

# TINTO BRASS INTERVIEWED IN ROME

by james ruscoe

James: You've got a degree in Law from the University of Venice. Have you ever used it?

Tinto: No — except in the many court cases arising from my films! Then it's been useful. Not only censorship problems with the authorities — but also with producers. Mine was a special option: 'The rights of the director in front of the producer'! I was so fed up with law that I decided to work in the cinema to avoid it, and instead I find myself very often involved in law suits.

J: Your latest film *Caligula* is very involved with the law.

T: Very involved. I must say here that my knowledge of law is proving very helpful. I shall win.

J: This is against Gore Vidal as the screenwriter, or against censorship problems?

T: Not just Vidal. Most especially against the producers who, after I had finished shooting and was half-way through editing, threw me out and wanted to finish the film according to their tastes. So I've taken them to court.

J: This is Bob Guccione, of *Penthouse* and *Forum*.

T: Yes, Guccione — and the Italian one, Rossellini. Not the real one! His nephew. *Caligula* has two producers, American and Italian.

J: Guccione is publishing in London.

T: Yes, I know.

J: They're being very cagey about letting in the Press . . .

T: Maybe they're being cagey because, after all, they're not authorised to work on the film according to the sentence of the judge. Therefore it's got to be done in a hole-in-the-corner way; they

don't want it officially known. That's the reason, shoddy.

J: Your way of making *Caligula* created great scandal.

T: Where?

J: In Rome. The city's full of gossip about how it was made. The things that Maria Schneider said after she walked out, that it was just too dirty, too much for her. The mass-masturbation scene producing the sperm shampoo for Adriana Asti . . .

T: Yes.

J: The rumour that Malcolm MacDowell had to have psychiatric treatment afterwards. Stories grow and grow; in a sense they do no harm, but for you as a director — if it got accepted that you're a difficult man to work with?

T: I'm not frozen. I have to make decisions. I cannot change myself after all these years working in the cinema. If I were to change and accept other concepts of how to work then it would mean that up 'till today I'd been a shit and I can't say that. I am what I am. If they come asking for me (I didn't ask them, they came to ask me) then they must accept me as I am. I'm not changing because a film cost \$10,000,000 rather than a \$100,000.

J: If you could remake *Caligula* to avoid all these problems you've had since — would you change the way you shot it?

T: Well, I'd change the producers and that's all. I'd choose a producer who could guarantee to respect the work his director is doing for him.

J: As a choice of material, the life of the Emperor *Caligula* was bound to be scabrous, you were

inevitably going to encounter censorship-problems, problems with excess.

T: Yes, that's not new for me. All the films that I've done had problems. I don't see why I should choose the films I do according to whether they'll produce problems or not. I do what appeals to me. If I found myself involved, interested, excited by a certain type of film I'd do it — problems or not. Otherwise I'd be castrating myself, or at least, let's say, castrating my inspiration as a director.

J: Is it true that during casting you specified that the actors had to be prepared to do certain things; that you inspected pricks for length, balls for size and so on; that the further an actor was prepared to go, the more likely he was to be taken on?

T: Beh! They're just voices, voices. I'm not like that, and anyway, given that I haven't finished the film, I'm not going to make publicity for it. Nowadays, I don't talk about *Caligula*.

J: For you, it's their film now?

T: Until the case is settled; until I've won. Now you tell me that they're editing in London. I know that. I see what's happening. What the final verdict will be, the courts will tell; the judgement on a film they've finished will come from the courts.

J: Do you consider profits?

T: No. The logic of profits is the logic of the producer. My logic is the logic of truth, not of profits. The moment when the producer comes to me he has already done his sums as to whether I'm profitable for him. It's not my business to care

about profits. My logic is that of the artist who tries to enjoy himself, and get others to enjoy themselves.

J: Must you always be an expensive director?

T: I've never been an expensive director. I did films for many years for a \$100,000 a time. The 2 big films before *Salon Kitty* were both done in 16mm with big actors like Vanessa Redgrave and Franco Nero. Professional films in 16mm, on budgets of \$100,000 each.

J: You did have a long connection with the French cinema, the end of the 50s, the influence of Godard . . .

