

« audible music causes vibration in the air

inaudible music is not worth paying for

no music is worth paying for, unless it causes vibration in the air. »

Or:

« no bald creature needs a hairbrush
no lizards have hair

no lizard needs a hairbrush. »

It is through the iron rules of logic that the automatic mechanism is released in Carroll. I think something very similar happens in Melotti. All you have to do is look at them, these scaffoldings tossed into the air. They make use of their maniacal perfection to remove all doubts as to what is really taking place: namely, a gamble.

In the first place, Melotti reveals an iconoclastic spirit, which pulverizes the very concepts of volume, surface, empty and full spaces. If Tatlin saw a sculpture like *The Rain* he would feel like Rodin. These are not sculptures, they are drawings which have stepped off the sheet of paper. Melotti would say nothing is arbitrary: suffice it to know the 'bases of harmony and plastic counterpoint to be found in geometry'.

We might answer that Pollack's mechanical process was also governed by a strict rule. His inimitable gesture had to be controlled down to the slightest flicker, like an actor's in the Theater of Cruelty.

Another iconoclast, Jasper Johns, might be closer to Melotti in this: his confidence springs from the use of collective symbols — in his words, 'things the mind already knows — and not from a subjective proposition. Geometry is something the mind knows.

To set out from a mental truth it makes sense. Today there is a mania for explaining art in terms of life. It is the guilty conscience of modern man that has brought about this obsession. It is easy to see why Melotti's sculpture has been ignored for so many years. He is an electronic engineer as well as a skilled craftsman. Yet he believes in the 'mad supposition of art'.

He clings to a trapeze and soaring through space draws the figure of a man who is an artist.

There may be a world of art that corresponds to the world of life, but in that case it is not art that must change, but life.

We have to make up our minds to believe in art for what it is.

Gabriella Drudi

Translation by Robert W. Mann



FABRO, NAGASAWA, TONELLO, TROTTA: POINTS IN COMMON

Without indicating individual names, we have put the word « artists » before each answer since we are not interested in personalizing opinions which, if shared, belong to all of us and possibly to other artists as well.

Data: Do relationships among you play a decisive part in your cultural autonomy?

Artist: A relationship, or exchange, has always existed among artists. It's like thinking that there are no relations among peasants who have similar problems. It is with the advent of the technological era, of the consumer system and cultural industry that relationships among artists are broken off, because interests unrelated to art emerge.

- Since there are problems, which moreover come before producing art, it is simple and natural to have relationships, to try to act coherently without denying oneself or one's origin.

Why do all artists end up by accepting competition and isolation?

- Probably because they eliminate the real reasons for being artists. They have professional, not art problems.

I think that for many of them it is a question of bringing their cultural models up-to-date, since they tend to assimilate everything, even what does not belong to them.

- They are part of a system where no present exists. Because they correspond culturally to what is being done today, where the idea of future and of constant change is dominant, this has novel quality for them.

Naturally, this value expires automatically, so then other things have to be invented, and so on. To lose the sense of reality is like looking for immutable values within mutability. Their main

fear is the forming these dynamics, because they would find themselves inside a vacuum, thus emphasizing their constant self-denial.

In your opinion, what kind of culture can be achieved as an alternative to the dominant culture? From time to time we hear Mediterranean art mentioned...

- Yes, a Mediterranean art has been hinted at. I've always wondered why, from a certain latitude upwards, the world has chosen so-called development and progress, while from a certain latitude downwards it has remained underdeveloped: Mediterranean area, Third World, etc. Anglo-Saxon civilization advanced in a particular direction and has produced a particular type of culture which cannot be recognized by those who have other roots and wish to be consistent with their own origins (that is, uncolonizable). They seem to me two different or even opposite things. They can move away from poetry and culture because they came from by now the destruction of culture. Where we are concerned it is natural instinct; it is part of our being.

Nagasawa and Trotta, your cultural background differs from Fabro and Tonello's European background. What are the differences?

