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A Story of Telltale Eyes: Filmic Gaze and Spectatorial Agency in Ferzan Ozpetek's *Facing Windows*

This essay was originally published in the 2019 issue of The Anachronist, though its earliest form was developed first as a presentation and later as a seminar essay for Gender and Film, led by Nóra. The in-class discussions, shared film analyses, and Nóra's generous feedback on both the presentation and the essay have significantly shaped the way I think about the filmic gaze, the relationship between film and viewer, and the cinematic interpellation of gender. For these formative insights, inspiring conversations, and so much more, I remain forever grateful.

Between Absorption and Address: Rethinking the Cinematic Gaze

Since the 1970s, much has been said about how viewers are sutured into the fictional world of cinema. Most prominently, Kaja Silverman's cinematic suture theory has helped reveal the strategies through which films address the spectator, producing a specific kind of spectatorial agency (47). Drawing on Emile Benveniste's notion of suture as the joining of the split subject within discourse, Silverman applies this idea to film-audience dynamics to show how spectators, through formal devices like the shot/reverse shot formation, are provided with a stable point of identification that masks the rupture in subjectivity. As a result, the viewer gains a fictional sense of mastery and becomes immersed in the diegesis (201). In this aspect, Silverman also builds on Jean-Pierre Oudart's claim that "[e]very filmic field is echoed by an absent field, the place of a character who is put there by the viewer's imaginary, and which we shall call the Absent One" (36). In other words, the camera as well as other devices like editing, cutting, exclusion and negation are defined as the absent "speaking subject" which conceal themselves to create "cinematic coherence and plenitude" (Silverman 205) while in fact they "speak," direct, and control the gaze of the viewing subject. As Susan Hayward explains, conventional film-audience dynamics not only facilitate but also control the viewing subject as "the spectator is identified with the gaze" created by the filmic discourse (157).

Many films engage with these dynamics critically. Often labelled as postmodern and self-reflective, these films require a spectator who likes to question the pleasures provided by the classical filmic gaze, having a keen eye for artifice and an appreciation for the devices that offer moments of disenchantment instead of absorption into fiction. The suture at work in such films is unique only to the degree that it grants access into the diegetic world of a self-investigating and sceptical viewing subject: the diegesis is designed to accommodate such agency and grant her the pleasure of the doubt. Beyond these familiar approaches, there also exist films that, rather than aiming for full absorption or overt self-

reflexivity, treat their viewers as participants in momentary acts of intersubjective communication. This article explores such moments: not when films aim to fully deconstruct classical film-viewer dynamics, but when they look back at us tentatively. In this reading, the filmic gaze refers not to the creation of the filmic/discursive self through suture but to the mode of address, the whole fabric of the film, which is construed as a looking subject.

This perspective diverges from the assumptions of early psychoanalytic film theorists – such as Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey – who, drawing on Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, emphasised the spectator's illusion of control over the image (McGowan, *The Real Gaze* 2).[1] Todd McGowan critiques this tradition for reducing the gaze to the function of the Imaginary – manifested in the mirror phase –, and that of the Symbolic – perpetuating ideology –, while neglecting cinema's potential of bringing us into contact with the Real (*The Real Gaze* 4). In Lacan's own terms, the Gaze introduces "depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me" (96). It is the point from which the object (the film) is imagined to be staring back at the subject (the spectator) (Lacan 84), and for this reason, the cinematic experience is "the site of a traumatic encounter with the Real, with the utter failure of the spectator's seemingly safe distance and assumed mastery" (McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze" 29). This reconceptualisation shifts the focus to the film's own acts of looking.

In this paper, I propose that the notion of the cinematic gaze as mode of address is best explored through characters' glances, body language, and positioning, as well as optical devices representing human eyes (i.e. cameras, telescopes, binoculars), since these elements activate moments of de-suturing, coupled with the experience of our non-diegetic selves being confronted. My argument is that the majority of films do not look at but through the spectator, who is immersed into the diegetic universe, treated as a passive observer. This does not entirely mirror the psychoanalytic notion of the voyeur, since the scene's spectacle is not constructed by the viewer but by the film; the cinematic apparatus remains the more active agent of the gaze. I contend that when films look at viewers – rather than through them – they momentarily grant spectators a more active role, creating a form of cinematic eye contact.

