

Affective Sceneries – Diaries of David Perlov
by *Ilana Feldman* and *Cleber Eduardo*

Through the window of his daughter Yael's apartment in Paris, David Perlov observes a group of children and a succession of feet walking. We see these images in the fifth chapter of David Perlov's *Diary, 1973 – 1983*, a simple daily beauty unveiled by free and selective picture frames that represent the formal principle of the six parts of the memorialistic and metalinguistic audiovisual cahier of annotations. Whilst children of different origins play in a patio and, behind them, on the street feet move in a flurry, or with elegance, in the narration plane, Perlov proposes and sets forth his esthetic manifesto: a cinema without a plot, without intrigues, based on the observation of spaces, whether public or private, on the observation of the movement of bodies as times fluxes, on the capture of fragments of daily life, on tiny gestures and expressions of anonymous faces – situations or instants, whose wealth lies not only in the experiences apprehended, but also in the way of looking upon them.

It can be said that the cinema foretold in the *Diaries of David Perlov*, revealed to a large part of Brazilians through the film festival exhibitions this year, was one of the great highlights of the program – and was therefore awarded this mention during the Independent Critics Award. This cinema, which claims an aesthetic for the ordinary, which is inherent to it, began to be filmed in 1973 and ended in 1983, and was organized during its creation in six chapters lasting 55 minutes. At the beginning, using a 16mm camera, it was an experience without a specific aim. It was only when it was turned into a TV series, aired on Channel 4 in English that Perlov added the narration, subsequently adding on to the capture of images a memory, or his own visual “annotations”. In this way, Perlov made of his *Diaries* a powerful center for the construction and updating of memory, but also an auspicious ground for thought and reflection - oftentimes on his own documental methodology.

This is the second round of David Perlov's work (1930-2003), a Brazilian Jew, born in Rio de Janeiro, brought up in Belo Horizonte and São Paulo, a citizen of Israel – a major reference in the documentaries of the country he chose as his home. The first round was marked by work that was not particularly appreciated by the Israeli status quo, with mention of *Jerusalem* (1963), a 33-minute documentary in which Perlov filmed the Tel Aviv beggars, a social group in the heart of which, according to a female poet commenting on the film, the Messiah would be born. Despite the prizes at the Venice Festival in 1963, and despite the fact it was considered as a milestone in Israeli cinema,

the film led to Perlov's isolation on the part of political authorities of that country. Perlov sought aesthetic and political freedom at a historical point in time blemished by legislations and inflexible authorities in Israel, who clamored for cinematographic projects fostering ideological propaganda, but did not value formal experiences with the intent of allowing more breathing space for people.

According to his wife, Mira Perlov, also a producer of the Diaries (and who was in Brazil accompanying the exhibition of his work), Perlov "wished to make films on people, while they [the status quo in Israel] wished to see films on ideas". From Europe to South America, continents with which the director had close ties, experiences and ideas, the arena of images was seething – the Nouvelle Vague, the novel cinemas, Jean Rouch, the North American direct-cinema. Affiliated to this aesthetic modernity, and under the seminal influence of the poetic documentaries of Joris Ivens (for whom Perlov worked as an assistant), Diaries is also the result of a crisis in conventions for fiction and documentaries, practically a mixture of experiences being enforced since the 1960's. Thus, while the film incorporates the awareness of whomever is being filmed – as in the French *cinéma-vérité* –, it also leans on the non-interference observational method from the North American direct-cinema. In any fashion, there seems to be in the Diaries a return to the origins, those of Perlov and of cinema as a whole – as in the street scenes and the family scenes captured by the Lumière brothers.

Add on to that the esthetic and stylistic references, the constant presence of narration on off, not as a voice of an omniscient and teleological wisdom, but as the subjective voice of the author-narrator speaking out in the first person. The voice of Perlov who narrates it all, not reiterating images, nor to round up the meaning of experiences, but to incessantly continue the quest. Perlov develops an aesthetic project in which narration is not committed with the truth of "who you are", but instead with the sonorous materiality of words, a materiality which contemplates intonation, the structure of sentences, and the oral rhythm attuned to the movement of planes, and, above all, to movement 'within' such planes. Thus, his narration ceases to simply conceptualize the moments of filming, and looks upon such moments as a bridge towards feelings and sensations that inhabit his past.

There is therefore a paradoxical relationship between image and memory, as, at the same time in which images, captured during the filming, evoke memories, articulating the images in montage also produces these same memories. Because of this, it is far

from being a Proustian project, marked by involuntary memory. In *Diaries*, the quest for the lost Madeleine is conscious, desired and required. It is also not about a documentary project which is embedded in temporal duration, as his narration is not simultaneous with the capture of ideas. Perlov, in a distinct way, has worked based on the logic of flow, evoking and building memories based on the fragmentation of time, on spaces and experiences, albeit such experiences are organized chronologically.

In *Diaries* there is a quest that is undertaken and that is constantly presumed. From the very beginning we are not sure what is being sought, although, due to the insistence of Perlov's voice in looking at some images as portents or prophecies, we can intuitively deduce that this quest is for some sort of revelation. As somebody scrutinizes the confines of memory in the search for a lost mien or face, a sweet smile, a deafening scream and the music of childhood (in this case, an *Aria* by Bach), Perlov seeks an image that will be able to show us something which can only be apprehended by the perpetually alert camera-eye of the film maker, and that can only be captured by cinematic technology.

