
BEFORE
MEMORY
ARRIVES
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The Art of Attraction · 08

When a child is born, the first thing everyone looks at is the eyes.

We lean over the cradle, we bend closer, we search for a colour.

Will they be his mother's?

Will they be his father's?

Then a doctor, or a nurse, comes along and says the thing no one wants to hear: that the colour does not exist yet. That at the beginning it is almost the same for everyone. A grey, a washed-out blue, the colour of someone who has not yet seen anything.

Because that is how it is.

At the beginning of life, the gaze is universal.

It is empty.

And it takes months to fill.

The iris works slowly. It lays down a little brown, a little green, a little black. As if the body were waiting to understand which world it will have to look at before deciding with which eyes to look at it.

I have always thought it is not so different afterwards.

We keep being born with that empty gaze.

And we spend the rest of our time filling it.

Every experience leaves a trace.

Every joy adds a shade.

Every sorrow adds another.

And so, without our noticing, the eyes stop being just a part of the body and become an archive.

A silent memory.

Then comes the moment when we realise a simple and cruel truth: we often truly see people only when we can no longer look at them.

And that is when memory takes us back.

To a sentence left unsaid.

To a phone call put off.

To a visit we could have made.

To an embrace we took for granted.

No, I have not lost my mind.

“Be patient a little longer, reader, and follow my reasoning.”

How many times do we think of those who are gone, and of the things we would have liked to say or do?

It has happened to everyone.

And it will happen again.

If today I could speak with someone who is no longer here, I would choose my father, my mother, my grandparents, my sister, a close friend.

And I would always begin the same way.

I would say:

“Forgive me if I did not give you the time you deserved.

Forgive me if I kept running after my urgencies, my goals, my everyday selfishness, without understanding that one day I too would walk the same road as you.”

Then the mind travels even further.

It crosses the centuries.

I would like to meet Jesus, not to ask him questions, but simply to listen to him.

I would like to meet Galileo Galilei, Einstein, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Dante Alighieri, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, Kipling, John Fitzgerald Kennedy — and the greengrocer downstairs, together with the owner of the wine tavern.

And then, almost as if under a spell, I would like to listen to all the women of the world.

Without distinction.

Because each of them would have something different to tell.

A different perspective.

A different story.

A different truth.

And yet, coming back down with my feet firmly on the ground, I arrive at a parallel that seems beautiful to me.

If everything we create, everything we believe has value, everything that might leave something to others, is not shared with people in time, then the same thing always happens.

The day comes when someone will say:

“What a pity. I would have liked to meet him.”

“What a pity. I would have liked to listen to him.”

“What a pity. I would have liked to know what he thought.”

But the responsibility for what goes unseen never lies only with the one who creates.

Often it lies with those who do not show it in time — and here, as always, women are the masters: they know how to be seen.

And it lies with those who decide what gets seen: the web. If Google does not give you visibility, no one reads you — unless you pay.

With those who do not allow people to notice what is happening before their very eyes.

Because memory almost always arrives afterwards.

The gaze, instead, when we are lucky, arrives in time.

Ferdinando