



MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT

La Grande Bouffe

La Grande Bouffe (Blow-Out)

Director: Marco Ferreri
Production Companies: Mara Film, Films 66, Capitolina Produzioni Cinematografica
Producer: Jean-Pierre Rassam
Associate Producer: Vincent Malle
Production Manager: Alain Coiffier
Assistant Director: Enrico Bergier
Screenplay: Marco Ferreri, Rafael Ascona
Director of Photography: Mario Vulpiani
Special Effects: Paul Trielli
Editor: Claudine Merlin
Art Director: Michel de Broin
Costumes: Gitt Magrini
Music: Philippe Sarde
Piano Solo: Michel Piccoli
Sound: Jean-Pierre Ruh
Gastronomic Consultant: Giuseppe Maffioli
Cast:
Marcello Mastroianni (*Marcello*)
Ugo Tognazzi (*Ugo*)
Michel Piccoli (*Michel*)
Philippe Noiret (*Philippe*)
Andréa Ferréol (*Andréa*)
Monique Chaumette (*Madeleine*)
Florence Giorgetti (*Anne*)
Rita Scherrer (*Anulka*)
Solange Blondeau (*Danielle*)
Michèle Alexandre (*Nicole*)
Cordelia Piccoli (*Barbara*)
James Campbell (*Zac*)
Henri Piccoli (*Hector*)
Bernard Menez (*Pierre*)
Patricia Milochevitch (*Mini*)
Louis Navarre (*Braguti*)
Mario Vulpiani (*co-pilot*)
Gérard Boucarou (*chauffeur*)
Giuseppe Maffioli (*chef*)
Margaret Honeywell, Annette Carducci (*hostesses*)
Eva Simonnet (*secretary*)
France-Italy 1973
125 mins

The restoration has been made by Cité Films with the participation of the CNC and the Immagine Ritrovata, Cineteca di Bologna.

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SIGHT AND SOUND

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

If Marco Ferreri was among the greatest marginal Italian filmmakers, his marginality functioned on several levels. For one thing, his position within Italian cinema was necessarily peripheral, since so much of his work was shot in Spain, France and the US. For another, his political concerns inspired him to push against the boundaries of what could be shown on screen in a way that marked him out as a nonconformist even in a generation of auteurs that included Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardo Bertolucci. To paraphrase D.H. Lawrence, the Pasolini of *Salò* was trying to be extreme; Ferreri just was extreme.

Salò (1975) is almost certainly the title those encountering *La Grande Bouffe* for the first time will be reminded of. Indeed, Ferreri's film seems so obviously to have been conceived as a parody of Pasolini's that it is difficult to believe it was actually made two years earlier. The plot involves four men who occupy positions of privilege within French society and who bear the first names of the actors (all Ferreri regulars) playing them – Marcello (Mastroianni), Ugo (Tognazzi), Michel (Piccoli) and Philippe (Noiret). As in *Salò*, these men retreat to a mansion, but there, rather than tormenting helpless innocents, they methodically commit suicide by overeating. Although their reason for doing this is never made clear (the plan itself only being revealed around the halfway point), it is obviously related to the same insight that motivated Gérard (Depardieu) to castrate himself at the end of Ferreri's *La Dernière Femme* (1976): the realisation that masculinity has been rendered redundant.

If Pasolini often focused on men resisting the institutions that restrained their sexual impulses, Ferreri was more interested in individuals who were the products of societies that had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist: his films frequently introduce their protagonists as solitary intruders in otherwise vacant landscapes, while *Bye Bye Monkey* (1978) takes place in a New York patrolled by mysterious hazmat-suited figures and in danger of being taken over by rats. Ferreri's work often has a post-apocalyptic feel, as if some unspecified catastrophe has taken place, leaving survivors with the task of finding new ways to live amid the actual and ideological debris of the past. And although the director claimed, in an interview for *Cahiers du cinéma*, that he did not understand women ('I have a masculine vocabulary. I was formed, brought up, in a masculine culture'), it is usually women who prove most adept at meeting this challenge. Men, by contrast, insist on reproducing patterns of behaviour that, stripped of context, seem farcical, and in those films where society is still robust enough to exert a direct influence these unreconstructed males simply move to a space outside it: to an island in *Liza* (1972), a Yugoslavian villa in *The Harem* (1967), a house by the sea in *La Carne* (1991) and the mansion in *La Grande Bouffe*.

There is, however, nothing rebellious about their exhibitions of aggressive masculinity. Ferreri's 'heroes' are never more fully representative of the dominant ideology than when they believe themselves to be angrily rejecting it. If *La Grande Bouffe*'s four gourmands thumb their noses at bourgeois morality, they nonetheless subscribe to precisely the consumerist principles that once played an essential role in maintaining a functioning economy – and which, free of all externally imposed restrictions, can now be pursued to their logical conclusion. As responsible subjects under capitalism, we should, after all, be free to eat as much as we can afford to pay for, so why not keep eating until we expire?

