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FORTINI/CANI

France-Italy 1977

Directors: Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet

Production Company: Straub-Huillet

Assistants: Leo Mingrone, Gabriele Soncini, Gregory Woods, Bernard Mangiante

Sound: Jetti Grigioni

Camera: Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti

American Distribution: New Yorker Films

Cast: Franco Fortini, Franco Lattes, Luciana Nissim, Adriano Apra

Running time: 83 minutes

"History, the last fetish. It is being talked about a lot these days. . . . Everyone, astonishingly, is in agreement: above all, no more History for nothing, let History serve contemporary struggles, long live the popular memory, down with nostalgia, let's reappropriate our past, etc. And little masters appear to busy themselves with it, the Bertoluccis and the Cassentis, of course, but tomorrow a hundred others, administrators of the goods of the dead, Michelet said, the new management: they were like us, the many million damned of the earth from whom we are descended, so we are like them, they prefigure us, so we fulfill them. . . . Rare discordant voices in the concert: Godard: "Pas d'histoires!", Straub: "Let's not forget forgetting. . . ."

"There is a scene in *Not Reconciled* which illustrates this forgetting within memory: Schrella, the exiled anti-fascist resister, returns to Germany; he goes back to his old neighborhood, he no longer recognizes anything in this vacant lot, these new buildings. He asks a little girl if a family called Schrella used to live there. 'No, I don't know them. . . .'

"Why, in Straub's films, these holes and syncopes, these absences of story, if not because they are homogeneous with their object: history, history which is not the past. I wanted to construct *Not Reconciled* like a *corps lacunaire*, he declares, that is, according to the dictionary, a body composed of agglomerated crystals with intervals between them. And bordering these intervals, the petrified and petrifying inscriptions of which Pascal Bonitzer has spoken. . . . In the images of *Fortini/Cani* there is only that: lapidary inscriptions, places of memory, scraps of time enclosed in stone, landscapes, monuments, ossuaries. And each shot, as has been said of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, is itself a stone.

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"What is the step forward taken with *Fortini/Cani*? It brings into the film, at the same time as the book (*I Cani del Sinai*), the author of the book. . . . The source-text and its author are inscribed in the film at the same time, as parts, beside the other parts, neither before nor after (landscapes, music, extracts from the RAI newspaper, the banks of the Arno, the synagogue in Florence, Fortini's journal etc.). . . . But there is something else besides this introduction of the book and the author, there is the fact that the author is not only an author or an actor, but also a reader. Fortini, author of *I Cani del Sinai*, is filmed reading aloud excerpts from his book. . . .

"Straub and Huillet insist on this: contrary to what happens in their other films, they wanted no rehearsals, no work/reading session with Fortini before the act of shooting. What was important was for Fortini to find himself confronted, 10 years later, with a passionate and polemical text hurled into combat the day after the war of June, 1967. What we are given to experience is therefore no longer just the 'pleasure of the text' linked with reading out loud which Barthes describes (referring without saying so to *Othon*), pleasure in the grain of the voice, the voluptuousness of sound captured close-up, but the effect of the character listening to his own reading, the effect of listening-to-oneself-talk: effects of astonishment, stupor, non-recognition, or on the contrary, of adherence and familiarity, provoking visible effects of discrete emphasis, oratorical accentuation, self-approval. A duplication in the fictive scene of the question of forgetting within memory which we spoke of earlier. Remorseless anamnesis of a family romance, a *melodrama* as Straub-Huillet say very seriously, where the son confronts the father, all the fathers and peers of his father."

Jean Narboni, CdC No. 175

Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet are French, but they have not lived in France for several years. Straub left in 1958 to avoid serving in the French army during the Algerian war, and after Huillet joined him they lived in Berlin and Rome, where they made a series of films about fascism, power politics and music. *Fortini/Cani* is the third part of their "Jewish triptych," after the *Introduction to Schoenberg's Music for a Silent Film Scene* and *Moses and Aaron*. Upon completing it, they returned to France to make their first film there: Mallarme's *Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard*.

Filmography:

1963—*Machorka-Muff* (short). 1965—*Not Reconciled*. 1968—*Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. 1968—*The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp* (short). 1969—*Les Yeux ne veulent pas en tout temps se fermer, ou Peut-etre qu'un jour Rome se permettra de choisir a son tour (Othon)*. 1972—*History Lessons* (short), *Introduction to Schoenberg's Music for a Silent Film Scene* (short). 1975—*Moses and Aaron*. 1977—*Fortini/Cani*.