line between Italo and Marcello, with window to studio on left of screen, Marcello, seated in centre background, head on hand, face onto the camera but looking down, asleep, and in right foreground the Colonnello seated facing a point between Marcello and the window, looking at Marcello, with his hat on his knee. Italo's voice off, but quieter: **E se hanno stabilito . . .** Marcello wakes with a start, looks up at the Colonnello and starts to rise out of his chair apologetically. The Colonnello holds out a hand to gesture him to stay put, saying: **Prego . . . Caro Clerici.** From now until the end of shot no. 38, but with the exception of nos. 33 and 34, the voices of Marcello and the Colonnello appear to activate a voice-operated compressor, so that Italo's words decrease in volume when these two speak, and increase in the gaps between their dialogue, which means that we half-hear the rest of his speech, and in the next minute or so the following snatches are clear: . . . **supreme decisioni . . . l'Europa non può procrastinare . . . l'ordine nuovo . . . rivoluzione . . . propaganda . . . reazione . . .** Meanwhile, Marcello: **Ci sono novità per me?** Colonnello: **Le vostre note personali . . . sono molto buone.** Marcello: **Saro assunto?**

32. (21.9 secs) Reverse angle of no. 31, with the camera low behind Marcello's back and to his right, with him in the centre of the frame, and the Colonnello facing him and the camera on the right, and the desk with the lamp on the left. Colonnello: **Sono decisioni che vanno ben meditate.** Marcello: **Sì, capisco.** Colonnello: **Funzionario di stato, buona cultura classica, prospettive di carriera, con una raccomandazione del camerata Montanari, una mattina vi presentate al Ministero, arrivate nel mio ufficio con la vostra faccia da bravo ragazzo e mi fate una proposta precisa.**

The Colonnello serves as a device to lead from the flashback of the radio station to an anterior (and very brief) flashback, to Marcello's first visit to the Ministry (I take the Colonnello's words in shot 32 to be narrative, rather than imperative; if they are imperative, then shots 33 and 34 are a 'preview' of the flashforward which is finally established in shot 39; it is extremely difficult to be

sure, but the tone of voice of the Colonnello in shot 32 does not sound convincingly imperative. The whole matter is further complicated by the fact that in hard celluloid reality, as opposed to 'narrative' reality, shot 34 is a continuation of shot 39 -see below), and then to a flashforward, from shots 39ff, to his introduction to the Minister himself. However, the flashforward is definitive, in that we do not return to the radio station after shot 38, except that shots 62 and 63 (outside the scope of this analysis) show Marcello climbing the stairs to his fiancée's apartment to the sound off camera of a radio receiver playing the lead-up to the time signal, and the start of the radio news - a device typical of the neatness with which this film is put together.

The compression of Italo's speech while the Colonnello and Marcello speak to each other is a way of producing on the soundtrack the same kind of superimposition that was achieved visually in shot 27: Marcello's behaviour is observed through the filter of the ideals he is both imagining and attempting to conform to. The Colonnello expresses reservations about Marcello's motives for his proposed action, and attempts to interrogate him about those motives. Marcello refuses to participate in that interrogation. But first the flashback inside the flashback.

33. (5.5 secs) High camera looks down on the floor of an enormous hall, with a large black desk in the middle, at which is seated a small man. Marcello approaches the desk from the left (on the soundtrack can be heard no longer the voice of Italo but the footsteps of Marcello), and stops, asking the man at the desk: **L'ufficio del Capo Gabinetto.**

34. (8.7 secs) Low camera on crane behind and to the right of Marcello, who moves to the left of the desk, round it, and away to the left hand back corner of the hall, and up about three steps at the edge. As he does this, the camera simultaneously cranes up until it is well above head height, and tracks forward towards the desk. As this happens, the Colonnello's voice off (with the acoustics it had in no. 33), in a

form, therefore, of voice-over, says: **Vi siete mai domandato, Clerici, perchè la gente chiede di collaborare con noi?** (Against these words, we do not, however, hear Italo's radio speech, though we do hear Marcello's footsteps.)

