ORPHEUS TRANSCENDING: BERTOLUCCI'S LAST TANGO IN PARIS

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—Remember the first day? 'Madame will you give me the pleasure of this dance?'
—'But, sir, I don't know how to dance the tango.'
—'Nothing simpler, madame. I hold you in my arms. You've only to let yourself go... Ab, the uncertainty, the delicious disturbance of that first day of days. The searching, the awareness, the groping toward the unknown...

JEAN ANOULH, EURYDICE

Amid all the heated debate concerning Last Tango in Paris—whether or not Mailer is right about Schneider's underwear, whether Brando emerged with irreparable psychic scars; whether butter is really better—much of the basic structure and message of the film have been overlooked. Despite its intensely personal references and its apparent looseness of construction, the film embodies an unusually coherent structure based on an intricate series of allusions to the ancient Orpheus-Eurydice myth, on the masterful interweaving of this myth with Bertolucci's already tested (in Partner and The Spider's Strategeme) theme of the double, and on the psychological meaning which emerges from their confrontation.

According to the myth, Orpheus' wife Eurydice was fatally bitten by a serpent while fleeing the advances of her lover, Aristaeus. Insensitive at her death, Orpheus managed to obtain permission from the gods of Hades to descend into the world of the dead to retrieve her. The infernal deities, softened by his poetry and music, allowed her to return to earth on condition that Orpheus precede her the entire way without looking back. Orpheus broke this command, turned to look back and instantly lost Eurydice forever. Orpheus was subsequently set upon by the Thracian maenads during a Bacchanalia and was disemboweled and devoured.

Although a first viewing of the film may not immediately convince one of the parallels between Paul (played by Brando) and Orpheus—especially since, like the transcriptions of the myth by Cocteau, M. Camus and Tennessee Williams, Bertolucci's version is as much a perversion as a restatement—recourse to the basic structure of the film will elucidate the parentage.

Tango, in simplest terms, presents a man, grief-stricken at the death of his wife (Rosa) who died apparently to escape an impossible situation with her husband (Paul) and her lover (Marcel). The man expresses a desire to get her back (in both senses of the term), fails, and is finally killed by an evening female.

Paul's apostrophe to Rosa's corpse provides one of the keys to understanding the mythic structure. Although occurring late in the film, the apostrophe to Rosa's body is crucial: it retroactively elucidates Paul's relationship with Rosa and provides a comprehensible underlying motive for his otherwise inexplicable search for an apartment and his complex affair with Jeanne. Beside her bellowed bier, he intones a lament which gradually becomes a terrible but impotent accusation: Rosa was a 'goddamn fucking whore' and a 'pig-fucking liar', her suicide (accomplished with her lover Marcel's razor) was a betrayal. Paul pleads, exclaims, and raves at her inert remains, vowing, 'I'd do it too, if I knew how, I just don't know' (Bertolucci & Arcalit, pp. 166-67). What bothers him most about Rosa is her inaccessibility:

Even if the husband lives two hundred fucking years, he's never going to be able to discovery his wife's true nature. I mean, I might be able to comprehend
the universe, but I'll never discover the truth about you, never. I mean, who the hell were you?

(pp. 156-66)

It would take an eternity to get to know a woman. Yet Paul clearly rejects eternity as his refusal to allow her the rites of the Church makes clear: 'No one believes in the fucking God here!' (p. 63). Paul must thus search elsewhere for communion, understanding and vengeance. He chooses for his purposes one of Bertolucci’s favourite themes, the double. The love-aversion ambiguity between Paul and Jeanne can therefore be understood as the displaced frustrations of the Paul–Rosa relationship. Indeed, it is remarkable that the first moments of the scene beside Rosa’s bier lead us to believe that Paul is addressing Jeanne—only after several sentences does the camera shift from Paul to the dead woman.

The film opens with a series of highly symbolic and deliberately allusive camera shots. Of the first view is of Paul, then of Jeanne, who overstates and passes him. The camera then pans to a shot of the bridge and the river, deliberately emphasizing their transition. (It will, of course, be remembered that according to Greek mythology only one was obliged to cross the river Styx to reach the gates of the world of departed spirits.) Jeanne thus precedes Paul on to the Quai de Passy (whose very name constitutes an allusion to death: passy' passage 'ripueur' 'to die') from a most dramatic visual of the trestle become cavernous tunnel. The camera quickly cuts to groups of riot-police who appear to be guarding the far bank, in what I believe to be an early allusion to another well-known interpretation of the Orpheus myth. (Bertolucci insists not only on his own early immersion in film, but also his propensity to refer constantly to other films in his own work, see Michener, 1973.) In Cocteau’s film, Orphée, the same aggressively militaristic, uniformed French police deliberately represent the personal guardians of death’s kingdom.

