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## **The Unordinary Madness of Marco Ferreri**

This month we sample the films of the maverick Italian director Marco Ferreri, "the most ferocious satirist at work in movies today" (Vincent Canby). He is best known for *La Grande Bouffe*, the film that caused a near-riot by disgusted filmgoers at Cannes before taking the International Critics' Prize. But Ferreri has worked in Italy, France, Spain, and the U.S., casting the finest actors in modes unlike that of any other director—letting an already surreal fable be guided by the what these actors bring of themselves. The results can be bizarre, even madcap, and also touched by sadness. There is abundant nudity (male and female) and open sex in many of Ferreri's films in the service of "laying bare" a bigger picture of changing, if not failing, male-female roles and relationships. Men, in particular—their gross appetites and petty quirks—are the butt, so to speak, of Ferreri's often ribald, always mordant humor. In bringing to the fore the unspeakable, the forbidden, Ferreri has been called the cinema's Rabelais, but Voltaire might also be apt: Ferreri is an equal-opportunity cynic, aiming his barbs at bourgeois excess and sexual taboos, male chauvinist freaks and '70s-style "women's libbers," racism, and the inherent frustrations of our overly industrialized society. Nor is the satire for its own sake; it's for you and me, brother. Ferreri is the cinema's version of that sidewalk fanatic who tells us, "The end of the world is nigh!" No one will listen unless you call it comedy.

*The Unordinary Madness of Marco Ferreri* is presented in association with Cinecittà International, Rome, a Division of Ente Cinema; Streamline Pictures; Sceneries Distribution; and the Italian Cultural Institute, San Francisco. Our thanks to Franco Lucchesi and Camilla Cormanni (Cinecittà International), Phillippe Langlet (Sceneries Distribution), Carl Macek (Streamline Pictures), Amelia Antonucci (Italian Cultural Institute), Venanzio Ciampa, and Marco Ferreri. Thanks also to Film Forum II in New York for our series title.

**Friday January 3**

**La Grande Bouffe 7:00**

**Marco Ferreri (France, 1973)**

(*The Big Feast*). More precisely than Buñuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, more gently than Pasolini's *Salò*, Ferreri's breakthrough international hit mixes and then explodes every metaphor for bourgeois power and stasis. Four gourmands—Marcello (Mastroianni), Ugo (Tognazzi), Philippe (Noiret) and Michel (Piccoli)—repair to a disused villa for a blow-out gastronomical weekend. Marcello brings a beautiful Bugatti; Michel, gas (natural); Ugo, his prized culinary skills; and Philippe, a schoolteacher (Andrea Ferreol) who becomes Snow White to the four sedulous sensualists. They



are joined for a time by three call girls but the tarts can't get with the food thing and leave. Then the subtle shift in mood is masterful as the men's true drive becomes clear: they will eat themselves to death, methodically, mechanically, bowing to the inevitable, what Ugo calls "the universal deluge of shit." This bawdy, bad-taste beautiful comedy of the body *mécanique* doesn't just erupt, it disrupts. Repeated January 4 and 11.

• Written by Ferreri, Rafael Azcona. Photographed by Mario Vulpiani. With Marcello Mastroianni, Ugo Tognazzi, Michel Piccoli, Philippe Noiret, Andrea Ferreol. (125 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, From Streamline Pictures)

## **Don't Touch the White Woman! 9:20**

### **Marco Ferreri (France, 1974)**

(*Touche pas à la femme blanche!*). In the days of Nixon, Ferreri carved up the myth of the American west. This is a western set in modern-day Paris, the enormous hole where Les Halles used to be serving as a desolate, dusty backdrop for the action. Ferreri reassembled the cast of *La Grande Bouffe* for this grand spoof: Marcello Mastroianni is a preening, primping General Custer; Philippe Noiret, his properly outraged foil, General Terry; Michel Piccoli, an outright exhibitionist Buffalo Bill; Ugo Tognazzi, an Indian scout who runs a curio shop where atrocities are among the souvenirs and white women are exploited but not touched. Catherine Deneuve is the seemingly demure gal who gets Custer's little big horn before the Indians do. A *fin-de-siècle* comedy about genocide, and the man-to-man/woman indignities that lead up to the slaughter—a truly unusual film having its West Coast premiere in this series.

Repeated January 12.