This is the secondary flashback. We then return to the studio, and then go into the flashforward. This device of moving backwards and forwards in time at the 'leading edge', so to speak, of a transition is used in even greater complexity when we go from the car en route to Savoy, to Marcello as a boy, back to the car with Manganiello, then back to the boy, then to Marcello as an adult in the confessional, then to the story of Lino, back to the confessional, and straight on to the train journey to Ventimiglia. But the example in the sequence we are analysing is less complex, except for one detail: shot 34 is a continuation of shot 39 below. For the time being, let us note the subtlety of the sound editing: shot 33 has straightforward

synchronous sound, both for dialogue and for sound effects (the footsteps). Shot 34 has synchronous sound effects, but non-synchronous dialogue. The dialogue belongs in the studio sequence - the Colonnello's voice-over is really a continuation of the sound from shot 32, with one difference, namely that Italo is not present at the 'effects' or 'background' level.

35. (8 secs) Close-up of no. 31, with the head and shoulders of the Colonnello and, to the left, and more distant, those of Marcello, taking up all the screen. The Colonnello, in the same tone as before, but this time with Italo's voice in the background once more: **Per paura qualcuno, per soldi quasi tutti, per fede fascista pochissimi.**

36. (11.2 secs) Close-up of no. 32, with the head and shoulders of the two filling the frame in a reverse angle corresponding to that of nos. 31 and 32. The Colonnello: **Voi no. Voi non siete spinto da nessuno di questi motivi.** Marcello, after a pause in which he 'ought to have' responded to an implied question: **Tra, quanto potrò avere una risposta?** The Colonnello: **Presto, spero.**

37. (3.8 secs) Same camera set-up as no. 29, i.e., the camera inside the studio looking into the anteroom with Marcello's head visible through the reflexions of the music stands at bottom left, the Colonnello at the right of the frame, and towards the centre the reflexion of Italo reading. Italo's voice-off at full volume now: . . . **e di minare la saldezza degli ideali rivoluzionari e . . .** As he speaks, we see the Colonnello speaking quite animatedly to Marcello through the glass, but naturally we do not hear any sound.

38. (21 secs) As no. 35. Italo's voice-off, loud: . . . **della fede fascista . . .** at which point it is suppressed by the voice of the Colonnello: **E mi domando qual è il vostro obiettivo.** This is said in a meditative tone, exactly as in no. 36, as though he were trying to get the reply that in no. 36 Marcello did not give. This being so, the animated talking we saw but did not hear in no. 37 seems inappropriate. Marcello moves a little nervously: **Sono pronto a partire appena avrete deciso.** The Colonnello: **Beh,** reaches down to his hat, puts it on, starts putting his gloves on, **vi presenterò al Ministro.**

Shots 35, 36, and 38 all show the same situation. Shots 36 and 38 show a similar exchange between Marcello and the Colonnello. Shot 38 could be exactly the same action as 36 with a different camera set-up and different dialogue dubbed on afterwards. In fact it is not, because Marcello moves a little more in replying in shot 38 than in shot 36. Nonetheless, the redundancy, the repetition of 36 in 38 (made palatable by the interpolated shot 37, which, however, is not narratively convincing), must be the clue to the fact that Bertolucci wanted to insist on Marcello's refusal to deal with the matter of his motives, and on the Colonnello's doubts about them.

39. (5.8 secs) This is the beginning of the crane tracking shot no. 34, and is cut off at the point where no. 34 takes it up. Marcello enters the hall of the ministry at left, and walks down some steps, and the camera cranes down to follow him, and pans to

camera right as he goes past the camera towards the desk. Just about at the lowest point of its crane (knee-level) the camera stops its movements. Putting this shot and no. 34 together, we have a sequence shot that includes a crane from above head height down to knee-level and then back up to well above head height simultaneous with a nearly 180 degree pan, and in which Marcello enters the hall, goes down some steps, over to the desk, asks a question and proceeds on past the desk to the opposite corner of the hall, goes up three steps and out. Whereas in 34 the soundtrack had footsteps and voice-over of the Colonnello, here there are footsteps and music. Numbers 34 and 39 are a single shot that has been cut and reintroduced into the film at different points out of sequence.

Bertolucci is the virtuoso of the moving camera, who acknowledges Ophüls as one of his masters. But he has grown to want to disguise his indulgences, and this is a characteristic of his films: complex shots hidden by the fact that they have been cut in the editing. There are many examples in Il conformista, and many in La luna. The movement of the camera is Bertolucci's way of relating Marcello to his environment, in this case Bertolucci's version of what fascist architecture would have like to have been. The whole sequence in the ministry quite clearly juxtaposes the measure of man with the measure of fascist rhetoric. The teasing quality of this piece of editing comes from the fact that the two halves of the shot are used for quite different moments in the time of the narrative.

