

The Power of Detail

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«Those extraordinary close-up details that hit the spectator between the eyes like a hammer», wrote Eisenstein, perfectly synthesising the power of the shot, filmic or otherwise, in the moment in which the use of an extreme close-up makes of a detail a full-screen unicum.

The detail, shot with care and from a fictitious distance, becomes an obligatory, indispensable element of narration (that is, it explains), but from a strictly visual point of view, isolated and decontextualised as it is, it eventually appears as something other than itself. The power of the detail lies in its very capacity to suggest diverse interpretations, in the overturning of the bivalent signified-signifier relationship, supplying new elements, possibilities never previously contemplated. The history of film provides numerous examples of this upheaval: showers, from *Psycho* onwards, generate fear; hands, combined with handles, create expectancy and suspense; boxes (Bunuel) offer endless interpretative possibilities

when their contents are not shown. Although she does not direct films, Annika Larsson is well aware of their semantics and makes knowing use of them in her videos: works rich in details in which the shots frequently mutate, but with elegant slowness, directly entering the filmed action with a voyeuristic spirit and sophisticated ambiguity.

Apart from wearing clothes that at times resemble or actually are uniforms, the male figures employed by the Swedish artist act, play and look at one another as if celebrating a ritual, some strange, unfinished late millennium ritual that is barely perceptible and characterised by the transience of the historical moment in which it is enacted, celebratory to the point of paroxysm.

In Annika's world the dominant shades are the black and white that, illuminating to a greater or lesser extent the settings, stimulate the claustrophobia of the void, of the suffocating emptiness. Under the effect of this light we encounter

men smoking a cigar, looking at each other in a tactile manner (*Cigar*), bonding through gesticulation in a dimension of apparent detachment; or there are two who are «playing tennis» (40-15) in front of a mirror in an apartment, in the presence of a glacial umpire and a sombre ball-boy. The game will never be played, and the prize will be received by both, in spite of the fact that the action is concentrated in the propitiatory aspect of the event, the event itself being missing. Silent, intent figures, participatory but at the same time inactive, probable aesthetic icons, giants in miniature, of a religion of nothingness, of ambiguity elevated to essence, where concreteness and truth have lost the assertive faculty of speech, of testimony. A world invented by Annika Larsson is composed of men who know that «a man who cannot summon up a sense of reality even in relation to himself may suddenly, one day, come to see himself as a man without qualities.» (R. Musil, from «The Man Without Qualities»).



40-15, 1999. Video still.



Cigar, 1999. Video still.