[1] As Metz puts it, "the spectator is absent from the screen *as perceived*," but also "present there and even 'all present' *as perceiver*" (54). Metz contends that the spectator's agency is created by the illusion that the subject looks at the object (the film), while he is not looked at in return, which prescribes that the viewer believes to be controlling the cinematic image. Baudry explicitly links this kind of spectatorial experience to that of the mirror stage. He states that "the arrangement of the different elements – projector, darkened hall, screen – in addition to reproducing in a striking way the *mis-en-scéne* of Plato's cave . . . reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the 'mirror stage' discovered by Lacan" (539). Furthermore, Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" perpetuates the notion that the filmic gaze is associated with male spectatorship and the ideological machinations of patriarchal society.

Tom Gunning's concept of the "cinema of attractions" helps illustrate this point. He distinguishes early-modern, pre-1906 cinema, which addressed audiences directly, from later narrative cinema, which suppresses direct address to maintain psychological realism and viewer absorption.[2] Gunning notes how narrative cinema casts viewers as passive, immobile observers by discouraging acknowledgment of the camera. However, he also suggests that elements of the "cinema of attractions" persist in later films, "provid[ing] an underground current floating beneath narrative logic and diegetic realism" ("An Aesthetic of Astonishment" 826), thus revealing the potential for alternative film-viewer dynamics even within narrative frameworks. This is important because, as I argue, it is not only postmodernist, highly self-reflexive films that can engage viewers in the meaning-making process, and, by the same token, it is not only classical narrative cinema that can confine viewers to the role of passive observers. It is crucial to see that films can address, or in my interpretation look at or through spectators irrespective of paradigmatic categorisations.

Gunning's genealogy also takes into account the fact that the gaze of the whole cinematic text is largely determined by the actors' stance vis-a-vis the camera. Indeed, the filmic gaze is often expressed through the characters' extra-diegetic glances. Breaking through the fourth wall, however, is not the sole condition of looking at the audience, and Gunning's theory fails to recognise this: it only mentions two modes of address, suggesting that films treat us either as passive voyeurs or as active looking subjects. Thus, the question is: what about the movies that seem to establish a coherent diegesis only to begin ogling us? Or what about those in which direct address is integrated into the diegetic universe? Such films fit neither the category of "narrative cinema" nor that of the "cinema of attractions."

Using a similar binary categorisation, Timothy Corrigan distinguishes between "gaze" and "glance cinema" (62). He contends that with the increasing significance of televisual media in the 1980s, audiences watched movies "according to a glance aesthetic rather than a gaze aesthetic" (62), by which he means that films were "watched across distractions rather than the collective gaze" of spectators, and as such, they disrupted mechanisms of "primary identification" through which cinema sutures viewers into the filmic text (16).[3] Thus,

[2] While the "cinema of attractions" addressed the audience directly so as to confront, astonish, emotionally and critically engage spectators, – which effects were mostly achieved through the actors' "mischievous contact with the camera" (Brown 4) –, the "cinema of narrative integration" absorbs viewers into fiction, treating them as "static, passive observers" (Staiger 13). According to Gunning, the distinction between the opposing types of cinematic address evolved as follows: "The performers in the cinema of attractions greeted the camera's gaze with gusto, employing glances, winks and nods. With the establishment of a coherent diegesis, any acknowledgment of the camera became taboo, condemned by critics as destructive of the psychological effect essential for an involved spectator" (*Origins of American Narrative Film* 261).

[3] Corrigan's distinction between "gaze" and "glance aesthetic" can be traced back to John Ellis's *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (1982), wherein these terms were used to distinguish between watching movies (gazing) and watching television (glancing).

for Corrigan, "glance cinema" still engages viewers in meaning-making, but through fragmented, performative modes rather than continuous narrative identification. In this sense, both theorists maintain a binary framework: films either fully absorb the viewer or directly address her. What remains under-theorised is the filmic gaze that oscillates: films that neither wholly suppress nor fully embrace intersubjective engagement. These ambiguous, hybrid forms of address are particularly evident in contemporary auteur films which neither dismantle classical spectatorship nor reinforce it uncritically.

