



#### The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp

Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter

Directors: Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet \*

Production Companies:

Janus Film und Fernsehen (Frankfurt),  
Straub-Huillet

Producer: Klaus Hellwig

Collaborators: Herbert Linder, Herbert Meier,  
Heinz Pusl, Dietmar Müller, Bernward Wember,  
Ian Bodenham, Helmut Färber

Script: Jean-Marie Straub

Original play: Ferdinand Bruckner

Photography: Klaus Schilling, Hubs Hagen

Editors: Danièle Huillet, Jean-Marie Straub

Music: Johann Sebastian Bach

Sound Recording: Peter Lutz, Klaus Eckelt

Cast:

James Powell (James)

Lilith Ungerer (Lilith / Marie in the play)

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

(the pimp / Freder in the play)

Peer Raben (Willi / Alt in the play)

Irm Hermann (Désirée)

Kristin Peterson (Irene)

Hanna Schygulla (Lucy)

Rudolf Waldemar Brem (Petrell)

West Germany 1968

28 mins

Digital

#### The Woman's Film

Directors: Judy Smith,

Louise Alaimo, Elin Sorris

Production Company: Newsreel

USA 1970

40 mins

Digital

\* Uncredited

This event is co-presented by

Third World Newsreel

<https://www.twn.org>



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**Laura Mulvey: Thinking through Film**  
Experimental Riddles of the Sphinx in Context

# The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp + The Woman's Film

Jean-Marie Straub describes *The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp* as 'the most aleatory of my films, and the most political'. The element of randomness or chance in its genesis is well documented in many interviews with Straub and in Richard Roud's book on the director: after completing his Bach film, Straub 'felt like making a short thriller' but got diverted into adapting and producing the Bruckner play for the Aktion-Theatre; during the play's three-week run, the other elements came together in Straub's mind (the graffiti, a long-standing fascination with the Landsbergerstrasse in the 'red light' district of Munich, a newspaper story about a romance between an ex-prostitute and an African American man), and their conjunction produced the film.

The result is extremely intensive, and broaches an extraordinary range of issues: the conventions of theatre staging, the form and syntax of narrative film, 'realism' and 'melodrama' as modes in both theatre and film, a specific socio-political situation in West Germany (*vis-à-vis* what was happening elsewhere in May 1968), the inherited weight of the 19th century's social morality in contemporary Europe. The fact that the film has no dominant, unifying diegesis but instead proposes links between its seemingly disparate fragments on various other levels means that there are – deliberately – a great many possible 'ways in' to the film.

One is the Bruckner play, which Straub has reduced to around one-twelfth of its original length; it subsists as a series of confrontations between two or three people, impossible to follow as a narrative, although the conversational banter yields a number of two-sided themes: true love/prostitution, idealism /pragmatism, suicide/survival by any means, stylisation/naturalism and so on. The way that it is staged – on one tiny set, incongruously but sparsely furnished, with the characters constantly entering and leaving through the two (mismatched) doors – suggests a parody of 'conventional' theatre, as does the way that a patently theatrical text has been rendered unintelligible by simple compression.

The play ends with its most sustained scene: Freder, the character who has been offering to make the maid Lucy a prostitute and who has just furnished Désirée with the veronal for her suicide, confidently proposes marriage to the distraught Marie, saying their union would be 'exemplary' as an act of social integration. Straub's direct cut from this to the 'drama' of James and Lilith is teasingly plausible on a number of levels, despite the drastic change in tone, visual mode and style of acting. For a start, the cut compares the stage-set with a hallway in Marie's apartment block: both are seen as two walls and two doors. James' not-quite-instantaneous appearance through one of the doors, and prompt disappearance through the other one, into a lift, evokes the mechanics of the play's staging. And his tender parting kiss to Marie, an image of trouble-free miscegenation, creates an uneasy resonance with Freder's sardonic proclamation of social integration. This resonance is amplified by the use of actors in more than one role: Lilith Ungerer plays both Marie and Lilith, Rainer Werner Fassbinder both Freder and the pimp who tries to stop Lilith from marrying James.

If the play is taken as a starting point, then Straub's handling of the Bruckner text could be seen as the model for his 'de-construction' of film narrative conventions in the following action. Thus the brevity and discreteness of the play's scenes would find a correlative in the film's discontinuities (arbitrary switches from night to day, cuts that preserve the linearity of a plot only tangentially), establishing the act of narration in both theatre and film as problematic. But at the same time, the final section offers countless other links with what has gone before. The beginning of the 'chase', with Willi driving off after James at night, recalls the long travelling shot along the street at the beginning of the film. Lilith's past as a prostitute recalls the prostitutes huddled in small groups along that street. The wedding scene, shot in

## **Laura Mulvey: Thinking through Film**

### **Crystal Gazing + intro**

Sun 23 Nov 15:10

**Le Vent d'est** Wind from the East

Mon 24 Nov 18:15

### **The Bad Sister**

Wed 26 Nov 21:00

### **Disgraced Monuments + discussion with Laura Mulvey + 23rd August 2008**

Thu 27 Nov 18:10

### **Antonio das Mortes**

O Dragão da Maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro

Sat 29 Nov 15:10

## **Big Screen Classics: Laura Mulvey Selects**

### **Imitation of Life**

Mon 1 Dec 20:30; Sat 13 Dec 15:00;