The main female character, Andréa (Ferréol), who is sexually involved with all four men, suggests a healthier alternative to this death-orientated activity. When the final delivery of food arrives, she orders it to be strewn about the garden, an idea the delivery men respond to with incomprehension ('It's good meat!') and contempt. Her insistence on having objects with a quantifiable value disposed of like so much rubbish is the one truly rebellious act in this film. Ferreri seems to have been fascinated by narratives in which four men become involved with a woman who rejects the notion of sexual exclusivity – but whereas *The Harem*'s Margherita (Carroll Baker) is ultimately destroyed by her lovers, *La Grande Bouffe*'s Andréa

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La Mort en ce jardin (Evil Eden)

Thu 1 Jun 20:35; Tue 6 Jun 18:15

Le Mépris (Contempt)

From Fri 2 Jun

The Diary of a Chambermaid

(Le journal d'une femme de chambre)

Fri 2 Jun 18:15; Fri 16 Jun 20:55

Belle de jour

Fri 2 Jun 20:40; Sun 25 Jun 18:45

Les Choses de la vie (The Things of Life)

Sat 3 Jun 12:30; Tue 13 Jun 20:45

Themroc

Sat 3 Jun 15:00; Wed 14 Jun 18:15

La Grande Bouffe (Blow-Out)

Sat 3 Jun 20:30; Mon 12 Jun 18:10

Ten Days' Wonder (La Décade prodigieuse)

Sun 4 Jun 15:20; Sat 17 Jun 20:40

Vincent, François, Paul et les autres

Sun 4 Jun 18:00; Sun 18 Jun 13:10

Beyond Good and Evil:

The Discreet Charm of Michel Piccoli

Mon 5 Jun 18:15

Passion

Tue 6 Jun 21:00; Fri 16 Jun 18:20

Spoiled Children (Des enfants gâtés)

Wed 7 Jun 18:10; Mon 12 Jun 20:40

Une chambre en ville (A Room in Town)

Wed 14 Jun 20:45; Sat 24 Jun 13:00

Mauvais sang (The Night Is Young)

Sat 17 Jun 15:15; Thu 22 Jun 20:40

Milou en mai (Milou in May)

Sun 18 Jun 16:00; Mon 26 Jun 20:40

Belle toujours

Wed 21 Jun 20:50; Sun 25 Jun 16:30

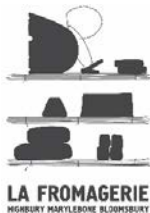
La Belle Noiseuse

Sat 24 Jun 15:20; Wed 28 Jun 18:10

Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope

Sun 25 Jun 14:00; Thu 29 Jun 20:45

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becomes the sole human survivor in an arena littered with male corpses, covered in the detritus of consumerism, and overrun by dogs.

Although the bulk of Ferreri's oeuvre remains unknown in the UK, *La Grande Bouffe* not only enjoyed British theatrical distribution (at least in the capital – it was awarded an X certificate by the Greater London Council after being banned by the BBFC) but has also been available for home viewing since the earliest days of VHS and Betamax; an English-dubbed transfer, taken from an astonishingly battered print, was released as a rental-only tape by Intervision in 1979 under the title *Blow-Out*.

Brad Stevens, *Sight and Sound*, September 2015

La Grande Bouffe opens with introductions of its four principal characters in their home or work environments – a cocksure Mastroianni touching down at Orly, a dapper Tognazzi packing up his best German carving knives, a quietly trendy Piccoli loaning his apartment keys to his daughter in the unearthly TV company offices, a porcine Noiret roused from sleep by his matronly nanny (evidently the begetter of his bosom fetish) – in oblique, fragmentary scenes, where the emphasis on 'random' detail and low-key quirks of behaviour recalls Ferreri's remarkable *Dillinger Is Dead*. But where the earlier film effectively dispensed with plot in its exploration of the Piccoli character through his possessions and obsessions, *La Grande Bouffe* studiously applies its observations to an elaborate narrative that verges perilously on allegory in its closing stages. Mastroianni's playboy cool, for instance, with its attendant boyish pleasure in the vintage car, turns out to conceal intermittent impotence, suggested when he takes his first whore with the Bugatti manifold, and then calls the others 'eunuchs' after a tumultuous failure at mounting Andréa from the rear. And Piccoli's ominous fastidiousness (he enthuses equally about the joys of rubber gloves and lemons as 'nature's own cleaner') proves the harbinger of both his solitary ballet exercises and his progressive digestion problems, which achieve a bizarre synthesis at his death, farting volubly and floating almost weightlessly out on to a balcony.

In fact all the fetishes – cars, virility, breasts, mothers, *haute cuisine* – look more and more like symptoms as the film proceeds, with the carefully assorted characters living out their society's death-wish with growing self-consciousness. Ferreri at least allows them to begin in style, racing through their plates of oysters, savouring the touch of blasphemy in a lesbian pose on a *fin-de-siècle* magic lantern slide, rising at cock-crow to continue the odyssey through the larder. Even then, though, he presents the inevitable indignities and vulgarities of their enterprise with decidedly unsympathetic detachment. At the abrupt onset of winter halfway through the film, his position petrifies into venomous contempt. The characters forget sensual pleasures and huddle together for subsistence warmth alone; the rooms that seemed splendidly ornate and exotic are suddenly dark and hostile as the characters no longer fill them. Noiret's dogged devotion to Andréa is put through the mill as he watches his comrades take her one by one; 'I'll marry her anyway ...' he mutters to himself, 'she does it out of goodness, not vice'. Even the food loses its transcendence once the gourmets start to squabble among themselves ('Chestnut puree is one of my vices' – 'Then it's a solitary vice, because I detest it') and Tognazzi is reduced to creating great follies of dishes like the final mammoth pate in the form of a temple, which the survivors reject as tasteless.

This bleak vision of course echoes *Porcile* in its abstraction of bourgeois mores into a kind of rarefied consumerism; but where Pasolini's film carries the sting of an acknowledged complicity on the audience's part, and of bourgeois caricatures who recognise their own Grosz-ness but know they will survive, Ferreri's clear-cut narrative leads his characters all too directly to their (part consciously willed) end. This confident precision lends the film a simplistic, allegorical air, with only Earth Mother Andréa (in a suitably delicious performance by Andréa Ferréol) saving it from gratuitous nihilism. None the less, the film is never negligible thanks to Ferreri's consistently inventive use of detail; and whatever else, it stands as an overdue riposte to the contemporary cinema's ubiquitous hymns to male camaraderie.

Tony Rayns, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1974