

**IL MARE E LA TORTA**

***THE SEA AND THE CAKE***

A Film by EDGAR HONETSCHLÄGER

Austria / Italy, 2003, 60 minutes, Digi Beta, 4:3, Stereo

screenplay / director: Edgar Honetschläger

music: Giovanni Sollima, Giacco Pojero and Nino Vetri

camera: Edgar Honetschläger, Thomas Woschitz, Giovanni D'Angelo, Martin Putz

editor: Thomas Woschitz

sound: Peter Waldenberger

producers: Gabriele Kranzelbinder, Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu, Edgar Honetschläger

production company: Amour Fou Filmproduktion

more information at:

[www.amourfou.at](http://www.amourfou.at) [www.honetschlaeger.com](http://www.honetschlaeger.com)

## SYNOPSIS

I used to think that Goethe had written the most boring stories about Sicily – till I met him in a dark, mysterious tavern in downtown Palermo. His face showing the traces of decades of booze topped by a crown of curled grey hair, he offered to guide me through Sicily. Frederick the second, Hohenstaufen emperor came along to visit an Arabic school, in which the kids were gaily twittering a song of tolerance, while the former Mayor Leoluca Orlando, surrounded by his bodyguards would drag a huge Christmas tree into the salon of his ancient villa. The Etna did not want to hear of calming – therefore, the star cellist Giovanni Sollima had come to challenge him – both erupted – side-by-side. Next a sign appeared on top of the garbage: “Non e un Film di Mafia” (this is not a film about the mafia), that the city had bestowed the sea, just as the “conscience” - the mafia photographer - Letizia Battaglia, took a seat. What remains are the musicians, who like Muezzins, standing on top of the Norman cathedral in Monreale, would shout a poem by Dylan Thomas into the land that always appeared to me like a big tasty cake laying astray in the sea.

IL MARE E LA TORTA  
By film critic Robert Buchschwenter

When a Sicilian says “conscious of identity” it sounds like an Arab mantra. This is probably due to the fact that turning in a circle is necessary for comprehending Sicilian identity: turning to face all the directions of the compass, to which the mysterious Mediterranean island has opened and closed itself throughout the ages; in a cycle with history, which one encounters there as if it were fused with the present in order to prevent the future.

Soon after the beginning of *Il Mare e la Torta*, Edgar Honetschläger lets the saints circle far above his head, who seemingly keeps watch from a mosaic on a cathedral’s dome over the Christian order considered necessary as part of the never-ending struggle against Islam. But one need only turn in a circle often enough to take in the traces in between monumental ruins and the everyday chaos in the cities, in the faces of the local residents and the words of poets and thinkers to realize: There is proof that Islamic culture is as enduringly immanent here as the faceless Mafia.

The traces which Honetschläger follows on his journey across Sicily and his expeditions through Palermo do not, however, end at vistas providing views of daily life, the island’s history or destinations which could be labeled “insight.” Rather he falls for the ambivalent flair of places magic where history is refracted in the looking-glass of myths: myths which have been imprinted in the cityscape, living on in tales or as animated movie characters who carry on the magic.

For example, the great German poet laureate, Goethe (Pietro Cacopardo) whom Honetschläger presents as a curious, somewhat lost stranger, straying through the island and never arriving anywhere, particularly not with his shrewd and powerfully eloquent observations of country and people. (One of the locals tells him “Goethe is so fantastic for the German people, but so bad for the Sicilians.”)

Or Frederick II, the legendary Hohenstaufen emperor who seems to dominate the island and its cultural self-image to this day. In *Il mare e la torta*, however, he remains as iridescently amorphous as the bizarre noises from the Sicilian noise machine that supposedly receptacles all of the island’s sound. It is foisted upon Honetschläger’s Goethe and other tourists by a sinister peddler. Just as the myths those sounds mingle with history and reflect the present as in a kaleidoscopic.

