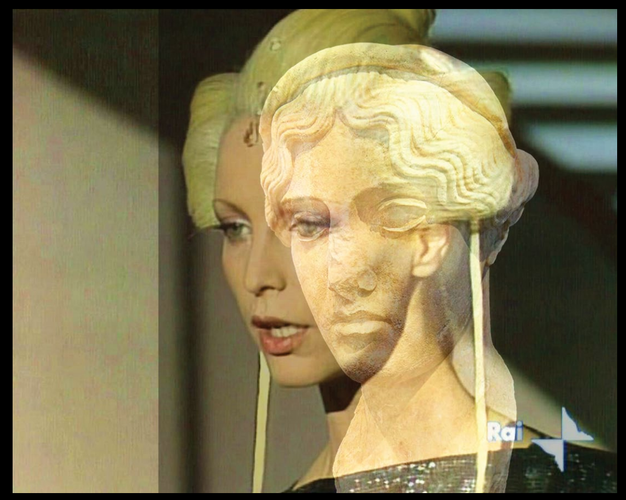
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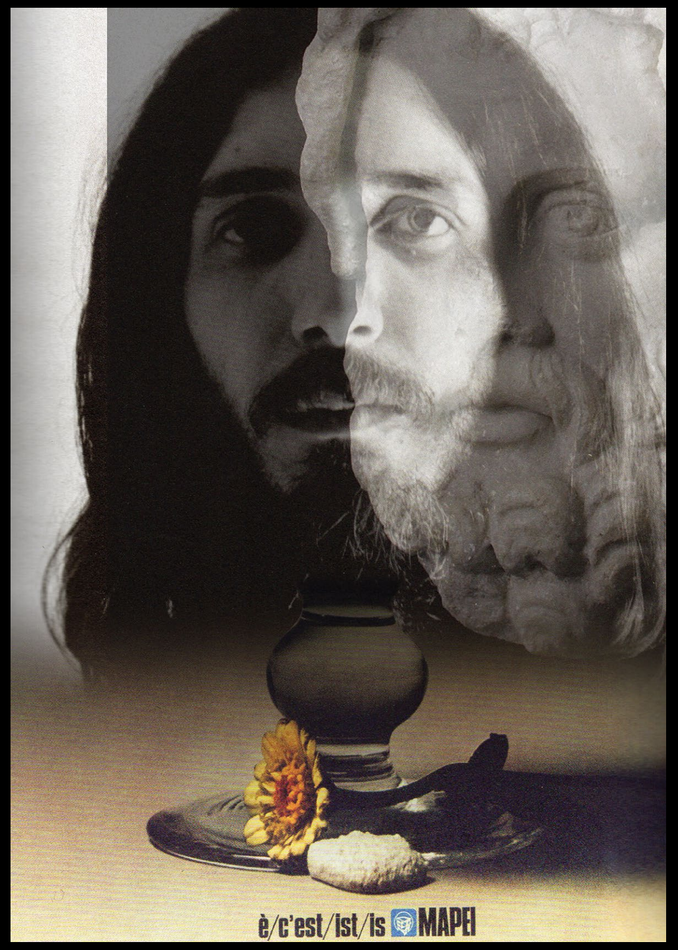


SUPERPOSITIONS

23 NOVEMBER –
1 DECEMBER 2019



DAMIANO BERTOLI





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DAMIANO BERTOLI

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SUPERPOSITIONS

Of all the books I've never read, *Superpositions* remains a firm favourite. To my knowledge untranslated into English, this 1978 collaboration between Gilles Deleuze and Carmelo Bene, the grand avant-garde agitator and supreme irritant of Italian theatre, poetry and cinema, functions as an operative guide to Bene's aesthetic and intellectual project. In three parts —Bene's annihilation through 'screenplay' of *Richard III*, a critical essay by Deleuze on Bene's theatrical works, and a response to Deleuze from Bene – *Superpositions* presents a succinct analogue of Bene's approach to the reconfiguring of theatre's canon, and to his desecration of cinematic conventions. Through an unrelenting challenge to the power structures of Western civilisation and its philosophies, Bene's work attacks the democratic ideal of civilization as a 'super-imposition' of culture(s), advocating instead for a subjectively-driven experience of cultural forms.

Characterised by a fevered dismantling of the elements that traditionally define theatrical and cinematic 'performance', Bene's radical reworkings of literary and dramatic classics by Shakespeare, de Sade, Huysmans, Masoch and Oscar Wilde, form a continued assault on the idea of representation and its relationship to power. These interpretations operate within the 'hollows' of the text, ignoring the major dramatic structures in order to destabilize their Classicism, and expose an alternative 'minor' discourse, demolishing the ideological framework of both theatre and writing.

