SPECIFIC SCENARIOS IN THE VISUAL CONFIGURATION OF THE SPACE IN DINO BUZZATI'S PROSE

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Abstract. *This paper aims to identify the scenarios underlying the visual experience of capturing the space in Buzzati's prose, indicating the way it is configured through the trajectory of sight, and supporting the idea of a space with mental and emotional charge filtered by the eyes. In this regard there are important the object of the gaze, the field that is created according to the viewer's focus interest, as well as the specific process which defines the visual range area. These issues are analyzed in a series of texts of the above mentioned author – short stories and novels – with emphasis on space and gaze.*

Key words*: visual, space, clues, surveillance, fascination*

A first step in the construction of space understood as an environment of life, gradually created around the human being in the sense of constituting a basic architecture of the world and of insertion in the multiform network of things (Mihali 26), is represented by the sensory experience of which the most relevant for the universe (re)shaped by the text is the sight. Considered a sense of coverage and depth, seeing is the one that establishes our place in the surrounding world, preceding the words and actively marking the relationship with things (Berger 7-9). From this relational and gradual perspective in which the relationship between the individual and the world is perceived, the definition of the space at the visual level regards encompassing and highlighting a certain portion of space, establishing for the viewer a corresponding area, correlated to the direction followed by eye and to the selection it operates.

As regards the direction of the gaze, this corresponds, in a first variant, to the frequently met **scenario of quest** aimed at a pre-established target. This can be represented by the border of the kingdom searched by the son of the king in *I sette messaggeri* or the mysterious village of San Piero, the alleged end of the new road in *L'inaugurazione della strada*, by the cave of the dragon that is the target of hunting in *L'uccisione del drago* or the landslide about which the journalist in the homonymous short story has to write, and so on. Subordinated in this case to an initial project, the characters' gaze investigates the surrounding space, trying to find out the searched place or at least the signs announcing for it.

The recording of the spatial elements that fall under the visual area of the character-narrator in the first above mentioned text – which are generic forms of an essentialized landscape, reminiscent of the archaic architecture of the fairy tale – follows the trajectory meant to find the border. The line of the latter, which the son of the king expects to find, should be a structure that stands out against the mentioned background.

In accordance with a goal stated from the very beginning by his mission, the journalist from *La frana* is scrutinizing the space in the hope of detecting it. It is considered that this is a phenomenon that should immediately catch the eye, particularly by the very fact that it represents a quite easily noticeable manifestation.

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In relation to the target towards which the character moves, a certain horizon of expectation is created, a certain image of how the border, landslide or other elements in the same category should look like. This horizon of expectation engages the materialization of the border into a specific form of relief or architecture, singularized at the visual level (*muraglie di separazione, valli divisorie, montagne che chiudano il passo*, Buzzati, 2002: 7), involves a certain aspect and context of the landslide, a certain position and size, without which the eyes move on.

Thus, the journalistic investigation leads reporter Giovanni to various landslides that do not correspond to its image and to its conditions. The first landslide does not match the requirements of being located in the neighbourhood of an inhabited area, as it is in a territory completely unpopulated, described as "brulli costoni, rocce affioranti, umidi colatoi di rigagnoli, muretti di pietre a sostegno di brevi coltivazioni, dovunque un desolato colore ferruginoso" (337) –, or the recent date – as it may have occurred even hundreds of years ago. The second one does not have the expected proportions, is only a trivial piece of land, a small part of the mountain probably rolled down due to heavy rains or to the moisture of the season: "E Giovanni guardò sbalordito la frana, scalfittura del monte, quell'inezia, quel nulla miserabile" (339). None of the realities the journalist discovers fit the previously built pattern and the scenario he imagined.