(Nagasawa): Yes, there are a great many differences, but I don't feel them very strongly. What's important is to know them. I'm Japanese, but for me the knowledge of other cultures is important. In the past, cultures always came to Japan from outside, and they were studied. We accepted what interested us, without destroying anything, and in this way our culture evolved. Then in modern times, European culture arrived, and unlike what happened in the past, it created a certain confusion, since it mixed together both Latin and Anglo-Saxon culture. Latin culture had something in common with Japanese culture; it was normal to live the present. The Latins lived in an existential way; the present can be found at any point in the history of Latin culture. Anglo-Saxon culture sets out with the intention of creating the new, which is gone an instant later; then something else new follows: a repetitive culture, with a vision of the future without the present. Latins live in a more realistic way, for today alone. It's like being born in the morning and dying each evening. The most difficult situation for man is to destroy his own culture and to receive another, in which he doesn't find roots. This means to die. Such danger and fear must have always been felt by the Latins, which would explain their continuity and coherence with their culture without becoming strangers to it.

- (Trotta): I lived here as a child, then for more than 20 years in Argentina and I've been back in Italy for about 5 years

now. So I have a typically emigrant background. As far as I'm concerned, there isn't a great difference, since cultural origins over there are Mediterranean too. I would say that over there, one develops by looking at that missing historical reality from a distance. And in my opinion, this is interesting because one creates a different intellectual version. Historical values are mixed; they are filtered pell-mell, like shuffling cards. This explains why, in the cultural splendor of the '20s and '30s in Argentina, what was later called existentialism was born.

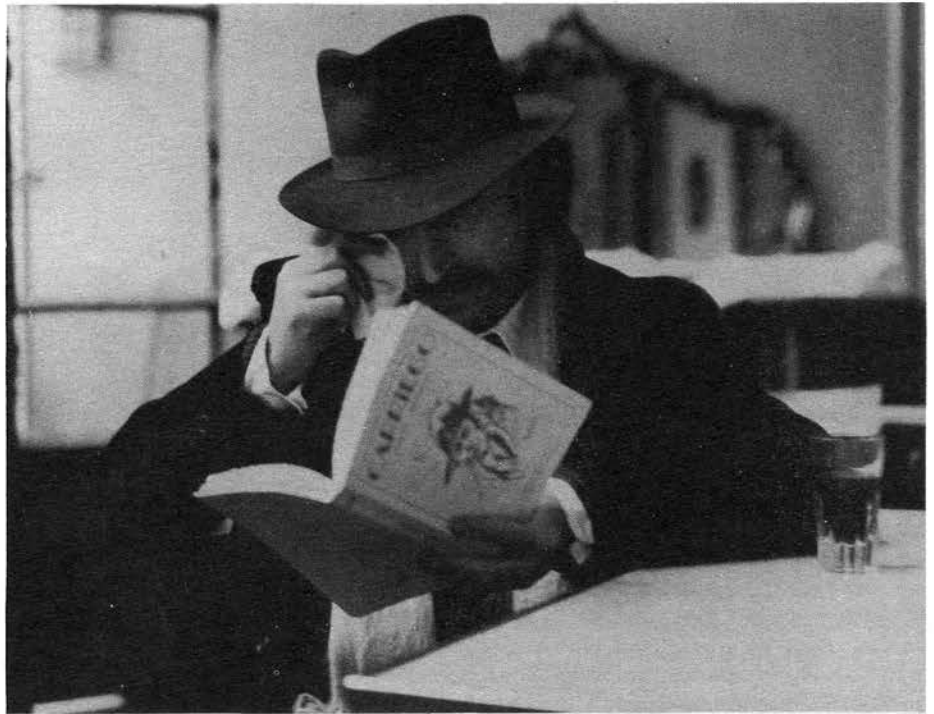
For instance, this allowed Baudelaire to be better known in a suburb of Buenos Aires than in a Paris suburb. In the literary sphere, we all know about the games with time, the pretences and, the tautologies, by José Hernández, Borges, Macedonio Fernández, Roberto Arlt, etc. On the other hand, I find a difference in New York or in Germany, where I feel that people live and think as if they were immortal. Swift himself felt it in his characters.

How can the necessity of fighting against cultural colonialism, which is a political necessity, be reconciled with the intellectual necessity to know and to learn the contributions made by other different cultures?

- This is cultural permeability. A few days ago in Switzerland, an amazed artist pointed out to that we Italians manage to work with certain materials over and over again without making them look worn out. He reminded me that in Naples this year before winter, snails, instead of hiding just below the surface of the ground, dug down almost 70 centimeters thereby forecasting a very cold spell.

