

Poetics and languages. The modern methods of representation in the cinema of Wim Wenders and in the dance theatre of Pina Bausch

by Giusi De Santis

INTRODUCTION

In Germany in the Sixties, signs of a deep crisis in the film industry were multiplying, forcing the new generation of film-makers to publish the Oberhausen Manifesto, spelling the birth of the *New German Cinema* (1962-1982). The decisive distancing from conventional cinema and the search for a new language of images represent two of the aspects at the basis of the movement, of which Wim Wenders is among the most important promoters.

In Germany again, between the Sixties and the Seventies, the *Tanztheater* was born, promoted by the strong innovative demands of young choreographers, focused on investigating into new body expressiveness, in contrast to the sterile post-war restoration of classic ballet. Pina Bausch is at the forefront in the experimentation of new codes and new forms of choreographic theatre.

FOCUS

The objective of this contribution is to highlight the intimate echoes in the poetics of Wim Wenders and Pina Bausch that, in an incisive and deep manner, have been able to intercept the changes of their era and react to the mutations in languages, relying on a completely original representation of themes and contents.

Two artists, a man and a woman that are also deeply connected by their passion for travel, seen as training, exploration, discovery: a way of extending a working method, a path of knowledge, in constant dialogue with the contemporary reality¹.

The meeting in Venice between Wenders and Bausch, during the Biennale Teatro directed by Franco Quadri in 1985², resulted in a long and profitable collaboration that ended up with the creation of the two films by the film-maker dedicated to it, *Vollmond* (2010) and *Pina* (2011). After having seen *Café Müller*, Wenders was completely captivated by the creative power of the show: «No, a hurricane hadn't crossed the stage. People had appeared, people moving in a completely different way from what I was used to and they moved me in a way that I had never felt before [...] This was not theatre, nor a pantomime, nor a ballet and not even opera. Pina is, as you know, the inventor (not only here with us) of a new form of art. It's time to speak about "movement"³».

CREATIVITY AND NEW FORMS OF REPRESENTATION

It was between 1975 and 1976 that the German film-maker created *Falsche Bewegung* (*The Wrong Move*) and *Im Lauf der Zeit* (*Kings of the Road*) – two of the films that represent the 'trilogy of the trip' together with *Alice in den Städten* (*Alice in the cities*) (1973) – sensing the need to not only reflect on the possibilities of the cinema medium, but also on the origins of creativity and, in particular, on the relationship between writing and thought.

¹ R. Giambrone, *Pina Bausch. Le coreografie del viaggio*, Ephemera Editrice, Macerata, 2008, p. 7-9.

² During the Biennale Teatro Pina Bausch received final consecration, influencing a generation of actors and choreographers.

³ W. Wenders, *I pixel di Cézanne e altri sguardi su artisti*, Contrasto, Roma, 2017, quote p. 110.

In *Falsche Bewegung*⁴, Wenders relies on the character of the aspiring writer, Wilhelm, to carry out a search for an inner dimension of creativity: Wilhelm has lost all imagination, he is not able to think or write and is unable to let himself go in relationships with women. The journey that he undertakes - during which he meets six characters that recall the Pirandellian “in search of an author” - becomes at the same time a pretext for an authorial reflection on the possibility of representing the image.

The “search for meaning”, that as far as Wenders is concerned is the opposite to “physical evidence” that characterises American cinema⁵ -, becomes, in the next film, *Im Lauf der Zeit*, the opportunity to investigate into the expressive possibilities of the cinema with even more acuity, in order to search for the ‘original images’⁶, refusing the codes of classical cinema, including the narrative linearity: «with this new ink I could think, see and write something new⁷». «An unconscious fantasy exists», states the psychiatrist Massimo Fagioli, «[...] making the identity, originality of the artist, giving him the chance to rebel and refuse the norm⁸».

Café Müller (1978), an artistic billboard of the *Tanztheater* by Pina Bausch is the most concrete sign of its aesthetic revolution have much deeper connections between movement, language and representation; and *Nelken* (1983), where the solo of Dominique Mercy, characterised by an explosive expressive strength, represents yet another and revolutionary statement of poetics, as well as an invective against the strict and ‘conservatory’ codes of classic ballet.

