

# JONAH who will be 25 in the year 2000

john  
berger



## Introduction

There has been a lot of positive feedback on the two letters by John Berger published in Ciné-Tracts number 1. Our readers seem to have related to them in a very positive way.

We are reproducing, here, a portion of the script of the Swiss film *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000* (*Jonah who will be 25 in the year 2000*) co-scripted with director Alain Tanner. Without detailing the plot to any extent — and because the scene basically stands so well on its own the following notes are offered as a means of contextualizing the film.

### **Marco is one of eight main characters: The year is 1975.**

No two characters in the film are quite alike, in terms of class, work, desires, temperament — but the general frame of reference for them all are the events of May 1968 in France. In addition, many are concerned with the future, with work, with the growth and development of their awareness, with a fear of compromising with the status-quo. There is a fair amount of self-conscious questioning on the character's parts — questioning their abilities and inabilities to relate to others, questioning their politics, their lifestyles, the education of their children....

Some seek to concretize their ideological/philosophical positions. This is especially true of Marco, the protagonist of the following scene.

The film deals on one level with "dream life". "Dream life" as a state of mind in which the frustrations of everyday life are diminished by a process of fantasy. Fantasy makes survival somewhat easier, more bearable. For example, in the film the head of a bank is a "pig" and the fantasy-film process has him change into a 'live' pig. Fantasy becomes a means of imagined transcendence, a means through which the characters repress the reality of the contradictions that they are in.

It is the interplay between their fantasies and their reality which is the focus of the film's struggle. Neither reality nor fantasy can be divorced from the on-going daily attempt to develop a relationship with an alienated and alienating social context. Jonah (a child about to be born) is both the projection of a fantasy and the realization of its impossibility. The understanding of this contradiction is the necessary premise on which a more creative form of practice can be generated.

**The film leaves open the question of growth, change, political action. Rather, it tries to point out the false scenarios that can be followed, scenarios which confuse the issues rather than clarify them.**

In this extract, Marco, short, plumpish, with dark curly hair, enters a very traditional classroom and proceeds to bombard the students with a metaphoric statement on history, in a totally unconventional way. The "lesson" has as its focal point a long uncooked piece of blood pudding. The essence of his talk is about the rise of capitalism and how it transformed pre-existent notions of time, progress, etc. The situation appears contradictory. A conventional classroom, an unconventional teacher. Marco's attempted resolution of this contradiction is to create the kind of metaphors which will fire the student's imaginations. In one sense "giving" the lesson is as important to Marco as giving the students an anti-capitalist analysis of history.

**We are presenting the scene in both English and French.**

**M.A.B.**

## **Scene 12**

A college class. The students, male and female, are about sixteen to seventeen years old. The director of the college introduces Marco, the new history professor.

### **The director**

*I'd like to introduce you to your new history teacher, Mr. Marco Perly, who will be replacing Mr. Genthod, who, as you know has retired. I'd like you to make him feel at home.*

The director leaves. Marco takes the suitcase that he has been holding and puts it on top of his desk. He opens it and takes out a long piece of blood pudding, a small cutting board, a butcher's knife and a metronome. The students look both surprised and amused.

### **Marco**

*Don't forget that my father is a butcher and that my mother sings light opera very well.*

Laughter. He lays out the blood pudding, brandishes the knife and turns on the metronome.

### **Marco**

*Does someone want to cut the blood pudding in time to the metronome?*

A young man volunteers and starts to cut the blood pudding. Laughter and shouts in the class.

### **Marco**

*O. K. you can stop now.*

The young man stops and Marco takes a few pieces of the pudding in his hands.

### **Marco**

*Here are some pieces of history! What names can we give to them? What are we going to call them? Hours? Decades? Centuries? It wouldn't matter what we called them, since, ultimately, each never ends. Blood pudding is eaten with apple sauce on top of it. Is time a blood pudding? Darwin believed that it was although the kind of meat changes from one end of the sausage to the other. Marx thought that one day everybody would stop eating blood pudding. Einstein and Max Planck peeled the skin off theirs, and it then lost all its shape. What is the skin of the blood pudding made of anyway?*

### **A girl**

*It's made out of a pig's bladder.*

**Marco**

*Very good.*

Marco slows down the metronome. The young man begins to cut again. Marco stops him.