The same thing happened in the Mediterranean basin, where all the people were discharged and tamed, immediately to be followed by a fresh avalanche of « proud men » who had come to be tamed, and so on. This is precisely what developed that sense of continuity. Continual conquests have generated a continuous stratification. Each successive layer served as a shield for the preceding one. You could say that after each flood, different layers surfaced in different places, kept intact by the clay that had covered them.

G.B. Vico, who denied « History » had a non-illuministic, metaphysical concept of it; the concept of one who lives within time, not of one who must invent it. History is a process toward perfection; history as a forward to the avant-garde was not born in the Mediterranean area. The idea of progress corresponds to the idea of checking to see that nothing unforeseeable happens; progress is foresight, not the unexpected; therefore it has only a past. Progress is checking mechanism and needs structures to that



the thrust can be unidirectional. If someone asks, « I want to go ahead », he doesn't accept my reply: « to go ahead, you can go this way or that way; in fact wherever you go you are condemned to go ahead, dear friend ». He wants guarantees. So in order to have guarantees someone invents the term « avant-garde », which is a kind of door in the middle of the desert, with « desert entrance » written on it, and which by convention, some desperate men regard as the door to immortality.

The idea of avant-garde involves the concept of repetition, of revival, the only leading concept from Winkelmann to the present. Avant-garde means to destroy the Parthenon and to rebuild it in a shed; avant-garde is the sense of estrangement, of discomfort, of dissociation. The concept of avant-garde comes from the concept of historicism and progress; it coincides with the desperation of wanting to get out of art. After forty years of neurosis, to put a mustache on the Mona Lisa, and after twenty more years of satisfaction, to erase it. Avant-garde is a gracer's art; a mingled smell of cheese and detergents. Avant-garde is fear of the art done by others. It is competition.

How can you say you are not conditioned by Anglo-Saxon culture?

- Because we lack the mass media sense. We are used to interpersonal communication. I don't believe in the power of mass media; the whole of McLuhan's theory seems silly to me; to apply it to art is ridiculous.

- It's not a question of judging mass media, but of pointing out the extraneousness of the whole notion. I think it is difficult for us to speak about it because we don't live in a cultural space represented by mass media. Since the

very beginning, we noticed something reductive in mass media, while the Anglo-Saxon culture recognized something connatural in it.

- We have a cultural density which we feel but can only occasionally probe. This doesn't distinguish the cultured person from the uncultured one, since every social stratum has a cultural base of its own which sinks in over the centuries and whose base mixes with other strata. Just think for instance, that the spaces of our art used to be public spaces. In a similar space one might have been a king and the other a servant, but for the most part, everyone passed through the same spaces, they all saw the same things, knew the same things.

- Culture for us is 3,000 years old; we have a circular concept of time. A work of art of the 14th century, reread on a present basis, can give us new concepts, like things made today. It's logical for the Americans, who have so few years of culture behind them, to behave like students who lose their heads over the first new toy they come across. For us, a medium is just one more medium; mentally, it doesn't make us modify anything.

- Perhaps something is changing over there too; maybe now a good deal of the American crisis consists in realizing that they too have a past; a short one but nevertheless, a past. They are not used to it, and so it unloads on them more violently than on us.

Since their past was formed on our past as well, don't you think that American artists have behaved with less inhibition toward history and culture, while even during the '60s we rejected history and culture because we were inhibited by their enormous, dogmatic stratifications?

- From this type of inhibition the idea

of liberation was also born, as was the avant-garde, to which the Mediterranean artist never gave a thought. He has made art for liberation. The problem of liberation is purely a bourgeois one; it is the bourgeoisie that generates its own inhibitions, and it subsists precisely because it manages to feed the myth of liberation.

- When the Mediterranean artist did have avant-garde problems, he manifested them like an Italian mediaeval student. The density of history doesn't inhibit, since history is like having a road to walk along freely; without history, you have the same feeling you have when walking in the desert; the feeling of freedom exists only within a limit.