More than just the portrait of an island and its history, *Il mare e la torta* represents an entire cosmos of atmospheres that Honetschläger captures as a breathtaking ensemble of sounds and images, mirroring them in associative montages of motifs.

The sole monument in this cosmos which is resisting all of history’s cycles and circular approaches by present-day observers is the Etna. Mighty the smoke-and fire-spitting giant towers from a rugged lava field upon which cellist Giovanni Sollima counters the volcano’s rumbling with an impassioned solo – allowing the viewer to forget the search for reason for a few minutes and sink into a blissful feeling of nullified history.

## Producer's Statement

IL MARE E LA TORTA was shot with minimal funds in Sicily in November/December 2002 (completion in October 2003). As with the films L+R and COLORS a rather literary screenplay, which provided a rough outline for shooting, came first. Honetschläger's spontaneous approach toward filmmaking finds its parallel in the uncomplicated possibilities offered by digital technology. Each scene is set up spontaneously with the protagonists on location: A colourful mix of outstanding Sicilian intellectuals and eccentrics who – with great anticipation – were staged by the director. This is what makes the difference from Honetschläger's earlier films: While this "staging" was rather hidden in the documentary approach, it has now become obvious. The documentary nature was driven into the background, creating an essay in which the filmmaker doesn't even bother with pretensions to objectivity. Interesting to us was that the form is determined by editing, uniting the pictures into a narrative whole. Honetschläger employs an unconventional method: After shooting, he meticulously analyzes the tapes and transforms every scene, every detail into drawings. He terms the hundreds of drawings he made "frozen moments", which resemble a storyboard but aren't. These drawings are sequenced and re-sequenced until the film is ready for editing. However these "frozen moments" and the story found whereby cannot hold up against the running image. Therefore, the pictures and scenes find their final place only through the significant input of the editor, in this case, filmmaker Thomas Woschitz.

## Director's Statement

From island to island. First Japan, then Sicily, and the similarities are astonishing. Christianity in one place, Buddhism in the other. The characteristic sense of isolation and of an "outstanding status" is the same. The unknown is always welcome and yet the outer world, everything that comes across the sea, is viewed with suspicion. "No one can, no one wants to understand us" is the tenor, though cultural assimilation has proven to be the only effective survival strategy throughout history. Consequently, the observer is unable to understand the new arrival because it is too multi-layered. At best emotions can be conveyed, spinning associations that allow one to feel, because the openness to experiments is greater at the edge than in the cosy nest of the landlocked. IL MARE E LA TORTA captures ambiances/moods, which, assembled, associatively reflects Sicily as an emotional state of mind. Goethe, Frederick II, the Arabs, the Mafia and the music of the "cake in the sea" allow between the tones – today – all of this island's historical cultural layers, which made it the centre of the Christian world before America was discovered. It has turned out to be a political film!

## BIOGRAPHY

EDGAR HONETSCHLÄGER is an artist / filmmaker born in Austria. From 1989-91 he lived in New York City, from 1992-98 in Tokyo, and from 2000-02 in Rome and Palermo. From 1988 on art exhibitions in Europe, United States, Japan. 1993 realization of the internationally acclaimed Performance-Project "Schuhwerk" in Tokyo und Yokohama, followed by 97-(13+1), Performance-Project staged in Tokyo and New York in 1995. 1997 participation in DOCUMENTA X, Kassel/Germany and presentation of the feature film "MILK" at the BERLINALE (Berlin Int. Film Festival). 2000 realization of the filmic essay "L+R", premiering at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. 2001 premiere of the trilogy "colors" (the history of chocolate, masaccio, in times of emergency) at Kunsthalle Wien. 2002 short film "George in Hollywood" and Internet film "enduring freedom." 2003 premiere of the film essay, "IL MARE E LA TORTA", at the VIENNALE, International Film Festival Vienna.