Giovanni Drogo (*Il deserto dei Tartari*) also, on his first way to Bastiani Fortress, his first garrison, scrutinizes anticipatory the space, imagining the fort of destination in a certain way: "Egli **scrutava** i bordi altissimi della valle per scoprire la Fortezza. Immaginava una specie di antico castello con muraglie vertiginose" (Buzzati, 1998: 10, our emphasis). During this process, the character capitalizes the more or less correct clues he receives along the way, the vague and fragmentary information provided by those he encounters, and especially the glimpsed fleeting sequences along the road, and the effects created by them. Significant from this point of view is the remote image of the Fortress, its almost surreal figure, veiled in twilight, which Drogo briefly perceives through a sort of window open between rocks, which gives him an extremely strong first impression.

Similarly, Professor Ismani in *Il grande ritratto*, during his journey to "military area 36", where the objective of his research mission is, spots through passages and openings in the mountains. Not knowing much about his destination point, due to the strict secrecy of the project, Ismani tries to discover and understand at the visual level the spatial figures announcing it, and makes a predictive scheme based on the sensations transmitted by them.

> Per una frazione di secondo, in uno spiraglio fra le dirupate quinte di roccia […], Ismani intravide una bastionata di rocce bianche dalla sommità tondeggiante, che ricordavano vagamente i teschi. L'insieme gli diede una sensazione di disagio. Pensò: „Se lassu fosse la mia destinazione, non ci resterei, a nessun costo". E subito dopo: „Vuoi vedere che ora voltiamo a destra, nella gola?
>
> (Buzzati, 1974: 26)

The landscape glimpsed at the crossroads is not indicative of his destination – as it turns out afterwards –, being in the opposite direction. Yet, it serves as a factor of contrast compared to the area he enters, which seems pleasant and welcoming.

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Identifying and deciphering the visual clues serve particularly when the gaze belongs to the **surveillance and expectance scenarios**, common to Buzzati's prose, and involve the careful monitoring of portions of space associated with the possibility of the occurrence of someone and/or something.

Thus, in *Bàrnabo delle montagne* the gaze lingers – in accordance with the rangers' mission to guard the deposit of ammunition and explosive and to defend it against the villains' attacks – on the mountains, as bandits' possible hiding place and assault base. Bàrnabo, like Berton, studies and tries to interpret the changes in the landscape, the suspicious signs that could betray an unusual movement or a strange presence.

On the same principle, Drogo and other soldiers from Bastiani (*Il deserto dei Tartari*) keep under observation the border area and the northern land, up to the visibility, to register any sign of the enemy. Their ongoing and tense supervision can be explained through the defensive character of the fort and through the expectance of the heroic event. The border position of the Fortress, nearby a territory that contains the threat of a potential aggression, and its definition as a military defense structure involves reorienting the sight towards the danger zone. All these are augmented by the fact that Drogo and his colleagues are expecting the enemy forces to come from the legendary desert of the Tartars, and to bring along the fulfillment of their destiny.

In the idea of surveillance and waiting, the eyes focus on a spatial portion, whose elements are "read" insistently: the plateau across the border in *Il deserto dei Tartari* and the northern road leading to the mountains and to the border in *La torre*. The gaze of Giuseppe Godrin, the main character of the latter, is fixed upon this area in which there is the access path where the "Saturns" could come on, a highly feared barbarous horde whose arrival he is waiting for. His supervisory role is very clear from the beginning, as he built a tall tower, which helps him dominate visually the road as much as possible, and thus allowing him to make preparations in the case of an invasion. Up in the tower, his watchful eye supervises amply the space, staring at the road, a kind of artery of the landscape (*non cessando di* ***scrutare*** *dal suo osservatorio [...]* ***la strada del nord***, Buzzati, 2010: 96, our emphasis), like the walls of Anagoor in the homonymous short story, which are searched and then kept under observation by all the people waiting for the gates to open so that they could enter the town.