- Now the multinationals of culture operate through agencies and galleries in Europe and in the States; the artist has to make choices. There are artists who maybe do not come from bourgeois backgrounds and don't respond to these structures, but they are involved in them; and there are those artists who remain within the circular concept of time and identify themselves with repressed, defeated culture; and those who identify themselves with the people that changed the world; there are the autochthonists and the collaborationists. Not that there's much of a choice. Because it depends on background and origins. For instance, I (Trotta) could never put a mustache on the Mona Lisa; I wouldn't be capable. It is not a question of fighting, but of creating a strong resistance to verify what one is. We don't feel the problem of future and of progress, nor of consumerism: firstly, because we can't make it mentally and biologically, and secondly, because we don't believe in it.

- To believe in the progress of art as one may believe in technological and industrial progress is a consumeristic fact.

- To be aware of this helps to overcome the moment of stress. The liberating Dada gesture can or could have helped, but it is the becoming aware that marks the overcoming. Due to the changing the social condition, I (Fabro) belong to the first generation that had something to do with culture. Before me, my parents and grandparents were victimized by it through the priest or the landlord. Their intelligence could help to create resistance and tricks to survive; they made me study so that I too would put up some resistance. For me, culture had the sense of defence; its contents didn't belong to me but I had to know its mechanics. I believe one of the differences between bourgeois culture and proletarian culture is precisely that the bourgeois defends its contents while the proletarian unmasks its mechanics.

In this way the artist as well, if he doesn't take a stand, is involved in these

structures and accepts their contents. He cultivates flattery and feels protected by the system.

Culture serves him only as an ideological screen. His main aim is power, which among the bourgeois people is the only term of comparison. He says: « I want power so that I can administer it well », but he knows that when one has that power the only thing left is the time and the will to defend it. Yet he fails to have any other aspiration but power. He is bourgeois because he believes in power. For the bourgeois artist power can be pursued by attempting to fit into the power procedure; first by permanently stationing himself in the power gallery to manifest his availability and his aim to be at the structure's disposal; then, by transforming his work into the art simulacrum of the choices the power structure has already made. Thus we have the worker of pop art, the worker of conceptual art, the worker of body art, proud of being workers with the appendage « art », just like the Fiat workers in the days of Valletta. But if there are no power galleries in Italy, then what does the poor guy do? He offers himself to that gallery which carries out the programs imposed by the power galleries, that gallery which is influenced by the latter. And mouse that he is, he takes up the cause of those tigers. He works out programs and strategies, but as soon as there is a bit of commotion, he must move over otherwise he's stepped on.

What about your background?

- Perhaps because of a certain evolution of the species, 20 years ago I (Trotta) was able to choose to become an artist. My father couldn't. There are those who become artists as a natural product of society or of a certain culture, and those who become artists by chance. But since

the origins are different, an unforeseen resistance is created.

I mean, it's no longer possible to foresee who will become an artist. Of course, it's normal that the American artist, satisfied and happy because of the world that was left to him, should feel inclined to represent highways and service stations. For people like us, everything is a result of circumstances; for others, it was an *a priori* choice. I believe that an artist must live and give what he can't help giving; « the best of my singing remains inside of me », a folk poet once said.

- My education took place in a particular environment so that I'm sensitive to certain things and not sensitive to others. Our references were the peasant, the craftsman, the folk singer. In the Friuli region where I come from (Fabro), the artist and the house painter were the same people. Therefore the concept of artist was quite informal and not even very elastic since the peasant society is hardly permissive. My family thinks the path I have chosen while not exactly criminal, is just as dangerous.

So that I live somehow like an outlaw and if I feel like boasting about something, it certainly shouldn't be about being an artist. I remember as a kid, an old and good artist who had been a member of the « Corrente » group or something like that, told me: « Art is a profession for the rich ». He wasn't rich and had to return to Friuli and work as a house painter. It's true even today, but I could never swallow this.

- Where I come from (Nagasawa), an agricultural region, we never saw an artist because it's a poor area and over there too, a profession in art is for the rich; a profession one wouldn't dream of taking up. To say one wanted to become an artist or a nut was one and