**Marco**

*O.K. We can stop playing butcher now. And cut out the laughing, kids. Let's look at the piece of sausage which hasn't been cut yet. We can see the way it bends and winds, meanders. **I want to talk about the forms the blood pudding assumes.** What constitutes a 'bend' or a 'fold' in time? In agrarian societies people believed that time was cyclical, which accounted for the passage of the seasons. Each winter solstice represented the same moment in time. The individual aged, of course, but mainly because he was wearing himself out. He was the fuel that kept the machinery of each season working. Capitalism brought with it the idea of time as a 'high way' — the road to the sun, the road of progress etc. The notion of progress was not simply regarded as one in which 'conquerers' overcame obstacles, winning battles, but rather one' in which the 'oppressors' were specifically chosen for their intrinsically superior qualities. This superiority could cross the boundaries of cycles and seasons.*

**Superiority transformed cycles and seasons into a corkscrew — the 'conquerers' became the sharp end point of this instrument — the imperialists. Once in possession of this point, the imperialists opened bottle after bottle of the less developed cultures. They drank until their thirst had been quenched and then threw out the bottles, assuming that they would break. This was a new form of violence this oppression. The sword and the arrow had been used to kill before, but now, the weapon doing the killing was the 'verdict of history'.**

*The history of Imperialism, to be sure.*

*This new form of violence brought with it a new type of fear — fear of the past, fear of the peoples who had been oppressed, thrown away like so many broken bottles. If the past could catch up to the oppressors, the oppressed would shed few tears in pity. In the 19th century this fear of the past rationally transformed itself into a system of scientific laws. Time became a road with no curves. The length of the road was frighteningly abstract but but then, abstractions do not seek revenge. From this point on 19th century thinkers chose a fear of abstract thought over a fear of the savage and his arrows. And their roads had signposts. Very regularly situated. Millions of years divided into eras, dates, days and work hours, clocked in on the punch clock. Like blood pudding. To-day at last, we can see that the road, the 'highway' of capitalism is collapsing. . . for more reasons than I can explain with this piece of sausage which has served us so well in this first lesson.*

**An oak tree, knotted, twisted, meandering, is capable of producing an acorn.. What you are, each one of you, existed in chromosome form at the moment of my conception. Excuse me at the moment of your conception. (laughter) I am not a determinist, but your first cell contained a message, which you are now reading/completing.**

*There are things which create 'holes' in time.*

He goes to the blackboard and makes a drawing.

**Marco**

*The 'holes' are perfectly aligned. (he draws on) One could pass a skewer through them. Don't forget, my father is a butcher. Time 'bends' in order that the holes coincide. And why is it that a prophet is without honour in own country? Because prophets exist between times — they only reach the midpoint in these holes.*

*Nobody understood Diderot until the moment when an entire generation screamed that Freud was a monster. One needs this kind of time span to get through a hole. The holes made by prophets to look into the future are the same ones through which historians ogle monuments of the past/past achievements.*

*Look at them ogling the holes dug by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to explain the 18th century to us!*

*You are looking at your watches. Good. it's time.*

*We'll finish off with a binary rhythm — heartbeats and banging.*

He begins to bang rhythmically on his desk.

**Marco**

*Between each beat there is an interval. Time means recognizing that the second beat is not the first.*

*Time is created by a process of opposition.*

He bangs the desk and several students take up his lead.

Laughter and shouts in the class.

**Marco**

*Time diminishes through a process of synthesis.*

The banging intensifies. By now everyone is banging. Marco has to shout to be heard.

**Marco**

*The human embryo transcends evolution.*

The banging becomes louder and louder. The class is delirious. More Laughter. Marco roars.

**Marco**

*Time disappears through a total synthesis.*

The bell sounds. The class is over.

## Scène I2

Classe du collège de X. Les élèves, garçons et filles, ont environ seize ou dix-sept ans. Le directeur du collège présente Marco, le nouveau professeur d'histoire.

### Le Directeur

*Je vous présente votre nouveau professeur d'histoire, Monsieur Marco Perly, qui remplace des aujourd'hui Monsieur Genthod, qui, comme vous le savez, vient de prendre sa retraite. Je vous prie de lui faire bon accueil.*

Le directeur sort. Marco, qui tenait une valise à la main, la dépose sur son pupitre et l'ouvre. Il en sort un long morceau de boudin, un petit étal de une hachette de boucher et un métronome, qu'il montre aux élèves amusés et surpris.

### Marco

*N'oubliez jamais que mon père est boucher, et que ma mère chante très bien l'opérette.*

Rires. Il étale le boudin sur le bois et brandit la hachette, puis met en marche le métronome.

### Marco

*Est-ce que quelqu'un veut venir couper le boudin. Rires et cris dans la classe.*

### Marco

*Bon, ça va pour le moment.*

Le garçon s'arrête. Marco prend quelques morceaux du boudin coupé.

### Marco

*Voilà les morceaux d'histoire. Comment va-t-on les appeler? des heures? des décades? des siècles? c'est la même chose et ça ne s'arrête jamais. Le boudin se mange avec de la purée de pommes. Est-ce que le temps est du boudin? Darwin le croyait, quoique la nature de la viande changeait d'un bout à l'autre de la saucisse. Marx lui pensait qu'un jour tout le monde s'arrêterait de manger du boudin. Einstein et Max Plank arrachèrent la peau du boudin qui perdit dès lors sa forme. De quoi la peau du boudin est-elle faite?*

### Une Fille

*C'est une vessie de cochon.*

### Marco

*Très bien.*

Marco ralentit le métronome. Le garçon se remet à couper en mesure. Marco l'arrête.