Once past these guardians of the other bank (which include a mysterious Neptune-like sweeper who appears to attempt to sweep Jeanne away and an old bag who literally burns her teeth at the young woman) Paul and Jeanne find themselves in the rue Jules Verne, appearing innocuous detail until one realizes that the geography of Paris has been deliberately, and therefore presumably purposefully, scrambled. The actual rue Jules Verne is situated far from the Quai de Passy, in the heart of the Eleventh Arrondissement. Once again Bertolucci alludes to Cocteau’s celebrated film of 1930 in which he effected the creation of an imaginary city out of Paris. In that earlier film Orphée got out of his car at Grenelle, walked up the Buttes-Chaumont and arrived at the Place des Vosges. The choice of rue Jules Verne constitutes its own allusion to the fantastic voyage of self-discovery Paul is about to undertake and to which I shall return below.

Just before entering the heavy iron gates Jeanne pauses very insistently to consult her watch, another allusion to Cocteau’s film in which the Princess repeatedly stops to consult her watch as Orphée follows her through Paris. Both gestures, of course, allude to Lewis Carroll’s White Rabbit who is also preoccupied by time. Immediately prior to his plunge down the hole leading to Wonderland.

Once inside the heavy iron gates of the apartment building, Jeanne suddenly encounters the sinister West Indian concierge who basing ritually on Jeanne, 'Some funny business here'. Refusing at first any knowledge of the vacant apartment, refusing to visit it because of the 'rats up there' and then only grudgingly producing a double of the missing key, she suddenly seizes Jeanne's hand and holds her prisoner for several anguished moments. One remembers that, according to Greek legend, the vestibule of hell is traditionally guarded by the Erinyes/Eumenides, who sit in cages and harass everyone. (Alley’s novel 'based on the film describes her voice as immensely old. It was as if Jeanne was attempting to gain entrance to some shadowy and threatening netherworld, and the gatekeeper was bent on preventing her. This old woman, like Charon at the gates of Hades, demanded payment before admitting suppliants; Jeanne wondered if she would disappear in the depths of the building', and the place becomes a 'place out of time, where there were no real people doing those things real people did, just the deformities and the plethora of unharmed bodies'. (Alley, 1973, pp. 13–14). Similar witch-like figures can be

found in both Camus’s Orpheus Negro and Tennessee Williams’s play, Orpheus Descending, filmed as The Fugitive Kind.

Jeanne’s entry into the apartment (the living-room of which is a perfect Dantesque circle) becomes yet another allusion to previous recent versions of the myth. Jeanne’s entrance through the doorway of the apartment, the camera shifts from a direct to a mirror-reflected shot of Jeanne, so that she appears to pass through the looking-glass to enter. Cocteau’s Orphée had also to pass through the mirror of his bedroom in order to visit Hades, and in that film, ‘Miroirs are doors through which death comes to get souls.’ Thereafter, each time the two return to the apartment, they are projected on to it by means of jump-cuts which break the normal time-space continuum in a most disconcerting way.

The rest of their first meeting continues the mirror’s allusion to an almost infernal world, removed from yet somehow parallel to accepted reality. This parallelism is further reinforced by the fact that Paul leaves behind in his hotel a double of himself in Marcel. Bertolucci himself referred to the apartment as ‘un espace privilégié’ (Godard, 1972). The series of koning rituals, ‘Some funny business’ (discussion of where the chair should be placed, use of the toilet and telephone), begin to establish Jeanne’s role as Rosa’s surrogate. Significantly, too, in the later scene in which mysterious movers carry in unannounced and never-to-be-explained furniture, one of them addresses Jeanne as if she was Paul’s wife.

The unexpectedly abrupt sexual encounter which terminates this scene further contributes to the Jeanne–Rosa doubling, both in identifying the former as Paul’s mate and in tipping her as whore, the accusation Paul will later level at the dead Rosa. In that Jeanne’s relations with Paul constitute a betrayal of her boyfriend (Tom), she also imitates Rosa’s betrayal of Paul.

