



SCALA: SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK AND ROLL CINEMA

Salò, or The 120 Days of Sodom

Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom
(Salò o Le 120 giornate di Sodoma)

Director: Pier Paolo Pasolini

Production Company:

P.E.A. – Produzioni Europee Associate,
Les Productions Artistes Associés

Producer: Alberto Grimaldi

Unit Managers: Alessandro Mattei, Renzo David,
Angelo Zemella

Production Manager: Antonio Girasante

Production Supervisor: Alberto De Stefanis

Post-production Supervisor: Enzo Ocone

1st Assistant Director: Umberto Angelucci

2nd Assistant Director: Fiorella Infascelli

Continuity: Beatrice Banfi

Screenplay: Pier Paolo Pasolini

Script Collaborator: Sergio Citti

Based on the novel by:

Donatien Alphonse François de Sade

Director of Photography: Tonino Delli Colli

Camera Operators: Carlo Tafani, Emilio Bestetti

1st Assistant Cameraman: Sandro Battaglia

2nd Assistant Cameraman: Giancarlo Granatelli

Editor: Nino Baragli

1st Assistant Editor: Ugo De Rossi

2nd Assistant Editor: Alfredo Menchini

Art Director: Dante Ferretti

Set Dresser: Osvaldo Desideri

Costumes: Danilo Donati

Assistant Costumes: Vanni Castellani

Costumes Created by: Farani

Make-up: Alfredo Tiberi

Special Make-up Effects: Rocchetti-Carboni

Hair: Giuseppina Bovino

Wigs: Rocchetti-Carboni

Music played on the pianoforte by:

Araldo Graziosi

Music Publisher: Eureka

Music Consultant: Ennio Morricone

Sound: Domenico Pasquadisceglie,

Giorgio Loviscek

Boom Operator: Giuseppina Sagliano

Mixer: Fausto Ancillai

Sound Effects: Luciano Anzellotti

Post-synchronisation:

International Recording Studios (Rome)

Set Furnishings/Drapes: D'Angelo

Crystal: D.O.M.

Porcelain: Richard – Ginori

Unit Publicity: Nico Naldini

Cast:

Paolo Bonacelli (*the duke*)

Giorgio Cataldi (*the bishop*)

Uberto P. Quintavalle (*chief magistrate*)

Aldo Valletti (*the president*)

Caterina Boratto (*Signora Castelli*)

Elsa De Giorgi (*Signora Maggi*)

Hélène Surgère (*Signora Vaccari*)

Sonia Saviange (*the piano virtuoso*)

Sergio Fascetti, Bruno Musso, Antonio Orlando,

Claudio Cicchetti, Franco Merli,

Umberto Chessari, Lamberto Book,

Gaspere Di Jenno (*masked victims*)

Giuliana Melis, Faridah Malik,

Graziella Aniceto, Renata Moar, Dorit Henke,

Antinisca Nemour, Benedetta Gaetani,

Olga Andreis (*female victims*)

Tatiana Mogilansky, Susanna Radaelli, Giuliana

Orlandi, Liana Acquaviva

(*young women*)

Pasolini's hopes, energies and talent were focused on resistance to the sameness of culture, to the homogenising, consumerist demands of capital, its creation of (false) desires and the politico-social instruments for their establishment. Throughout the 1970s, until his death, he railed against any hint of accommodation and reserved his most violent and outrageous remarks for the tolerance offered by Italian society as its means for greater social integration rather than, in his terms, genuine freedom. At the core of Pasolini's resistance, particularly in his films, was the body, sexuality, violence, physicality. It was on the basis of the body that he sought his actors, the way figures smiled, moved, danced, shouted. It was their (sacred) beauty and thereby their opposition in their very being to the institutionalised. Alas, such beauty is always ephemeral; not even analogy can save it.

It was the young and their sexuality that Pasolini had idealised, particularly in the case of his *Trilogia della vita* in the early 1970s which immediately preceded *Salò*. But there was a problem.

The institutionalisations and repressions he decried were too powerful. It was as if the youth, sex, rather than resisting, had capitulated to a tolerance and liberality that absorbed it, not only changing character but characteristics, features and bodies. *Salò* is not only the story of that capitulation but a punishment for it. Pasolini was like an angry disappointed father chastising his children, while the horrors committed by the libertines on the young in the film were analogies of what was already current for Pasolini in present-day Italy. The libertines were, in more ways than one, his instruments, even his joy. Power, for him, had usurped sexuality, had destroyed the last bastion of difference and defence, the very difference out of which poetry could be made; hence the equation-analogy of reality and language that he entertained. It had reduced the irreducible.

The scandal of *Salò* resides less in its representations of torture and perversity than in the perversity of the film whose visual beauty frames horrors with such care and in such a manner as to make the film, in its meticulousness and precision framing, analogous to the rules, order and inescapable power exercised by the libertines. There is too the scandal of his impossible, inappropriate analogies: de Sade, fascism, present-day capitalism and Dante, equated, hypothetical, hyperbolic comparisons, untenable and in being so, impossible to accommodate and, in certain scenes of *Salò*, to witness and accept.