In the context of surveillance and expectation, every detail that could reveal the feared and/or desired event is recorded and decoded more or less relevantly. Fabio Natali notes the exacerbation of the visual faculties in the case of people who are at the border, especially those living at the gates of the desert, both in terms of capabilities related to spatial habits, to the type of frequented space and to the mythical and imaginative capacity of seeing "beyond", of the possibility to penetrate the mist that blurs the contours and makes them undefined (Natali 142-3).

The most frequent clue in this sense, with obvious anthropological connotation, an elementary form belonging to a tradition as old as mankind, is the smoke that the gaze notices and which nurtures a speculative approach. This is the only thing beyond the walls that the viewer manages to see in *Le mura di Anagoor* and which bears the suggestion of human life, stating, in consonance with the peoples' wishes and expectations, the existence of an inhabited world in that area.

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> Io stesso sospettavo, un tempo, che dentro le mura non vivesse più nessuno. Ma c'è la prova del contrario. Certe sere, in condizioni favorevoli di luce, si possono scorgere i fumi della città che salgono diritti al cielo, come tanti incensieri. Segno che uomini vivono là dentro, e accendon fuochi, e fanno da mangiare.
>
> (Buzzati, 2002: 352)

A column of smoke is also seen in *Bàrnabo...*, rising between the mountain peaks, and understood as the concrete sign of human presence – in this case of the so-called bandits or criminals – in a place where it can hardly be imagined, on inaccessible heights dominated by silence and solitude.

> Intanto [...] in cima a una grande croda che sembra una torre franata, proprio a destra dei *Lastoni di Mezzo*, si solleva lentamente un leggero fumo. Non è nebbia, è proprio fumo nero che s'incolonna diritto nel cielo come se il vento si fosse fermato.
> Berton si alza in piedi stupefatto […] C'è qualcuno sulle crode, dove nessuno aveva mai avuto il coraggio di andare. Si ha un bel dire briganti o assassini. Fin lassù sono arrivati. (Buzzati, 1994: 49)

The aspect and the position of smoke recall an archaic form of communication and somehow gain the sense of a challenge (Spera 88), of a battle call, but especially of a confrontation with the rock and the heights to conquer the edges. The smoke is perceived from a perspective dedicated to surveillance purposes, as it is considered one of the main visual traces that would lead to locating the "others". At the same time, it echoes the rangers' intimate reflections and feelings, which double the gaze.

An analogon of these signs is represented by the lights that Drogo and Simeoni in *Il deserto dei Tartari* notice in the great open area, otherwise deserted and bounded by mist:"Drogo portò il cannocchiale all'occhio destro, lo puntò verso l'estremo settentrione, vide nelle tenebre un piccolo lume, una punta infinitesima di luce che brillava sì e no ai limiti delle nebbie" (170). The lights also answer the watch and the aspirations of the fortress viewers, being attributed to some enemies, as a distant indicator of their arrival, as a signal that could anticipate their invasion.

Starting from the spotted black dots and from the nocturne light, the character with the status of "watchman" and "semiologist" (Gachet 114), builds step by step an apparently logical theory regarding the construction of a road by the northern people, with strategic implications. He offers seemingly rational explanations for the evolution of these dots, for their appearance and disappearance, probably due to the mist movements in the area, which hide and disclose them periodically. Their slow movement is demonstrated by various procedures of tracking according to certain landmarks, and also explained through the existence of some transport vehicles involved in building the road.

The first ideas are then used to perform calculations regarding the number of the participants and the approximate duration of the process and to formulate predictions of military tactics, supporting a whole structure of assumptions. The argumentation based on the visual elements refers in particular to the temporal aspect of the issue, so much detailed that he specifies almost all the possible causes of some delays to the expected date (the distance calculation errors, various relief obstacles encountered in the way,

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technical or political difficulties, atmospheric phenomena), and to the space aspects, referring to the location and positional capitalization of the road by the others.

