

Roberto Nanni
“For a Diary of the Gaze”

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It is not easy, nowadays, to identify a specific direction of research in the fields of art. Probably because there isn't just one, as the paths of experimentation have fragmented to the extent that a case-by-case analysis, work by work, has become necessary. The criterion of unity is no longer based on shared poetics or trends but rather on Wittgenstein's notion of “family resemblances”.

However, “research” is the word that best associates with Roberto Nanni's cinema: a visual and visionary quest recognizable in all of his work, whether it takes the seemingly classic form of an interview or the rhapsodic form of a wandering gaze spying on fragments of the world to observe.

The movie camera is never a neutral instrument, nor is it an extension or expansion of the eye. The lens rather causes an alteration of visual perceptions, the light whitens the contours or darkens them, deforms the figures or places them in an active space, which cannot be reduced to the illusionistic volume of a scenography or even to the minor tonality of a background. In this sense, “*Through a Dirty Glass*” is an emblematic film. At the beginning, a window opens, with no other diaphragms between the movie camera and the street. However, a hesitation immediately follows: the window draws closer, revealing glimpses of an internal space, the room from which the images are captured. From that moment, the transparency of the window becomes the threshold of compensation between the gaze and the city, an “outside” that occasionally takes on the appearance of television, our everyday glass of interposition between sight and the world. The fact that it is dirty is a way to denounce the illusions of transparency: just as the lens cannot be neutral, neither can the sight, which is always a montage of fragments following the reconstruction of an order, a form inherently undefined and revocable. The projection towards an destabilizing “outside” is a constant in Roberto Nanni's films. The word “documentary” is too narrow for him if we think of it only in terms of news or reproduction, as is mostly the case.

We should perhaps reread an old text by Michel Foucault, *“The thought of the outside”*, dedicated to Maurice Blanchot, to understand what is at stake in this projection: to place language outside of itself, to examine fiction to turn it against itself, to use the image not to reveal the invisible, but to reaffirm its unattainability, or to confirm its invisibility.

It is not a question of a renewed idealism, which perhaps through the dirt of the glass or the deformations of the light aims to grasp an essence of reality.

It is, instead, a denial of the ideal, because the eye can only do what it is intended to do, see, and the movie camera multiplies its steps, rooting the gaze in a real space from which it is no longer possible to gain a ideality: the diaphragms are there, present and emphasised, to remind us that the naturalness of seeing is only a prejudice to be corrected in the name of the cut, the framing, the portion of the visible around which, unseen, the invisible presses.

The lights, the reversals, the hallucinations, and the dark contours in *“And She Forgot”* say a lot in this direction. The role that Roberto Nanni's cinema assigns to spaces, houses, windows, to the streets, to the rooms, are in close relationship with this "outside" and are the sign of the distance he maintains towards the narrative.

Space, as Foucault once again writes, «is to fiction what the negative is to reflection», while «dialectical negation is anchored to the fable of time».

The relationship with music is also spatializing, neither soundtrack nor narrative object, but rather a rhythm to which the images collaborate, transforming the relationship into a surplus, a “plus” born from the intersection of two independent and yet converging media.

An intermedial work, that of Roberto Nanni, which does not fold the conjunctions into a simple act of cross-reference, but extends them to that limit in which, together, they produce something else: a theater of the mind, as in *“Pexer”*, very close to our way of looking. Even in the most dreamlike films, *“Faraway, Still”* or *“Steven Brown Reads John Keats”*, space is the protagonist, testifying to the continuity, or rather the obstinacy of a research path. Space that multiplies the retinal vision, urging it to pursue points and colours, recognizable images or luminous crossings in a four-dimensional volume.

The need for transmutation into form keeps this notebook of visual sketches away from any risk of self-referentiality and transports it, transports us, constantly into the space of the outside. The words spoken by Derek Jarman in one of Roberto Nanni's most impressive films, *“Love Conquers All. Conversation with Derek Jarman”* define well the common thread that connects his collaboration with Steven Brown and the works of the

late 1980s, such as “*Sweet Wandering in Sacred Wild Places*” or the same conversation with Jarman and the visions of “*And She Forgot*”.

These are words that Jarman links to one of his films dedicated to Yves Klein but could very well refer to Roberto Nanni, who perhaps has let himself be guided and strengthened by these words.

Roberto Nanni's is, in fact, a “diary of the gaze”, “*autobiographical to the point of becoming universal*”.

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