In contrast to these hybrid forms, Hollywood films tend to construct a diegetic world that immerses viewers and does not reciprocate their gaze. This dynamic evokes the situation of the bearded man in Descartes's engraving from his Optics: locked in a dark room, the only view he can get of the external world is through the eye of a human being inserted in the wall. As Miran Bozovic explains, Descartes wanted to emphasise that we "can never step out but are forever entrapped in a room in which we deal with our retinal images only and never with things themselves" (162). This parable can also be seen as an illustration of the gaze of Hollywood films which tend to act upon the limitations instead of the possibilities of human visual perception: we are bound to look at the film, but it does not look at us in return, since it is constructed as the external world which one sees only from the dark room of his or her own perspective.[4] In other words, classical narrative cinema re-enacts the "impossibility of stepping out from the world of imitations, copies and simulacra" (Bozovic 162) so that we are not offered more than an absolute point of view, "a point of interiority which can never be externalised … a point at which we can be nothing but voyeurs" (164). To put it simply, mainstream cinema restricts the spectator's agency to the role of the voyeur who believes to be the subject of the gaze, hence her feeling of being sutured into the diegesis.

By contrast, some independent or auteur films suggest a split in this seamless viewing experience. They allow brief moments in which the suture loosens and the viewer senses, as it were, being seen by the film. As suggested earlier, these moments do not necessarily come through direct address but may emerge through characters' glances, ambiguous compositions, or shifts in perspective. Such films therefore also challenge the dominant opposition between passive absorption and critical distance by weaving both into their fabric. The two films I analyse in this paper – Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and Ferzan Özpetek's *Facing Windows* (2003) – offer contrasting yet complementary examples of how films can construct the spectator's agency. *Rear Window* serves as a paradigmatic case of classical Hollywood cinema that, despite its self-reflexive elements, ultimately restricts viewer agency by suturing the spectator into the protagonist's gaze. In contrast, *Facing Windows*, while also employing classical narrative strategies, creates fleeting but meaningful moments of intersubjective contact through its ambiguous mode of address, multifocal perspective, and the faciliation of intimate character-viewer interactions.

[4] This does not mean that watching Hollywood films is an unbearable experience: we readily suspend our disbelief in exchange for the pleasures of viewing (Rowe 88).

Classical Film-Audience Dynamics: A Film That Looks Through Spectators

As a representative example of Hollywood cinema, *Rear Window* demonstrates that the use of meta-cinematic devices does not necessarily entail intersubjective communication with viewers. In my reading, *Rear Window* – as a looking agent – does not bring about an active spectatorial agency, because the camera consistently identifies viewers with the protagonist's point of view, thereby absorbing them into fiction, and treating them as passive observers. The film's mode of address is solidified, and as such, it does not aim to initiate a type of communication resembling actual acts of looking. Instead, *Rear Window* makes references to the voyeuristic mode of watching films to reveal how restricted the dynamics between film and audience are. As such, this example shall serve perfectly to explain how spectators are sutured into the fictional world of cinema, and at the same time, to illustrate Descartes's dark room parable about the limitations of human visual experience.

If *Rear Window* is indeed a "metaphor for cinema" in which Jeffries stands for the audience (Mulvey 23), the whole filmic text can be read as a rendering of the spectator's inability to escape the viewpoint provided by the looking subject. The viewer's limited agency is underpinned by Jeffries's constrained physical position – being tied to a wheelchair – as a result of which his perspective is as severely restricted by his binoculars and his camera as that of the viewers by cinematic technicalities (movements, positions of the camera, and editing). Memorable references to this shared position are the scenes in which Jeffries zooms in on the opposite flats: the dark framing of the camera is a direct reference to the filming device that controls our gaze. As Silverman argues, *Rear Window* "foregrounds the voyeuristic dimensions of the cinematic experience, making constant references to the speaking subject" (206). Another example in this regard is the episode when Thorwald suddenly looks back at Jeffries and later comes to attack him in his apartment. The alarming sound of Thorwald's footsteps, his menacing stare, the ominous glare of his cigarette in the darkness, his silhouette coming closer and closer remind viewers that, similarly to Jeffries, we only wish but are unable to control the spectacle. In our relation to the cinematic image, we are as immobile and helpless as Jeffries.