## FILMOGRAPHY

1991

SEQUENCES, 16 mm film, 15 min

1994

GADGETS, Video, 12 min

1995

HCN MIAU, HUMANIC TV Spot

1996

97-(13+1), video, 10 min

1997

MILK, 35mm feature film, 100 min

1999

SARDINES, screenplay for a feature with Susie Landau  
Randzonen, teaser for cinemas

2000

L+R, 35mm film essay, 79 min  
colors, = the history of chocolate, masaccio, in times of emergency, digital film trilogy, 33 min

2001

LOS FELIZ, screenplay for a feature film □ Isola Farnese, teaser for Diagonale

2002

George in Hollywood, 35mm short film, 3 min  
enduring freedom, Internet film, 4 min

2003

IL MARE E LA TORTA, digital film essay, 60min

## the “cast”

Giovanni Sollima, a Palermo native, is one of the most renowned cellists and composers in Italy. His collaborations include Riccardo Muti, Gidon Kremer, Yo-Yo Ma and Bob Wilson. In IL MARE E LA TORTA, Sollima plays one of his compositions at the foot of the erupting Mount Etna. To honour the majestic vulcano, he brought his most valuable instrument, offering the giant an “equal” spectacle, as the man himself is a volcano.

His music is equally important as the plot in this film.

[www.giovanisollima.it](http://www.giovanisollima.it)

Pietro Cacopardo, a Palermo native, restorer and idler. While desperately searching for a Goethe, we found him in a working-class bar; his face didn't quite seem to fit. He fulfilled my image of Goethe perfectly and best of all: he did not speak a word of German – excellent – this I could muzzle that unbearable hero.

Leoluca Orlando, a Palermo native and two-term mayor of his hometown. The city underwent a cultural renaissance during his time in office. He is presumably the best-known Sicilian alive, thanks to his tireless struggle against the Mafia. At his initiative Palermo's airport was named in honour of the judges Falcone and Borsellino, two of his friends who were blown up by the Mafia. Their names are synonymous with Italy's awakening in the struggle against organized crime. Orlando, now a member of the European Parliament, must still be protected by bodyguards.

[www.leolucaorlando.it](http://www.leolucaorlando.it)

Letizia Battaglia, photographer and Palermo native, a courageous woman who has spent decades taking dramatic black-and-white photographs of Mafia murders, risking her life in a battle against this “honorable society.” Leoluca Orlando made her a municipal councilor for environmental issues, though she has returned to familiar terrain since the mayor's recall. What the Mafia failed to accomplish has been achieved by FORZA ITALIA. She is at present in the process of moving to Paris – another diaspora of intellectuals has begun.

Roberto Andò, a Palermo native who lives in Rome; a director of films and plays who learned his trade from Francesco Rosi and Federico Fellini. His filmography includes Il Manoscritto Del Principe, a feature film about Guiseppi di Lampedusa with Jeanne Moreau, and the film essay Diary with no dates starring Bruno Ganz.

Giacco Pojero & Nino Vetri, both Palermo natives, make music that will simply blow you away. They are members of the Cooperativa Teatrale Dioniso, founded by Claudio Collová, and take part in its productions as actors and musicians. They play music both as a duet and in other groupings.

[www.coopteatraledioniso.it](http://www.coopteatraledioniso.it)

Claudio Collová, a Palermo native and theatrical director. For one of his plays he translated poem by Dylan Thomas into Sicilian, which Giacco und Nino shout in IL MARE E LA TORTA from the apse of the cathedral in Monreale like muezzins. The theatre Collová stages, is often inspired by painting (e.g. Magritte and Bacon) and is predominantly surreal but very political. In the film, he opens and closes countless doors to the outer world.

[www.coopteatraledioniso.it](http://www.coopteatraledioniso.it)

Cristina Arcuri, a Palermo native, popular TV announcer, was willing to read my story of the forks on Sicilian TV during prime time.

Francesco Librizzi, a Palermo native, lives in Milan as an architect. His machine which makes all the sounds of Sicily, was not well received by his professors at the university. Nevertheless it plays an important role in IL MARE E LA TORTA. I called it "Goethe Machine", as a symbol for the selling of stereotypes.

