

is indeed paradoxical to see the study in academic circles of the medieval "cancionero popular," while the popular song of the 20th century is ignored with olympic disdain.

In Europe, only the bourgeoisie (upper or lower), and more recently, the middle class, are considered the guardians of "good taste" and the repository of cultural models. This is a delusion created by the images offered by media and advertising. There is no uniformity in what is or should be considered "good taste" and no possibility of reducing bourgeois behavior to some inflexible structures. Grignon and Passeron declare that as an opposition to "somewhat edifying descriptions of the domineering class, one feels like introducing, within sociological discourse, the vast libraries with unread books, the museums that are visited by hurrying patrons, the concerts that are heard by an audience that is half-sleep, the buffet dinners that are *assaulted*..." This is so true in Europe that, contrary to what one may think, a great number of those who are considered "people" sometimes do go to concerts without falling asleep, visit museums, read books, and do not "assault" a buffet dinner, even though it may be free of charge.

These stereotypes of social classes (and their "cultures") are arbitrary and useless. It is, however, a fact that the tastes of the upper class, cheapened and interpreted by the middle class, are taken over by the working class, sometimes becoming a caricature. This happens in patterns of behavior, in clothing, in interior decoration and even in linguistic usage. This game of influences, which normally follows a descending pattern (from the upper to the lower classes) has acquired a peculiar dynamic in the rural population of European countries.

It is a privilege enjoyed by the domineering class "to convert into cultural delicacies popular products that have been transformed into consumer goods" (Grignon and Passeron). This recycling of popular artifacts and culture is evident in European interior decoration: the pieces of furniture that had been discarded by the rural households, in order to modernize their

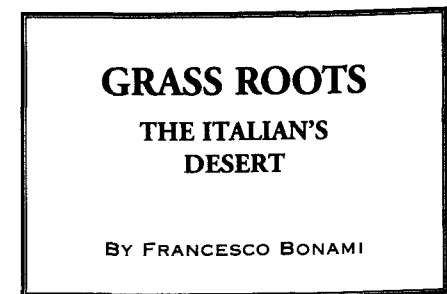
homes, became the latest trend in urban circles and recently these pieces have been revalued and restored by rural households. The enormous influence of magazines is a contributing factor (all of them monopolized by the great European urban centers; *Hola* is published simultaneously in Spain and in England): many people in rural areas furnish their homes, dress, copy behavioral patterns, and acquire information and gossip tidbits from glossy magazines. One wonders whether the rampant consumerism of rural areas is the result, in part, of true and real needs, or whether it is an offshoot of the willingness to imitate symbolically the middle and working urban classes.

After romantic populism came modernity and modern neopopulism, and later, postmodern "Pop." And thus, urban popular culture has acquired enough prestige to leave an imprint on our century, particularly in the second half of the 20th century. But, what has happened to rural popular culture in Europe? It is difficult to establish what elements of daily life in a rural area are remnants of old and ancient customs, or which ones result from the imitation of urban models. If one avoids the extreme position of categorizing certain expressions of rural popular culture as forms of resistance, one can nevertheless state that, in it, "essential things take place by the mere fact that it is forced to function as a ruled culture, that is to say, unfailingly as a *culture of abnegation and a culture of denial*, as subculture and counterculture." And "the characteristic difficulty in the sociology of a ruled symbolism is founded on the fact that the traits and the behavior of such are never purely autonomous nor purely reactive." Thus "the *neglect of domination* is, without a doubt, only one of the principles of the activity of popular symbolization" (Grignon and Passeron).

To a certain extent, specially for these two thinkers, all that happens within what is known as popular culture, is "an activity of popular symbolization." For, after all, and we strongly agree with Grignon and Passeron, the "tortured conscience of cultural indignity" occurs more frequently within the middle classes and

appears less in the popular ones. In order to be hyperobjective one must analyze the total "space of popular culture" (nutrition, domestic culture, employment, the establishment, the culture of adolescence, street culture, the culture of the factory, the culture of the bar, of the supermarkets, of sports, of television, of videos, of the automobile, etc....); perhaps only then can we know the reasons why populism is seen as a threat in Europe.

Translated from the Spanish by Doris Schnabel and the author.



*After "Arte Povera" and the "Transavanguardia," an "Untitled" and autonomous generation of Italian artists is ready to enter onto the international contemporary art scene. Mario Airo', Stefano Arienti, Massimo Bartolini, Vanessa Beecroft, Maurizio Cattelan, Eva Marisaldi, Liliana Moro, Alessandro Pessoli, Massimo Uberti, Vedova Mazzei are only some examples of those who speak a completely transformed creative language. Despite this energy, however, no one is able to enter or exit the "fortress" Italy in order to establish the international dialogue than can no longer be put off.*

Capucci, Riccardo Cavallo, Amalia Dal Ponte, Paolo Gallerani, Paola Gandolfi, Gianni Pisani, Angelo Savelli, Vito Tongiani, Mino Trafari, Giuliano Vangi. Who are they? Maybe some of you will get to know them. You will get to know them if you visit the Italian Pavilion at the next Venice Biennial. They are some of the artists invited to represent (in a theatrical sense, I imagine) Italian contemporary art. They must be those Tartars that the second lieutenant Giovanni Drogo is waiting for

in a distant fortress on the border of an imaginary country in the beautiful book written by Dino Buzzati in 1940. They could be those Tartars who only come when Drogo, forgotten by all, is already dead.