Further, when Paul tells the unknown telephone caller, ‘There is no one here’, he is announcing their symbolic death and finalizing the separation from their normal social roles and identities, preparing the intricate relationship they are to share within the ‘privileged space’.

Both of the succeeding scenes serve primarily to insist on the presence of doubles in the film. Jeanne’s ‘real’ boyfriend, Tom (played by Jean-Pierre Léaud), emerges from a train and attempts to capture Jeanne with a violence equal to Paul’s but displaced here on to the camera. Throughout the film we are to witness the same explicit parallelism of behaviour between Paul and Tom with, in each case, Tom’s version of Paul’s behaviour expressed in terms of a displacement from a sexual or active to a photographic or ‘distanced’ form of interaction. Frustrated by his voyeuristic obsessions, Jeanne sarcastically mimics his romantic excesses, but Tom’s distance permits even this to be treated as a cinematic or personal element equally as functional as her other emotions. ‘Magnifique! he cries, ‘Cort!’ (p. 45).

Bertolucci does and Rosa has. He cuts to a bloodstained room where a maid languidly describes and re-enacts for Paul Rosa’s suicide. Following her description of the wrist-slaughtering, she explicitly reintroduces the theme of the double, saying, ‘I did everything like her’ (p. 46). Paul angrily seizes her wrist and neck, but quickly pushes her aside and leaves. This momentary anger at an explicit double of Rosa suggests Paul’s real emotions about the dead woman. In his own hotel, however, he is frustrated in his attempt to express his anger; a frustration which throws him back on the other double or surrogate, Jeanne.

Two rapid jump-cuts, one to the Styx-Seine as symbolic recouping and a second to the door of the apartment, bring us back to Passy. Jeanne enters simultaneously with the mysterious group of movers, and then she and Paul continue symbolically to re-enact Paul’s home life. The intimacy which this appears to create leads Jeanne to ask Paul his name and thereby
elicits the sacred law governing their continued existence together. Paul proclaims furiously, You don’t have a name, and I don’t have a name, either. No names here... We don’t need names here... We’re going to forget everything we knew... All the people, all that we do wherever we lived... Everything! (pp. 55-56).

This absolute interdiction to consider each other’s indentity (which is a direct function of the past) metaphorically parallels the divine command to Adam not to look back. Paul’s subsequent violations of his own operating rules will fatally doom their relationship as inevitably as Orpheus’ disobedience.

During their third meeting, Paul explains, ‘Let’s just look at each other... It’s beautiful without knowing anything’ (pp. 68-69). But moments later Jeanne-Eurydice tricks Paul into turning back to some bitterly nostalgic revelations about his youth. Although no separation immediately follows this violation of the code, a more subtle rupture occurs. Henceforth we do not witness a single act of love between the two. After Paul’s monologue Jeanne marathorizes while Paul looks on in tears. Their next encounters are punctuated by violent acts of sodomy, obviously sterile and painful exercises. Their final and irrevocable separation occurs late in the film when Paul, like Orpheus, cannot resist the temptation to look back. After, significantly, recrossing the river, Jeanne emerges from the tunnel (the first visual reference to the tunnel since their original descent) and is suddenly overtaken by Paul who brazenly reveals his name and profession. Jeanne’s answer can only be: ‘It’s over.’ From that moment Jeanne quite her role as Eurydice and becomes instead a stylizing medium.

She leads him first to a cheap dance hall, where they parody both a Bacchic orgy and their own sexual rituals. Jeanne then manipulates him to a clausual only to desert him, an unmistakable gesture of castration.

In Tennessee Williams’s Orpheus Descending filmed as The Fugitive Kind, Orpheus (played, significantly, by Marlon Brando) is castrated with a blow torch. Jeanne takes up a com-

parable instrument in the closing moments of the film to fire at close range into Paul’s lower abdomen.

The structure and development of the film thus parallel to a remarkable degree those of the myth. And yet, the mere presence of these allusions does not in itself provide an explanation of the meaning of the film. To translate these mythical figures into interpretation we must search behind the myth, as Freud did with the Oedipus legend, recognizing that myths are actually paradigms of mental states, namely ‘distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies... the secular dreams of youthful humanity’ (Freud, 1908, p. 132). Since the Orpheus myth is most obviously the re-enactment of a rescue fantasy, we should first seek deeper understanding of the working of this in the aspect of mental functioning. But first we must ask, who is being rescued?