T: I started very connected with the French cinema because I lived in France from 1958, so I was very familiar with the *nouvelle vague*, and in fact my first film was done with the actor of Godard's *Vivre sa Vie*. I still like Godard, but I've developed in my own personal way. I must say that I don't either denigrate or apologize for anything that I've done. Even the films not very well received by the critics, like for instance *Salon Kitty*. *Fly-*

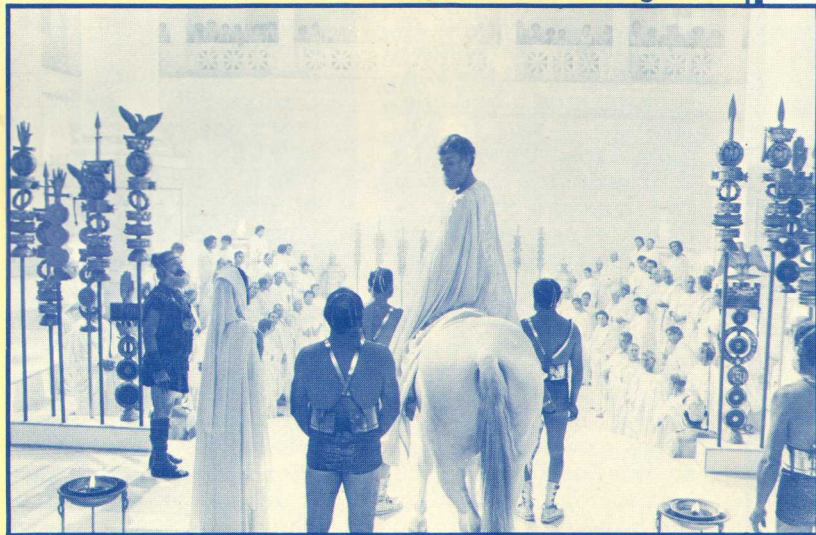
film of Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, something I've wanted to do for a long time. Another writer whom I like very much, tho' he's not very well known, is Jacob Lindt, superb stories. And for instance — this latest book of Alberto Moravia *La Vita Interiore* full of pornography, very nice!

J: Do you find pornography very nice?

T: Beautiful!! Beautiful!! I like pornography precisely because it's vulgar. I like everything that's vulgar. Just as Dante's *Divine Comedy* is written in the vulgar tongue, not in the cultivated language of his day. So I exalt pornography because it is a vulgar way to approach the problem of sex. More sane than eroticism — less exciting, less morbid. Just take it for what it is, without any taboo, any surprise, any guilt-complex, anything.

J: Do you think that sex is a serious subject?

T: Very serious. Very serious. But not to be emphasised too much; just to be had. It's not so much that sex per se is serious; it's that it is as serious as eating, as



ing Saucer wasn't readily accepted but I think it's a good film. With *Salon Kitty*, people didn't understand that I set out to make a kind of vulgar film, deliberately to try and halt the cinema's slide into élitism.

J: I like both. With *Salon Kitty* though my only fear — and realized afterwards — was that it would lead to a spate of Nazi sexploitation movies.

T: Yes, but unfortunately you never saw my film: you saw it as cut by the producer. In the end it wasn't my film. In the end I had a big row also with that producer. As I intended, the film was full of irony, and the grotesque; and each time it arose as the situation demanded they cut out the grotesque — wrecking my intention to make a consciously vulgar film, not just a mass film.

J: And writers . . . ?

T: For God's sake — NOT Gore Vidal!!

J: Do you still want to work with a writer who's alive?

food. The problems people invent about sex are always stupid ones: the dramatic problem is that there are people who are afraid of sex — it's still the main problem in Italy after centuries of Roman Catholic culture. And in the West.

J: Have you ever thought about making a film about the East? About India? Your films are very opulent, lush, sensuous — above all the latest 2 — as the India of Shiva is. Or Latin America — there are very hush-hush rumours that you are soon to start shooting in Mexico . . .

T: No. Not Mexico. I've a project near Mexico. I won't say where because it's a rather provocative film so I don't want to say where or what it is . . . otherwise, it would be difficult even to start the film off! I am interested in the East, but I'm still involved in the problems of our civilisation. I mean, surely the answer is there, but I like to develop the contradictions with which we live here. I do have some convictions. Normally, it happens like this: when you're a young director



you mainly have the problem of expressing yourself, of showing what you are. After that, and you've discharged some of this early need, you start feeling the aesthetic pleasure of communicating — not only information, but what you believe. For example, I have some specific beliefs. I believe profoundly that we are living in a society which is too rationalistic, and that this is our fault. We saw it here recently over the Red Brigade's kidnapping (if that's what it was) of ex-premier Aldo Moro: it was terrific as everything developed! Like a film: but the end-solution was a bad one, because it was so evident to me that we had a confrontation between two opposed values or rather of one value and one non-value — Eros and Logos. One the Sentiment of life, the other the Reason which encloses life. And I deeply believe that it is Eros which has to guide Logos and not vice versa. It is Sentiment which has to take Reason by the hand and bring it to make the right choice. Instead, the solution of the Moro Case (the refusal to discuss or to treat with the Red Brigade) is a typical decision of Reason, not of Sentiment. Sentiment was for doing everything possible to keep Moro alive and not to lead to his death.