In Mladen Dolar's interpretation, "Rear Window is the Hitchcockian presentation of the Panopticon, his illustrative application of Bentham and Foucault" (144), since the flats opposite Jeffries's rear window evoke the cells under the pervasive scrutiny of the Supervisor's gaze. Yet, while in Bentham's and Foucault's Panopticon, it is the prisoners who live in constant fear of the gaze they cannot see, in Rear Window, it is Jeffries who lives in permanent fear in his watchtower, troubled by the fact that he cannot make his gaze ubiquitous (and as an evidence of his powerlessness, he is asleep at the time of the murder). As Dolar concludes, "the inhabitants are not the prisoners of the gaze of the Other, with its invisible omnipresence; it is rather the Supervisor who is the prisoner, the prisoner of his own gaze – a gaze that does not see" (144). By connecting the experience of Jeffries with that of the viewers, the meta-cinematic devices in Rear Window thus expose

the conventional framework of watching films, wherein spectators wish to pervade the cinematic image with their gaze yet can only behold it from the position of peepers, as if through binoculars and a rear window.

By the same token, Hitchcock's film can be interpreted as a re-enactment of the limitations of human visual perception as such, where the window represents eyes. In terms of this metaphor, the window shades rolling up in the first scene are the eyelids opening to the external world. As Bozovic claims, "[t]hat the window we are looking through functions virtually as an eye is evident from the fact that the room itself functions as a camera obscura – what unfolds in the room on this side of the window is precisely the inverted image of what unfolds beyond the window of the flat on the opposite side of the courtyard – the Thorwalds' flat" (162). Jeff on this side is immobilised in a manner similar to Thorwald's wife on the opposite side, and the actions of these two characters are subordinated to those of their mobile partners, Lisa and Lars, respectively. This insight informs Bozovic's comparison of Jeff's room with the dark room in Descartes's parable: both spaces represent "the world of imitations, copies, and simulacra" in which we are all entrapped (163). In agreement with former criticism, I therefore believe that Rear Window, with its allusions to the limitations of the spectator's agency and of human visual perception, looks through rather than at viewers, or in other words, it aims not to modify suture, but, as Zizek describes Hitchcock's works, "to pursue the transferential fiction to the end" (10).

The Telltale Eyes of Facing Windows: A Film that Looks Back

Ferzan Ozpetek's *Facing Windows*, an example of contemporary auteur cinema, employs a more ambiguous visual strategy. In my reading, it destabilises the conventional dynamics between spectacle and spectator, because, while following the conventions of narrative cinema, it introduces moments that question the stability of its mode of address. This is achieved by three distinct but interrelated means: 1) by refusing the objectifying influence of voyeurism within the diegesis; 2) by providing a multiplicity of perspectives to be identified with; 3) and by creating thorough ambiguity concerning the distinction between fiction and reality, which culminates in a crucial hallucinatory scene. It must be noted, however, that not even in this emotionally elevated, illusory moment does the main character look directly outwards, and, in this sense, *Facing Windows* too is an example of classical narrative cinema. Yet, I argue that the filmic gaze addresses the audience mainly through the main character Giovanna's telltale eyes, as she is able to establish a confidential relationship with the viewers through the camera.

Indeed, the story is told through and by Giovanna's eyes, from which it follows that Facing Windows displays specific features of what Gunning identifies as the "cinema of attractions". The main character's positioning (more precisely, doubling) and the undefinable direction of her gaze make the spectator self-conscious, the movie ambiguously metafictional, and the gaze of the whole filmic text oscillatory, meaning that it occasion-

ally and implicitly blurs the boundary between the act of watching and actual looking. By inciting spectators to detach themselves from the point of view of the voyeur, that is, the perspective they had originally adopted, *Facing Windows* requires self-reflection from the viewers, offering a more active spectatorial agency than classical narrative cinema. This also implies that identification here is rather conceived "as a series of shifting positions [which] assumes that cinematic identification is as fragile and unstable as identity itself" (Mayne 27). In short, the movie's oscillating gaze results in an inconsistent spectatorial agency.