40. (5.6 secs) Camera looking down a long wide corridor, with windows down the left side (camera is towards right side). Marcello walks down the left side, away from the camera, which pans slowly to the right to follow him. A man approaches on the right side, and the panning camera eventually reveals a man standing in profile facing left, with his arms folded, in a doorway on the right, quite close to the camera. On the soundtrack, the footsteps of the two men walking.

41. (3.4 secs) A flight of marble steps in the centre of the screen, open at either side. At the top of the screen cut off by a ceiling, and at the bottom finishing on the floor. On the soundtrack can be heard steps going down stairs, and a shadow (presumably Marcello's) appears on the floor at the bottom of the steps.

42. (3.8 sec) A table-top across the top of the frame, with a woman's calf and shoe swinging down from the middle, and a seated man's leg on the left of the frame. The camera is shooting under the table. A woman's whisper: **Ancora.**

43. (2 secs) The screen is dark at either side, becoming clearer to the centre, where grey curtains can be seen. A hand appears from behind the curtains, pulls one aside, Marcello looks out, catches sight of something near the camera and looks. (This is a reverse angle shot relative to no. 42; one assumes he is looking at the table and the girl.)

44. (3.8 secs) Close-up of the girl's face from Marcello's angle, in profile looking to left; she turns, chuckling, and looks in the direction of the camera.

45. (2 secs) Reverse angle of Marcello's head through the curtains, which withdraws with an expression of disgust.

46. (10.1 secs) Reverse angle, this time showing the table-top through middle of frame, the girl seated with one leg raised on the table, the other dangling down, leaning back on her arms, facing the man seated to her left behind the table. The girl swivels round to put her head to the left of the man, and to lie on her back. The man (the minister) puts his arms around her and buries his head in her bosom. The camera does a very fast zoom back to a very long shot of the desk at one end of a huge room, with the perspective enhanced by a black carpet strip on the white marble leading from the camera to the desk. On the wall high above the desk and behind it is an eagle, and there are busts on pedestals at either side of the desk.

47. (2 secs) Same as no. 43. Marcello withdraws and shuts the curtain.

The stylistic device of proceeding from detail shot (42) to establishing shot (at the end of the fast zoom in shot 46) is motivated by the alienation which Marcello is made to feel in discovering that the monumental 'norm' of the Ministry is tainted. It also serves another purpose, which is to superimpose religious imagery, and the connotations of sacredness that go with it, onto the Minister's office. At the end of the zoom, we have a view of what might be an altar at the end of a long nave. The girl, and the Minister fondling her, are then images of sacreligious profanation.

Shots 41 to 47 are a film version of an episode in Moravia's novel. What Bertolucci has added is the face of Sanda (who will play two other women who represent projections of his fantasy: Anna, Quadri's wife, and the prostitute in Ventimiglia), the way she looks at Marcello, and the intimacy of their exchanged glance. However, this is not so much a 'real' intimacy as an event in Marcello's psyche. We see in shot 44 a large, close-up view of Sanda's smiling face. It is part of a series of reverse angles, which leads us to attribute the point of view to Marcello; we think that this close, smiling face is what he sees. But the zoom in shot 46 reveals to us that Marcello is a long, long way away from Sanda, and that she must be no more than a tiny figure in the distance. The zoom back asserts a sort of 'reality' which puts Marcello's fantasy into its context. It also repeats the point being made about the relationship of people to environment.

48. (17.5 secs) A large hall, the camera looking at one of its walls, with a large staircase going across the top left hand corner of the frame. Down on the right is a large door, with large marble framing making it seem two or three times the height of a man, from which Marcello, a tiny figure, appears, and walks towards the camera. Two men walk across the frame from right to left, and left to right, crossing past each other, on Marcello's plane, bearing a statue of an eagle and a bust respectively, both of which dwarf the men who are very small in this large space. Marcello turns 90 degrees and walks towards the left, while a man descends the stairs from the top of the frame, stops when he gets to the left hand edge of the frame, looks down at Marcello, and calls: **Clerici! Clerici!** Marcello cannot see him, and retraces his steps towards the extreme bottom right edge of the frame, turning to look up at the man, backing further to the edge of the picture. Marcello, taking his hat off: **Eh, agli ordini.** The Colonnello: **Faccio avvertire il segretario. Il Ministro ci sta**

aspettando. This exchange takes place with the speakers two tiny figures in a vast architectural space, at the extreme opposite corners of the frame.