Tue 30 Dec 20:40

### **People on Sunday** Menschen am Sonntag

Tue 2 Dec 20:50; Sun 21 Dec 12:20

### **Morocco**

Wed 3 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);

Fri 12 Dec 20:30

### **Notorious**

Thu 4 Dec 14:30; Thu 18 Dec 20:45;

Sat 27 Dec 12:20

### **The Arbor**

Fri 5 Dec 20:45; Sun 21 Dec 18:20

### **Man With a Movie Camera**

Chelovek s kino-apparatom + (*nostalgia*)

Sat 6 Dec 15:30; Mon 15 Dec 20:45

### **Lives of Performers**

Sun 7 Dec 18:30; Fri 19 Dec 18:20

### **Golden Eighties**

Mon 8 Dec 20:50; Wed 17 Dec 18:20

(+ intro by Laura Mulvey)

### **Daughters of the Dust**

Tue 9 Dec 20:45; Sat 20 Dec 14:30

### **What Scoundrels Men Are!**

Gli uomini, che mascaloni!

Wed 10 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);

Tue 23 Dec 20:30

### **Under the Skin of the City** Zir-e Pust-e Shahr

Wed 10 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);

Tue 23 Dec 18:15

### **Xala**

Thu 11 Dec 18:15; Sat 27 Dec 11:45

### **Through the Olive Trees**

Zir-e darakhtan-e zeyton

Sun 14 Dec 12:30; Mon 22 Dec 18:15

### **It**

Tue 16 Dec 21:00; Sun 28 Dec 12:10

### **Pierrot le fou**

Thu 18 Dec 20:50; Mon 29 Dec 18:00

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a single static take from a slightly oblique angle, recalls the whole of the play, which is shot in an identical fashion. Lilith and James speak to each other in quotations from the 16th-century Spanish poet Juan de la Cruz, recalling the theatre actors 'quoting' Bruckner. While the religious poetry recalls the rhetoric of the wedding ceremony, its own rhetoric (it is full of images of freedom and commitment) recalls the 'profane' exchanges between pimp and prostitute in both play and film. The fact that James is American, and speaks German with a strong accent, recalls the expatriate's graffiti at the beginning. And Lilith's final, blissful soliloquy by the open window, after she has shot the pimp, is linked with the Landsbergerstrasse shot by the recurrence on the soundtrack of the 'glorious' Bach oratorio.

Such inter-connections – and there are a great many more – not only demonstrate the density of Straub's assemblage, but also bear witness to his refusal to confine himself to a single level of discourse: conceptual ideas jostle with immediate political realities, Straub's insistence on the materiality of the medium (which for him means direct sound, shots that are self-defining and other strategies that counter the risk of 'transparency') providing the common base. Although *The Bridegroom* takes its place in a group of recent political films that use the figure of the prostitute as a kind of key to contemporary society (Godard's *Vivre sa vie* and *Deux ou trois choses...*, Fassbinder's early gangster movies), it is finally a measure of the film's provocativeness that it transcends any such categorisation. It remains Straub's wittiest and most daringly experimental film, issuing a challenge that little modern cinema (including Straub's own subsequent work) has yet taken up.

Tony Rayns, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1976

## **The Woman's Film**

Produced collectively by women, this documentary is a valuable historical document of the origins of the modern women's movement in the United States. The film delves into the lives of ordinary women from different races, educational levels and class. Filmed mostly in small consciousness-raising groups, from which the women's movement grew, the women talk about the daily realities of their lives as wives, homemakers and workers. They speak, sometimes with hesitancy, often with passion, about the oppression of women as they see it.

*The Woman's Film* was made entirely by women in San Francisco Newsreel. It was a collective effort between the women behind the camera and those in front of it. The script itself was written from preliminary interviews with the women in the film. Their participation, their criticism and approval were sought at various stages of production.

Third World Newsreel, twn.org

Founded in December 1967 as Newsreel, an activist filmmaker collective in New York, Third World Newsreel quickly expanded into a network with chapters across the US. Originally producing and distributing short 16mm films that highlighted key social movements of the era – including the anti-war and women's movements, and civil and human rights movements – Newsreel gained unique access to groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party. This period of activism attracted many artists who later became renowned filmmakers, such as Norman Fruchter, Susan Robeson, Robert Kramer, Christine Choy, Tami Gold, Allan Siegel, and Deborah Shaffer.

In the mid-1970s, as the global landscape of solidarity movements evolved, New York Newsreel was reborn as Third World Newsreel, reflecting a deepened commitment to developing filmmakers and audiences of colour.

Today, TWN honours the progressive vision of its founders and remains the oldest media arts organisation in the U.S. devoted to cultural workers of colour and their global constituencies.