## **Marco**

*Bon arrêtons la boucherie maintenant. Les rires aussi s'arrêtent, jeunes gens. Regardons maintenant le boudin qui n'est pas encore coupé. On y voit des plis, des méandres. Et c'est de cela que je veux vous parler. De quoi sont faits des plis du temps? Dans les sociétés agricoles les hommes croyait que le temps consistait simplement en cycles, en saisons. Chaque solstice d'hiver contenait le même moment. L'individu devenait vieux, bien entendu mais c'était simplement parce qu'il s'usait: Il était le combustible qui faisait marcher la machine des saisons. Le capitalisme apportera l'idée du temps-autoroute. L'autoroute du soleil, l'autoroute du progrès. L'idée du progrès c'était que les conquérants n'avaient pas simplement gagné une bataille, mais qu'ils avaient été choisis et désignés en tant qu'êtres intrinsèquement supérieurs. Leur supériorité devait forcément traverser les cycles et les saisons. Elle les transforma en tire-bouchon dont eux, les conquérants, étaient la pointe.*

*Et avec cette pointe ils ouvrirent les unes après les autres les bouteilles des cultures inférieures. Ils burent jusqu'à éteindre leur soif et jetèrent les bouteilles en s'assurant bien qu'elles se cassent. Ceci était une nouvelle forme de violence. La flèche ou l'épée avaient déjà tué, mais ce qui tuait maintenant c'était le verdict de l'histoire. De l'histoire des conquérants, bien sûr. Avec cette nouvelle violence arriva une peur nouvelle chez les conquérants: la peur du passé, la peur des inférieurs dans leurs bouteilles cassées. Ah! si le passé pouvait un jour rattrapper les conquérants, il montrerait certainement aussi peu de pitié qu'ils n'en avaient montré eux. Au dix-neuvième siècle, cette peur du passé fut rationnellement transformée en loi scientifique. Le temps devint alors une route sans virages. La longueur de la route était une abstraction terrifiante, mais les abstractions ne se vengent pas. Dès lors les penseurs du dix-neuvième siècle choisirent le peur de la pensée en éliminant la peur du sauvage et de ses flèches. Et leurs routes avaient des bournes. Absolument régulières. Des millions d'années divisées en ères, en dates, en jours et en heures de travail à pointer sur la machine à pointer. Comme du boudin.*

*Aujourd'hui, enfin, on voit que l'autoroute, l'autoroute du capitalisme, s'effondre. Pour plus de raisons que je ne peux vous en dire dans le petit bout de boudin qu'est cette leçon inaugurale. Dans un gland il y a déjà les méandres qui donneront la forme du chêne. Ce que vous êtes chacun de vous, était déjà là dans les chromosomes au moment de ma conception. Je vous demande pardon, de votre conception. Je ne suis pas un déterministe, dans votre première cellule il y avait un message, que vous êtes maintenant en train de lire. Il y a des choses qui font des trous dans le temps.*

Il va au tableau noir et fait un dessin.

## **Marco**

*Et les trous s'alignent parfaitement. (il dessine)*

*On peut y faire passer une brochette. N'oubliez pas que mon père est boucher. Le temps se plie pour que les trous coïncident. Et pourquoi n'est-on jamais prophète en son propre pays? Parce que les prophètes n'arrivent qu'à la moitié des trous, comme ça. (il mime) Ils sont entre les temps. Personne ne comprit grand chose à Diderot jusqu'au moment où une génération entière cria "Monstre!" à Freud. Il fallait ce temps-là pour passer au travers du trou. Les trous qui font les prophètes pour regarder le futur sont les mêmes par lesquels les historiens lorgnent ensuite vers les vieux*

*meubles du passé. Regardez-les lorgner à travers les trous creusés par Jean-Jacques Rousseau pour nous expliquer le dix-huitième siècle!*

*Vous regardez vos montres. Bon. C'est l'heure. On va terminer avec le rythme binaire, celui du coeur et des batteurs.*

Il se met à battre en rythme sur son pupitre.

**Marco**

*Entre chaque coup il y a du temps. Le temps c'est le fait de reconnaître que le deuxième coup n'est pas le premier. Le temps est créé par l'opposition.*

Il bat le pupitre, une partie des élèves lui emboitent le pas. Rires et cris dans la classe.

**Marco**

*En synthèse le temps se réduit.*

Le rythme des battements s'intensifie. Toute la classe tape sur le pupitre. Marco est obligé de crier.

**Marco**

*L'embryon humain siffle au travers de l'évolution !*

Les battements sont toujours plus rapides et plus fortes la classe délire. Cris et rires. Marco hurle.

**Marco**

*Dans une synthèse totale, le temps disparaît.*

La sonnerie de l'école retentit, qui indique la fin de la leçon. ●