At the very beginning of this quasi-omnipresent voice off, Perlov explains his aversion to artifices who construct meaning, proposing a non-fictional approach for this "revelation" sought out in the *Diaries*. There would thus be some sort of secret in the image, an epiphany, apparently invisible, about to be revealed. Such an epiphany can only be grasped without a prior script or acting, merely through the insistent observation of life's minute details. A secular Jew, Perlov, during several moments in the *Diaries*, shows a rather religious tie with the ability to reveal the image, upon retaining instants and producing memory – a vision that reminds us to André Bazin, a defender of cinema devoted to making the ordinary something sacred.

In the sixth and last chapter of the *Diaries*, Perlov tells us that, since his childhood, he was an admirer of the picture frames, the frames of windows in the train that connected Belo Horizonte to São Paulo, while he keeps in his mind the view from a window in the coach at Estação da Luz, evocative perchance of the genesis of his trajectory – that is not far from the image-genesis of cinematographic exhibition (the Lumière train). As of that moment onwards, he observes and frames everything within the windows of trolley cars, automobiles and the apartments he walks by. It is during those moments that we see two frames, that of the visor of the camera and that of the window, through which the film maker observes the movements of the world, notwithstanding that he does not

grant a prior meaning, or an aim – simply a sort of chance witness. Perlov states, based on the image of the legs of a man running, that the only thing that matters is the movement of the running man, and not where he comes from or where he is heading. “Observation is part of my being”, he stresses.

Nonetheless, when he watches from his windows, Perlov, far from opening up fully to chance, seeks the extraordinary in any common image, not the ordinary in any image. The windows are a means to propose conviviality between the inner life (a family’s daily life in movement) and the outside (the distinctly repetitive movement from the street). This relationship is also established with the use of the same ambient sound of the city, noisy and laden with horns, within domestic environments. Nonetheless, when he films in Israel, be it within his apartment or outside of it, he points out that this conviviality between the interiority and exteriority is based on a sort of dichotomized relationship. Family and friends are always filmed in harmonious situations, in a sort of affective relationship utopia, whilst the country, when mentioned and visualized, carries the burden of frustrated expectations. Home therefore is a refuge from the national aberrance or abnormality. His wife and children are, in this context, his primary people.

In the first chapter of the Diaries, it is the Yom Kippur war, after some images of a protest captured from the window that reach us through television (another window explored by Perlov in the first two chapters). These war images plant uncertainty in a space of security. In this case, there is a fusion through TV of the inside/outside relationship. In the subsequent chapters (three and four, above all), this relationship becomes one of complementariness and opposition. The third part of the Diaries brings some of the most beautiful images of the series, initially through the dancing of friends in the very bare living room in the Perlov apartment in Tel Aviv, and later with the daughter Naomi learning French with her boyfriend in Paris. Both scenes are truly powerful when it comes to capturing these intimate moments, an intimacy that emerges from the intermediation of the camera and as a reaction to it. Perlov’s camera, through which he expresses his love, paying tribute to family and friends, attempts to film them in a poetic and tender fashion, establishing an affective relationship, not only with his beloved, but also with the scenery, images and memories that surround him, even the harshest and saddest.

Regarding his method of coming closer, at times his camera is indiscrete, does not ask for permission, on other occasions is bashful, insisting on showing its presence, on

requesting a certain performance (and not any performance), in which those being filmed are aware they are part of this frame and react with such an awareness. In this sense, the construction of family intimacy set forth in the Diaries does not take place, at all, in the intimate and intimidating exploration that the term “first person” symbolizes, whether it is in documentaries (such as Tarnation, TV Junkie or Le filmeur) or in all sorts of confessional technological apparatus (such as blogs, fotologs and webcams). These ten years in the life of David Perlov are not presented to us from a confessional viewpoint, one that capitalizes on the issues of the “I” as being the primordial subject. Quite the contrary, his biographical trajectory is revealed to us through fragments and his subjectivity emerges not from an essential interiority, but instead from the observation of the worlds’ exteriority, with its rhythm, movements, what is permanent and what changes. That is, it is only from the observation of the world that its “being in the world” can be captured, revealed and amalgamated.

Because of all this, the six chapters of the Diaries are marked by a journey that is constantly underway, and this journey refers to all of the personal issues in Perlov’s trajectory, as well as to his audiovisual working methodology being developed. The personal part is directly tied, in the sixth chapter, to the past and to an absence: when he returns to Brazil, he will again meet some friends, revisit affective sceneries in São Paulo, and hear anew the Bach Aria from his youth, Perlov seems to be close, because of the structure chosen, to finding something. Would this be a lost image from childhood? The tension between the proximity of Belo Horizonte, a city laden with sad memories, that he left still a child is magnified through the mention of his mother, Ana, a figure that is little evoked and surrounded in a haze, of whom he prefers not to speak. It is only after visiting her tombstone, still in Belo Horizonte, that Perlov can finally return home, to Israel, the hidden house – not before going through Lisbon where, while he regales us with beautiful images of feet and legs entering and leaving a trolley car, he fills in the sound track with the Ave Maria played on the radio of that city, revering some women who have been important in his life.

To once again learn to see – and subsequently structure whatever has been seen in the filming – this is Perlov’s challenge. If we accept this invitation, enabling us to also find the revelation he is seeking, each fragment tends to be an event, a happening, a great potential image, and not merely a record of trivial experiences. Each image thus becomes part of a romantic search, an almost metaphysical one, because of the invisible in this vision, non-trite image of the simultaneously simple and complex

movement of life. And to see these images, articulated by a rhythmic montage and narrated by Perlov's melodic voice has something ritualistic in it – and therefore sacred – in the sense that we share the memory of his search and the memory built by such a search. Nevertheless, this is not merely an audiovisual experience amalgamated by the poetry dear to memorialistic gestures. Instead, The Diaries by David Perlov fall into the territory of aesthetic militancy, as upon looking at the past of their director, they can see the future of the documentary.

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