In *Facing Windows*, the viewers see mainly through the eyes of Giovanna, a young mother of two children, a discontented wife. Her disgruntlement is related to her unfulfilled desire to become a pastry chef; to support her family, she works as an accountant in a poultry factory. Her yearning is, as it were, sublimated into the habit of peeping: she secretly gazes at the window of the opposite apartment and its handsome resident, Lorenzo. The two eventually meet, and they together end up looking after an old man who is walking the streets of Rome unconsciously, suffering from partial memory loss. While helping Davide unfold his story and regain his identity, Lorenzo and Giovanna's romantic interest in each other also develops toward its climax.

Although it is about desire, *Facing Windows* refuses the objectifying, passivising influence of voyeurism. Early in the film, Giovanna's daughter says: "I told you I don't feel like watching TV," and she would prefer to help the adults arrange groceries. At this point, it seems that Martina inherited the wilfulness of her mother, who is similarly obsessed with order, annoyed by any disruption or intrusion into her vision.[5] Giovanna's stubborn insistence that only her view is correct could also explain why she starts prying on Lorenzo's life, but her looks are infused with shame: her eyes are cast down after catching something private and she always closes the window after peeping. Her behaviour thus betrays that she does not derive pleasure from voyeurism, and that, by watching somebody else's life, she only wants to elude the disappointments and frustrations of her own. This assumption is also supported by the fact that once she faces her disappointed self, she renounces peeping. In this sense, Martina foreshadows her mother's superiority which results from her self-reflexivity rather than from seeing more accurately than others, and in a similar manner, Giovanna focalises the spectator's self-reflexive agency when facing herself in the window in the hallucinatory scene.

As implied above, the role of gender is crucial in *Facing Windows*, as the film privileges a distinctly female gaze that challenges the traditionally masculine structuring of looking in cinema. Unlike the dominant cinematic paradigm theorised by Mulvey, in which the gaze is aligned with male desire and control, Facing Windows centres both its narrative and its self-reflexive visual strategy on Giovanna's perspective: a woman who does not objectify what she sees but contemplates, reflects, and ultimately transforms through acts

[5] In a scene when Giovanna wants to report an illegal worker at the factory, her friend mockingly calls her an SS officer just to take the edge out of her behaviour.

of looking. In other words, her gaze is not directed outward to possess or dominate, but inward to confront her own dissatisfaction and repressed desires. By focusing on her sensory and emotional perception rather than on scopophilic pleasure, the film articulates a gaze that is emphatetic, self-scrutinising as well as relational – qualities often associated with feminist reconceptualisations of spectatorship. This alternative form of vision allows *Facing Windows* to explore the potential of the female gaze not only to resist objectification but also to foster introspection and intersubjective connection, positioning Giovanna – and through her, the viewer – as a subject who sees, feels, and transforms.

At the same time, *Facing Windows* presents a polyphonic visual field that resists confinement to a single point of view: we are presented with a multiplicity of perspectives not all of which are infused with the delusions of voyeuristic desire. The first scene that disperses the main character's dominant viewpoint is the one in which we learn that Giovanna and Lorenzo engage in mutual voyeurism: Giovanna's friend Eminé reveals to her that "He spied on you just like you spied on him." In this light, Lorenzo's perspective is added to that of Giovanna, even if only as its duplication. When, however, Davide appears, his own oblique and confused perspective is also added to the others'. Therefore, gaze here is not a privilege and, at the same time, limitation, of a male hero, let alone one single character, but belongs to multiple characters and their perspectives. There are a few scenes that I shall further highlight in this regard.

In what I term the "scene of the traveling gaze," Lorenzo's perspective gains narrative significance as his attention focuses on the lost Davide sitting on a fountain behind Giovanna. This implies that he is not only interested in the love affair but also dedicated to the common cause of helping the Holocaust survivor find his bearings in the present. At the same time, he passes the gaze on to Giovanna, so it can be suggested that the viewer identifies with the two characters' shared perspective, which, in addition, points beyond their desire towards each other, creating a supplement embodied in the concern for Davide.