To begin a discussion about some of the artists invited by Jean Clair to occupy the Italian Pavilion so that we can embark on the journey into the interior of this European chimera called Italy, is neither simple nor painless. As a good Italian I am congenitally afflicted with a polemical spirit, a spirit that pervades the private as well as public history of every citizen who grew up in the shadow of the Brunelleschi dome, among the scents of sage and rosemary, through the years of terrorism, to the days when everyone owns three pairs of Timberland shoes and wears two identical Swatch watches on their wrist. And yet, it is equally important to look at the facts that surround the preparation for the next Biennial—which will mark its hundredth anniversary—before any other polemic explodes blinding everyone. The facts must be analyzed for what they signify as symbols and examples of a perverse cultural condition that appears incurable.

The names I have listed, names that will be presented to an international public in competition with artists such as Bill Viola or Katharina Fritsch, do not represent Italian contemporary art. This is an indisputable fact. It is indisputable because contemporary art is no longer a parochial phenomenon and hasn't been for many years. It is no longer a creative reflection of provincial pathologies, which are respectable and justifiable but do not represent a cultural generation that has been educated in communication with the rest of the world. In Italy a generation of artists exists between the ages of twenty-five and thirty that is in direct contact with international research and creative trends. These artists are capable of producing art works that are fully autonomous and represent a contemporary culture in transformation. The names selected for the hundred year celebration of one of the most important international art institutions do not reflect a transformation but an

embalmed world that has voluntarily sealed itself off the rest of the planet and is thus incapable of understanding global developments and traumas.

What I am saying is neither polemical nor arbitrary, but easily documented. Every critic or curator, small or large, local or international, will understand what I am saying with regard to the need for cultural evolution and progress. If he or she doesn't pursue this he/she favors a specific preparation towards an objective and honest vision of the reality in which he should work. What I am confronting is not a problem of individuals but the drama of a culture and its patterns of progression.

In spite of the political morass that has governed and still governs Italy, a look at the panorama of contemporary art from the post-war period to the present reveals a bipolar structure. On the one hand there is Germano Celant and on the other Achille Bonito Oliva. These two characters, employing both their strengths and their weaknesses, have ruled the two largest factions in the Italian art world. Through domination and subjugation, they deny even their own inspiration to an entire generation of young curators and critics who could offer the world a truly contemporary vision of what has been created, produced, and researched in Italian art during the last ten years.

Celant has functioned from within a politics of filters. The strength of his extensive historical research allowed him to occupy positions of power in the art world, and as he moved from seat to seat he placed his harmless pawns, *strategically or not, anywhere the system offered: magazines, marginal museums, galleries.* An understandable tactic, since Italy is ruled by a paternalistic and nepotistic mentality to which inevitably a parricidal instinct will oppose itself. Patricide, then, becomes the only possible action in order to clear the way towards autonomous thought. Unfortunately, this system doesn't produce anything other than clones, photocopies of the fathers that surrounded themselves so cleverly with impotent and uncertain godsons. Celant is one of these fathers in whom every future generation identifies itself thereby eclipsing itself.

Conversely, Achille Bonito Oliva has operated through his home-made strategy of chaos and confusion. Instead of exclusion or filtering, Bonito Oliva has pursued the poetics of the crowd in which all values, even the most brilliant, become the same or cancel themselves out. Bonito Oliva proceeded in an ecumenical fashion, moving closer, instead of farther away, as Celant did, to all. The "Transavanguardia" was his creation and he continues to feed off it, but he is wary of its repetition. The artists he ingeniously but ingenuously promoted have obscured him, their fame and their fortune having squashed his image. In the future, we will see, Bonito Oliva will not repeat this error and he will diffuse all of his energy in a thousand homogeneous projects in which inevitably his figure will become the vanishing point. During the last Biennial, however, this strategy proved itself to be fatal. Stubbornly refusing to form an organized work team, fearing that a restricted number of collaborators might produce a possible successor, he ended up being overwhelmed by the landslide of criticism directed at him personally.