The visual clues become the gradually (re)built framework of a message consistent with the characters' hopes. A certain optical instrument can contribute to obtaining them, as happens in *Il deserto dei Tartari*, where the telescope can detect the smallest movements and signals. The telescope also marks the axis of the gaze, established by the observer's target and position. Both Godrin's telescope (*La torre*) and the one used by Drogo and Simeoni (*Il deserto dei Tartari*) trace the direction of the gaze in the space, being systematically directed towards the north.

The recourse to instruments such as the telescope and the binoculars focuses a particular portion of space, the one within sight, especially if the concerned area is the desert or the sea. From the vastness of the latter, Stefano Roi's father (*Il Colombre*) retains, through the looking glass, the area in which is present the marine creature called "colombre". From the wilderness of the desert, Drogo and his colleagues retain the field of manifestation of the otherness.

Besides using instruments of observation, in the scenarios of surveillance and expectation the viewer's position in privileged places is also relevant (Siddell 12). This enables him to visually dominate large areas. From these high points he can watch the space, in the sense of looking up, to get out of the horizontal visibility and control field (*in cima a un cono di roccia, incombente sulla pianura dei Tartari*, Buzzati 2005: 82), act which is correlated to the idea of power and excessive watchfulness (Ioan 25-6). It is what Giuseppe Godrin tries to do from his extremely high watch tower that he has built (***Di lassù poteva*** *poteva dominare per lungo tratto la strada che portava al nord, in direzione delle montagne dove passava il confine*, Buzzati, 2010: 95, our emphasis) or the soldiers from Bastiani from the New Redoubt or from the terraces of the Fortress, a method through which the "remoteness could be appropriated, and the foreign forces transformed in objects that can be controlled with the sight" (Mihali 79). The visual control has also strategic importance, giving, in the case of a possible confrontation, the advantage of early knowledge and preparation, allowing the observation of the enemy and the measures of defense.

> Grazie alla visibilità che si godeva dalla sommità della sua torre, il Godrin non solo sarebbe stato il primo a segnalare tempestivamente l'incursione, ma avrebbe potuto prepararsi a combattere – così diceva – con grande anticipo su tutti gli altri.
> (Buzzati, 2010: 95)

Here, like in *Il grande ritratto*, the space surveillance is part of the safety measures caused by the fear of a possible enemy invasion or aggression. Thus, in the aforementioned novel, the requests "from above" to intensify surveillance lead to almost an obsession. The mechanisms of this "panoptic practice" are very well illustrated in the context of the "military area 36" (*Il grande ritratto*) by the existence of a central point from which the rest is monitored, of a high place which gives the opportunity to see without being seen, to anticipate the signals of the patrols or guards in an incomprehensible way to soldiers in garrison, making them wonder: "C'è qualcuno che ci controlla, non visto, ed esercita la nostra stessa sorveglianza, anzi, ci supera in tempestività e precisione? Ma chi? E da dove?" (40).

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The control system is so complex that the guards themselves are observed without having the ability to ever see those who keep them under observation (*Loro, guardie, non avevano mai scorto nessuno nei paraggi, né sul ciglio delle rupi sovrastanti erano mai stati visti uomini di* fazione, *ibid*.), giving the impression of an all-encompassing eye with magical qualities (*O bisognava ammettere che quelli del commando fossero dei maghi?*, 41). This seems even more intriguing as the center does not have the basic form of visual communication, being represented by a blind building, with no windows or other visual checkpoints, while the soldiers from the guard post have an exacerbated visual function, having to guard the perimeter and check the access ways (*Per il materiale c'é anche una teleferica, ma noi* ***vediamo*** *quando passa, se è carica o no, ibid*., our emphasis). What they see and what they hear make them exclude the idea of a nuclear installation, and to persist in the concept of a mysterious building.