By his insistant allusions to Cocteau’s use of the Orpheus myth, and particularly through insistence on the passage through the mirror, Bertolucci suggests an answer to this question, for obviously in Cocteau’s film, Orphée and Le Sang d’un poète, the mirror serves primarily to reflect oneself and to pass through the mirror represents a fantasy of self-exploration. Michel Serres (1972) has demonstrated how, in another version of the Orpheus myth alluded to in this film, Jules Verne’s novel Le Château des Carpathes, the Orpheus figure pursues his own image into a ‘sacred space’, perceives the image of his loved one (i.e. himself) on a screen and plunges through the screen causing an explosion of the entire inner space (i.e. goes mad).

To what extent is Tango similar? The key to Paul’s self-recuperation seems not only in the use of mirror-imaging (to which I shall return) but also in the correct identification of the Rosa-Jeanne figure. Rosa, we must remember, functioned primarily as a mother-wife image for Paul. She had ‘adopted’, him and supported him for years, but had never completely satisfied him. She becomes an object of intense ambivalence—a desired love-object and a hated betrayer (because of her love-marcel). This mother-role is iterated visually when the chambermaid, a remarkable look-alike of Rosa’s mother, recapitulates Rosa’s suicide in the manner described above. Moreover, Paul vents his ambivalent feelings both on to this surrogate (by grabbing her wrists and throat) and directly on to Rosa’s mother at several points in the film. Indeed, he says to his mother-in-law after biting her hand, ‘Rosa was a lot like you,... People must have told you often... Isn’t that right mother?’ Rosa’s mother answers, ‘... two sisters’ (pp. 107-08).

Winnicot (1967, p. 27) has noted the mother’s function as mirror in child development: ‘What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face?...herself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there.’ Such a function is normally greatly transformed in adult behaviour, and would be overinterpreted in this instance were it not for several factors: the insistent presence of mirrors in the film—especially in scenes which problems either of self-definition or re-suppression; the emphatically regressive sexual behaviour of Paul in the apartment and the allusion to Francis Bacon which opens the film.

The two Bacon paintings occupying the split screen at the outset of the film constitute both a call for identity and a reference to the mirror, for: ‘... to look at a painting by Bacon is to look into a mirror and to see there our own afflictions and our fears...’ (Rotenberg, 1964, p. 15). Rotenberg also notes that Bacon’s preference for glazing his paintings derives from ‘his belief that the fortuitous play of reflections will enhance his pictures. His dark blue pictures in particular, I heard him observe, gain by enabling the spectator to see his own face in the glass.’ Winnicot (1967), in his essay on the mother’s mirror-role, insists on Bacon’s allusion to the mirror and identity:

Francis Bacon... the exasperating skilful and challenging image that one goes on and on painting the human face distorted significantly... is seeing himself in his mother’s face, but with some twist in him out of the pure diadematous both him and us... Bacon’s face seems to be far removed from perception of the actual; in looking at face he seems... to be painfully striving towards being seen, which is the basis of creative looking (p. 29).

Winnicot further relates Bacon and mirroring to a more fundamental historical process (which seems to be so central to Paul’s experience with Jeanne and to have been so absent from his life with Rosa): I am linking apperception with perception by juxtaposing a historical process (in the individual) which depends on being seen. ‘Who am I? I am seen, so I exist. I can now afford to look and see. I now look creatively and I am appreciative.’ (Ibid.)

Winnicot quotes one of his patients as having said, ‘Wouldn’t it be awful if the child looked into the mirror and saw nothing?’ (p. 31). The only glimpses we have of Paul’s relationship to Rosa are characterized by this same fear and frustration. In her bier she is an expressionless (embalmed) mask, incapable of returning any image whatsoever. Her mother (whose resemblance to Rosa Paulnote) wears a similar mask in life. And there is a further allusion to Rosa’s blindness while alive. As Paul leaves the room of his double, Marcel, he muses, ‘I wonder what she ever saw in me.’ By condensing this expression of anxiety here displaced on to an explicit double, we must understand, ‘I wonder what she ever saw in me? ’ These feelings may explain why, in the hotel lobby with Rosa’s mother, Paul instinctively extinguishes the lights.

