

STREET

Photographs by Milcho Manchevski

How do you organise a book of photos? You study the images, you put them in order, you construct a relationship between them and try to give them a certain visual rhythm. In other words, you adopt the methods of a film editor; you become the director who takes his/her original clips, then cuts and splices them until the definitive film has been created.

When I look at the images that make up this volume, I cannot help but wonder what it was that made Manchevski abandon, even if temporarily, his work as a film director and focus on photography. I cannot help thinking of the title he has chosen for this book, *Street*, the theme around which the images have been "edited;" and then there is what the photographer indicated when he first showed me his choice of photographs.

Manchevski has no doubts about the differences between a film director and a photographer: cinema is a synthesis of artistic disciplines dependent on market forces, he pointed out, which conditions the creative freedom of the artist much more than photography. Of course, he is right, it takes a lot of people to make a film, and a lot of money. Taking a photo, on the other hand, is instantaneous, all the photographer needs to do is take a good look at him/herself, a good look at the subject and "click": It is an independent act that requires no organisation nor production, and from this point of view, it is not limited in any way.

I thought about this for a long time. This is all very well, but Manchevski just happens to be the director of that extraordinary film, *Before the Rain*. I can still remember exactly how I felt at the end of that film: it was a mixture of intense joy and bitterness, the thought of what I have seen pained me, and - yet - at the same time, I was exhilarated by the way in which the story had been presented. This film was not a simplistic reproduction of reality, it was much more. It had distilled, interpreted and given its audience reality in the form of a refined language with a series of metaphors producing infinite variations of meaning. How can a director who is so overwhelmingly original be afraid that his work is limited?

Is this why Manchevski has decided to look for new creative stimuli, or is it simply that he has decided to explore the brilliant ideas that gave birth to his first full length film in other forms? Has he decided to establish a more precise relationship between his work as a director and his work as a photographer?

The most powerful images in *Before the Rain*, its most emotional and figuratively intense moments, all seem to be profoundly bound to the photographs that make up this volume. Manchevski, the director produces personal images, marked by precise and powerful artistic individuality and unmistakable style. Even if he longs to shrug off the chains that cinema imposes on him and even if he has intensified his artistic exploration, Manchevski, the photographer has not abandoned the spirit with which he directed his first film, nor has he left the roots of his own particular brand of poetry. What he has done is to pick out certain observations from the film and to weld these into a new structure, a further reflection on the reality of the world in which we live.

Street. The title of this photographic journey plunges us immediately into the depths of social landscape. Traces of humanity captured as if by chance, in the rhythm of their day-to-day life, routine gestures, figures met at the moment when pressing a button - who then slip away - visual structures stolen from environments that shirk every attempt to decode them.

Manchevski seems to shy away from highlighting details, his method does not underline the particular, indulge in dramatic twists or promote a certain viewpoint at the expense of another. He flees from any technical or figurative expedient

that may give the photograph an immediate, transparent meaning and cheat the observer of the pleasure and surprise of ambiguity. This is where Manchevski's provocative style surfaces, the same character, the same stare that remains both involved yet distant, immersed yet subtly objective, the style that I had admired so much in *Before the Rain* which can now be found on every page. Here again, his incredible ability to suspend and at the same time render dynamic the subject of the frame, is apparent. It may be a single image or a sequence, but what is important is his ability to confer a polysemous structure on his work that permits the discovery of a multitude of interest points that give depth to his communicative power and are never exhausted at the first viewing.

Manchevski's photographs are simple, direct and extremely agile; he never displays what the observer desires or expects. There is nothing brutal in these photographs, nothing narcissistic and in this respect his work is a significant move away from the pseudo-realism of many other contemporary photo reporters and from the abstraction of those who render reality as a type of game. Manchevski does not judge or scream, nor does he select his subjects on the basis of predefined calculations. On the contrary: he seems to neglect the most important details rather than push them into the centre of his shots. This way the images give a real sensation of the street, a flow of events that proceed simultaneously in all directions, spotted almost out of the corner of the eye. The curious desire to individualise something is ever present, further ahead, further behind, to the side, behind a half-closed window, in a garden, in the shade or in a local shop, anything that reveals a vital flow, a trace of humanity.

There is no point in expecting for these photos to give us a history lesson, to scream in pain or to flare up in anger or revolt. We cannot expect to find any consolation in these images. These places, these faces even if they seem familiar, remain forever shrouded in mystery, they slip into their own world that neither the viewer, nor the photographer, will ever be fully able to grasp. This is what struck me most about these photographs. In this era of global information, which penetrates all things and which levels every difference, which has an explanation for every phenomenon, and never stops to look below the surface, it comes as a relief to drown our certainties in the steamy, enigmatic, indistinct flood of the street.

Andrea Morini
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