There is a conventional hierarchy to the film image on the screen: what is large and is in the centre of the screen is important, and what is small and on the periphery is unimportant. Shot 48 exploits that code very effectively. We are left with a Marcello extremely alienated in his 'chosen' environment. This is in part achieved by having made us superimpose the unconscious level at which Marcello is seeking peace in fascism onto the interpretation of fascism as an inhuman, bombastic rhetoric.

49. (2.4 secs) The point of view is the same as at the end of the zoom in no. 45. They are walking down the strip of carpet towards the Minister's desk. The camera is tracking forward, and the Segretario is looking back at the camera over his left shoulder, walking ahead, asking Marcello (the camera): **È la prima volta che venite introdotto dal Ministro?**

50. (5 secs) Reverse angle relative to no. 49 of Marcello's head and shoulders, with the curtains in the background. Marcello: **Sì.** Voice-off of the Colonnello, to which Marcello responds by looking to camera right: **Quando gli ho esposto il vostro piano, ha detto subito 'superbo!' (Tracking back.)**

51. (6.3 secs) Still tracking, this time forwards again, for a reverse angle shot of the Colonnello from Marcello's point of view, the Colonnello on the left and front, looking back at the camera/Marcello over his right shoulder: . . . **Avvicinare il Quadri, ispirargli fiducia, entrare nella sua organizzazione e cercare di scoprire i suoi corrispondenti qui in . . .**

52. (10.1 secs) All three viewed from behind by the camera still tracking forwards behind them. The Colonnello and the Segretario keep looking back at Marcello who is walking a pace behind them and between the two of them. Colonnello: . . . **Italia.** Segretario: **Sì sì sì, superbo.** (His voice is not accoustically appropriate to the room, more like a muttered voice-over, said with great relish, but unreal in its relation to the image - this tonal quality persists throughout this shot.) Colonnello: **E quel che più conta, spontaneo!** Segretario: **Anzi, volontario!** (at this point logical syntax disappears, and the utterances are like a montage of exclamations). Colonnello: **Opera Volontaria.** Segretario: **Repressione Antifascismo.**

The hushed tones enhance the reverential atmosphere referred to in connexion with shot 46. The sense of unreality that was achieved visually in shot 49 is achieved in shot 52 on the soundtrack by having the utterances degenerate into slogans, gradually shedding conversational syntax. I have used capital letters for the last two pieces of dialogue because the slogan put all together of 'Opera Volontaria Repressione Antifascismo' is the title of the Fascist secret police, OVRA, which Marcello is joining.

The woman on the desk in shot 44 is playing, and her smile is both inviting and playful. The fornication on the 'altar' of the regime is playful in its desecration. In

play, what is potentially serious is treated without anxiety, and this is precisely what is impossible for Marcello. In the Chinese restaurant Giulia remarks that he never laughs (to which he responds with anger), and Quadri says that he is 'troppo serio', and that such people are never really serious. Bertolucci casts sexual encounters in the film as having a playful quality to them - with the important reservation that Marcello's role is always anomalous; he is never playful, or if he is, then there is something sinister about it. His encounter as a boy with Lino is playful, until a certain point, and the shooting is a matter of playing with the gun. Giulia sees sex in terms of play, and playfully deflects Anna's advances, rather than rejecting them abruptly. As Anna becomes more persistent in the restaurant, Giulia laughs happily at the prospect of nude play in the snow and on noisy bedsprings in Savoy, while Marcello listens anxiously, and on the soundtrack the ominous chord of the background music starts up. His honeymoon night on the train consists of the superimposition of romantic music and a picture-postcard sunset (*Dialogue on Film*, 14-15) onto his imitation of Perpuzio's rape of Giulia. His lovemaking with Anna in the side room of the dancing school is cast in an alienating blue light which Bertolucci intended to imply the 'slaughterhouse' - while, in the room next door, children are playfully dancing. Marcello imitates the ballet students' curtsy in what at first seems a playful way, but it is a ruse to yank Anna into the next room. In other words, play is used as part of the code to express the ambiguity and levity in sexual relations that Marcello cannot tolerate, and from which he is fleeing into a refuge of 'normality'. The dance, with its mixture of the erotic, the aesthetic, and the ritual, is the supreme image of Marcello's antithesis. One of the students in Quadri's apartment asks Marcello if it is still permitted to dance in Italy under the fascist regime. The scene which opposes Marcello to Giulia, Anna, and Quadri very clearly is the one in which they all go to a dance-hall at Joinville.¹⁶

