

In the storehouse of memory

Memory as damnation, confusion, the destruction of every hierarchy of thought. Because, let's just admit it, if we could remember everything - everything we are taught and told, everything we ever understood, if we did not screen for feelings, moods and the state of our legacy of experience at the moment - our mind would become, paradoxically, a land of chaos. And it can come as no shock that the case and the chaos recounted in such fascinating and eccentric ways in *The Mnemonist*, the film by Paolo Rosa (of Milan's Studio Azzurro), that the (true) story of a Russian violinist afflicted with an irrepressible memory, had already won the attention of Borges (who used it as the starting point for a story in *Fictions*) and of Peter Brook, who based a theater piece on it.

The story of S., first violinist in an orchestra and a man rendered desperate by his extraordinary memory, was included in a little 1965 book by neuropsychologist A. Luria (*The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast, Vast Memory*). In the limpid, mysterious, spare and imaginative film by Paolo Rosa, it finds an unusual, anti-naturalistic, abstract translation that both encompasses and surpasses the preceding theatrical and video works of his group. S. - who was in reality named Zeresiwski - as embodied by the sad-faced clown of Sandro Lombardi, is a man so overwhelmed by his immense storehouse of memories that he can no longer find his music in the deluge of D-sharps flooding his memory; hence, he transforms himself into a "mnemonist", appearing onstage as a phenomenon in popular shows, fleeing from life and its excess sediment. Meanwhile, Professor L. - the excellent Roberto Herlitzka - tries to unravel his mystery in the setting of a Central Europe reconstructed in an old Liberty building in Milan, and the delightful Sonia Bergamasco incarnates his dream of the tangible. The reconstruction of this world, in which childhood and the present, memory and obsessions, quasi-omniscience and despair are interwoven, is conducted with rarified elegance. It is a (true) fable for our times, warning us that we are exposed to far too much and that we risk the madness of being leveled by it.

Irene Bignardi - *la Repubblica* - 30 August 2000