• Written by Marco Ferreri, Rafael Azcona. Photographed by Etienne Becker. With Marcello Mastroianni, Catherine Deneuve, Michel Piccoli, Philippe Noiret, Ugo Tognazzi. (108 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, From Streamline Pictures)

### **Saturday January 4**

## **La Grande Bouffe 7:00**

### **Marco Ferreri (France, 1973)**

For program notes, please see Friday, January 3.

## **The Last Woman 9:20**

### **Marco Ferreri (France/Italy, 1976)**

(*La Dernière femme*). Like *La Grande Bouffe*, *The Last Woman* is a picture of monstrous male appetite, what critic Molly Haskell called "[a] fine and complex feminist film—not in riding the crest of the revolution but in observing the death rattle of an old order through its defending champions." Gérard Depardieu stars as an engineer whose wife has left him, and with good reasons which he soon begins to bestow upon a new love (Ornella Muti). An infant son also receives the benefits of papa's boundless masculine pride. But Muti isn't mute, and suggests that twenty million Frenchmen can be wrong. *Après moi, le sex* is called screamingly into question in what we must warn you is a Grand Guignol finish involving an electric carving knife à la Three Blind Mice. In this film, as Haskell writes, "as in *La Grande Bouffe*, feeling imbues the imagery so that the real and the metaphorical coalesce, and in the character played by Depardieu [sensational in this unbelievably difficult role] we see both the appeal and the horror of retrogression."

• Written by Ferreri, Rafael Azcona. With Gérard Depardieu, Ornella Muti, Michel Piccoli, Zou Zou. (109 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, Courtesy Columbia Repertory)



## Sunday January 5

### **Bye Bye Monkey 5:30**

#### **Marco Ferreri (Italy, 1978)**

(*Ciao maschio*). Civilization as we know it ended a long time ago, Ferreri says sardonically in this film set in New York. Nothing sci-fi about it, but New York is post-apocalyptic, its apartments inhabited by rats and ruin. (The Bronx is up and the battery's run out.) Two Europeans—free-spirited man/boy Gérard Depardieu and ancient asthmatic Marcello Mastroianni—are singularly ill-equipped to make sense of this “new barbarian age” but that doesn't stop them trying. Their cohorts include James Coco as a Roman wax-museum curator, and Geraldine Fitzgerald as a sexy senior. As in *The Last Woman* (also set amid inhuman highrises), Depardieu's Lafayette in NYC finds himself amid brave new sex roles, with only the eponymous pet monkey to train into his idea of manhood. A felled figure of King Kong found on a riverside beach says a lot about breastbeating masculinity in the post-modern age—and something about Ferreri's penchant for the bizarre, as well.

Repeated Friday, January 10.

• Written by Ferreri, Gerard Brach, Rafael Azcona. Photographed by Luciano Tovoli. With Gérard Depardieu, Marcello Mastroianni, James Coco, Geraldine Fitzgerald. (114 mins, In English, Color, 35mm, From Streamline Pictures)

### **My Asylum 7:40**

#### **Marco Ferreri (Italy, 1979)**

(*Chiedo asilo*). All of Ferreri's narratives are determined somewhat by the personalities of his actors, and in *My Asylum* we are drawn, not to but *by* the freewheeling comedian Roberto Begnini (star of Fellini's *Voices of the Moon* and, recently, *The Monster*) and his co-stars: a classroom full of kindergarteners. (Think of Begnini as Italy's Robin Williams and you can imagine the possibilities.) Begnini plays a first-time teacher assigned to a kindergarten in the middle of a fortress-like housing project on the outskirts of Bologna. His unconventional teaching methods delight and stimulate the kids, for whom school is a sanctuary; for Roberto, too, the children in their outspoken purity offer a kind of asylum. But taking his little charges on some unlikely mental journeys and unauthorized field trips (to their fathers' factory, for one), he runs afoul of the authorities. Roberto's concern for one child who refuses to eat or talk leads to a quizzical finale: can what we learn from children, and what we give them, survive in the larger society?

Repeated January 9.

• Written by Ferrari, Gerard Brach, with collaboration of Roberto Begnini. Photographed by Pasquale Rachini. With Roberto Begnini, Dominique Laffin, Chiara Moretti, Carlo Monni. (105 mins, In Italian with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, From Streamline Pictures)

## Thursday January 9

### **My Asylum 7:00**

#### **Marco Ferreri (Italy, 1979)**

For program notes, please see Sunday, January 5.

