

# Caligula – The Ultimate Cut

USA, Italy – 2023 – 172 min – 4K – 5.1

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# SYNOPSIS

After murdering his adoptive grandfather, the Emperor Tiberius, Caligula seizes power and begins to dismantle the Roman Empire from within. A treatise on the corrupting influence of power, Caligula undertakes a harrowing journey through depravity, madness, and destruction.

**40 years after its original release, Penthouse Films International presents a completely new cut of the shocking cult classic Caligula, featuring an unprecedented amount of never-before-seen footage. One of the biggest scandals in cinema history, the notoriously decadent film is finally presented in the manner it was always intended to be seen. Starring Malcolm McDowell, Peter O'Toole, John Gielgud, and Helen Mirren.**

*It's easily one of the worst films ever made.*

Gore Vidal, screenwriter

*What we're shooting right now is definitely not Gore Vidal's script*

Tinto Brass, director

*I've made the worst mistake in my life asking Tinto Brass to direct the film.*

Bob Guccione, producer

*It's not a shoot, it's the Fourth Reich. Caligula Uber Alles.*

A crew member

# Caligula – About the original film

Italy has a long-standing tradition of producing sword-and-sandal epic movies. But when Tinto Brass began production on *Caligula* in 1976, no previous project could compare to what was about to be shot. No film with the scope and topic of *Caligula's* had even been considered thus far. This was an over-the-top, extravagant, bold, subversive, offensive movie... that would prove highly problematic for most involved, whether in front of or behind the camera.

## ***A Three-Headed Project***

There have been various stories about how contentious *Caligula's* creation, production and editing turned out to be, as evidenced by the many disputes that arose throughout the filmmaking process.

On the financial side, *Caligula* was put together by *Penthouse* founder Bob Guccione. He was a rich American businessman who shook up the adult magazine business in the US during the 60s and 70s and who had been trying to invest in movies since the early 70s – he was involved in the financing of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974). With *Caligula*, his ambition was more in sync with the magazine he was known for – to make a spectacular porn blockbuster, light years away from whatever had been done in the genre.

The script was developed by novelist Gore Vidal, a key figure of 1950s-60s American literature who on occasion worked for television and film.

Eventually, the Italian Tinto Brass took the directing chair. Brass was a director who specialized and was known for his erotic films, but who had so far been flitting back and forth from one genre to the next – going from western to romcom to drama. He was offered to direct *Caligula* because of his then latest film, the controversial erotic-war movie *Salon Kitty* (1976).

Guccione, Vidal and Brass were three strong-willed men who had little in common and who unquestionably didn't speak the same language. Guccione was a pleasure-seeker who lived a lustful life. Vidal was a politically committed, left-wing intellectual. Tinto Brass was a subversive, transgressive filmmaker with an anarchist streak. In actual fact, those three men, although they were connected through the same project, didn't have the same *Caligula* in mind and had very different, let alone opposite, approaches on what direction the film should take.

## ***A Stormy Development***

Guccione had high expectations for the film and wished to cast A-list actors. Very quickly three iconic actors joined the project – Malcom McDowell as the title role, veteran John Gielgud and Peter O'Toole.

Although Brass was hired to adapt Vidal's script, he had other ideas in mind. He didn't like what the writer had done – and McDowell didn't like it, either –, so the director and the leading actor began rewriting entirely Vidal's screenplay. They could rely on Guccione's support not only because he had no use for some of the novelist's choices (the role of homosexuality was too conspicuous in his narrative) but also because he meant to butter Brass up so that the shoot could run smoothly. However, Brass did not intend to go for the kind of pornography Guccione had promoted in his magazine. He aimed for something grittier, more down-to-earth, visceral and subversive.

When Brass showed the early changes he'd made on the script, Vidal wouldn't hear of changing one single word of his own writing. From then on, Vidal and Brass were no longer on speaking terms and only communicated vicariously through media, including newspapers where they both went for each other's throats.

When Guccione put pressure on the filmmakers, preproduction began all at once. A date for principal photography was set, which gave Brass, his assistant, the production and costume designers only a month and a half to do the job. They had a month and a half to assemble the crew, create the sets and the costumes, do the fittings and the rehearsals... Part of the male extra cast was based on the penis size. The bigger – or the taller – it was, the more likely the extra was hired. Hundreds of pictures of penises were taken so that Brass could pick and choose.

Although the shoot hadn't begun yet, *Caligula* already hit the headlines of Roman artistic life. Guccione denied reporters and anyone not working on the film access to the set, which helped fuel the wildest rumors. So much so that a PR agent needed to state in the press at the time that no zoophilic scene with a horse had been shot.