J: On the radio here you recently made a contribution to a programme on the Swinging 60s in England, which you personally experienced. Why did it happen, will it happen again — and where?

T: Of course this isn't a switch from what you and I have been talking about all evening. It will happen again. Not in England, that's for sure. Not now. Somewhere it

will happen. Fundamentally, I hold that the vibrant explosion of the 60s in London was the explosion of the power of Eros in front of Logos. This is the key to what happened. It can, and will, happen somewhere else. Where? Beh! Maybe in the States . . .

J: There it hasn't already?

T: Oh no. Maybe in the States because there things are so out of control, they have got to the point such that rationalism, computerisation, preorganisation of life is creating a real need for an irrational explosion. It could, and should, happen in a much more hedonistic, Dionysiac way. And that's not yet happened in the States. But it must.

J: When you're making a film, how do you see your actors: as adults who participate, or as children/objects to be manipulated?

T: My relationship with actors is, you can say, mixed. I respect them a lot, even though I know that it is impossible to have a friendship, ever to make a friend of an actor. They're too much obsessed with their narcissistic ego to be able to have a friendly relationship.

J: With anyone?

T: Oh yes. I think so. The true actor basically has this disassociation, this schizophrenia: it's therefore impossible for him to have a human relationship with anyone. He's always an actor, before everything and everybody he's an actor — and that's something which forbids one to be really friendly. You must accept that, otherwise you cannot understand him. If you expect friendship you ruin the chance of any sort of rapport. And if you accept the fact that he's an actor and that's why you want him, never hope to close in friendship — it remains that you can use and realize what he is, you can work with him.

J: Would you now consider making a Realistic film with untrained actors?

T: Well . . . let's see . . . I'm not afraid of doing it. It depends on the subject. A love story, yes; I think I could do one without trained actors. The participants should be deeply involved . . .

J: They should be in love?

T: Yes, should be, deeply involved. I should have more the rôle of the macro, how do you say—?

J: The pimp.

T: Yes. The pimp. Not the director.

J: You think *Salò* is pornographic?

T: In the good sense of the word, sure. Very. Sure.

J: Don't you find cruelty too pornographic?

T: Not when it is critical. *Salò* is a critical film, against cruelty — it wasn't gratuitous, nor just to excite the sadistic tastes of every audience.

J: We have a parlour game — I give you the choice of one building in a city to keep and live in (the others all to go), and in reverse — one to knock down, keeping the rest. In London, I'd live in St Pancras Station, and demolish Westminster Abbey — a mess of a building . . .

T: I'd knock down the Museum . . .

J: The British Museum?

T: Museums in general — all of them. To kill off this mania to conserve objects, things. Unhealthy. I think that life should finish with everyone's own death. I'd live in the Whitechapel-Isle of Dogs area — in a big warehouse. And you in the engine shed up at St Pancras!

Signora T: Oh, for me the Colosseum — surrounded by lawns and fields.

J: Why do you live outside the city?

T: We're in the country, towards Lake Bracciano. I was really fed up of the noise of the city — the endless sirens, police, Red Cross, politicians; fire brigades . . . couldn't stand any more. I mean, I'd accept it in Chicago — but not in Rome. Now: the peace of the countryside; the sound of water; the shade of trees.

J: Are you frightened of being kidnapped?

T: Why kidnap me? I'm not a rich man. I don't even need to be rich. My needs are very few; I don't have a house . . .

Signora T: . . . we rent it . . .

T: I've no property. I hate the idea of possessing things, of being tied to possessions, things. We are free: if I want to change country, I change country, *e basta!* Hate museums.

J: But are you at all concerned about the state of Italy?

T: I find it quite joyful! I like chaos. I like anarchy.

But never rationalism — I'm for Eros against Logos every time. Sure, it's difficult to work in Rome; this city has never been geared to work. To live in tho' — better than a safe German, or Anglo-Saxon one. Couldn't live in London, not any more. West Berlin? I spent a month or so there for *Salon Kitty* It's a very desperate town.

