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Author(s)	Steve Bouser
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# Fascist 'Stampede' Provides

# Chilling Film

BY STEVE BOUSER  
Herald Staff Writer

A conformist enjoys the security of losing himself in the herd. But he also must share in the guilt for the fate of those who are trampled when the herd stampedes.

## Movie Review

"The Conformist," a film by the Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci, deals with the anguish of a man caught up in one of the biggest stampedes of all — the rise of Fascism.

While the film (in Italian with English subtitles) is obscure and dissatisfying at times, it also provides moments of chilling insight in its portrayal of an emotional cripple who seeks refuge in a sick establishment and finds himself one of the inmates helping run the asylum.

THE BACKGROUND of the conformist, played by

Jean Louis Trintignant, is a microcosm of the kind of European decadence that aided the rise of dictatorships.

A violent homosexual episode in childhood has shattered his self-esteem. His mother is an aging, opium-smoking degenerate, and his father is a hospitalized madman, tormented by the brutality in his own past as a Fascist agent.

Determined to establish some semblance of a conventional identity, the conformist marries an empty-headed middle-class girl and vows: "Whatever price society asks of me, I will pay."

The price, it turns out, is high. He is given the mission of going to Paris and assassinating his former university professor, a troublesome expatriate leftist.

AS HE SETS OUT on his assignment, it becomes clear that his motivation has more to do with killing a part of himself than with helping the cause. By immersing himself in the blood of an enemy of the state, proving once and for all his loyalty, he hopes to exorcise his own corruption.

Upon being issued his pistol, he symbolically takes a couple of practice aims and then impulsively points the weapon at his own head.

But during the period when he is ingratiating himself with the victim to set him up for the kill, the conformist quickly finds his re-



**Trintignant**

... *rewarding drama*

solve fading under the benign influence of the professor, his lesbian wife, and Paris.

AMONG the scenes used to show his dilemma, the cleverest is one that takes place in a dance pavillion when a long line of dancers, holding hands and led by the professor and their wives, encircles him time and again — leaving him frightened and trapped in the eye of a huge, gaily colored spiral.

Such sumptuous scenes as these contrast nicely with earlier ones, in which immense, echoing, white-walled government ministries and hospitals are used to mirror Fascism's sterility and emptiness.

"The Conformist" isn't everybody's cup of tea, and those expecting a secret-agent thriller will find disappointingly little action. But those interested in psychological drama will find it rewarding.