### ***A Chaotic Shoot***

Principal photography began in late July-early August 1976 and took place mostly at Rome's Dear Studios where Brass had shot *Salon Kitty*. However, the "monster harem" was built in the Roman countryside for financial reasons. In the same way, the Suburra scene was shot at the Baths of Caracalla. Brass used three cameras for all his shots. In total, over 650,000 feet were shot. More than 300 crew members worked on the film. 16 weeks of shooting were scheduled and the shoot was supposed to wrap up in late November. In the end, it took an additional 8 weeks.

The cinematographer was Silvano Ippoliti who'd been working on all of Brass's films and would go on working as his usual director of photography.

The production designer was Danilo Donati who particularly worked on Federico Fellini's *Roma* (1972) and *Amarcord* (1973) and created spectacular, bombastic sets. Famous crew members also included chef-actor Giuseppe Maffioli (who portrayed the cook in *The Big Feast*) who among other things handled the feast in the film (while appearing briefly – and uncredited – on screen).

With a hasty pre-production, the sets were not completed for the shoot. The art department people were constantly rushing about, with Brass and his crew shooting while trying to avoid the incomplete parts of the sets. But Donati's production design is still beautiful. So much so actually that right in the middle of the shoot Bob Guccione tried to find a museum willing to host all Donati's extravagant creations later on. None agreed but it inspired him to do another film back-to-back on the same sets.

On the very first day of production, a female extra got attacked by a Neapolitan mastiff – a dog breed that were taken to arenas to fight lions. With her arm bleeding, she was rapidly taken to a hospital. Tinto Brass got mad that none of the cameramen thought of capturing the attack... This was only the first of many accidents that took place over the shoot. During the offensive scene of the guard being disemboweled, the actor playing the part actually got stabbed – during the early attempts, Peter O'Toole had had a hard time running his sword through the bag the guard was carrying – a bag filled with organ meats and cheeses supposedly representing his intestine –, and during the final take, he pushed the (real) sword too hard and stabbed the poor guy just beneath the ribs. The fact that the scene and the soldier's crying appear to be so convincing is because they're 100% genuine. Brass was precisely aiming for real-life reactions. When he didn't like an orgy scene, he would get on set and directly perform oral sex with one of the "penthouse pets" attending just to show the kind of action he wanted.

It didn't take long for the production to get short of cash and some of the crew and extras didn't get paid – or sometimes less than expected.

After more than a month of not being paid on time (or not at all for some) and unpaid overtime, the crew decided to go on strike. To fight back, Franco Rossellini, a producer overseeing the shoot, wrote to the newspaper *Il Tempo* the day after the beginning of the strike to complain about the crew's behavior. After three days of strike action, the crew eventually received part of their payment but not the whole of it. Extras and stuntmen didn't get anything. Promises were made to calm down the crew, but they weren't kept. From that point on, the atmosphere on set grew much more tense. So much so that it was decided that the 1<sup>st</sup> AD would be watched over by two bodyguards. The extras – several hundred throughout the shoot – were particularly difficult to handle as they had a significant impact on the shoot. Many of them lived off this job and a job on a film like this should have been a guarantee to get paid regularly during several months. Therefore, the production was pressured to hire some of them although either they weren't needed, or it was decided that they weren't necessary for the shoot.

Towards the end of the shoot, even the main cast didn't get paid anymore. The money involved was actually significant as they had committed to a 16-week shoot, which meant they were doing overtime.

Delays in the schedule were due, among other things, to the complexity of some of the action. Which weighed heavily on Brass's shoulders. Another issue occurred when Maria Schneider, cast as Caligula's sister, suddenly left the set after she had an argument with the director during rehearsals. The actress was supposed to wear a dress with an open side showing her body. But she asked one of the wardrobe assistants to sew it from top to bottom so that she wouldn't appear naked. Brass got furious and threatened the wardrobe assistant in the process. Schneider was replaced at the last minute by Teresa Ann Savoy that Tinto Brass had already cast on *Salon Kitty*.

With the many issues piling up and the growing tension on set, the director suffered a heart attack one night when he got back home – his excessive cigar smoking and alcohol consumption probably didn't help either. His wife performed CPR on him and saved his life... and the very next day, he was back on set. Other attacks followed, including special effects supervisor Franco Celli who had a heart attack three months into a rough shoot. Mario Basili, who handled extras payroll among other things, also suffered an attack in his office. Giovanni Michelagnoli, one of the second assistants, snapped and resigned in early November.