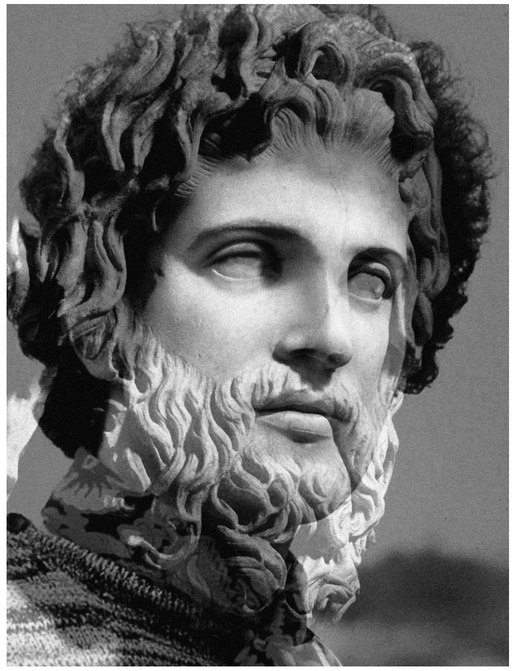
Through a series of contradictions, omissions, amputations, and the insertion of other works — acting as a contaminant and degrading the purity of 'origin' — Bene subverts his characters' identity, the audience's subjugation to the text, the author's role, and the illusion of meaning. A cascade of delirious, dissonant montage and deconstructed language, both spoken and visual, Bene's cinema resembles a hypnotic and hallucinatory mutilation — but not a rejection — of traditional form, and bears no resemblance to the localised narratives of auteur cinema.

Bene's work can be read as a symptom of Italian culture in a period of accumulated transitions; from pre-war agrarian society, into a financial boom, then dragged through a global counterculture. The binaries that helped define 20th century Italy – catholic and secular, fascism and communism — birthed the 'progressive provincial' as both a collective civic attitude and cultural identity. Nowhere else is the contradiction of modernity and ancient (Classical) culture experienced as such a relentless, seamless multiplicity; in private life, public space, and in contemporary media, the ghost of the Classical figure is joined — through its performative gesture — to the figural image in cinema, fashion and television. Almost all Italian cinema and TV is inevitably infused with a narrative existentialism wrought from traditional form, be it dramatic, literary, operatic or pictorial, where the Classical figure continues to operate at a ground zero – the 'representation of representation'.

This 'figure' appears more sharply contrasted during the 1970's programming of RAI, Italy's state television broadcaster. In this decade of social upheaval known as the 'Anni di Piombo' ('Years of Lead'), during which the modernisation of Italy was forged through student and worker protests against exploitation, referendums for the legalisation of divorce and abortion and the violence of political terrorism, RAI resembled a legitimate and expansive model for community based broadcasting. Regular interviews and debates with leading philosophers, authors, directors, artists and community leaders shared airtime with innovative musical programming and avant-garde theatre, collectively suggesting an increasing sense of personal and political autonomy.

In this context, the Italian counterculture assumes the image of an oppositional other, not only through its clear affirmation of political and social position, but also through its gesture. The occupation of public space, privileging of the body, and its tilt toward the provincial 'pre-modern' as a rejection of capitalism and the machinery of state and church, recall forms of paganism and antiquity. In the daily theatre of 'transitional' Italy, the collision of social codes and compression of historical time typical of the 60's and 70's articulated itself in 'real' time and space, enlivened by a context of symbols and gestures which simultaneously define the distant past and the living present.

Damiano Bertoli



ANOTHER COUNTERCULTURE?

The oldest one I can tell you about is (shock and awe!) the counterculture movement in the late Republic period of the Romans. That might be a shock to you (Heck, counterculture movements go back that far? Now way!), but the reason we know about it is because of our fantastic records of Roman...well...everything. Unfortunately, many of the records we HAVE are from people who weren't fond of said counterculture movement (such as Cicero's letters), but I'll happily quote some material so you can get an idea of who these people were! First off, I'm going to note - Cicero always spoke of these people with derision, very similarly to how a conservative in the modern day would speak of a hippy generation. The youth of the Late Republic were...well...not overfond of the establishment. The establishment and the culture of Rome was that men were clean shaven - indeed, all of the great men of Rome are portrayed as beardless, paintings of Romans almost always show them as completely clean-shaven, and the "gateway ritual" to manhood, as it were, was when a boy shaved for the first time. So, of course, these "hot-headed youngbloods," as Cicero calls them, sported beards.