The Orpheus rescue fantasy, then, would respond to the thoroughly ambivalent retrieval of Rosa, using Jeanne as surrogate: to get her back in both recuperative and vengeful terms, where the need for recuperation is, as I have suggested above, most strongly revealed by the mirrors and the mother–role to be one of rediscovery of identity, i.e. self–rescue. Also, to the degree that Jeanne performs simultaneous roles as sex object and mother–surrogate for Paul, we must realize that there is another level of self–rescue at work here:

The mother gave the child life, and it is not easy to find a substitute of equal value for this unique gift. With a slight change of meaning, such is essentially effected in the unconscious and is comparable to the way in which in conscious consciousness a shade is casted into one another, rescuing his mother takes on the signification of giving her a child or making a child for her—needless to say, one like himself. This is not too remote from the original sense of rescuing, and the change in meaning is not an arbitrary one. His mother gave him a life—his own

* Freud (1910a, p. 171) notes of the natural development of ambivalence toward the mother, ‘If these impulses do not die away, there is no outlet for them other than to run their course in phantasies, which have
Life—and in exchange he gives her another life, that of a child which has the greatest resemblance to him. The son shows by his gratitude and willingness to have his mother a son who is like himself: in other words, in the rescue fantasy he is completely identifying himself with his father. All his instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, helpfulness, dependence and independence, find satisfaction in the single wish with to be his own father (Freud, 1910a, p. 173, Freud, 1911d).

Bertolucci himself terms the entire relationship for Paul an "obvious search for authenticity" (Bachmann, 1973). Practically every detail of their secret life together reinforces this interpretation.

In this privileged space, womb-like in shape and colour, undoubtedly serving as a representation of the unconflicted part of the ego, Paul announces the Orphic command of refusal to look back, thereby attempting to eliminate memory, culture and civilization and all that they mean in terms of taboos, inhibitions, repressions and defences. Just as in primitive language or in the language of dreams, where contradictory concepts have been quite intentionally combined, not in order to produce a third concept, ... but only in order to use the compounds to express the meaning of one of its contradictory parts" (Freud, 1910a, p. 157), this command simultaneously prohibits (on the explicit level) and permits (on the unconscious level) a particular mode of behaviour. We must bear in mind here that, according to Bachmann (1973), Bertolucci has explicitly stated that the film is "a form of dream" and that 'Brando ... feels, in a way, that he is as much the son of his wife as he is the father of this girl' ... Paul is thus free (with the excuse of mirroring and approving him) to experiment in regression to earlier stages of sexual development; pure ocipital desire, onanism (Freud, 1910a), anal-eroticism and even bestiality (with the dead rat). The ultimate expression of this regressive and thoroughly narcissistic desire occurs during their last moments together in the apartment, when Paul explains (ironically, as it turns out, describing himself):

You want this gold and shining powerful to rule over the world where you can shine like ... Well, then it won't be long until he'll want you to build a fortress for him out of your hair and your smile—and it's somewhere where he can feel—feel comfortable enough and secure enough so that he can worship in front of the altar of his own pric (p. 159).

While, in a sense, this privileged space is without taboos (i.e. without father or social presence) and Paul is free to act out his every fantasy, conflict is nevertheless hinted at and occasionally acted out. Jeanne is constantly verging on her more social role, frequently seeking to recall (by tricking him into revealing it) Paul's social identity and destroy his fantasies. In return Paul acts out his conflicts in the very scene in which he simultaneously gratifies a thoroughly regressive sexual fantasy, punishes the mother-surrogate and attacks the whole institution of family, i.e. the system of lies perpetrated on the child by authority figures in order to repress or transform his wishes and fears.

The most explicit admission of both this regression and the conflict it arouses in Paul occurs in the following exchange:

JEANNE: It's funny, it's like playing grown-ups when you're little. I feel like a child again here ... It's the most beautiful thing.

PAUL: It's the most beautiful thing to be ... forced to admire authority.

The apartment thus satisfies to a high degree Paul's self-rescue fantasy, for the ever-increasingly regressive set of fantasies which retrieve his earliest desires as fixated on a mother figure and his punishment of the mother surrogate for her betrayal together constitute a recuperation of his earliest sense of identity.

Nor can we ignore the implications generated by this discovery of Paul's primarily narcissistic urge. At one point Jeanne screams at Paul,

Why don't you listen to me? You know, it seems to me I'm talking to the wall. Your solitude weighs on me, you know. It isn't indulgent or generous. You're an egoist (p. 97).