In order not to go way over budget once again, day-by-day workers who weren't unionized were all fired. It definitely didn't help the understaffed crew that had to deal with a constantly heavy schedule. Many changes had to be made along the way. The prison scene was originally supposed to be entirely shot on a set specially built for the occasion. But as money – and time – were running low, the production eventually decided to shoot on location – at the Baths of Caracalla. For the wedding scene of Proculus and Livia, all the food on the set had turned sour or at any rate was no longer edible. The production had no more money to give Luigi Urbani who oversaw the purchase of food for the scenes and so the latter had to pay for all the required stuff out of his pocket. Unsurprisingly, he didn't buy top quality food. As a result, a vast majority of the extras threw up or had diarrhea.

The chaotic atmosphere that plagued the shoot generated actual barbarian moments – the animals sacrificed for the scene of Jupiter's Temple were not bought from a butcher's shop. They were brought to the studio and killed on site by various extras – with their hands, their feet or different sharp-edged tools... During the shoot of a scene at the Baths of Caracalla, a female extra got raped by five other extras in nearby tunnels. She refused to file a complaint for fear of retaliation...

With the shoot extending to December, all cast members had to appear in a toga or scantily clad. They were all freezing on the set. The production wrapped up on December 31, 1976.

### ***The End?***

The wrap-up of the shoot should have marked the end of the making of *Caligula*. But nothing like that happened.

The editing process got bogged down in a variety of issues that delayed the film's release by more than two years.

In January 1977, Bob Guccione, along with Giancarlo Lui, one of the crew members, returned to the film's set in Dear to shoot additional X-rated scenes with the "Penthouse Pets." That same month, Tinto flew to London where all the dailies had been sent for the editing process. After three months of work, Tinto got to the studio one morning and was denied access to the editing room. Guccione had fired him and began working on his own cut. Tinto Brass sued Guccione in Italy so as to keep control over the film's final cut. Although he won the case in 1977, the producer carried on with his project.

As far as Gore Vidal, he settled for an agreement with Guccione – his name was removed from the film and only appeared as "Adapted from an original screenplay by Gore Vidal." Two years after the original lawsuit, Brass also had to reach an agreement with *Penthouse* and ended up only listed as "Principal Photography by Tinto Brass."

The film premiered during a private screening at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival. *Caligula* eventually opened in Italy in November 1979. Over the following months, the film had a wide international release and was naturally distributed in the US and in most Western European countries, in South America and in Asia. Although the film was poorly received by critics, it was a hit at the box office on many territories, including France, Germany and Japan. When the film was submitted for rating to classification/censorship boards, reactions were heated. When a print of the film got to the UK in 1980, it was seized and impounded by Customs and Excise. As the British distributor asked to submit the film to the British Board of Film Classification to be rated, they were told that the film could not be viewed outside the BBFC's premises and that if some footage had to be cut out, it could only be done on site. Guccione's lawyers, an editor and director of the BBFC James Ferman began working on reediting the film. At first, no less than 10 minutes were removed. But Ferman and his colleagues weren't satisfied yet and asked for more cuts. An additional four minutes were removed, which came down to 14 minutes in total. When the film was finally permitted to open, the scandalous footage that had gotten so much press attention was desperately missing, much to the audience's dismay. In Japan, no less than 330 cuts were demanded before the film could open. Once released, the film got into more trouble. After five days in Italian theaters, the film was pulled out of cinemas as two far-right members of parliament filed a complaint. In the US, the release was first unauthorized in some cities, including Boston where authorities seized the film.

In 1981, a new, shorter version, without any explicit sexual material, was released.

In July 1985, the X-rated version of *Caligula* aired on Canal +, which helped boost the number of subscribers. From that point on, the network began broadcasting porn movies.

Over the decades following the film's original release, a number of different versions were distributed across the world – they were of various runtimes and sometimes featured never-seen-before scenes or a different cut.

As it has become a cult movie, *Caligula* has kept many amateurs and film buffs fascinated and excited ever since its original release. One question has kept coming up since the late 70s – what would the film have been like if Bob Guccione had not meddled with it in the first place?

Since the beginning of the new millennium, several projects have tried to come up with an alternative version. None came through.

Up until now.

# Caligula – The Ultimate Cut

In the January 2020 issue of *Penthouse* magazine, it was announced that the original *Caligula* materials had been located and that Penthouse had commissioned author and archivist Thomas Negovan to produce a new edit of the film, conforming to the original Gore Vidal script, in honor of its 40th anniversary: *Caligula – The Ultimate Cut*. This new three hour edit will premiere at the Cannes Film Festival before being released in 2023. With not one frame having ever been seen before, *Caligula – The Ultimate Cut* unleashes entirely new performances, extended scenes and reveals the story as it was originally intended and originally performed.