First off, there was a man named Catiline in Rome - who was at the centre of one of the most well-known conspiracies of all time (The Catiline conspiracy), and, without getting into too much detail on this, he (supposedly) tried to lead a revolt and kill a whole buncha Romans, but before he could, the Senate had him (and his followers) dragged from their beds and killed without a trial or anything (which was ANATHEMA to Romans. Citizens had RIGHTS dammit, and that was one of their inviolable ones - to always be allowed a trial, especially concerning the death penalty). So, these hot-headed youngbloods who supported him (generally the more liberal youth - they were called the populares) adopted a beard that was known as the "Catiline chinstrap" in protest and support of Catiline. Needless to say, this would have been the kind of drama that would have lasted for months on the front page of Reddit, or CNN, or BBC, or what have you. If there was a People Magazine precedent, Rome was IT. Anyways.

So there was this dude named Clodius who was a(nother) guy who would have been a gossip-worthy celebrity. Think of a Roman (male) Lindsay Lohan. He (supposedly) slept with his sister, was involved in the most hilariously infamous incident of cross-dressing ever (which caused G. J. Caesar to divorce his wife with the quote "The wife of Caesar must be above suspicion"), and just loved causing drama - he also did something that no Roman had ever done before. He lowered himself from the patrician rank (he was from one of THE most prestigious families in Rome) just so he could become tribune of the plebeians, JUST so he could get back at Cicero. Yeah, he was a character. ANYWAYS. So the Senate tried to hold a trial for that cross-dressing incident (they didn't know WHAT the fuck to do. He was intruding on a sacred religious rite, and no one had ever done anything like this before), and the youth, who really liked Clodius, sported goatees instead. From Cicero's letters!

Affairs in Rome stand thus: The Senate is quite an Areopagus, thoroughly resolute, strict, and courageous. When the day came for the bill to be put to the Assembly under the terms of the senatorial decree, there was a flocking together of our goateed young bloods, the whole Catilinarian gang with little Miss Curio at their head, to plead for its rejection. Consul Piso, the proposer of the bill, spoke against it. Clodius' roughs had taken possession of the gangways. The voting papers were distributed without any 'ayes.' Suddenly up springs Cato [He was the strict, 100% moral, HUGELY conservative guy] to the platform and gives Consul Piso a spectacular dressing down, if one can apply such a term to a most impressive, powerful, in fact wholesome speech.

Though another man who would be considered a role model to the rebellious youth of Rome would be a figure you've probably heard a lot about - Gaius Julius Caesar, who had grown up in a not-so-great part of town, yet was hugely popular with the people. He's famous for being extravagant - and breaks with tradition constantly (Remember Cato, the traditionalist I was talking about earlier? Yeah, they pretty much hate each other's guts.) When Caesar was a young man, there was a guy in charge of Rome (He sort of conquered the city and made himself dictator) who's name was Cornelius Sulla. Sulla hated Caesar's ass too - mostly because he thought that "In that man goes many a Marius." (Gaius Marius is the guy who caused the civil war that made Sulla into a conquering dictator in the first place - and he's the first one to have given the word "Dictator" a bad name. Sulla purged everyone who was affiliated with Marius, and it was really a bloody mess, but that's beside the point.) Only reason he didn't purge Caesar is because his friends like Caesar and convinced him not to. Caesar, at that point, was...well...for lack of a better term, he was a hippy, and many conservative Romans would have considered his manner of style feminine! (Goatees were considered feminine. As a man with a goatee, I personally find that hilarious.) He himself may have sported a goatee when he was young (we don't have any sources, but the youth copied the ever living FUCK out of him, so...), though it's also rumoured that he had every hair except the ones on top of his head plucked (pubes, armpit hair, chest hair, beard hair, leg hair, ass hair), he wore his toga long and flowing, with fabric that was "transparent as a veil," (nuff said.) and he wore that toga "loosely belted." He attached sleeves to his toga, and added a fringe, and he was EXTREMELY fastidious with his hair throughout his life - when he started to go bald, he wore a toupee, and carefully combed his hair over his bald spot to try to hide it. Speaking of his baldness...well...Roman beliefs were that the more promiscuous a man was, the more bald he was gonna get. Caesar pretty much slept with EVERYONE.

Chris "Celebreth" Das Neves,
AskHistorians :)