IN-DEPTH STUDY

«Occasionally, the questions that we ask ourselves lead us to experiences that are much older, not only belonging to our culture and our here and now. It is as if we recall a knowledge that has always been a part of us, but of which we are no longer aware. It reminds us of something that is common to all of us. This gives us a huge amount of strength and hope⁹».

These are the words spoken by Bausch during the speech held at the University of Bologna, in November 1999¹⁰, when he also stated: «there is a need to find a language, with words, with images, movements, atmospheres, that allows us to sense something that has existed within us forever. It is a very specific knowledge [...] something that we all own, and dance and music are very specific languages, through which it is possible to sense this knowledge¹¹».

A universal language whose origins lie in a non-conscious world, vital for the artist in order to recover, to return to that internal image, necessary to ‘create’ something that is

⁴ The film, scripted by Peter Handke, has been freely inspired by the novel *Gli anni dell'apprendistato* di Wilhelm Meister (1795-96) by J. W. Goethe.

⁵ W. Wenders, *I pixel di Cézanne e altri sguardi su artisti*, Contrasto, Roma, 2017, quote p. 22.

⁶ The scene in which an audience of very young spectators is exemplary as it confirms how to look at the images created through the movement of the two protagonists, Bruno and Robert, through new eyes, behind the curtain on the stage: a return to the origins of cinema, the ‘primitive’ and silent images.

⁷ Taken from a dialogue of the film *Im Lauf der Zeit*

⁸ M. Fagioli, *Bologna 1980. Realtà umana dell'artista e opera d'arte*, in “Il sogno della farfalla”, 4/2001, quote p. 10.

⁹ L. Bentivoglio, *Pina Bausch. Una santa sui pattini a rotelle*, Edizioni Clichy, Firenze, 2015, quote p. 110.

¹⁰ The speech was made by Pina Bausch during granting of the honorary degree at the DAMS of Bologna, in November 1999.

¹¹ L. Bentivoglio, *Pina Bausch. Una santa sui pattini a rotelle*, Edizioni Clichy, Firenze, 2015, quote p. 97.

completely new, something that 'never existed before'. Whatever the artist creates, Fagioli states at the University of Würzburg in January 1999, is «something without any meaning (if it had any meaning it would create a road sign, a sign indicating where we should turn), but perhaps it has a meaning that can be perceived and understood by others¹²».

Indicative bibliography

- AA. VV., *Antologia Pina Bausch*, Teatro La Fenice, Venezia, 1985
- AA. VV., *Sulle tracce di Pina Bausch*, a cura di F. Quadri in collaborazione con A. Martinez), Ubulibri, Milano, 2002
- A. Bergala, W. Wenders, *Wim Wenders: Written in the West, Revisited*, Distributed Art Pub Inc, 2015
- AA. VV., *Wim Wenders. Il cinema dello sguardo*, Loggia de' Lanzi, Firenze, 1995
- Antoccia L., *Il viaggio nel cinema di Wim Wenders*, Dedalo, Bari, 1994
- Benjamin W., *Immagini di città*, trad. it., 2a ed., Einaudi, Torino, 1971
- Benjamin W., *Infanzia berlinese*, trad. it., Einaudi, Torino, 1973
- L. Bentivoglio, *Pina Bausch. Una santa sui pattini a rotelle*, Edizioni Clichy, Firenze, 2015
- G. De Santis, a cura di, *Il cielo della luna. Un film di Massimo Fagioli*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2020.
- Fagioli, M., *Istinto di morte e conoscenza (1972)*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2017; trad. *Death instinct and knowledge*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2019
- Fagioli, M., *La marionetta e il burattino (1974)*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2011
- Fagioli, M., *Teoria della nascita e castrazione umana (1975)*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2012
- Fagioli, M., *Bambino donna e trasformazione dell'uomo (1980)*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2007
- Francia di Celle S., (a cura di), *Wim Wenders*, Il Castoro editore, 2007
- Galli M. (a cura di), *Da Caligari a Good Bye, Lenin. Storia e cinema in Germania*, Le Lettere, Firenze, 2004

¹² M. Fagioli, ... *mi serve per pensare...*, a discussion held by Massimo Fagioli on 30 January 1999 in the Auditorium of the Institute of Anatomy of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery at the University of Würzburg, during screening of the film *Il cielo della luna*, in G. De Santis, by, *Il cielo della luna. Un film di Massimo Fagioli*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2020, quote p. 172.