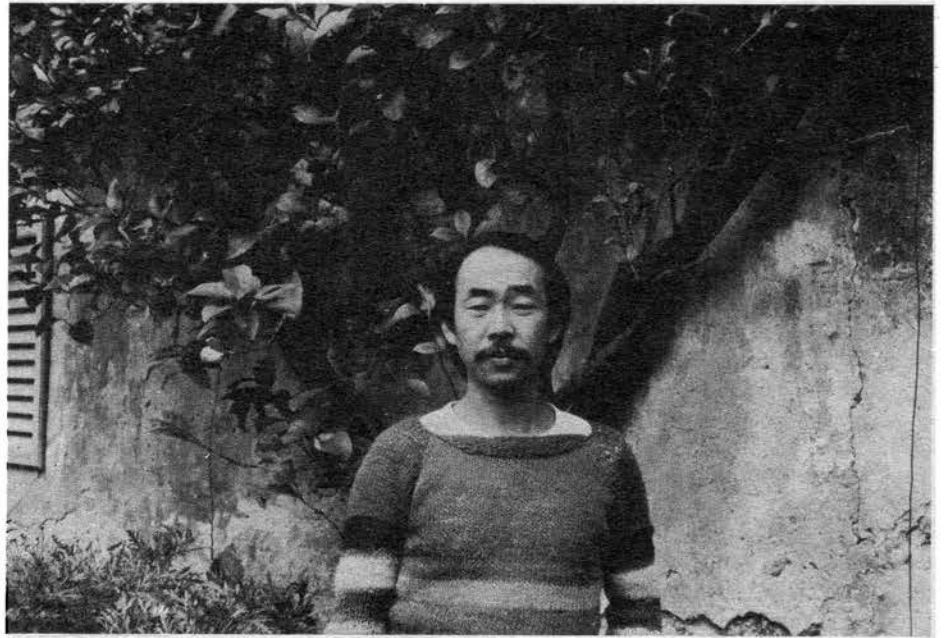
the same thing. It was like that for me too. Even today it's impossible for my mother to think of her son making art. My maternal grandfather wanted to be an artist but he didn't make it. I never forgave my grandfather for going back home after having gone off to become an artist. Anyway, I don't know whether it takes more courage to go on being an artist or to give up and go back home. My parents still don't consider me a responsible man because I am an artist and don't have a safe job. What remains from my background and education is simplicity of living.

- My origins are quite different (Tonello); my background is bourgeois. Where I grew up, if one chooses to be an artist, one comes up against refusal, since it's not a profession that brings security except in very rare instances. If you insist, they let you become an artist (just like letting you fall in love with a poor girl), as long as your behaviour coincides with the image the bourgeoisie has of an artist. The security of the bourgeois culture-structure makes you believe that everything you touch magically turns to art since your financial means allow you to do that. The conditioning is almost total. You have to appear in certain magazines, you must arrange a certain number of «important» and official shows, your pieces must be seen by certain people and belong to certain collections. When you become aware of this situation, you busy yourself researching liberating gestures which the very same bourgeois structure concedes to you as freedom on bail.

This awareness creates in the artist a kind of dualism: to look for liberating gestures and to coexist with the bourgeois world. Being forced to support this situation continuously brings you to a series of inner crises which manifest themselves as a form of neurosis; a need for solitude and on the other hand, to feign constantly. Confronted with this state of things, it's normal that from such anxieties there are limits where you can't even create a political alibi. Since the bourgeois culture-structure implies such a long and strong tradition, you can always be easily identified, even when you try to slip out of it. At this point, the choices seem prearranged in advance.

Nagasawa, you have chosen to live in Italy. Do you feel uprooted? Do you keep in touch with the evolution of Japanese culture?

- I believe there were more chances of losing my roots if I had stayed in Japan because there wasn't the strong need to think of losing them. Whereas, living abroad, I must constantly be careful not to lose my roots. It would be like dying. Over here, it's like being on top of a mountain where the wind is strong but you can have a better view. I live here



and I'm interested in knowing Latin culture in order to find points in common; but I'll never be able to grasp it as if it were mine.

The dominant cultures born from conflicts and which feed on conflicts bear within themselves momentarily beaten political lines. For example, this is so in Russian literary Futurism, where the Pan-Slavic line of Velemir Chlebnikov lost the battle against the European line of Burljuk and Mayakovski. Do you recall a line which has already for some time given all possible alternatives to the dominant culture?

- There are many cases of this kind, but I think that nothing is lost. When Marinetti went to Buenos Aires, he was already internationally known as well as officially institutionalized. To introduce him, just by chance they happened to call on Macedonio Fernandez, who didn't represent anybody. When Fernandez understood who Marinetti was and what his ideas were, he explained his action during a toast by saying: «Take note, Mister Futurist, that the past is not dead. On the contrary, it has much of the future in it».

