

WARSAW BRIDGE

Synopsis

Warsaw Bridge is dated 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Beneath a sparkling surface of spectacular socio-cultural events and the frivolous life in a happy Europe, lies the tension of broken memories and personal and historical cataclysms. *Warsaw Bridge* shatters the plot into a thousand fragments in a European landscape broken by the return of History.

Technical Specifications

Director: Pere Portabella

Script: Pere Portabella, Carles Santos and Octavi Pellissa

Dialogues: Octavi Pellissa

Photography: Tomás Pladevall

Artistic Director: Pep Duran

Editing: Marisa Aguinaga

Music: Carles Santos

Executive Producer: Joan Antón Gonzalez

Producer: Films 59

Spain – 1989

85 min.

35mm.

Color

Cast

Paco Guijar

Jordi Dauder

Carme Elies

Ona Planas

Josep Maria Pou

Jaume Comas

Francesc Orella

Pep Ferrer

La Fura dels Baus

Ricard Borràs

Ferran Rañé

Joan Lluís Bozzo

Quim Llobet

Joan Miralles

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A Statement from Jonathan Demme

I was lucky enough to first see "Warsaw Bridge" at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Barcelona in the summer of 2000 as part of a "hometown boy makes good" retrospective the museum was presenting of Portabella's work. I was literally freaked and said, "Who? Pere Portabella? Used to produce Bunuel films? Why haven't I ever even heard of this guy? How could a rich and dazzling and sumptuous film such as this remain so utterly unknown in my country? The exquisite images, the superbly rendered music, the bravura style, this bold narrative, the great performances, the perfection of the totality of this unique and vibrant wonderland of a film --- How to get it seen in America?"

The answer now, these few years later, is the intrepid and visionary tricksters at Shadow Distribution, to whom I am so deeply indebted for the work that they have put into making this American distribution a reality. The release here of "Warsaw Bridge" is a movie dream come true for me. And somehow appropriate, too. I've been taking inspiration and plundering ideas from Portabella's great film ever since I saw it back there in Barcelona. Portabella comes to America! A lovely gift for outside-the-mall film-seekers.

Texts

VIRTUAL ARCHITECTURE
(ARQUITECTURA VIRTUAL)
By Diego Trerotola

In the first series of shots of *Warsaw Bridge* the viewer sees different buildings that seem to suggest the plans of an impossible museum, one which can contain a life-size history of architecture, going from a mud or adobe hut to glass and metal skyscrapers, not forgetting some Gothic cathedral. This museum could well be the city of Barcelona where, as one can see in the first sequences, different architectural styles are all found side by side in the middle of a pedestrian street with neon lights. Although Pere Portabella always expressed a particular interest through his films in architecture and its visual description, in spaces where the senses expand beyond the action, in his latest full-length film he seems to insistently stress, right from the title itself, his status as an audiovisual architect. Portabella glimpses a bridge made of problematic crosses which is at the same time the title of a novel drafted by one of the characters, the mental image of someone else and an adaptation of that novel to the cinema which without any hesitation bursts into an exploration of diverse and coinciding paths.

At first sight, this new exploratory facet is a long way from the experimentalism and miscellaneous structure of some of his short and long films as director during Franco's regime, and seems to inherit some of the style of the later

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Buñuel, for whom Pedro Portabella produced *Viridiana* (1960) - especially that of *El discreto encanto de la burguesía* (1972) and *El fantasma de la libertad* (1974). As in these works of Buñuel's, Portabella creates an opulent visual style, developing a plot which though not in the least linear or consequent, does not completely give up the narrative impulse, nor to some extent a principle of causality: each sequence seems to exist strictly in its own right but at the same time every image clings on like a hungry leech to the ones surrounding it because this architecture of belonging and rejection is formed of a number of superimposed layers, like different stages in a sensitivity incorporating both guiding lights and signs of dispersion.

The anecdote which acts as one of the starting points in the story is that of a diver found dead in a burned wood. The idea of this body outside a "natural" context, a mystery for forensic medicine, is explained with inexorable logic at the end of the film. The architecture of the dead body, classified with strict thoroughness in an autopsy shot in a sequence shot does not solve anything. The realm escaping the language of science is grasped by *Pont de Varsòvia* in its interior with a strict logic of long stylized and slowed-down shots. This swing between science and art is put forward as the main focus of a film that has at its core a perfect equilateral triangle, made up of an orchestral conductor, a biology professor and a writer. This geometry has three very clear edges: dreamy abstraction (the musician), scientific scepticism (the teacher) and a synthesis of both (the writer of the book *Pont de Varsòvia*, who supposedly contains the other two characters).