- R. Giambrone, *Pina Bausch. Le coreografie del viaggio*, Ephemeria, Macerata, 2008
- Lestini R., Moscati M., *Wim Wenders. Lo sguardo inquieto degli angeli* – Bibliotheka Edizioni, 2023
- Lindberg P., *Untold stories*. Ediz. inglese, francese e tedesco, edizioni Taschen collana Fotografia, 2020
- Meneghini S., *Identità di una fotografia*, Independently published, 2023
- Ponzi M. (2010), *Il cinema del muro. Una prospettiva sul cinema tedesco del dopoguerra*, Mimesis, Milano, 2010
- Quadri F., a cura di, *Pina Bausch in Italia*, Teatro La Fenice, Venezia, 1983
- Russo M., *Wim Wenders. Percezione visiva e conoscenza*, Editore Le Mani-Microart'S, 2014
- Servos N., *Pina Bausch – Wuppertaler Tanztheater*, Ballet-Bühnen Verlag, Köln, 1979 (ed. inglese: *Pina Bausch – Wuppertal Dance Theatre or The Art of Training a Goldfish*, Ballet-Bühnen Verlag, Köln, 1984)
- Spagnoletti G., *Il cinema di Wim Wenders*, Grafiche Step, 1977 – ND
- Spagnoletti G., *Lineamenti introduttivi alla storia del cinema. Il nuovo cinema tedesco: Rainer Werner Fassbinder e Wim Wenders*, Aracne, 2002 ND
- Spagnoletti G., *Nuovo cinema tedesco. Da Herzog a Wenders, da Fassbinder Kluge, analizzati, fotogrammi alla mano, nei loro procedimenti tecnico-formali*, Audino, 2009
- Spagnoletti G. e Töteberg M. (a cura di), *Stanotte vorrei parlare con l'angelo. Scritti 1968-1988*, Ubulibri, Milano, 1989
- Wenders W., Wenders D., *Buena Vista Social Club*, edizioni Mondadori collana Strade blu, 2000
- Wenders W., *Electronic paintings*, Oliva A. B., (a cura di), edizioni Socrates, 1993
- Wenders W., *I pixel di Cézanne e altri sguardi di artisti*, Reschke A., (a cura di), Contrasto, 2017
- Wenders W., *Il tempo con Antonioni. Cronaca di un film*, edizioni Socrates, 1995
- Wenders W., Zournazi M., *Inventare la pace. Dialogo sulla percezione*, edizioni Bompiani collana Overlook, 2014
- Wenders W., *Il quotidiano della storia nella metafora degli angeli*, "Cinema Nuovo", n. 1, gennaio-febbraio 1988
- Wenders W., *Immagini dal pianeta terra*. Ediz. Illustrata, edizioni Contrasto collana, 2005

- Wenders W., *L'atto di vedere - The Act of Seeing*, Ubulibri, Milano, 1992
- Wenders W., *L'idea di partenza*, a cura di T. Verità, Introduzione di P. Bertetto, Liberoscambio, Firenze, 1983
- Wenders W., *Lisbon story*, Sesti, M., (a cura di), edizioni Ubulibri collana I film, 1995
- Wenders W., *Lo Stato delle cose*, edizioni Ubulibri collana Nuovo cinema tedesco, 1995
- W. Wenders, M. Camber Porter, a cura di J. R. Flicek, *Melinda Camber Porter In Conversation With Wim Wenders: On the Film Set of Paris Texas 1983, Vol 1*, Blake Press; Hardback First Print Pod ed. edizione, 2016
- Wenders W., *Nel corso del tempo*, Spagnoletti G. (a cura di), edizioni Feltrinelli collana Universale economica, 1982
- Wenders W., *Off scene. Wim e Donata Wenders*. Ediz. italiana e inglese, Polistampa, 2004
- Wenders W., *Polaroid stories*, Jaca Book collana Illustrati. Arte mondo, 2017
- Wenders W., *Scritto nel West. Immagini del West americano*, Zapparoli M. (a cura di), edizioni Jaca Book collana Varie. Fotografia, 1988
- Wenders W., *Una volta*, edizioni Socrates, collana Galleria delle arti, 1993
- W. Wenders (1987), *Warum filmen Sie?* In W. Wenders, *Die Logik der Bilder. Verlag der Autoren*, Frankfurt a.M.
- W. Wenders, *Wim Wenders: Places, Strange and Quiet*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2013