### **The Wheelchair 9:00**

#### **Marco Ferreri (Spain, 1959)**

(*El Cochecito*). Buñuelian black humor informs the social satire of this first masterpiece by Ferreri, written with his frequent collaborator, the Spanish scenarist Rafael Azcona. An elderly widower, Don Anselmo (played by the renowned Spanish actor José Isbert) is the powerless patriarch of his family. At loose ends in the large family apartment, he covets a motorized wheelchair as the key to his freedom. With this he can buzz around town alongside his disabled pal Don Lucas (whose own wheelchair is a custom job), join in the wheelchair races, and become part of the fraternity of the



disabled. When his family, citing his good health, refuses to indulge the request, our hero takes drastic measures by which he inherits the family money and can purchase the wheelchair of his dreams. Playing on the very prevalent lack of interest in the disabled and their needs, *The Wheelchair* is also a mordant satire on the bourgeoisie. This curious malcontent rides circles around the fussy taboos of his class.

• Written by Rafael Azcona, Ferreri. Photographed by Juan Julio Baena. With José Isbert, Pedro Porcel, José A. Bepe, Maria Luisa Ponte. (88 mins, In Spanish with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, From Kino)

### **Friday January 10**

#### **Bye Bye Monkey 7:00**

**Marco Ferreri (Italy, 1978)**

For program notes, please see Sunday, January 5.

#### **Mafioso 9:10**

**Alberto Lattuada (Italy, 1962)**

One of the great black comedies of the sixties, co-written by Ferreri, *Mafioso* effects a deft balance of the comic and the frighteningly serious. Alberto Sordi portrays a technician, Badalamenti, living in Milan, who takes his wife and daughters on a pilgrimage to his native Sicily. There he finds that nostalgia is not what it used to be, but nothing else has changed—still the old code of honor, the system of patronage, the sun-drenched square and the black-clad women who watch disapprovingly as his blonde wife nervously smokes. Director Lattuada seduces us into an atmosphere of authenticity built around these revealing confrontations between past and present, North and South. So we are as surprised as Badalamenti when, visiting old Don Vincenzo, for whom he used to run errands, he discovers the cruel underside of a culture that he cannot escape. Once an errand boy, always an errand boy, and this time the errand is murder.

• Written by Marco Ferreri, Rafael Azcona, Age, Scarpelli from an idea by Bruno Caruso. Photographed by Armando Nannuzzi. With Alberto Sordi, Norma Bengell, Ugo Attanasio, Carmelo Oliviero. (104 mins, In Italian with English subtitles, B&W, 16mm, PFA Collection, permission Films Inc.)

### **Saturday January 11**

#### **Tales of Ordinary Madness 7:00**

**Marco Ferreri (Italy, 1981)**

Ferreri found a mirror for his biting dark humor in the hardbitten writings and life of Charles Bukowski: *Tales of Ordinary Madness* is based on Bukowski's *Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness* and set in the L.A. skids Bukowski called home (when he wasn't reading at colleges and fighting off attempts to canonize him). Ben Gazzara plays the grizzled poet/novelist, Charles Serking, modeled after C.B., saturated in drink and seeking after sleazy sex and some kind of salvation. What grace there is, is in the gutter, and there he finds another lost angel, Cass (Ornella Muti), a Catholic girl who punishes herself in prostitution and self-mutilation. A Chandleresque narration keeps a self-mocking edge to Serking's search for truth and beauty. "There's a genuine audacity and risk-taking in this movie...its nakedness has an aesthetic force. Not for people disturbed by four-letter words or sexual acts performed with lewd gusto. That should still leave quite a few of us." (Pauline Kael)

Repeated Sunday, January 12.

• Written by Ferreri, Sergio Amidei, adapted from a novel by Charles Bukowski. Photographed by Tonino Delli Colli. With Ben Gazzara, Ornella Muti, Susan Tyrrell, Tanya Lopert. (107 mins, In English, Color, 35mm, From Streamline Pictures)



**La Grande Bouffe 9:05**

**Marco Ferreri (France, 1973)**

For program notes, please see Friday, January 3.

**Sunday January 12**

**Don't Touch the White Woman! 5:45**

**Marco Ferreri (France, 1974)**

For program notes, please see Friday, January 3.

**Tales of Ordinary Madness 7:50**

**Marco Ferreri (Italy, 1981)**

For program notes, please see Saturday, January 11.

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