Three years after this film, Portabella declared that for cinema "heterodoxy, incorrectness, is the only escape route possible to try and do something of interest proposing a type of discourse and use in different languages". That an incorrect heterodox should believe in the possibility of discursive typologies and of the cinema as language is no contradiction, for it is precisely this synthesis which is handled in this film. For example, the inclusion of computer-generated images in *Pont de Varsòvia* (this is probably one of the first Spanish productions to announce the imminent digital culture) is a lucid sample of this paradoxical conflict stimulated by the film: mathematical precision used for the creation of images sound polysemous and autonomous as to make them escape any kind of scientific classification. Like architecture, digital culture is between science and art for Pere Portabella, and it is this bridge, above all things, that he manages to put across in this film; in this place of transit, in the firm belief in this movement, precisely where Portabella's cinema (dis) orientates us.

Pere Portabella Biography

Since the 1960s, Portabella always maintained a political commitment with all those movements against the Franco dictatorship that supported individual and collective democratic liberties. In 1977, he was elected senator in the first democratic elections and he participated in the writing of the present day Spanish Constitution. He has presided over the Fundación Alternativassince 2001.

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As a filmmaker Pere Portabella has been a relevant presence in the Spanish film world for the last fifty years.

With Films 59, his production company, he fostered some of the most emblematic films in the history of Spanish cinema. "Los Golfos" by Carlos Saura (1959), "El Cochecito" by Marco Ferreri (1960) and "Viridiana" by Luis Buñuel (1961). He directs his own creations combining a heritage of avant-garde culture with breakaway forms of language. His films, *Vampir* (1970) and *Umbracle* (1972), constitute radical interventions in artistic and cinematographic institutions. A long interval ensues between *Informe General* in 1976 and his return to his work as film maker and producer at present, during which he enters the political/institutional world during the "Transition" period in Spain.

In 2001, his films became part of the artistic collection of the MACBA. In 2002, he was the only Spanish artist invited to participate in Documenta 11 in Kassel. In 2003, the Pompidou Center organized a homage for Portabella and acquired one of his films for its collection. Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago and New York have all organized exhibits and screenings of his films. The Buenos Aires Film Festival and the 42nd "Mostra Internacional del Nuevo Cinema" of Pesaro have both programmed retrospective exhibits in 2006.

His latest film, *The Silence Before Bach*, selected for the Orizzonti Section of the 64th. "Mostra Internazionale di Arte Cinematografica di Venezia" will premier in the fall of 2007 in the MoMA in New York, as part of a retrospective exhibit of his work as a whole.

Reviews

"The first North American retrospective of Catalan filmmaker Pere Portabella is one of the year's biggest cultural events.... At the center of *Warsaw Bridge* is a romantic triangle between a prizewinning novelist, a symphony conductor, and a university marine-biology lecturer, but the narrative crisscrosses more than follows these characters. In between it offers, among other things, meditations on Spanish architecture and landscapes, an outdoor concert where the conductor is on an elevated platform in a shopping arcade and the musicians are on nearby balconies, a lavish state party thrown for the novelist, a verbal chess match at the party, a credit sequence 20-odd minutes into the film, a concert inside a cathedral, extended lovemaking, a recitation of part of the novelist's book, an opera performed at a gigantic fish market, a university lecture on algae, another opera set (though not staged) in a Turkish bath, a TV interview, a meal prepared and eaten by the three lovers, a film screening, and a plane trying to extinguish a forest fire. The images of operas and at least one of the concerts move gracefully in and out of sync with the music, and the opera in the fish market includes some spectacular bits with sharks and blocks of ice. Some of the dialogue and action segues into non sequiturs and nonsense. And

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whatever it all means, the whole thing is gorgeous.."
-Jonathan Rosenbaum, *THE CHICAGO READER*

"Visually, Warsaw Bridge is incredibly elegant, full of wonderfully sinuous camera movements and exquisite cinematography by Tomas Pladevall. And you have to love a film in which the credits suddenly pop up 20 minutes after it has begun, another sign of Portabella's devious, meta-cinematic humor. I'd be lying if I said I understood *Warsaw Bridge*; I suspect that will take several more viewings. But I certainly haven't enjoyed any other film as much so far this year."

-George Robinson, CINE-JOURNAL.

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