Conte Federico and Alvine, he is a descendant of Frederick II, she is a Salzburg native and sings operetta melodies (MiauMiau) in shows for tourists put on in the family's resplendent palazzo, which is located in the center of Palermo.

[www.antibes.co.uk/holidays/italy/sicily/](http://www.antibes.co.uk/holidays/italy/sicily/)

Giovanni Licata, a native of Racalmuto (birthplace of Lionardo Sciascia) lives in Palermo. In the film he plays the singing mayor in a church destroyed by a recent earthquake. The child of Sicilian emigrants, he grew up in Germany and has just finished his study of medicine in Palermo.

FREDERICK II, of Hohenstaufen, 1194-1250, king of Sicily, Roman-German emperor, precursor of the Renaissance, had learned a great deal from the Arabs. He is present throughout the film – all male voice-overs are based on his writings from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. I like the man because he was sure of the following: There is no individual immortal soul. I believe that the universal reason of man which distinguishes us from animals, is our soul and that this understandable soul which is part of the 'intellectus universalis' as the infinite spirit, is the same in all people, so that an individual's consciousness living on after death is dropped, that what is individual in the human soul, is peculiar, limited to the body and thus is mortal.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, the old fart, wrote the most boring things imaginable about Sicily. And still he has managed to influence generations of German-speaking writers and painters. After his works were published, the famous Greek theatre in Taormina was always painted as he had described and drawn it. The same angle, the same distance from the volcano Etna smoking on the horizon. To this very day whenever you look at a travel guide or catalogue in German, it's obvious that the pictures of these places carry on this "tradition." We are still looking through Goethe's eyes.

DYLAN THOMAS,  
OUT OF THE SIGHS

OUT OF THE SIGHS A LITTLE COMES,  
BUT NOT OF GRIEF, FOR I HAVE KNOCKED DOWN THAT  
BEFORE THE AGONY; THE SPIRIT GROWS,  
FORGETS, AND CRIES;  
A LITTLE COMES, IS TASTED AND FOUND GOOD;  
ALL COULD NOT DISAPPOINT;  
THERE MUST, BE PRAISED, SOME CERTAINTY,  
IF NOT OF LOVING WELL, THEN NOT,  
AND THAT IS TRUE AFTER PERPETUAL DEFEAT.

AFTER SUCH FIGHTING AS THE WEAKEST KNOW,  
THERE'S MORE THAN DYING;  
LOSE THE GREAT PAINS OR STUFF THE WOUND,  
HE'LL ACHE TOO LONG  
TROUGH NO REGRET OF LEAVING WOMAN WAITING  
FOR HER SOLDIER STAINED, WITH SPILT WORDS  
THAT SPILL SUCH ACRID BLOOD.

WERE THAT ENOUGH, ENOUGH TO EASE THE PAIN,  
FEELING REGRET WHEN THIS IS WASTED  
THAT MADE ME HAPPY IN THE SUN,  
HOW MUCH WAS HAPPY WHILE IT LASTED,  
WERE VAGUENESSES ENOUGH AND THE SWEET LIES PLENTY,  
THE HOLLOW WORDS COULD BEAR ALL SUFFERING  
AND CURE ME OF ILLS.

WERE THAT ENOUGH, BONE, BLOOD, AND SINEW,  
THE TWISTED BRAIN, THE FAIR-FORMED LOIN,  
GROPING FOR MATTER UNDER THE DOG'S PLATE,  
MAN SHOULD BE CURED OF DISTEMPER.  
FOR ALL THERE IS TO GIVE I OFFER:  
CRUMBS, BARN, AND HALTER.

ALBERTO BURRI, created one of the world's most beautiful Land Art pieces in Gibellina. He cast an entire village, which had been destroyed by an earthquake in concrete leaving the streets were they had been. What remains is a village of walls. Roberto Andò ruined his coat on one of those walls in IL MARE.

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