Sam Rohdie, *Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom*, BFI DVD booklet

It is, perhaps, Pasolini's most enduring legacy, as a Marxist maverick distrusted by the mainstream Left and loathed by the Right, to have stirred up ideological complacencies of whatever order and rehabilitated, in the context of progressive bourgeois democracies, the whole notion of scandal as secular blasphemy. For the critic, the particular 'scandal' of his last film might well be its virtual unreviewability: *Salò*, in an absolutely literal sense defies criticism. Its chapter-like structure is strong but unsubtle, there is no real narrative development and no 'performance' to speak of.

Rinaldo Missaglia, Giuseppe Patruno,
Guido Galletti, Efisio Etzi (*young soldiers*)
Claudio Troccoli, Fabrizio Menichini,
Maurizio Valaguzza, Ezio Manni (*collaborators*)
Paola Pieracci, Carla Terlizzi,
Anna Maria Dossena, Anna Recchimizzi,
Ines Pellegrini (*procuresses/servants*)
Marco Bellocchio (*dubbed voice of the president*) *
Laura Betti (*dubbed voice of Signora Vaccari*) *
Michel Piccoli (*voice of the duke, French version*) *
Italy-France 1975
117 mins
35mm

* Uncredited

The screening on Tue 9 Jan will be introduced by
season curator Jason Wood

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits
including priority booking at BFI Southbank
and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**,
the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine.
Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK
only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk



BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where
you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema
on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark
British and independent titles, films are available to
watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals
& Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with
three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library,
regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque
with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse
special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.
We're also pleased to offer you a unique new
space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside
views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious
seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for
cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-
cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun
goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme
updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account
at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

Visually, *Salò* consists of a series of ritualised tableaux framed by the décor of the villa in which the orgies take place. But the use to which Pasolini puts some of the most seductively evocative textures of the recent past – Bauhaus furniture, paintings by Léger and Feininger, dance-band music and Ezra Pound on the radio – bears no relation to the decorative, 'thirties-as-wallpaper aesthetic' of, say, Bertolucci's *The Conformist*. Here it is impossible to indulge in selective nostalgia. By placing a naked young girl eating her tormentor's warm excrement in front of the Léger, Pasolini in no way 'romanticises' the act; rather, he defaces the mural, as violently as, for its time, Duchamp's painted moustache defaced the Mona Lisa. He subverts a work of art that was itself once scandalous before becoming respectable museum fodder. And even if it were not justified by *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, only excrement could serve this purpose, being the original element of that metaphorical transference that produces graffiti, slogans painted on walls, etc.

For *Salò*, perhaps the most successful representation of physical cruelty in the history of the cinema, is also one of the least metaphorical of films. To understand why, it is necessary to raise the question of infidelity to Sade's text (so disturbing to French critics, in particular). Despite the (no doubt, consciously) provocative bibliography that figures with such prominence in the film's credits, citing Barthes, Blanchot and Klossowski, it would seem unarguable that, when he turned Sade's protagonists into Fascist monsters Pasolini was betraying the anarchic spirit of *Les 120 journées*. But, apart from the fact that, by availing himself of the novel's form without endorsing its philosophical substructure, he was only following Sade's example (from Dante and Boccaccio), there is a sense in which *Salò* is a truly Sadean film. In numerous interviews, Pasolini referred to its subject as 'the treatment of human beings as objects', presumably in as much a political as a purely sexual context. But, given the material he was shooting, he was certainly aware that his film risked being a huge *succès de scandale* and that crowds do not flock to see political allegories.

Any film containing explicitly sexual scenes is a pornographic film, for that is how it will be consumed. In effect, the film could not but reflect the conditions of its own fabrication, which become the real Sadean text. P.P.P., dandy (in the Baudelairean sense), cinéaste and homosexual, encloses himself and his crew for 52 days in an isolated villa (studio interiors) with 16 beautiful young men and women, on whom he inflicts humiliations less appalling, certainly, than those depicted in the film – the excrement, we are told, was a compound of chocolate and dry biscuit – but humiliations nevertheless, magnified by the cinema as by a giant two-way mirror. What else is one young girl's disappointment on being rejected, as a victim, but the reflection of so many heartbreaks at casting sessions that must have been organised like the preliminary heats of a beauty contest?

Critics tend to shy away from the material conditions of filmmaking, never asking themselves what happens afterwards to the grotesques that haunt Fellini's fantasies or the languid youths who grace Visconti's salons. The only true anarchy – as one of the characters in *Salò*, quoting Sade, remarks – is the anarchy of power. Pasolini's last film is disturbing not because of what it shows, but because of what it is.

Gilbert Adair, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1979