Their visual limitation as regards the interior which defends them, a form of control and protection of the secret, emphasizes at the same time the peripheral position and the sense of exclusion. The only place where you can see something is Angels' Valley, a place located at a distance of about one kilometer from where can be spotted "qualche cosa [...] come un pezzo di muro, liscio, senza né feritoie né finestre", a starting point for rumors and speculation. Lieutenant Trotzdem considers that a higher place on the top of some cliffs nearby would offer the possibility of understanding, and would satisfy, at least to some extent, the curiosity about the mysterious installation and the much discussed secret. This is, however, impossible, not because of the position, as the place is quite easily accessible, but because of the interdiction the soldiers have to strictly comply with which is also under the ban which they, as soldiers, must strictly observe.

Visibility is therefore essential for the knowledge of the space, which, in the spirit of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, "is complementary and enhances power" (Mihali 79). In this line, Simeoni's forecasts in *Il Deserto dei Tartari*, about the alleged construction of the road and the enemy's military intentions, place the enemies in the depression that crosses the desert near Bastiani Fortress, an area which escapes the gaze of the people in the fort or in the New Redoubt and belonging thus unknown. The sight of this depression, whose presence is detected only at certain times and under specific environmental conditions, and of the area beyond it, is limited. This is considered that would represent a positional advantage for the enemy.

Thus, the high position offers an overview which those below cannot have, being limited to an incomplete and partial view. In the same line can be mentioned the difference between the external vision (*Stavo sul balcone […] e guardavo la gente passare (com'è curiosa la gente vista dal di fuori quando non si accorge di essere osservata*, Buzzati, 1966) and that of the individual driving his car at high speed, which the protagonist in *I sorpassi* experiences one at a time.

The same effect is produced, in the urban context, the location at the height of one of the skyscrapers that so much fascinated Buzzati. The view upon the city from a high point, through a window or through a wall of glass, as in *Viaggio agli inferni del secolo* (*Dalla grande vetrata della sala si dominava il panorama della mostruosa città*, 405), captures the immense agglomeration in a comprehensive picture, transforming its universe into a readable text (de Certeau 144-5). By comparison, the people "at the bottom" live below the thresholds where visibility begins, use this space, fill it, writing the text without being able to read it.

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> Mi afferrò per un braccio, mi spinse alla vetrata.
> **Vidi allora di sotto la città con una precisione meravigliosa, fino alle estreme lontananze.** Declinando la opaca e livida luce del giorno, si erano illuminate le finestre. Milano, Detroit, Düsseldorf, Parigi, Praga, mescolate insieme in un delirio di pinnacoli e di abissi, sfolgoravano, e in questa immensa coppa di luce si agitavano gli uomini, questi microbi, incalzati dal galoppo del tempo.
>
> (*ibid*., our emphasis)

The created impression is that of an Icarus high above the labyrinth in which the crowd is moving (De Certeau 144), a celestial eye, like a deity (De Certeau 145), his visual capacities associated to this privileged position being explicitly indicated in another text (*Il crollo del santo*) as the privilege of the saints: "perché la vista dei santi, una volta issati lassù non conosce limiti*"* (Buzzati, 1966: 261). And they look down from the height of "a corridor to billions of light years" through a crystal wall framed with aluminum, the universe and the panorama of the creation, the land with specific human events.

The spatial snips are operated also according to the elements that catch the eye, in **scenarios of fascination**. This category includes the mysterious beings, which create mixed feelings of fear and attraction. These creatures contain the meaning of promises and allusions to other worlds that they announce by their mere presence.

Such an example is the strange monster Colombre, which Stefano Roi sees on the high seas, is spotted at the beginning with the curiosity specific to his age (*il ragazzo si fermò, incuriosito, a osservare una cosa che spuntava a intermittenza in superficie, [...] in corrispondenza della scia della nave*, 1109), imprinting then his soul (*E, sebbene egli non ne compendesse la natura, aveva qualcosa di indefinibile, che lo attraeva intensamente, ibid*.), and hunting his life until the last moment.

