

Learning from Everything.

[Susan Nash and Imagined Domesticity Framed Differently].

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We are trapped between irreversible simulation and absolute superficiality, now that the “art conspiracy” has become fossilized. Under the global *videocratic* régime (the true cornerstone of reality), we are experiencing the consolidation of the image as an a-representational device. Rancière has pointed out that, since everyone is part of the spectacle, there is no reason why anyone should ever leave it, not even those who know the reason for the spectacle: the only thing worth taking into account is that we have arrived at one definitive and proven certainty: *Video ergo sum*. Cynicism is, to a large extent, the general tenor of cultural strategies, accepting, with a mixture of negligent apathy and pseudo-radical rhetorical camouflage, the tourist-leisure tsunami. In the context of groundhog day politics, it is natural that the aesthetic of disappearance (apparent in the almost chronic *picnolepsy* that leads us to be present at the eternal return of eternal sameness without batting an eyelid) should strike a deal with the boredom that is the metaphysical tone of a present with no project for the future. It is fanciful, even pathetic, to see a critical intent in what is malicious gossip, in that radically inoperative “grammar of the multitude”. Susan Nash formulates a personal, objectual, pictorial, installational and photographic “speculation”, in order to describe the unsettling place we inhabit. *Our House* is by no means an immersion in our living space as something sinister but, to some extent, a quasi-surrealist pursuit of the marvellous within the real.

The ideological fantasy (that unconscious, overlooked illusion), instead of stimulating us to penetrate reality, gets us bogged down in trifles. The grandchildren of the “modern bastards” who challenged catastrophe shouting recreational slogans that *abandoned all hope*, enjoy themselves or simply vegetate as they view inanity live. Art is no longer the privileged realm of anything, but acts as a disempowered playpen. We live in a total conspiracy, confused by a colossal nothing, and incapable of bringing anything into focus. The show must go on even though we dream of killing time in a sort of karaoke inspired by David Lynch’s Silencio club. We are fossilized on the sofa, incapable of getting up to do something different from watching television. We are the incarnations of *destination hikikomori*, which may be nothing other than a mutation of the exterminating angel. Perhaps all we can do is wander to and fro between indignation and amusement (the two experiences that ultimately structure aesthetic ideology), beyond excitement, in a (an indigestible) dead calm, that final stupor in which we want nothing to happen or, in other words, *please let things not get any worse*. We need only some “background noise”, some “indifferent visuality” or “reticular rumourology” in order to remain *connected*. Susan Nash literally “connects” heterogeneous realities, for example a “found painting” and some plants, a *pompier* landscape with some remains of nature that attempt to take root in the metropolitan desert. The reason for naming this “device” *Sitting Room with Pharmacy* may be that she is seeking a drug (poison and antidote) that could push our imagination beyond polar (visual) inertia.

Perhaps in this *scopic narcolepsy* “other things”, different from the prepackaged, could happen. Susan Nash’s works create a visual short circuit, leading us into another situation, different from that of the *Ludovico Treatment* intended to “cure” our violent impulses by means of an overdose of horror. The artist has committed to the imaginary, conscious that art simply means *making what does not exist from what exists*. Some playing cards from the Spanish pack can be used *to play in a different manner*, even though the point of view remains, apparently, within the established framework. When she assembles a piece entitled *In Light of These Facts*, using lamps and plants, she may be creating an allegory of the need to establish other interpretative frameworks. Susan Nash definitely has no dogmatic programme to propound (with the hegemonic rhetoric of the pseudo-resistance aesthetic), nor intends her works to be mere fossilized structures. We need, to use Goethe’s last words, “more light”, even should this come from a work of art that fuses technology and nature through a recycling that enlarges our imagination.