J: You've said that you couldn't work again with O'Toole because he's so difficult, how easy is it for you to get notoriously difficult actors to work with you in harness? If I came, for instance, as a producer stipulating Elizabeth Taylor for the rôle of an old hag, and Robert Mitchum as an arthritic homosexual involved with Gerard Depardieu . . .

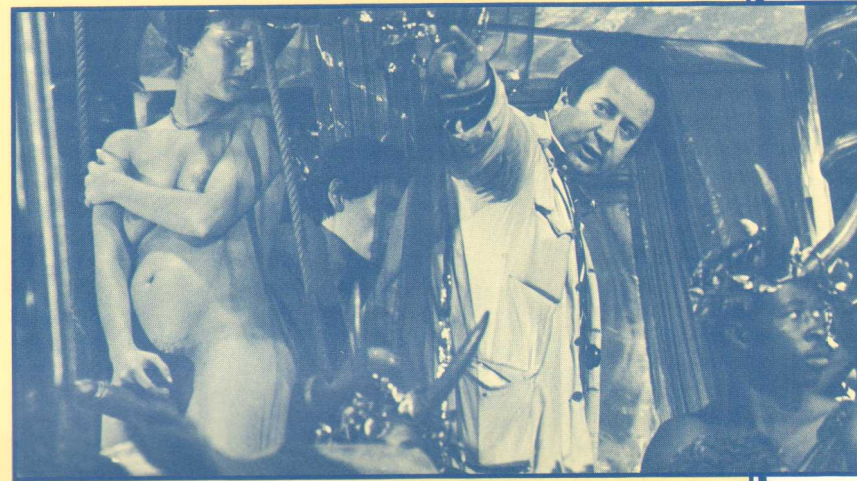
T: Oh yes, I could do it. If you'd insisted on Peter O'Toole I'd immediately have said "No, thank you very much" — because it's something I've already experienced. But with these three I've never worked. It would be very exciting for me: like going on a safari with new lions to face! To enjoy. At the end I might

do you miss most?

T: I was very close to Rossellini. I was his assistant, his apprentice. I learned a lot with him — not about the cinema, because in the cinema I don't think that you can learn — but on a human level, as a man. He was a real maestro, in the aristocratic tradition, able to bring out inner truths, to bring out you. I lived with him for two years in Paris, very happily.

J: Were you surprised at the way that Pasolini met his end: squalidly murdered?

T: Not in the manner of his death, no. I was surprised at what was made out since about his murder. Laura Betti's book gives the truth, don't you think? They gave, this society gave, a licence to kill Pasolini, well before he was actually murdered. Exposing his life-style, accusing, condemning, provoking etcetera. He was a man who could be killed without risk, whose death would be comfortable to too many people. The fault lies not with the individuals who committed the crime at



well say "Ugh! But they are impossible!", but not at the beginning, not at the start. I'm excited always by what is new, what is a challenge. Even new, difficult people to work with are a challenge. And Liz Taylor — well, she'd be new for me. A safari with Liz Taylor . . . mmm.

J: As a woman, does she appeal to you?

T: Yes. Yes, she appeals. Sexually, of course, you mean.

J: Do you think stars, per se, have any validity left in today's cinema?

T: Not at all. No one nowadays goes to see stars; they go to see good actors. And some of the stars are good — Vanessa, Jane Fonda and so on.

J: Can you make a star, personally?

T: The director and the producer can: both together, and wanting to do it. I was just thinking of subjects — there are some subjects one could do with a nobody, and make them somebody via the subject material. Maria Schneider is the perfect example.

J: Italian cinema lost in 18 months three great directors: Rossellini; Visconti; Pasolini. Whom

Ostia, but here in Rome — with the whole Italian society and the way it behaved towards Pasolini, not with his rentboys.

J: Did you think that the wide acceptance of the drug sub-culture was positive?

T: I took them all, as everyone did. Now the point is different. The innocence has gone. I see the situation here with horror — the mass dissemination of heroin on the American scale.

J: Would you now think of making a film about the drug scene here in Italy?

T: Not about drugs. Perhaps with drugs — non-actors experiencing drugs for instance. And me just looking on through a camera, filming these new values which seem to escape youth. In the Venetian dialect we have this. In English you say 'I'm bored to death!'; in Venetian we say 'Sborò!' — 'I ejaculate!' And there it is.

Signora T: Each morning, before he cleans his teeth . . .

T: . . . I masturbate. Every morning, I masturbate. Wonderful! Sex is everything. There can never be enough.