The same effects have on the viewer the man in white watched by the character in *Ombra del sud* in his wanderings through North Africa and the man in black who Giovanni and his mother in *Il Mantello* keep staring at, when the son returns from the battle to say goodbye before leaving in the Great Journey. Both are defined exclusively by their clothes and by their walking, which contribute to the hypnotic impression on the viewer. They act as guides to other lands, in a pattern in which the only variation is the selection of the opposite terms as concerns the chromatics (white-black) and the cardinal points (south-north).

> Scorsi un uomo […] vestito di una palandrana Bianca […] Camminava in mezzo alla strada come dondolando [...] (Buzzati, 2002: 47)
> [...] scorse sulla via una figura che camminava su e giù lentamente; era tutta intabarrata e dava sensazione di nero (72)

Sometimes the fascination effect can be produced by spatial elements, which the viewer inexplicably stares at, as in the case of the first floor of the hospital where Giuseppe Corte is hospitalized in *Sette piani*, a symbolic liminal space where the incurable sick patients agonize, or the strange building in which the woman loved by Professor Endriade is reincarnated in *Il grande ritratto.* Some of them can represent the object of double scenarios, by transforming the quest in careful observation, as in the case of the walls of Anagoor, or the mixture of surveillance and fascination of the way through

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the north in *La torre*. They can also reunite, as in the case of Bastiani Fortress and the desert of the Tartars, all the mentioned variants, articulated in a meaningful process. From the search instrument, the gaze becomes an exercise of fascination, and the surveillance is correlated to the latter. In fact, in this novel it can be met the strongest manifestation of the visual attraction created by a spatial element. While at the beginning Drogo tries to figure the Fortress on his way, as soon as he establishes the first contact with it, he feels its magic.

The Fortress profile, glimpsed from the distance, appears as a sign generating fascination, making, according to Alain Le Prado, the subject enter the enigmatic time of desire, a desire that becomes problematic in the proximity of the northern world (Le Prado 100). The signs of fascination can be detected for the first time – a theme that will be resumed and modulated throughout the whole novel – in the sense that Maurice Blanchot explains as a way to see through a remote contact, when what it is seen becomes imperative to the gaze, as if surprising it, attracting it and connecting it to appearance (Blanchot 26).

The feeling of enchantment is confirmed when Drogo reaches the destination. Despite the dull aspect of the fortress, lacking any grandeur, he cannot take his eyes from it, experiencing strange feelings at its sight.

> Non era imponente, la Fortezza Bastiani, con le sue basse mura, né in alcun modo bella, né pittoresca di torri e bastioni, assolutamente nulla c'era che consolasse quella nudità, che ricordasse le dolci cose della vita. Eppure, come la sera prima dal fondo della gola, Drogo la guardava ipnotizzato e un inesplicabile orgasmo gli entrava nel cuore. (Buzzati, 1998: 18)

The feelings are shared by captain Ortiz who, even if he has been in the Fortress for a long time, still looks at it with fascination. His face also betrays its ambiguous effects.

> Giovanni staccò finalmente gli occhi dalla Fortezza e guardò di fianco a sé il capitano [...] Anche Ortiz era rimasto immobile e fissava intensamente le gialle mura. Sì, lui che ci viveva da diciott'anni, le contemplava, quasi ammaliato, come se rivedesse un prodigio. Pareva che non si stancasse di rimirarle e un vago sorriso insieme di gioia e di tristezza illuminava lentamente il suo volto. (23)

The hypnotic force of the Fortress is associated with its position at the end of the desert and with its attraction. The character develops a real obsession for the mysterious northern land that nobody knows. Although, like the fort, the territory beyond the border displays no interesting elements, as major Matti states, it is absolutely monotonous, but stirs, by its unknown nature, Drogo's curiosity, the desire to know what lies out there.