## ***What's new ?***

- For this new cut, a completely unique frame-by-frame restoration was made, removing all scratches and damage.
- More than 90+ hours of original negatives were scanned in 4K and edited in accordance with the original script.
- More powerful, compelling and sensitive performances were selected, and completely different camera angles used.
- An entirely new sonic landscape, both sound design and score, was created.
- The narrative that was completely absent from the 1980 release was restored.
- All of the dialogue in *The Ultimate Cut* is taken from reference audio recorded on location. Using AI and cutting-edge audio technology, on set and mechanical noise was removed from the noisy tape recordings, rescuing live performances from 1976 which would otherwise have been lost to history.
- In the original version, the voice of lead actress Teresa Ann Savoy was replaced with dialogue recorded by an anonymous voice actor. *The Ultimate Cut* salvages and restores Teresa Ann Savoy's original vocal performance.
- Due to production constraints, the elaborate forward elements of the original sets were hastily completed with curtains or flat painted backgrounds. For the new version the flat backgrounds were completed and enhanced with VFX to more powerfully convey the world of Ancient Rome.
- The original script included an opening sequence which was never filmed. For *Caligula – The Ultimate Cut* it has been created for the opening credits, animated by Dave McKean, acclaimed graphic novel artist and director of *MirrorMask* (scripted by Neil Gaiman) for the Jim Henson Company



# Thomas Negovan, The Ultimate Cut's producer interview

**Boxes filled with unseen reels of the film were found and identified in 2016 by a fan. Since then many rumors have circulated regarding what would become of this footage. So, what happened between 2016 and now?**

This is where some of the mythology comes back into play. The idea that the boxes were discovered is not exactly correct. It's like, you have this pair of shoes in your closet that you forgot that you own. There is a story that one of the previous owners of *Penthouse* said that the movie was going to be destroyed. It's not true, but it's a good story. Bob Guccione said that he smuggled the film to New York by wrapping it around his arms. It's a truck full of reels! How many people and how many trips would it take to do so?! Again, not true, but it sounds good.

What really happened is that people at *Penthouse* knew that it was there. It's just that no one cared. The company had devolved into becoming more and more just pornography and had changed hands multiple times. While working on the Imperial edition on Blu-Ray, Nathaniel Thompson was let in the storage facility by the company, but they told him you can only have two hours. So he grabbed what reels he could and some of that footage showed up on that old Blu-Ray. And then... It's complicated for me to address what happened, because there are a lot of stories that would make other people look bad. And I don't want to be the person responsible for pointing the finger. The real story is that it's various degrees of mismanagement and it wasn't until the new owner of *Penthouse* came in that the project took off. They have a management company that is in New Orleans who was interested in really getting their hands dirty in helping this person look at the depth and breadth of what they owned. And saying there are things in it that should be invested in.

The thing I learned early on is that when I was trying to find out who could help me with this, it wasn't a lot of the people who I assumed it would be. I read the story about *Penthouse*: Ho, it's going to be destroyed. And we got an investor who is putting all his money into scanning the reels; all of these were completely made up stories. The real story was, it's just corporate bullshit, the story is so boring, it's literally companies that were buying a property and they wanted the assets for web streaming and things like that. No one really took interest in it. And then it would go to a new owner. And then another one. And so the final owner of *Penthouse* hired this company in New Orleans who reached out to me. And they basically said: it's part of the assets base, would you look at this? Is this good? And I did and I felt like I was in the last scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* where these priceless treasures are buried under dust.

I love Malcolm McDowell and I never watched *Caligula* because he said not to, but I heard the stories that it had been intended to be a serious film. And so I'm looking at these mountains of boxes that were just filthy and covered in dust. And I felt a little bit like: how do I handcuff myself in here to something so that it doesn't get closed up for 40 years again? I made my proposal, and mine was the one that they went with.

**In what state were the negatives when you started looking at them?**

The negatives were in pristine condition. I was shocked! The chemical makeup of the stock held up immaculately. The only thing that I would say is that when you look at the old DVD of *Caligula*, you see all the hairs, and all the scratches and you would think that it was a bad condition print. That is not the case, that was all in the camera negatives. Apparently, they never checked the gate during the shooting. There are shots where there are bugs on the negative, because there were dead things inside the cameras. So it was a very strange thing to have such a pristine negative that was so filthy. We did a frame by frame restoration. It now looks immaculate, but it was an extraordinary amount of work.