It is interesting to evaluate Jean Clair's choices in light of the work of Bonito Oliva. The dynamic of Italian rule is clearly revealed in all its intricacies. In order to free himself from the shadow of the last director, Jean Clair chose to renounce any type of informed collaboration, preferring celebrated but clearly uninformed intellectuals such as Hans Belting, Gillo Dorfles or Maurizio Calvesi. In spite of *this anomalous situation, to say that it would have been better to reappoint Achille Bonito Oliva as director shows a lack of comprehension of the drama in which Italy is consuming itself.* It would be as preferring Christian Democrats and Socialists (who were in power for more than forty years) over the present government. Any change is better than none at all. More than ever before, Italy has become a political and cultural vacuum with no idea of how a civilization should organize itself for the future in order to regenerate the quality of its own resources. The tragedy is that great potential exists within the vacuum but is denied any possibility of

consolidation in a social, intellectual, evolved European and international project.

Contemporary cultural forces exist. They are crushed on one side by a Celant-type of pragmatic censure and squeezed on the other by the savage crowding of a Bonito Oliva-type. Should they survive, they will be stepped upon by shortsighted alternates like Jean Clair whom tomorrow could have another name, perhaps better, but probably equally inclined to exploit the pathological vice of the Italian system. It is impossible to believe that a solution to the malfunctioning of a country's culture can be found during an afternoon in which names are substituted for other names and where ideas are only slightly altered. It is improbable that by substituting the nature and the origin of the charlatans, the results or the operational systems will change. What will be transformed is the vision of reality, which does not mean the distortion of the nature of this reality, but the beginning of its perception in its right scale of values and through the quality of its realization.

In Italy, anxiety is confused with passion, and the communal good corresponds to that which is good for the individual determining the communal good. Thus the wait for the true Tartars is once again prolonged. The group of artists who will occupy the Italian Pavilion for three months next summer, is not the populace so awaited and geared, giving meaning and identity to the fortress we occupy. No, this bunch of people is none other than a group of pilgrims who lost their way in the Italian desert and have been taken in by a generous Frenchman who does not know what the true Tartars look like. Italian contemporary art is desperately awaiting its Tartars while, like the second lieutenant Drogo, it is dying. It knows that over there on the horizon its enemies and saviors rise and fall, waiting for the door to the fortress to open for them, thereby transforming the enervating expectation into an extraordinary, inevitable, confrontation.

*(Translated from the Italian  
by Jenny McPhee)*



## NOTES AFTER THE SHOOT

BY BERNARD-HENRI LÉVI

### THE TITLE

"Bosna!," like Sarajevo, Gorazde, Maglaj, Bihac, Breko and Prjedor. "Bosna!," like Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has been dismembered by the Great Serbia's henchmen for years, and at the same time sacrificed by most of the so-called civilized nations. "Bosna!," like an inquest about this monstrous –and enigmatic– abandonment. And "Bosna!," like a combat film, alongside men, women, who, by defending their country, defending our values. "Bosna!," like Bosnia in Bosnian. This film could bear no other name than "Bosna!"

### THE DATE

There is no film that is not dated. This one is more so than any other, since it was hot, and then edited while the war continued. It is a film inscribed in time, sometimes hounded by the events. A film that is inscribed by the force of things in a period of the war. This had to have an effect –both on what it says and on how it says it. Meaning: Some 6 weeks shoot (following the location scouting and the preparation) that is broken down as follows: First shooting of the film in Bosnia: September '93. Second shooting in Bosnia: December, then January '94. Filming (Paris and Warsaw) the main interviews outside Bosnia: March '94. Final mix: April 20, '94.

### WHAT THE FILMS SAYS

The story of the war in Bosnia. The story of how Europeans –and on a wider scale, us Westerners– have perceived it, thought it and lived it. A film on them and us. As much about the West as it is about Bosnia. A film in which one sees only Bosnians, but which only talks about Europe after all. Why they are fighting? Why we did not fight?

### THE STYLE

Godard: "Documentaries are what happens to others, fiction is what happens to me." "Bosna!" is a documentary. But it is a subjective documentary.

### TIME ONCE AGAIN

It is known that more war movies are made after the fact. So much that the "after the fact" may sometimes take a long time to happen, and has even been known never to happen. War without images. War without memory. Such is the old eternal problem that wars have. The idea, this time: to film right away. The challenge: to make a film on the war while the war was still going on. "Bosna!," because the war is not over, and because one can not always wait for it to be over to tell it.

### THE GOAL

Neither a history film (to tell what happened), nor a mourning film (to break loose from the past that has happened). But a combat film (with, for, the Bosnians –being at their service). The Bosnians often told us: throughout the story they had no other friends than the opinions. Meaning the indignant citizens. And the journalists in the field. And sometimes the intellectuals. The journalists did their duty. They carried it out with a constancy, strictness and courage, which often saved their honor. Here, some intellectuals modestly try to do their job in their own way. The work? No, it of course does not mean talking in place of the Bosnians (they do not need us for that: one only has to look at the admirable work of Adhemir Kenovic, who has followed the tragedy from its start with his friends of Saga), but it means furthering the Bosnian speech (in order to think what one can about this inconceivable tragedy with words and images.)

### US

In the film I say "us." Who is this "us"? It is the film crew, of course. Meaning, first of all, Allan Ferrari, who has already directed "Les aventures de la