> Come appariva il regno del Nord, il pietroso deserto per dove nessuno era mai passato? La carta – ricordava vagamente Drogo – segnava al di là del confine una vasta zona con pochissimi nomi, ma dall'alto della fortezza si sarebbe visto almeno qualche paese, qualche prato, una casa, oppure soltanto la desolazione di una landa disabitata? (22)

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That space "beyond" that escapes the cartographic representation seems to convey messages and reverberations that cannot remain unheard, signals forming the encrypted and metaphorical language (Crotti, 2002: 51) of the legendary and strange northern kingdom (*Ma Drogo ascoltava appena le spiegazioni di Matti, atratto stranamente dal riquadro della finestra, con quel pezzetino di rupe che spuntava sopra il muro di faccia*, Buzzati, 1998: 28), creating vague, unknown, thrilling feelings (*Il vago sentimento che non riusciva a decifrare gli si insinuava nell'animo; forse una cosa stupida e assurda, una suggestione senza costrutto, ibid.*). Its powerful magnetism that contaminates Drogo, as well as other soldiers from Bastiani, has nothing to do with the beauty of the landscape, which is mainly desert, characterized by nudity, flatness and uniformity, but with its potentiality and its projections (Pugliese 30).

Defined by a vacuum regulated by an extreme rigor, like "the geometrical laws" of Fortress, the desert of the Tartars is, in its absurd geometry, as Cornel Mihai Ionescu notices, a space full of all virtualities (Ionescu 254). This mineral universe, arid and wild, offers the promise of a revelation, a fulfillment (*Dal deserto del nord doveva giungere la loro fortuna, l'avventura, l'ora miracolosa che almeno una volta tocca a ciascuno*, Buzzati, 1998: 56), the malignant fascination of the desert consisting, according to Ilaria Crotti, of its reverse meaning (Crotti, 1977: 32).

The tradition reveals, in fact, a fascination for arid lands and for the simplicity of the desert land, in the hope that some truth might be shown there (Doucey VIII). This pure, magnetic place, a mineral landscape reduced to its elementary constants of opacity and vacuum, of life and death, allows the soul, as Michel Suffran considers, "to discover, through transparency and refraction, the hidden ideogram of the visible, the filigree engraved in the heart of the matter, which reveals in the texture of the appearance the secret sign that Henry James calls "the figure in the carpet."(Suffran 60)

At the visual level, fascination blends with the forms of surveillance, in the idea of the message the character is waiting to discover in the desert, and that he is trying to read on its surface. This idea is reflected also by one of the alternative titles Buzzati proposed for this novel, *Il messaggio del Nord*, as Delphine Gachet notices, in a search of signs specific to the texts of desert (Gachet 111-3). The subjugating desert is a land of signs and traces that can be understood by a sight taught to decipher the dust (Sestigiani 60), and the one who came into contact with that space would forever bear the "mark of the desert" (Doucey VII).

These scenarios revealed the configuration of the space through the act corresponding to a gaze directed at a single, obsessive target, in the view of a goal of research or surveillance or under a phenomenon of fascination. According to it, it is traced an individualized spatial, meaningful area, through a complex process of identification and decoding of visual clues that mark the environment. The eye follows elements with value of signs, usually taken as an indicative of a presence or as message carriers, including them in a range of suggestions and projections related to a particular place or/and a certain manifestation, and which represent starting points for theories and suppositions concerning the situation in the focused area, for the construction of possible scenarios.

The aimed target is problematic for various reasons as it cannot usually be identified as such or properly understood, either it is a failed search (*I sette messaggeri*,

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L'inaugurazione della strada, *La frana*), a confusion or misinterpretation or difficult reading of the focused elements in the environment (*Ombra del sud*, *Il colombre* etc.), a self-delusion or inadequacy (*Sette piani*, *La torre*, *Il deserto dei Tartari*).

Far from offering certainty, the visual act configures in Dino Buzzati's prose a space rather corresponding to a universe of expectations, desires and/or fears, with hypothetical and imaginary shades, an idea modulated by the discussed variants, sending to the precarious nature of the individual surrounded by it, living in it and living it.

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