- The idea that whoever is not successful doesn't exist, is an idea invented by the success industry. But the world of success is a minimal world, a small club of people. The rest of the world, that is, the world, lives outside. I would say that those who live outside the world are actually those who have succeeded; those who live in a genuine manner, who keep in touch with the surrounding world, and don't care if they are not recognized by a foreign world. All cultures move along in a parallel way simply because culture is a component of the spirit and power is not. Power can carve in stone the culture that pleases it, but it can't block subterranean stirrings.

- There are those who identify themselves with the above, and others with what's below. For instance, if one is sensitive to industry and technology and another to craftsmanship and folk culture, it's normal that the one seems to go ahead and the other backwards.

Does there already exist, or have you already formulated a cultural and art counterstrategy as regards the dominant models?

- Many of our friends in Milan, and to a certain degree in Rome and Turin as well, deal with the problem of strategy, not of the doing, which on the contrary, is conditioned by it. One could even evaluate how profitable strategy can be, but it is just a matter of ideology; one cannot accept strategy's continual conditioning.

- I remember when many North American artists used to come to Argentina and I was surprised because many of them didn't look like artists to me. Their behaviour made them seem more like accountants. Then, if some idea had been realized first by us, they always maintained it was a different idea. Of course it was different. But if that same idea was later on realized by some American, it was never a different one. It was then that I understood there is a typical reasoning of the colonizer. What always came to mind was that the same thing happened to Montezuma when wondering, as he looked at Cortez' men, how it was possible that they were gods since they were so uncouth, ignorant and «naive». All the same, these men had the upper hand over Montezuma. That is, the myth possessed by the colonizer who knows how to use strategy well and the right means, had won. This happened over and over again in recent years when anybody could make art if only he understood the system and knew

how to choose the values imposed by cultural colonization.

- There was a moment when the Milan art world became quite ebullient. Many young artists had come to Milan from all over and everybody was hard at work. We knew the work of some and not of others, but anyway, we used to meet easily, to talk and to argue. We weren't able to exhibit our work, we went to openings, people stood around talking, but we felt like outsiders. Thus that process of estrangement was absent which comes about through the comparison between the work in a private space and the same work in a public space; a term of comparison between what one can do and say and what the others feel.

One of us was moving out of a large studio and we thought about using that space like this: we would each contribute and pay the rent (there were fifteen artists). When one of us wanted to show his work, he brought it there, sent out the invitations and stayed in the « gallery » during the exhibition period. He was able to meet collectors, critics and gallery dealers there with whom he could try to resolve certain problems without being embarrassed about a visit to his studio. A very simple thing with no ambitions concerning an alternative structure, but pertaining only to that moment. We spoke to many people about the initiative, we met often, we set down our ideas so that we could all agree on everything. At one meeting we decided that next time each one would bring the first monthly rate of 5,000 lire. At the next meeting only Nagasawa, Trotta, Tonello, Fabro and Nigro showed up. No one else.

Several problems had come up. The others wondered whether they would have jeopardized future shows in commercial galleries; whether that democratic space would have emphasized the reactionary elements of their work (sic), etc. We should add that gallery dealers didn't react against the project. On the contrary, they actually liked it if for no other reason than to get rid of so many applicants. The fact is, many were servants, more than artists. And the dealers actually made them pay. They made them wait day after day, for months, for years. Some are still waiting. Those who made it had to do some self-management; to pay for their catalogues, gallery expenses, leave a work as a gift, address invitations, make humiliating phone calls. Something to make them envy the rental galleries of the '50s and '60s.

- I want to point out that when we speak of other artists with other scopes, we don't deny the possibility of being artists with other aims. As soon as one is aware of a wrong evaluation of things, one finds oneself coinciding with our

position, and the dialogue becomes automatic; a dialogue where one shouldn't confuse the strategy of art with art. I mean, it's not a question of creating exclusions.

- The impressionists had not so much ideas in common as ideas that were not the same as other people's, and so they had the problem of creating a new space for themselves. Picasso and Braque were friends of Utrillo even if they were doing completely different things. Is it possible that in Milan there are no others who can say that they are friends of this or that guy, who get along easily with certain people? Not at all. As soon as you ask a question they evade the answer; they would rather emphasize the differences. Perhaps this is what makes the difference with us. We look at things in common, rather than at divergencies.