The familiar panes of glass abound, because the external walls of the dance-hall are glazed, and the meaning of the episode is partly articulated by the opposition implied in people or groups of people being on different sides of the glass. The episode begins with the two women running along the outside wall, looking in, and as they enter, the camera cuts to a position inside the door. As they prepare to dance, the camera shows the two men in the background outside looking in. The women dance together, and Marcello tells Quadri (they are inside now) to make them stop, to which Quadri replies 'Perchè? Sono così belle.' Quadri accepts and assigns high aesthetic value to what Marcello wants repressed. After exhibiting themselves in a tango (one of Bertolucci's many), the women start a farandole, in which all the

dancers join hands in a long, curling line. The camera returns to a position showing the two men at a table with behind them the windows of the hall. The end of the farandole sweeps past and picks up Quadri. In this shot, Giulia passes by at the head of the farandole on the outside of the window behind Marcello (the familiar superimposition, and once again the pane of glass separating ethical realms), at which point the camera starts to track along the glass wall parallel to the dancers outside, going round the building, with the empty tables passing by in the foreground. Finally the track gets to the end of the window, and Giulia passes out of sight behind the frame; in the foreground, sitting at a table is Manganiello. The beginning and the end of the shot are symmetrical, with the playful in the background on the other side of the window, onto which is superimposed the image of death: Eros and Thanatos. The rhetorical effect of suddenly and unexpectedly encountering Manganiello is a device from the genre of the thriller which Bertolucci is using all the way through the film. Marcello's repression of the playful is expressed by his walking across the empty dance floor to Manganiello and handing him the address to which Quadri will drive the following day. As he does so, in the background Quadri disappears behind Manganiello, at the end of the line of dancers. At this point the dancers return with their farandole, but the way the camera photographs them only makes sense when you realise that the angles are calculated so as always to keep in frame Manganiello rising, putting on his gloves, and walking out of the building. In other words, the dancers entering and swirling around Marcello (who is at that point recrossing the dance floor) are superimposed on the slow, purposeful exit of Manganiello. As the dancers tighten their spiral around the stiff and anxious figure of Marcello, the soundtrack is not synchronous; instead of the clattering of many feet, there is the orderly stamping of marching feet signifying, says Bertolucci, (*Dialogue on Film*, 21-22) the impending war, and constituting a quotation from Renoir's *La règle du jeu*.

Marcello hemmed in by the dancers will be repeated in the epilogue when the dancers singing *Bandiera Rossa* and *L'internazionale* surge round him. There is also the familiar superimposition of one film on another in the dance-hall scene. For just as in *Il conformista* the fascist is marked by being the only one on the dance floor who is not dancing, in *Strategia del ragno* Athos senior is marked as anti-fascist by the fact that he is the only one to dance to the anthem *Giovinetta*. Both the scene of Marcello in the midst of the dancers and the scene of him amongst the singing marchers in the epilogue are visualizations of his political relationship with a life that Bertolucci's structure (and in this it is diametrically opposed to Marcello's fantasy structure) posits as a 'norm' - beautiful (in Quadri's words) and happy. It is in

this context that it is important to remember that Bertolucci wishes to criticize Quadri for being a bourgeois activist from a safe exile, and also that he is interested less in fascism than the bourgeoisie, and less in politics than in a psychological condition (*Cinema 71*, 115 and Tassone, II, 65).¹⁷

The presence of an Eros in a playful context, reminding him of Lino and of his own frightening impulses, leads Marcello to a repression in the form of the murder. This is already expressed in his response to the intimate, chuckling smile of the Minister's-mistress-with-Anna's face in the cabinet minister's office.