### **Did you try and reach out to the people originally involved with the film?**

That was my original idea: why can't everybody work together? That just didn't work. The very first email I wrote was to Tinto Brass and it wasn't until 8 months later that I found out they'd been getting my messages, just ignoring me, because it was *Caligula*. Then his wife and attorney said OK, Tinto would work on it. But there is a recent documentary on Tinto Brass that said he had dementia. So, I said your terms are fine, but could I speak to Tinto? And they said you can't talk to him. And again, I understand. Your experience with *Caligula* was horrible, but if we have to pay you, I have to talk to you. And they said no and that ended those negotiations. The second email I wrote was to Malcolm McDowell. I wrote to his manager and said you should be involved in this, and no one responded. And it wasn't until I got deeper into it that I understood how much of a brutalization this was to people. Malcolm said in an interview: I know what it feels like for a woman to be raped. Then I kind of backed off and realized I'm coming at this from a neutral place and that is not where everyone else is.

What I realized was that the movie never had a real movie producer. My belief is that you cannot serve Tinto Brass, you cannot serve Bob Guccione, you have to serve the performers. Because everyone who is fighting on the upper level is not what shows up on camera. What I viewed my task as was to watch Malcolm's performance and to build a structure that would support that.

### **Even if Bob Guccione wasn't a typical movie producer, you had two producers on set, Jack Silverman and Franco Rossellini, Roberto Rossellini's nephew.**

Jack Silverman came from America, New York theaters, Hollywood films. For him, seeing Tinto Brass perform oral sex on an actress to demonstrate how it should be done was just something that could never happen in his world! By the end of the shooting, he had completely checked out mentally, it was too crazy for him. And in Tinto's defense, he was an artist and a madman. I think there wasn't anyone involved who could gap that bridge with him. Bob Guccione was notoriously difficult. Gore Vidal too. And so was Tinto Brass. And Jack Silverman and Franco Rossellini were both very gentle men and didn't want to get into that maelstrom. The real crime here is that no one made them work together. No one said: Gore, you're a great writer, Malcolm has a really good idea here, get over your ego and listen to it. Bob had an incredible sense of marketing spectacle. He succeeded: we're talking about this film more than 40 years later. For Tinto, I think it was too painful for him to deal with these larger budgets and it was more comfortable for him to do smaller films that he felt were artistically pleasant for him. I believe he had a great deal to offer but this movie wore him out. It certainly did Bob, he never did another one.

### **There had been rumors and fantasies for years regarding a possible *Tinto Brass'* *Caligula*, which could have restored the film to the vision of its director. That was not your ambition?**

I came into this film as a Tinto Brass fan. By the end of our work, the editor was less of a Tinto Brass fan, because we had to deal with cameras not being in focus, or perhaps there is a beautiful slow zoom and someone bumps the tripod, it does sometimes feel that it was filmed by amateurs. No one checked the gate, so there is always something dirty on the negative. We were able to navigate the technical limitations, the limitation of what was shot, the limitation of what they were able to finish with the sets. But the important thing is that the actors all showed up very ready to deliver powerful performances and they did exactly that.

I think Tinto's vision would have been released and forgotten. Because it would have been nonsense and zaniness that would be just a weird footnote in history. There is a beautiful movie that was filmed, but the main people at the top hated each other. And I feel like a very good producer would have said to Bob, you need to back the fuck off and not make everybody crazy. And I would have said to Tinto, you need to respect that this guy is putting this money up and you have an opportunity to really make something beautiful that isn't just reactionary as a fuck you to him. And so the thing that I did was that I tried to go in there with that idea of really respecting that the performers weren't a part of that drama. So that edit is really for the performers. And I feel like even if you hate the movie, the gift of seeing a Helen Mirren performance that was shot in 1976, that no one has ever seen before, to me that's worth spending the time right there. She is extraordinary and how could you not want to watch this young, beautiful actress right at the start of her film career? Even Bob Guccione said that he felt she was the real star of the film, he spotted it at the time. And the other thing is, I feel like this is Malcolm's best performance. He was at the peak of his power as a performer and left to his own devices, he had to work harder for this role than he had to on other roles – and I love *If, A Clockwork Orange*, there is no question those are great films. But the things he did here that are so powerful is because he was so concentrated on the story arc of the character. I've watched all the footage now, so many times, I've watched some 90 hours of unseen footage: no one puts more heart in this movie than Malcolm McDowell. He puts more than Bob Guccione and Tinto Brass. He noted that Gore Vidal's script was very one-dimensional: Caligula was crazy, and he said that's boring for an actor to play. And something that he and Tinto agreed on is that there should be a story arc to the character. That's what missing in the original movie, there is no arc, he's just wacky. And the thing we were able to find in the movie is in the first third: he's a scared young man. There's no madness, he's a survivalist, he knows Tiberius wants him dead. Tiberius killed his whole family and the only rock he has left is his sister. And so it gives the incest a little different context, it also gives us a platform so that in this first hour, we're sympathetic to him, because he knows that he could die any moment. Then, in the second hour, he gets power, and something Gore Vidal imagined, he's like a child who breaks his toys, because he doesn't have the discipline. And then when his sister dies, he's completely cut off from reality. The only person in the world that he could trust is gone. And then, because he has complete power and no discipline and no more link to reality, then he becomes a complete madman. And that was not Tinto's doing, that was Malcolm's doing. And that Malcolm is so salty and hurt over this movie, I get it now. It's not just the movie that he was in that didn't turn out right: he built this movie that no one ever saw.