The film also stages several instances of a phenomenon which I refer to as "the spinning gaze." In these scenes, all main points of view are included and equalised in a full circle tracking shot (with montage), with the camera revolving around the characters and the perspective changing according to who holds the gaze. A crucial scene in this regard is when Giovanna, Lorenzo and Davide are waiting for their drinks in a street bar, taking a break after the former two have been following the old man's ramblings through Rome. Since a fourth male character appears on the scene, who we assume to be Davide's long-gone lover, it is here that we get the first hints of his homosexuality and of his traumatic past inflecting and confusing his present vision. These are important details from two aspects. Firstly, as Davide has introduced himself from the beginning as Simone – the name of the object of his desire –, his subplot mirrors the relationship of Giovanna and Lorenzo where the roles of the loved one and that of the lover are exchanged as well. Secondly, the presence of the past is also important here, as, by intruding into the present, it blurs temporality. Since the character sees his dead loved ones as clearly as the living

around him, scenes such as this imply that according to the film's conception of memory, one never entirely loses others but retains little smithereens of them in oneself. Aided by sensory memory, the fragments of lost people make one see, hear and smell them as if they were still here. The concept of memory as a form of intersubjectivity can also be aligned with the gaze of the film per se, insofar as the latter also alludes to viewers as participants in a form of intersubjective communication.[6]

The role of memory is also crucial in the third scene which demonstrates the multiplicity of perspectives. This is the "scene of the dancing gaze," a music-triggered memory sequence showing Davide looking back at his past lover while dancing with Giovanna in the present. Apart from projecting on each other past and present, the scene is also significant because the act of dancing with a pretty woman, with obvious erotic overtones, gains a new, homoerotic perspective. In this way, it is not only the desirer who changes position in *Facing Windows*: the object of the desire is also rendered multifarious. Scenes like those of "the traveling gaze," "the spinning gaze," and "the dancing gaze," therefore tend to blur the dichotomy between the object and the holder of the gaze in more than one respect.

In *Facing Windows*, all perspectives have their own focus. What is more, these foci are also looking agents, which changes the traditional one-way relation between the holder and the object of the gaze. Metaphorically, Giovanna's gaze as a ray intersects with that of Lorenzo and, in their relationship, Davide serves as an intersection that allows the other two to connect with each other. In addition, the old man also connects past and present perspectives by unwittingly projecting past images on the present scenario. This multiplicity and intersection of different points of view enables Giovanna to reflect on her own position, outside the circuit of the narcissistic gaze, while the spectator is also caught in a moment of reflection.

In the scene when Giovanna and Lorenzo are finally together in the latter's apartment, Giovanna goes to his window to spy on her own life – her husband, her children, her friend, and eventually the reflection of her own discontented self, – and decides to leave Lorenzo for her family and to give herself the opportunity to change her carrier and start baking professionally. This cinematic moment, which "diverges from the traditional cinematic perspective that champions the male gaze, and . . . assumes male spectatorship" (Occhipinti 532), also challenges cinema's role of providing pleasure for the viewer, because it reveals that the point of view we have been identifying with was affected by Giovanna's delusions. As a symbolic gesture, she takes off Lorenzo's glasses and finally sees her lifeworld as Lorenzo's fantasy in which her own self is absent and her family members are reduced to silhouettes. While voyeuristic vision often results in entrapment in classical narratives, Giovanna's development implies a process of gaining clarity, of coming to terms with her own repressed desires. This is why it is so important that her

[6] In fact, one can imagine Giovanna ambiguously addressing the audience in the same way as Davide addresses his old love, Simone.

two selves are facing each other. The contact between her still deluded and later, more experienced self prevents her from satiating her voyeuristic drives, helps reveal her true dream that was formerly substituted with an erotic fantasy and, in a broader sense, it also reinstates the potential of the gaze to create empathy, understanding and intersubjectivity. Thirdly, and most importantly, even though Giovanna does not address us directly, she is positioned in a way that directs the filmic gaze at us, thus turning the whole fabric of the narrative into telltale eyes.