Bertolucci's comments on this scene are particularly useful here:

"At the beginning of the film he is superivile ... but slowly he loses his virility. At a certain point he makes the girl telephone him; going backwards, he has arrived at the anal stage. Let's say the sadico-anal stage. Then he goes back even further and arrives in the womb of Paris, dying with mother Paris all around him, her roof tops, TV-satellites, her grey, grabbing anonymity. Much of this feeling was born during the shooting of the film although I had planned for him to die an embryo even when we wrote the script. But now I find that all this comes out very specifically; that there is a clear departure and a clear arrival in death. When we were planning the film, all this was only in my subconscious. My camera research clarified it for me. The irrationnal becomes local" (Bachmann, 1973).

Paul's expression of this narcissistic stage is in the way he says, "I am a narcissistic lover of my own, and I am a narcissistic lover of the mirror" (Orphic self-rescue and the mirror) together with the tendency towards morbidity and the death-wish that commonly result from extreme narcissism (as we have learned from both psychoanalytic theory and previous literary expression). Following Paul's invocation to the altar of his own phallus (see above), he adds:

You're all alone. And you won't be able to be free of the feeling of being alone until you look death right in the face. I mean, that sounds like bullshit and some romantic crap. Until you go right up into the ass of death—right up his ass—until you find a womb in it. And then, maybe then you can—you'll be able to find him (p. 160).

For Paul the association of love and self-love seems to lead to a confiding description of anxiety, the womb (mother) and death, which itself is merely a prefiguration of his own womb-like position as he dies; symbolically castrated by Jeanne. Bertolucci comments on this relationship between sex, solitude and death as follows:

I quickly realized that shooting, when that you show the depth, ... you drown yourself, as it were, in that image and that death that attaches to a relationship in our Western, bourgeois society ... Sex is very close to death in feeling (Bachmann, 1973).

In his various versions of Orpheus, Cocteau recycled the Orpheus myth as the relation of primary narcissism and death. Mirrors, Cocteau tells us, are doors through which Death enters our souls, and through which Orpheus enters the souls of his death. (Freud, 1917a, p. 430) of course had long since noted a tendency in narratricism detrimental to self-preservation which Lacan (1949, p. 454) was to develop, seeing narcissism related to 'instincts of destruction, even of death' and noting, 'the evident relation of the narcissistic libido to the alienating function of the I'.

Earlier Francis Bacon's allusion to the mirror was noted. Bertolucci extends that allusion as well to include a notion of decomposition and death: 'Marlon Brando resembles Francis Bacon's characters . . . his face has that same plasticity of life in decomposition,' and quotes Cocteau, 'Faire de cinéma, c'est salir la mort au travail' (Godard, 1972).

Many of Bertolucci's statements on the film indicate how thoroughly personal a statement it is: 'In making Last Tango I was "worked" on by my unconscious; I wanted to become my unconscious' (Godard, 1972). He even claims that he cut a shot of Brando nude 'out of shame for myself. To show him naked would have been like showing myself naked' (Michener, 'Last Tango in Paris', 'The Times', February 27, 1973). This was much of his own history Bertolucci freely admits. Godard notes, 'He calls Last Tango a Freudian film, a film of exorcism: "By representing one's obsessions, one can get distance on oneself."' (translation). Bertolucci's parents were obviously models: 'In a couple, it's the man who sets the pace. I watched my mother all her life adapt to my father's pace. What more could a woman ask?' (Godard, 1972).
Indeed, that it is an extremely personal work should be obvious. But Bertolucci further elucidates another facet of the work: 'On s'exprime toujours par ses défenses, non ? Et puis il y a... une fascination pour l'autodestruction' (Godard, 1972).

One of the most classic defenses, Robert Rogers (1970) informs us, occurs in the process of doubling—and in this context we understand fascination with self-destruction: in a more figurative sense, as a pulling apart of conflicting aspects of the psyche, and hence congruent with 'the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego by self-observation into many part-egos, and in consequence to personalize the conflicting currents in his mental life in several heroes' (Freed, 1908, p. 150). The theme of the doubles, to which I have several times alluded, thus further develops the regressive and ambivalent tendencies of the film's characters almost as repetition compulsion, but also and quite marvelously contributes to the coherence of the mythical structure. In addition to the previously discussed Jeanne-Rosa couple, Bertolucci provides Brando with a double, Marcel, who lives in a nearby identity room. When a technician thrusts a phallic-shaped microphone into Jeanne's path, while Tom declares on love. Each time Tom and Jeanne meet, this sad scene erupts, all of Tom's 'zombies' replace Paul's 'hap-pents'. She even has to remind Tom in the proposed scene, 'I'm supposed to marry you not the camera' (p. 188). But ironically it is to Tom and not to Paul that Jeanne complains: 'You should have asked my permission... You take advantage of me and make me do things I never do before. I'm tired of being raped!' (pp. 44, 118).

