

AGAINST THE CURRENT

PASOLINI

BERG

HRDLICKA

Observing, documenting, and lamenting the disappearance of an original rural world with its regional uniqueness and distinct character is a defining feature of Werner Berg's artistic work. Remarkably, this aligns closely with the writings and poems of Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose fervent critique of an anthropological turning point represents the central theme of his numerous essays and indeed his entire thought.

Both artists positioned themselves and their work against the mainstream. Like Alfred Hrdlicka, they sought alternatives to a neoliberal, petty bourgeois society solely oriented toward monetary value, characterized by general leveling, and unrestrained hedonism and consumerism. Following their independent convictions, from which they arrived at similar conclusions, Werner Berg's statements and artworks are here juxtaposed with quotes from Pasolini's writings and freeze-frames from his films.

Both artists lived in direct contact with farmers and agricultural laborers, depicting them with all their characteristic traits—whether in the Friulian region around the Tagliamento or in Southern Carinthia. Independently from one another, both artists documented the loss of a centuries-old culture, becoming witnesses to the irreversible disappearance of a rural way of life.

Alfred Hrdlicka addresses Pasolini's homosexuality in his extensive cycle of more than 50 etchings entitled "Pasolini."

Coming from a wealthy family of technicians and merchants, Werner Berg chose at the age of 27 to lead a life defined by traditional conditions as a farmer in the Slovenian-influenced region of Southern Carinthia. He radically condemned the bourgeois existence characterized by conformity and conventions.

In his artistic practice, Berg's attention was drawn to the Slovenian population of Southern Carinthia, who maintained their cultural distinctiveness despite decades of assimilation pressure. The people of his surroundings constitute the central theme of Berg's works produced over fifty years, eventually highlighting how this rural world was irrevocably relegated to the past through countless new constructions, technical advancement, and the increasing industrialization of agricultural work. In his writings, Werner Berg strongly reaffirmed his rejection of unquestioning faith in progress and the tempting comforts of a spreading prosperity. His critique of civilization shows remarkable parallels to fundamental positions expressed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Although these two artists never met or knew each other's work, both reached similar conclusions—Werner Berg through his lived experience, Pier Paolo Pasolini through insightful essays. Both can be viewed as prophets of changes threatening our world, driven by constant optimization of profit. Werner Berg, an economist by education, identified the fixation on monetary value as humanity's most diabolical illusion.

Pier Paolo Pasolini tirelessly questioned the prerequisites for a humane distribution of the world's wealth that would not necessitate uniformity or inevitably lead to a universal petty bourgeoisie. The works of both artists raise questions whose answers remain open.

Although he came from a bourgeois background, Pasolini experienced his formative years as a young teacher in rural Friuli. In the war and post-war years marked by poverty, he discovered a way of life whose displacement and disappearance occupied him throughout his life. Sympathizing deeply with the struggles of peasants and laborers, he turned towards Marxism but was expelled from the Communist Party at the age of 27 due to homosexual activities involving youths that had led to a legal charge. After losing his teaching position as well, he was forced to flee to Rome with his mother. There, too, he strove as a philologist to preserve endangered dialects with their unique linguistic creativity. An authentic, unconcealed life was his highest priority—a way of living he recognized in the marginalized groups of society, whose assimilation implied the threat of existential shallowness and emptiness.

The juxtapositions shown here—freeze-frames from Pasolini's films alongside works by Werner Berg—reveal an often astonishing congruence in composition and pictorial structure. The outstanding quality of Pasolini's films lies in the sequences of faces, figures, and scenes precisely composed within the frame, to which non-professional actors lent distinctive character and authenticity. Werner Berg's subjects, sparingly set within or partially extending beyond the pictorial rectangle, remind the viewer of camera shots whose closeness generates a sense of direct confrontation.

The life of Pier Paolo Pasolini, the contentious and great Italian intellectual and artist, was characterized by decades of hostility and numerous accusations. His complex personality, shaped by an unshakable sexual vitality, challenged established notions of identity and gender roles—a theme extensively addressed in Alfred Hrdlicka's Pasolini cycle, comprising over 50 etchings. The Austrian master of etching, himself no stranger to confrontation, powerfully explores Pasolini's life-defining theme of homosexuality and compellingly conveys the shock and profound disturbance caused by Pasolini's brutal murder.