Although, as mentioned above, there is no instance of direct address in ninety-nine percent of the film, Giovanna as half-actress and half-character, a half-fictitious and half-real-life narrator plays a crucial role in conveying this story.[7] As such, she could occupy a "superior epistemic position within the fictional world," which is usually allotted to characters who perform direct address in movies, and who consequently seem "to know more – or are in a position of greater knowledge within the fiction – than other characters" (Brown 14). However, since she does not acknowledge the spectator's presence but only seems to be more sensitive to it, her position cannot arise from a heightened sense of knowledge but rather from heightened sensibility – as in sensory perception –, which manifests itself in her genuine flair for non-verbal communication – her voice, gaze, gestures, facial expressions and body language – to impress others and convey meaning. Since these abilities make the character Giovanna occupy a position which one might call superior sensorial, her eyes can be perceived as projecting the filmic gaze per se.

Giovanna's superior sensorial position is epitomised by the closing scene in which we see her walking in a park and hear her voice-over: it is almost clear that she is reading out or reciting a letter written to Davide, explaining how difficult it is to forget him and all the things he had taught her. She says that when she is working in the pastry shop, she still feels the elderly man's guiding presence by her side, which recalls the definition of memory as intersubjectivity, and at the same time alludes to the assumption that the relationship between film and audience can also be regarded as intersubjective. As if to enact this concept, the closing shot features an extreme close-up on Giovanna looking directly into the camera; her eyes are smiling as if knowing something: telltale eyes.

In this light, one could claim that the story is told through Giovanna's eyes. Yet, it remains difficult to decide whom Giovanna's voice and gaze are addressed to: Davide or the viewers outside the diegetic world.[8] It is, however, exactly this ambiguity of address, entailing

[7] An interesting fact that underpins the idea of the film initiating a form of intersubjective communication with viewers is that the characters of Giovanna and her husband Filippo are played by actors with the same names. This detail, along with the actress Giovanna's natural demeanour in relation to the camera, creates a sense of watching real people, real lives, or, of hearing a first-hand account of a personal story.

[8] It seems that addressivity is in crisis from the very beginning; the miscommunications within the family, Giovanna talking to thin air about love, the undelivered letter written by Davide to Simone, let alone Giovanna's voyeuristic fantasies about Lorenzo, all demonstrate that it is impossible to express desire without misdirecting it.

both the possibility and impossibility of understanding others completely, that makes human communication intersubjective and, consequently, intersubjective communication human. As I argued, it is due to Giovanna's ambiguous cross-diegetic gestures that the filmic gaze of *Facing Windows* oscillates and that at moments such as during Giovanna's hallucination we have a sense as if the film itself was looking at us.

Conclusion

By bringing *Rear Window* and *Facing Windows* into dialogue, this paper has traced a trajectory from classical narrative cinema's suture-bound spectator to a more ambiguous, self-reflexive spectatorial agency made possible in contemporary auteur film. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* has served to exemplify a cinematic logic that, in my interpretation, looks through the spectator, suturing them into the protagonist's restricted point of view and exposing their lack of visual control through meta-cinematic devices. In contrast, Facing Windows has served to introduce a more permeable form of cinematic address. While operating within the framework of classical narrative, Özpetek's film complicates the spectatorial position by creating moments of intersubjective contact, shifting focalisation, and self-reflection. Through Giovanna's sensorial and emotional perception – epitomised by her "telltale eyes" – the film projects a gaze that does not dominate but invites reflection, empathy, and shared vulnerability.

This filmic gaze, as I have argued, invites neither full absorption in fiction nor complete disengagement. Instead, it oscillates between identification and distance, absorption and reflexivity, thereby granting the viewer a fragile yet meaningful form of agency. In Facing Windows, the gaze becomes a mode of seeing that allows for self-discovery and tentative communication across the boundary of fiction. In this sense, the film not only constructs a polyphonic and gender-sensitive visual field but also gestures toward the possibility that cinema itself may look back – not to implicate or accuse, but to invite the viewer into a fleeting moment of recognition. Through its intersubjective mode of address, Facing Windows reclaims the gaze not as a mechanism of control, but as a site of mutual acknowledgment – offering the viewer, however briefly, the feeling of being seen.

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