Each of Paul's interdictions against turning to the past is countered by Tom's enthusiastic insistence on capturing the woman and her past, but only on celluloid. Following Paul's manifesto 'It's beautiful without knowing', the camera jump-cuts to Jeanne's country house where Tom's camera makes its symbolic but impotent descent: 'The camera is high... It slowly descends toward you. And as it advances, it moves in on you... It gets closer and closer to you...'. Here Tom not only parodies the mythical descent of Orpheus (or are we surprised to remember that Léaud played in Cocteau's Testament d'Orphée) but also contrives (as always) a displacement of sexual aggression on to the camera. As if instinctively applying Paul's rule to this other space, Jeanne discourages Tom's probing with the warning, 'It's melancholy to look behind you... but Tom will not understand and shrugs, 'It's marvellous... It's your childhood—everything... I wait... I'm opening all the doors... Reverse gear... Close your eyes. Back up, keep going, find your childhood again... You are 15, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9... (p. 79).

Significantly, Orpheus' descent in Cocteau's film is accomplished backwards. Before the close of the scene, Jeanne has provided Tom with another symbolic warning: she holds up a portrait of Paul and Tom and Tom appears to be satisfied with Jeanne's rendition of the dictionary definitions of menstruation and penis.

Bertolucci also creates doubling metonymically by means of parallel cutting. Soon after we see Paul and Jeanne on their bed, which Paul turns towards the camera. We cut to Tom and Jeanne floating towards a small waterfall on the 'Atalante' in yet another parody of lover's relations. Whereas Paul and Jeanne have just discovered their real names in an expressive scene of animal-like noises, Tom and Jeanne adopt the same position and mimic this exchange with an empty series of yesses and no's.

During Tom's descent into Jeanne's real Hades (the Jules Verne apartment) he finalizes his loss of his would-be bride by further insistence on examining her.

In Paul and Jeanne's privileged space Tom feels dwarfed: 'It's huge... It's too large... This apartment is not for us, absolutely not.' Instead of the passionate sexual encounters she has known here, Jeanne receives Tom's particular form of proposition: 'I want to film you every day. In the morning when you wake up, then when you fall asleep. When you smile...'. He senses Jeanne's exultation here: 'Take off, you slowly descend towards me... Descend.' But he is unable to stand this 'uncommon' experience. 'I can't act like children [thus Tom instinctively rejects Paul's games]—we are adults... serious, logical, circumspect.' Suddenly, at the end of this scene Tom realizes that 'The film is finished.' Jeanne suddenly sends him away alone and they do not meet again.

This doubling receives its ultimate reinforcement during Jeanne and Paul's final encounter in the apartment. She enters in her rain-soaked wedding gown and proclaims her love for an ambiguously identified personage immediately assumed by Paul to be Tom. His misconception is shattered only by the revelation that the loved one is Paul himself. Each of her claims about the man she loves is deliberately contrived to refer equally well to either man, so that we are forced to consider once again the remarkable parallelism between them.

From the many indications of Bertolucci's own conflicts and by analogy with Partner (which, according to Bachman, Bertolucci claimed of all his films 'the one most closely related to Tango') and with The Spider's Strategem, we can easily see how Paul and Tom constitute 'subject doubles' i.e. 'decomposition of various conflicting aspects of the psyche in order to defend against conflict over impulses or orientations. The artist isolates these opposing tendencies by projecting them on to two separate autonomous entities. Such a doubling, in theory, does not merely make the representation of intrapsychic conflict possible, it allows for the potential development of that conflict in the most dramatic way possible, putting emphasis on the dynamic nature of mental processes (Rogers, 1970, pp. 64, 84, 145). Nor is the process of doubling separate from the mythical one, for Rogers notes that when an artist doubles a coherent psychological entity into two or more seemingly autonomous characters, he is thinking 'archaically': i.e. his mental processes resemble magical conceptions of primitive superstition as seen in myth and folklore (Rogers, 1929).