**Your new version shows a lot less blood and sex than the original version. Obviously, there are no porn scenes. Why did you decide to tone down those particular aspects?**

We did not censor anything, but we did not include anything simply for shock value. There is no world in which this movie is appropriate for anyone under 18! It is still a horrific film in great many ways, in terms of the brutality. But in the first version it was

done just for the shock value. In the original version, the orgy scene is 12 minutes long. It doesn't need to be, you know you're in an orgy, there are copious amounts of nudity, there are copious amounts of blood. But the question was, are you doing it as a gratuitous joke or are you doing it to further a story? Everything we did was in service of *Caligula's* narrative. Everything that was legitimately interesting about the original movie is still there. You still have a three-storey decapitation machine, and yes, the fisting scene is still in there. By taking the 12 minutes orgy and making it 5 minutes, you're making a story and you're not looking at your watch like why are we still here. In some ways, our version is even more disturbing, because our violence is connected to an emotional narrative, I think it is heavier.

### **Can you tell me about some of the elements that we can find in your cut that weren't in the 1980 release?**

In the original movie, we see payoffs, but we never see the setups. We see the soldiers dancing, but we don't see that Caligula designed that dance to mock them. There are elements when you see a bird, but you don't realize in the original version that the bird shows up every time there is going to be a death. What happens by the end of the movie is that Caligula genuinely realizes that Rome is bigger than him, that he is part of an eternal play. None of that exists in the 1980 release. There is a shot that is really powerful, in the original he walks the stairs of the senate and they cut to something else. But what he does in the footage is that he walks up, he stands at the top of the platform and he touches all the sigils of Rome and he turns around and looks at the big, empty senate and he starts to cry. And at that moment, the giant who accompanies him and copies everything he does, touches his face and realizes he's crying too. In that moment, he knows he's going to die. But he knows that the Empire is going to live on, he's just part of this cycle which was intended at the opening scene, but which was never filmed, and which is now recreated with animation. There are some recurring themes, notably with the bird. The first bird, Caligula sees it, he freaks out. That's the one which heralds the death of Tiberius. The second one, he panics, because he knows it means death, and the death of his sister. When the third bird appears, Caesonia freaks out, but Caligula looks at it and just takes a deep breath. In the final scene, they're giving a play about the eternal play of life, death and rebirth. I'm not making this up, it was there, it just needed someone to put it together. My background is in symbolist art of the 19th century, so I was excited to see such strong themes in this raw film footage. *Caligula* is a symbolic, dramatic, metaphysical film, like a strange European graphic novel from the 70s. This film ultimately shows Caligula as this allegorical archetypal character who comes to terms, literally, with the illusion of reality.

### **What was the most difficult part when working on this new cut?**

I think realizing that it had never been done before. There was nothing I could refer to. There is no movie that I'm aware of where they took the entire raw body of work, all the location audio, all of the film. Technical issues can be overcome. But there is no road map of how to approach this. When I realize that people like Tinto and Malcolm didn't want to be involved, I was left with the question: how do I determine what should have happened? And so the deep dive that I needed to do, it's started as archaeology and then it became a time machine. I needed to listen to every interview, I needed to read every interview, I found tons of things that had never been released in terms of interviews that were never published and I got to the point where I felt I had a very intimate understanding of what each of the principle people involved wanted and I planted my flag in the middle and I tried to be an arbitrator. The writer hated the sets. The director