- There is a passage which is considered almost compulsory. They say you are either underdeveloped or a colonialist. You can overcome underdevelopment only by becoming a colonialist.

- It is the artists who must stir up the change; directing their work and thought towards other cultural spaces and strata. Perhaps it was the experience of the '50s and '60s with their attendant exacerbation of the consumer system which brought out more clearly the problem of exploitation. Before that, the artist was absorbed into the system after many years of work; now, as information allows a more general vision of art, if you're sharp enough, two or three years are sufficient. As things stand, and very clearly, if someone pretends he doesn't understand, it's only because he feels more comfortable on the other side.

- You are constantly constrained, even when it comes to media, and tools. Pressure is put on you by way of the media which you can't possess or use as required, because prices have been set in relation to that piece of paper. If instead of going to the dealer with a piece of paper to be hung with two nails, you go with a canoe which costs 3,000 dollars just to build, and which he wouldn't know where to place, how do you introduce yourself? Nor was the intention to create the typical misunderstanding of those who dig a well in the desert and then sell the photo of the well in town. It's useless to propose a simulacrum of the work when even the idea that behind the Virgin Mary is God, has faded out. The work of art must be safeguarded. The best thing is for the artist himself to look after it. The work's expensive. Who pays for it? The dealer doesn't keep the work. He passes it on to someone else and from there to someone else, with no one really caring about the work. Their only concern is that during all these moves each one makes his profit. So we thought it was better to give the dealer a warranty regarding the work,

instead of the actual work. Thus the idea of the guarantee was born. But since the document is signed by the artist himself it is considered as a work of art itself. Such a Duchampian interpretation was unacceptable. Many have the attitude of King Midas: everything they touch is a work of art. It's not surprising in the dealer, but it is in the artist.

Lots of people had the idea about the guarantee. It's at everybody's disposal and can be perfected by anybody. It was also thought to be an idea compatible with the Italian situation, where no museums exist. It was hoped that the municipality as well, would have allowed a space where one could deposit works; and where one could go and think, if by chance he owned some of those guarantees relative to a work: « a part of that work is mine ». In all capitalistic and neocapitalistic societies there is the idea of property and ownership. There are collectors who keep works in crates and unpack them only when they loan them for a show; others no longer even loan them.

- The situation in Milan is quite sclerotic. When you go to an exhibition you always bump into the same people; you realize that there is no longer any contact; it's got to the point where it's no longer even contemplative. People go to shows, listen to a few jokes, repeat them to someone else... it's ridiculous. If you're forced to do a show you do it because you have to eat, not because you care about the show. You're dealing with people you're not interested in, and with whom you no longer have any connection; neither communication nor confrontation.

From such a situation comes the necessity to go to areas where the artist can find himself again, where he can have a real confirmation with the public, where a dialogue can still take place, with the work as a link. It's like going out and breathing some fresh air. For example, Trini, if you present an artist in Milan at a given gallery, nobody would dare say « no, not him... ». It's already taken for granted. Therefore, we must start from the work itself in order to create a dialogue between artist and public.

We thought about places having no qualified art environment, of cities having no art structure, where one name is no better known than another, where no misunderstanding arises about who's an artist and who's not. These are values established by the structure. As soon as they say this is the « gallery » and its space is qualified, the work of art is no longer communicable; it's just oppressed. It's different when you go to other towns where everyone seems equal. You have to rely on other things; you must revise certain attitudes. Then there is the problem of public space where the

spectator forces you to reduce your exhibition to an elementary level since he is not qualified for the specific. The result is that it's the viewer who communicates with you; something that's been lost here. It all takes place in a very natural way because the spectator is not inhibited. You present yourself at his level; the dialogue takes place on an equal footing; an interpersonal communication is created.

- One more thing. One can no longer make Dada gestures. Nothing doing there, they just don't get it. Another thing we ought to point out since we're speaking about interpersonal communication regarding a basis of equal values, is that there isn't even that danger publicized by the so-called proletarian culture according to which the people are the ones who decide what they want. No, thanks to the equal basis we communicate our work, we want to qualify our work. And since I don't disqualify what another worker does, he, precisely because he works, is ready to respect my work.

