

Hot Set: The Dreamers

Author(s): David Thompson

Source: *Film Comment*, NOV/DEC 2002, Vol. 38, No. 6 (NOV/DEC 2002), p. 10

Published by: Film Society of Lincoln Center

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43577871>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Film Society of Lincoln Center is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Film Comment*

JSTOR

BERTOLUCCI, BACK ON HIS BELOVED PARISIAN BEAT, WEAVES A TALE OF SEX, THE '68 RIOTS, AND CINEMA FEVER



In the dawn light, Bernardo Bertolucci is riding a camera car following an American actor strolling along a Paris bridge. Not, however, the split-level Pont de Bir Hakeim the director made so iconic in *The Conformist* and *Last Tango in Paris*, but the neighboring Pont d'Iena, which connects the Eiffel Tower to the grandiose Palais de Chaillot. Nor is his subject an anguished, menopausal Marlon Brando, but the strikingly young Michael Pitt, blond hair cut short and a crumpled copy of *Cahiers du cinéma* in his jacket pocket, making his way to the Cinémathèque Française in the opening scene of Bertolucci's first film in four years, *The Dreamers*.

A few weeks before shooting began in July, Bertolucci had attended a packed screening of *Last Tango in Paris* at the Salle Wagram, 30 years after the sequence of the tango competition was shot there. What has brought him back to the city is not, as some advance reports suggested, to make a political epic about the infamous "events" of May '68, when Parisian students lobbed cobblestones and Molotov cocktails at the CRS police while strikes immobilized the country. Though *The Dreamers* does end with these events, the film is actually, in the director's words, "an intimate and intriguing study of relationships." As scripted by novelist (and one-time FILM COMMENT correspondent) Gilbert Adair, most of the action takes place within an apartment, where a young American (Pitt) becomes erotically entwined in the mysterious shared life of French twins, like him post-adolescent but pre-



The Dreamers keep dreaming on

adult. They are played by Louis Garrel, son of director Philippe, and Eva Green, daughter of actress Marlene Jobert.

If this casting already suggests a cinephile game afoot (an intensive auditioning process notwithstanding), then that suits a film celebrating the holy trinity of sex, politics, and cinema. The movie-crazy characters connect during the public demonstrations at their personal temple, the Cinémathèque Française, when its founder Henri Langlois was dismissed by the Minister of Culture, André Malraux. In February 1968 the Palais de Chaillot (home of the Cinémathèque theater and museum) and the surrounding streets were packed with protesters and the CRS in belligerent mood, a mini-revolution believed by many to have been the seed of what followed in May.

In what he likes to think of as a Proustian elision of time, Bertolucci has called on the actors Jean-Pierre Kalfon and Jean-Pierre Léaud to re-create their roles in these original demonstrations. Both declaim a tract written by Godard, and though a sadly aged Léaud arrives on

set in a state of nervous agitation, he delivers his tirade with astounding intensity. Afterwards Bertolucci and his crew are visibly moved. The director proceeds to add a few flourishes of his own invention, with protesters rolling empty film cans down the steps to the Cinémathèque's entrance. When an assistant invites the extras to shout out their own choice of titles, he nixes the first suggestion, Bertolucci's own *Before the Revolution*, which actually had its French premiere at the Cinémathèque in January 1968. As the director wryly comments while gazing down those same sepulchral steps, "This is the tomb where everything we make ends up."

The Dreamers is produced by Bertolucci's close ally Jeremy Thomas, who after securing the Forbidden City in Peking for *The Last Emperor* clearly has no fear of Parisian bureaucrats. For two nights permission is granted to cordon off the Avenue de Messine and restage the chaos and exultation of the May riots. As production designer Jean Rabasse notes, streets with cobblestones are now to be found only in the upscale areas of Paris where students are rarely glimpsed. The atmosphere here is discernibly more tense, for Bertolucci has come up with an alternative ending to the script requiring extra dialogue scenes. However, filming goes remarkably smoothly, members of the cast even manage to laugh about that dreaded phrase "new lines," and Louis Garrel is game to perfect the right way to throw a Molotov cocktail.

In the weeks before the crew is slimmed down and everyone retreats to a closed set, Bertolucci is visibly enjoying himself revisiting an era of youthful passions. In a café, Eva Green selects Françoise Hardy's "Tous les garçons et les filles de mon âge" on the jukebox and shimmies her way round the tables, conjuring up images of Anna Karina (who later visits the set, an offscreen Proustian moment). The rebellious trio even races through the Louvre in an attempt to beat the record set by Karina and company in Godard's *Band of Outsiders*. In May '68, Bertolucci was busy directing his most Godardian film, *Partner*, on the streets of Rome. Over 30 years on, the spirit of the nouvelle vague is permeating his new film, but with a greater sweetness; Bertolucci points out to me how his actors curiously resemble the doomed trio of Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*. From what I witnessed, Paris is casting its spell for him once again.—DAVID THOMPSON