53. (1.9 secs) As no. 7. Manganiello's voice off: **Va' un po' capirle, le donne . . .**

We have returned to the point from which we departed.

• University of Reading

Notes

1. 'Bertolucci on *The Conformist*'. An interview with Marilyn Goldin', *Sight and Sound*, 40 (1971), 64-66 (p. 65).
2. 'Bernardo Bertolucci', *Dialogue on Film*, 3 (1974), 14-23 (p. 19).
3. 'Dialogue on Film: Bernardo Bertolucci', *American Film*, 5 (1980), 35-43 (p. 41).
4. A. Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano*, 2 vols (Milano, 1979-80), II, 61.
5. F. Casetti, *Bertolucci* (Firenze, 1976), p. 10.
6. *Cinema 71*, 155 (1971), 114-120 (p. 115, p. 117, and p. 118).
7. S. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York, 1960).
8. Quoted in M. Morandini, *Il cinema di Bernardo Bertolucci*, Quaderni del Cineforum di Bergamo (Bergamo, 1973), p. 39.
9. An explanation of a few technical terms for the non-specialist reader: **rack focus**: e.g. the camera is focussed so that what is near is in focus and what is distant is out of focus; then, during the shot, the camera focusses on the distant object, putting the near object out of focus, and obliging the viewer to move his attention from one object to the other; **match cut**: what is photographed in shot B is similar (matches) to what was photographed at the end of shot A. Camera movement: **pan**: the camera revolves on its vertical axis, left to right or vice versa; **tilt**: the camera looks up or looks down; **roll**: the camera turns on the axis that goes from the lens to the object being photographed - the effect on the screen being that the image is

tilted askew; track: the camera moves forwards, backwards, or to one side, on rails; dolly: same as track, except that the camera is on a rubber-tyred trolley; crane: the camera is literally on a small crane. For a glossary of technical terms, backed up with diagrams and explanations, see J. Monaco, How to Read a Film (New York, 1977), pp. 395-437.

10. A discussion of the differences between Moravia's novel and Bertolucci's film is in D. Lopez, 'Novel into Film: Bertolucci's "The Conformist"', Literature/Film Quarterly, 4 (1976), 303-312.

11. Just such a trio, the Trio Lescano, was enormously popular at the time in which the film is set.

12. This, and a number of other points about this sequence, are discussed in an illuminating article: A. Britton, 'Bertolucci. Thinking about Father', Movie, 23 (1976/77), 9-22.

13. A list of sheets of glass and mirrors in the film: 1. mirror in opening shot in hotel room; 2. glass doors of hotel in second shot of film; 3. front windscreen of car in shot 7; 4. window of radio studio; 5. mirror in Giulia's mother's apartment; 6. Manganiello's car 'tailing' Marcello; 7. the windows of Marcello's mother's car; 8. the grille of the confessional; 9. windows of train; 10. the 'see-through' Magritte painting; 11. Lino's car's rear window; 12. window of Lino's bedroom; 13. mirror in Quadri's drawing room; 14. windows in Quadri's study; 15. windows in Giulia's taxi for the Eiffel Tower; 16. mirror in dancing school; 17. shop window in Paris and glass doors of the shop; 18. crack in the doorway of Marcello's hotel room through which he watches Anna and Giulia; 19. windows of the dance hall; 20. the steamed up windows of the three cars during the assassination. They function partly as barriers which emphasize the separation or difference of the observer from the observed, the desirer (or fearer) from the desired (or feared). In a similar vein, there is quite a catalogue of 'bars' through which, or from behind which, events are watched.

14. S. Eisenstein, Film Form (London, 1951), p. 75.

15. Bertolucci began as a poet, and his father was a well-known Italian poet.

16. In Sight and Sound, 65, there is a reference to a 'blind people's ball', and the credits at the end of Il conformista mention the actors who played the roles of 'cieco' and 'cieco ubriaco'. A scene of blind people dancing might be very relevant to the themes of seeing and of the dance which I am discussing here. Unfortunately, no copy of Il conformista that I have been able to see contains any such scene, notwithstanding the credits.

17. The status and ideological implications of Bertolucci's 'norm' are matters that require an entire article to themselves, and the fact that I do not deal with them here is not to be taken as an assertion that they are unproblematic.