- We should explain how these things happened. We thought of the great quantity of public spaces existing in Italy. At first it seemed a complex matter, but strange to say, when you get involved with certain initiatives you discover that everything goes quite smoothly; that you've got an enormous amount of people ready to help you. There are immense spaces, so much so that you think incredible maneuvering is required in order to get hold of them.

But it's not true. While in Milan you have to line up just to put up a bit of paper in a 2 square meter space.

The problem was to find a different space; not to gain a space like the various avant-gardes have done, and thereafter become dictators of space.

Self-mangement is complicated. It proceeds well as long as there are 4 or 5 of you. But if there happen to be 30, a few organize and the others... It's the artist's habit to be invited or excluded, not to take the initiative. In our case we try, among other things, to combine shows with debates; to see what instruments can transform a stifled debate into a communication tool.

In Pavia they asked us if we wanted an outdoor space. Unfortunately, for the past century art activity has taken us indoors. When our exhibitions take place outside, the result is very confused. To begin with, one must permeate the environment culturally.

- There were 9 of us in the Parma show (« Sulla Falsità »), because it was easier than getting along with 20, and then it was our first group show. At the Pavia show we are thinking of doing, there will probably be 20 in the end. We considered asking more artists of very different kinds, so that in the future,

each one can grasp the idea for himself and carry it out with whoever he wants or is closest to.

It's true, that if you talk about this with some artists, they seem surprised we're busy with Pavia while they are thinking about New York.

These are choices which derive also from the knowledge of facts. To have a show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York may mean exhibiting in a small room where during the course of a year, dogs and pigs pass through maybe only for the better part of one week. The show is in New York, but the paintings are sold in Italy, just like what happened in Paris during the '50s. We see these artists when they come back from the States, in agony because they have spent three-quarters of their life trying to obtain something, and the other quarter trying to forget a bad experience. On the other hand, we have instances like Piero Manzoni, who wasn't concerned with setting up shows in Paris. He was even able to work in some half-forgotten spot in Denmark. Once he decided to hold 40 shows in one year: he filled the whole province of Milan with his shows. He was interested in the number; he understood abstraction. It was something he himself, and not some other artist, had decided to do. Absurd things happen today. If you could put yourself inside the artists, you would see how desolate it is; to see how they behave, the sacrifices made, even by the younger ones; the continual anxiety because they want to be in that particular space and not in some other. It's a constant frustration for them and it affects their work. They spend their days waiting in galleries.

Translation: Eve Rockert

On strategy

The scene of Michele Zaza's art is a struggle that has been going on for over a hundred years. Culturally, it is the decline of the avant-garde, where the eternal battle of the new against the old, of innovation against tradition, has taken on the particular colour of clotted blood; of the *separate ideology* which the avant-garde has erected and now wants to knock down. Zaza's work represents this setting. It mimes it dialectically, but is no longer immersed in it because it is no longer avant-garde. Against other backcloths, this represen-



tation takes place figuratively, in interiors used up by time, among the peeling walls of a life that has been lived. The actors are absent-looking characters who have neither role nor function. They do, however, let themselves be photographed in uncomplicated gestures that are at once insignificant and significant. They look, meditate, eat and fall asleep, without recriminations or hopes. The philosophy of the absurd, you might say, seems to have made them peaceful and efficient. So they pass from myth to history and from history to myth, without the diaphragms of death which enlistment in myth or history, in one of the two opposing armies, carries in itself. Zaza knows his own ground well. It is his own circle of invested imagination and biological expenditure. Zaza was born on the Mediterranean and his actors have so far been his father, his mother and himself. This may perhaps mean nothing, but nothing in his work means anything other than what it actually is and is shown to be. The artist works with what he knows, which includes the writings of Camus, of Sartre (the political ones), of Epicurus and of other thinkers upon whom he has reflected. To know one's ground and position is fundamental to strategy, and a strategic vision underlies Zaza's art. The historical actuality of art, in these seventies, does not yet know that it is being projected beyond that island of history which we still call avant-garde. Out of its seed the tectonics of culture are raising another continent. Some, though really very few artists, like Zaza, are conscious of this. It is not a question of naming and defining these mists beyond the present, for that would be avant-gardeism again. This new continent is to be imagined and wanted, by all means, but the chief purpose should be to favour both its birth and its detachment from the long claws of the present. Conceptual and narrative forms of art