wasn't directing his lead actor. Going through Malcolm's performances, I could have made three different versions of this movie: one where he was histrionic, one where he was stoic and one where he gives the sensitive and powerful performance that we ultimately chose. Most of the people who worked on it have passed away, and those who are left are still wounded by it. Everybody was either Team Tinto or Team Bob, but I was neutral. You can't be dismissive of anyone who had a hand in this creation. The thing to unravel is how do you build the bridges between all these elements to really get to the very best version? Whether or not everyone agrees or not with that decision, I do know that I succeeded in that. What made my job easier was the quality of the core performers. All I had to do was follow Malcolm. There is a scene where you have Peter O'Toole, Malcolm and John Gielgud, in the 1980 version it is super truncated, they threw half in the trash can. I felt it was really easy for me to watch that footage, listen to their performance and you just get the goosebumps hearing these three masters. Someone who is a Tinto Brass fan would say: But you didn't do this craziness! But to me, it wasn't about him. Someone who loves Bob Guccione would say: Why would you mess with perfection? I don't disrespect the fact that you love the old movie. Because sometimes a movie is so weird and even if it's not a good movie, the whole experience is so fun. And I think that is what *Caligula* has been for a lot of **people**. This doesn't take away from that. I think if you had that experience this is like opening a time portal and getting to see three hours you've never seen before. Because not one frame of this movie has ever been seen before. A few times, we used a really similar angle, or the same angle but a different take, but for the majority of it, it's a completely new film. You used to see it close, now maybe we use a wide. Things that were one minute long in 1980 are now 7 minutes long. It's like *Pulp Fiction*: the camera keeps rolling, they keep talking. More than anything else, by focusing on the actors themselves, the new version restores dignity to the performances.

### **Was it one of your points not to take any frames that had been used in the 1980 version?**

No. I pretended it was December 1976 – I really pretended that I was a time traveler, and that I met everyone, and that I had spoken to everyone and I stopped Bob before he fired Tinto and shot pornography. What do I do from here? So we pretended that that old cut never existed. We looked at what had been shot, we looked at the script – of which there were many, many versions – we listened to the location audio to see what had been performed. And that took a long time. But when we began to edit, we just wanted to do the best version, honoring the performances. And I said to the editor as he was kind of pulling his best shots: let's go through this, let's both pull the shots that we would like to see used and if we need to use a shot from the 1980 version we'll just scan one of the 35mm prints. And then we reached a point where we were probably 85% done and there was not one occasion when we used or needed a shot from the original movie. Most times there was a superior take. And then at that point, I started getting nervous: this would be very cool if we didn't use anything from the 1980 cut. Then it gets to 90%, then 95% and I started gripping my desk more tightly, thinking: What's going on? They shot so much footage, there were so many things we put in the movie that weren't in the original anyway that it just played out. In the end we never needed to go back to that old footage. We didn't have the negatives that were used to make the film prints. So of the 96 hours that were shot, we had 93 hours of footage. A dozen of scenes are extended, and I think we have 7 scenes in this movie that do not exist anywhere else in any form. Scenes that are to me incredibly important, like smashing the head of the statues and then putting the head of the statues on. So it wasn't on purpose, but we were aware of it as we near the end.

Interview by Julien Sévéon

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### TINTO BRASS

Director

Born in 1933, Tinto Brass belongs to a wave of directors who shook up 1960s Italian film production. His first feature *In Capo al Mondo* (1963) made quite a stir when it was presented at the Venice Film Festival. For the film's theatrical release, the Censorship Board required a number of cuts, but Brass refused to comply. Eventually, thanks to a change in government officials, the director's cut of the film was allowed to open. It was followed by *Thermidor* (1964), a documentary about major 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutions, and the film was once again presented at the Venice Festival. Later on, Brass explored the popular genres of the day – comedy (*The Flying Saucer*, 1964), western (*Yankee*, 1966), Giallo (*I Am What I Am*, 1967) – while always bringing a personal touch and perspective. His drama *Attraction* (1968) was typical of the time period and of the director's unusual approach. In 1976, *Salon Kitty* was released – and is still controversial today. It tells the true story of a Berlin brothel in Nazi Germany. With this film, he showed he was the right man to be at the helm of *Caligula*. Exhausted by the latter's shoot, he decided to take full control of the production of his next feature *Action* (1980). From *The Key* (1983) onwards, he specialized in erotic films. He directed several iconic classics of the genre, including *The Mistress of the Inn* (1985) and *Paprika* (1991). Although he has appeared in front of the camera a few times since the 2010s, Tinto Brass hasn't directed anything since the erotic short *Hotel Courbet* in 2009.