In 2001, the magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* considered *Loft Story* (the pedantic and “citationist” French version of the Dutch programme *Big Brother*) to be among the ten best films of the year. At the *devastating foundation* of a century in which the Empire was to establish a “state of exception”, with manhunts (facilitated by the new “drone morality”), millions of spectators enjoyed viewing a “collective incarceration” for the sake of fame. Television was discovering its nature as *live “monitored” life*, and confession reappeared in a crazy new guise. This abject tele-nothingness amplifies the panoptic prison logic. Susan Nash goes beyond “mediatic literalism”, and in no way accepts the aesthetic of abjection, always preferring to leave some small opening for fantasy, as in *Guardian*, the amusing work in which broken pieces of a Lladró figurine have been placed in and around a metal medicine cabinet. It is not that kitsch cures, rather the contrary: we need to find, beyond cynicism and sarcasm, a creative orientation that, without aspiring to the sublime, gets us out of the contemporary bog.

Perhaps the reality show, that ridiculous *commedia (senza) arte*, is the proto-history of the strategy that consists of turning *patterns of life* into data. “The analysis of ways of life could be defined with greater precision” -Grégoire Chamayou points out in his *A Theory of the Drone*- “as a fusion of link analysis and geospatial analysis”. In order to form an idea of what this means, we need to imagine a superposition, on the same numerical map, of Facebook, Google Maps and an Outlook calendar. A fusion of social, spatial and temporal data; a combined cartography of the *socius*, the *locus* and the *tempus* –in other words, three dimensions that, with their regularities and also with their discordances, constitute what is practically a human life. Today we are trapped or mobilized by the so-called “information economy”, which prices feelings, confidence and social contacts in the same way that it prices actions and merchandise. In this world of strict and frenetic “commercialization of the self”, we do not so much establish contact with others as sink under a feeling of anxiety. In 1950, the sociologist David Riesman, in his famous book *The Lonely Crowd*, complained that in the modern world each person has become a radar operator inside his/her life. The twenty-first century has seen increased disquiet within a slightly paranoid world dominated by mutual suspicion and deception, and generalized distrust. Today, each individual is, metaphorically, in the same situation as the deer in the hunting scene used by Susan Nash in *Sitting Room with Pharmacy*.

Even though we may try to escape, the “bubble/filter” has us trapped, and Google quite literally knows what we want. This situation can lead us to “lose our heads”, like the figurine of the “guardian” in the medicine chest, but we need to be able to furnish our heads with different narratives and different images. It is evident that we live in a walled society with barriers everywhere, like the one laying down the law in Susan Nash’s *Square*.

Looking at these works, extremely playful, but at the same time lucid, I realize that the important thing is not only the image of the street with the strange “epiphany” of the *Lake Monster*, that dark hallway, or the roses that are almost imperceptible in the artificially illuminated night; for this artist, a decisive element is the the parergon, the frames, those means of delimitation which accommodate *flower arrangement trees* or the traditional Madrid scene in *Excursion*. As Ortega y Gasset has pointed out, the picture frame is, to a large extent, a materialization of the certainty that “I am myself and my circumstances”. Nash’s *Altarpiece* and *Orthodox* are not so much spiritual or mystical as a calling of attention to the material mechanisms for focusing perception: the transcendental is simply an everyday thing which has become mystified, a cutting from reality that aspires to live “in a different way”. In Susan Nash’s *punctualizations* -to borrow from Barthes- there is deliberate anachronism, but also a movement towards the world of dreams; in *Bedroom*, the almost anachronistic crucifixion that used to hang above beds seems to float in a specular or anamorphic landscape. In the little mirrors in *Screen: the Bathroom*, she has trapped razorblades, but also her own eye, as if recreating the terrible opening scene of *An Andalusian Dog*. Our house has long since become an alien place; the remains of a life of habitual “home confinement” may be no more (in Susan Nash’s poetic rescue operation) than a plant and a tin of tea bags left in the street, but now placed, by “affectionate contemplation”, on an artistic pedestal. Faced with the rise of *neurototalitarianism*, we must learn to “rewire ourselves” or, at least, protect our privacy, as with the fascinating *Calendar* Nash has made from small plastic screens containing a sediment of images: birds, an electricity mast, a nude Chinese lady, petrol pumps, or the ground we walk on at night. In one of the panels there is nothing, or rather, there, in that empty space, we have the possibility, the artist seems to suggest, of placing our dreams, in order to learn to inhabit our house and our mind differently.