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Your Circumspection Disclosed ***A Project for the Castle***

Marcella Beccaria

Olafur Eliasson can be thought of as a visionary of the new millennium. He is capable of extending both his and our own vision to a point so distant that, in the end, like the outermost point of a circle, it ends up encountering the subjectivity of each individual, emphasizing distinctiveness and differences. His is a subtle revolution, which challenges the dogma of globalization and rejects demands for uniformity, even in his own works. Like unexpected apparitions, Eliasson's pieces neither strive for stylistic unity nor search for uniform significance. In this sense, the artist confronts one of the central problems of contemporary culture, which is not the preoccupation to establish meanings, but more precisely the intention to challenge the very concept of any univalent structure of signification.

Perhaps facilitated by his Icelandic origins and time spent in a land that is geologically young yet ancient in its ruggedness, Olafur Eliasson has kept the memory of the powerful encounter with a nature in constant evolution and of the view of a landscape that changes with almost every step. Drawing upon this type of experience for his work, Eliasson manages to produce art that seduces with the force of a concept that is immediate, in that it is present in common experience. At the same time, the work refers to something that is immensely complex and difficult to represent, because it is ineffable and subject to radical mutations, depending the point of view of the observer.

This does not mean that Eliasson is like Caspar David Friedrich's man, who, in a state of ecstasy, contemplates the experience of the sublime, defenseless before its power.

Rather, Eliasson is an industrious cultural worker who is able to exploit modern technology on various levels, deliberately simple or sometimes more complex, to create particular phenomena. The piece entitled *Beauty*, first installed in 1993, recreates the presence of a rainbow, bringing it inside an exhibition space. The rainbow is obtained by creating a subtle wall of water and illuminating it with artificial light.

Eliasson leaves exposed all the components, even those that are less esthetic, such as electrical outlets or water taps.

He allows viewers the freedom to encounter an optical phenomenon that is always surprising and intangible.

Not disguising himself as a shaman he leaves also exposed the mechanisms that artificially produce his rainbow.

Eliasson's pieces are powerful yet fragile as a ray of sunlight, visible only from a certain point of view. The artist calls his works "machines," devices conceived to produce a certain phenomenon that the viewer will encounter. These devices become works of art only at this moment of encounter, and cease existing as such when left alone. They can even depend on meteorological variables. *Your Sun Machine*, 1997, is created from a hole in the gallery ceiling, from which the

sunlight falls on the floor, drawing new projections over the course of the day.

Heightening the subjectivity of the spectators, beginning with their perceptual disposition, Eliasson emphasizes the importance of diversity of interpretation, transforming this solution's consequent risks into a further significant option. The result can be a totally empty space, continually interrupted by the entry of visitors, devoid of any element other than the artificial light, like the space saturated with yellow light that meets visitors to the installation *The Curious Garden*, 1997. Or, from another point of view, this same work is a full space, the beauty of which is its pure celebration of light and the possibilities of thought, a work that is literally open to accepting every new visitor and registering his or her ephemeral and unrepeatable participation.

Dealing with the creation of phenomena that are not tangibly quantifiable, Eliasson's works tend toward immateriality, with theoretical precedents in the dematerialization of the art object, begun in the late 1960s, then annulled by the significance of the image and the object in art of the 1980s. In this era of virtual reality, when models of perception have become increasingly uniform through computer technology, the dissolution of the object effected by Eliasson presents a new kind of view. While the work refers to reality and does not disdain artifice, it seduces us like an inviting request for attention.

For his work at the Castello di Rivoli, Eliasson has presented himself first of all as a viewer, specifically the one who is looking. He has conceived an installation that stems from his encounter with the space and his perception of the extended possibilities of a place that, in any case, is defined as a room in a building. Eliasson has referred to this installation as "an eye-extension, a machine for seeing". He has brought the sphere of vision back to the eye of the observer, to then induce a physical perception of the space that is different from what is visually experienced.

Your Circumspection Disclosed, 1999, transforms the space, initially negating it and removing it from view. A hole in a wall allows the spectator to see a space that is otherwise hidden, and offers a view that theoretically links inner reality to the external reality of the building. Eliasson presents a point of view that contains a portion of reality visible through the window that defines the space and, at the same time a reversed view, framing what is usually not visible.

The two portions of reality are presented together within a single visual sphere, composing an image that seems to evoke a being's original perfection, as described by Plato. Turning the corner of the corridor, one physically sees the apparatus that has "created" the view, a specially shaped mirror positioned at a 90° slant to the window. The image previously perceived is revealed to be a sort of anamorphosis, in that it is a valid view only from a specific perspective. The mirror seen from a different angle is ready to reflect another point of view, eventually returning to us our own portrait.

What is the value of a point of view? Can subjective opinion be manipulated and belong to us only in part? Making visual conditioning visible, this installations raises even broader questions, ranging from the perception of reality to themes tied to individual freedom. As we said, perhaps Olafur Eliasson is a visionary and, as such, has his own utopia.

He leaves us with a choice, whether or not to follow him.

(Translated from the Italian by Marguerite Shore)