### GORE VIDAL

Screenwriter

A novelist and an essayist, Gore Vidal shook up the American literary scene in 1948 with his third novel, *The City and the Pillar*, portraying a homosexual protagonist. Although he mostly worked on American society, he also wrote historical fictions including *Julian* (1964), which is about the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate. In the mid-1950s, he began working for film, television and the stage – and his first assignment was to rewrite *Ben-Hur* (1959). For *Caligula*, he tried to approach the character and the time period with a historical lens. Because of the rewriting of his script, along with the release of a film he regards as unrelated to his work, he disowned any connection with the making of *Caligula*. However, his original script was adapted into a novel by William Howard as *Gore Vidal's Caligula*. He passed away in 2012.

### BOB GUCCIONE

Producer

A trained painter and designer, Bob Guccione made a name for himself starting the erotic magazine *Penthouse*. Originally, he was the one photographing the models appearing in the magazine, that was started in England in 1965 and was later published in the US in 1969. It didn't take long for *Penthouse* to shake up the publishing world by offering much more explicit content than most men's magazines, including *Playboy*. With *Penthouse's* success and novelty – the magazine also offered a variety of significant political and social articles –, Guccione quickly became a millionaire. With the increasing

availability of pornography online, Penthouse found itself in financial straits by the late 90s and the magazine went bankrupt in 2003. The magazine has changed hands several times ever since.

Bob Guccione died from cancer in 2010.

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

### **MALCOLM McDOWELL (Caligula)**

A key figure of 1970s British cinema, Malcom McDowell made his screen debut in *If...* (1968), a Palme d'Or winner the following year. He portrayed Mick Travis, a teenage rebel, and reprised the role in two "sequels" – *O'Lucky Man* (1973) and *Britannia Hospital* (1982) both directed by Lindsay Anderson. After his performance in *If...* caught Stanley Kubrick's attention, he was offered the leading role by Kubrick in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), based on Anthony Burgess's novel. Fully committed to portraying Caligula, McDowell felt devastated when he discovered the film in a public screening. After the film's release, it took him several years to appear in another film. From that point on, he was mostly involved in less significant productions – mostly exploitation movies bordering on Z-status. However, he's never stopped working since the late 80s and keeps making memorable appearances, as evidenced by his performance as Dr Loomis in Rob Zombie's *Halloween* (2007) remake.

### **TERESA ANN SAVOY (Drusilla)**

An Italian by adoption since the early 70s, Teresa Ann Savoy is a British actress who worked her whole life in Italy. She made her film debut in 1974 in Alberto Lattuada's *Le farò da padre*. She went on to play in Miklós Jancsó's *Private Vices, Public Pleasures* (1976), an Italian-Yugoslavian coproduction presented at the Cannes Film Festival in 1976. Tinto Brass offered her the part of a spy/prostitute in *Salon Kitty* and turned to her once again to replace Maria Schneider when the latter left *Caligula's* production. Later on, Savoy appeared in various projects for television and the big screen before she put an end to her career in 1989 – although she made a stealthy comeback in *La Fabbrica del Vapore* (2000).

Teresa Ann Savoy died from cancer in 2017.

### **HELEN MIRREN (Caesonina)**

Like her co-star McDowell, Helen Mirren is British and hails from the theater. Although she's kept busy on stage since her debut in 1966, Mirren turned to film in 1967 as she made her screen debut in *Herostratus*. She shared the screen with McDowell in *O Lucky Man!* and has carried on appearing in a great number of various films and roles throughout the 80s and 90s, including *The Long Good Friday* (1980) and *Excalibur* (1981). However, she began devoting more time to her film career in the 90s. Major roles include *Hitchcock* (2012), *Trumbo* (2015), *The Leisure Seeker* (2017). In 2003, she was appointed a Dame for services to drama, with investiture taking place at Buckingham Palace. In 2007, she won an Oscar for Best Actress for her performance in *The Queen*.

# CAST

Malcolm McDowell	Caligula
Helen Mirren	Caesonia
John Gielgud	Nerva
Peter O'Toole	Tiberius
Teresa Ann Savoy	Drusilla
John Steiner	Longinus
Paolo Bonacelli	Chaerea
Osidire Pevarello	Giant
Adrianna Asti	Ennia
Bruno Brive	Gemellus
Giancarlo Badessi	Claudius
Mirella D'Angelo	Livia
Donato Placido	Proculus

# CREW

Principal photography by	Tinto Brass
Adapted from an original screenplay by	Gore Vidal
Cinematography	Silvano Ippoliti
Editor	Aaron Shaps
Composer	Troy Sterling Nies
Production Designer	Danilo Donati
Produced By	penthouse Films International
Producer	Franco Rossellini Bob Guccione Jack Silverman
Executive Producer	
The Ultimate Cut Producer	Thomas Negovan
The Ultimate Cut Executive Producer	John Kirkendoll
The Ultimate Cut Opening credits	Dave McKean