We are not surprised to learn that the 'unnatural' film existence of Jeanne with Paul wins the fulfillment and the return of the dead, all of which occur in Tango on only slightly displaced level, are related to primitive ideas which we have 'surnourmated'. Other phenomena producing similar reactions include repressed infantile complexes (e.g. pre-ocipital and castration complexes) which also figure in a similarly displaced arrangement in this film. Whereas, Freud (1919) argues, these two types of experiences (that which is 'surnourmated' and that which is repressed) are not ordinarily confused, the boundaries are often blurred, if not obliterated, in art. Again we discover that Bertolucci has masterfully arranged 'mythic' and psychic material so as to harmonize with and reinforce each other.

In addition, the double arrangements mesh with the Orphic-narcissistic elements of the
work, both as 'reflections in mirrors' on the one hand (Brando often doubles himself) but more significantly because the double is originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an "emergent denial of the power of death", ensuing from the soil of unchecked self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man . . . (Freud, 1919, p. 235).

But, as we have already noted in the development of narcissism and as we are to witness in this film (and in other arrangements of the Orpheus myth), when this stage has been surmounted the 'double' reverses its effect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death (Freud, 1919, p. 235).

It should be clear from the preceding account of the Tom-Paul parallel that, as in Partner, Bertolucci has experimented with his ambivalence about his past through a double regression split into a mind-body and voyeur-actor (or Penthesilea-Bacchus) dualism. Clearly, Tom seeks to restore his own sense of identity through a double displacement of his own desires: his sexuality is entirely displaced on to the 'legitimates' elements of film making, microphones, camera and phone and camera (both so displaced as to be operated by others); his regressive desires are displaced through projection (Freud, 1908) on to Jeanne. His own regression is acted out only in such disjointed moments as his play among the skirts displayed in the dress shop, as well as in his feeling of such smallness in the Jules Verne apartment that he must immediately proclaim (as Paul did) an interference against (or censorship of) acting like children. His relationship with Jeanne devolves into pure form (which is extreme again the disembodied 'bill-board marriage' he proposes in the dress shop). But pure voyeurism and purely intellectual games are punished ultimately with indifference and merely fade away.

Paul, as the active and corporeal side of the psychological split, ultimately fares no better. As pure physical regression in search of earlier modes of his identity, he encounters increasingly sadistic, voyeuristic and morbid tendencies in himself. When he tries to translate these tendencies into a social relationship, aggressiveness is suddenly met with violence. When Jeanne functions merely as a mirror of his regressive tendencies in the protected world of his fantasies, she is seen and felt as a supportive and loving element. When translated into a social context, this accepting mirror Eurydice no longer reflects, she reacts, for in the real world a mother figure cannot sanction such advances and represses them through violence (acted out in gestures of unmistakable castration). In the mirrored dance hall Paul attempts to recreate an recapitulation of their inner life, but succeeds only in a sad burlesque of the externalities of their love accompanied by regressive exhibitionism. Jeanne manipulates him to a climax and dies—a thoroughly ambivalent gesture including encouragement and castration. When he pursues aggressively, the mirroring Eurydice becomes furious maenad. She does the Captain-father's hat and makes the ultimate gesture of castration (annihilation) of Paul by firing a pistol into his lower abdomen. Paul staggerers to the balcony and, as a reminder of his regression, childishly sticks his gun on to the balcony railing, curls into a fetal position and dies.

Bertolucci's Orphée are masterfully conceived both as psychological and artistic complements. For Tom, the man Bertolucci is of mind became clearer through the establishment of a difference from the prototype. Originally a demonstration of the necessity of obedience to the gods (Orpheus' violation of the divine command instantly robs him of all he holds most dear), through patterns of doubling, condensation and displacement, Bertolucci provides his own revision of the archaic paradigm. Originally a rescue myth about temptation, abstinence and obedience, Tango's Orpheus (Tom and Paul) make their respective descents in quest of their own identities as reflected in the face of their Eurydice (Jeanne). "Getting back" becomes as much a proposition of vengeance as of self-recuperation, and the refusal to look back: an empty command made to 'cover' his intensely regressive sexual activity. For Tom, any real recuperation becomes impossible when operated through such intense displacement. The film certainly is disturbing, as so many of its reviewers have pointed out, but for far more profound reasons than its forthright sexuality. It is not only a devastating comment on film as a replacement of emotion, on the viewer as voyeur, yet also on psychological conflict. Bertolucci may indeed congratulate himself on feeling more 'together' (réuni) after completing the film, but we as viewers have witnessed dispersion, displacement, regression and violence. We are, on the contrary, more likely to feel纽带 as well as réunis.

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