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The Reconstruction of the Dream: Ethical Fantasizing

"I think we could call 'spirituality' the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformation on himself in order to have access to the truth."
[1]

When confronted with a decisive and ambitious artistic act, any viewer will instinctively ask himself a series of questions. What does the artist actually do? On what level is he intervening? To what metaphysical and historical emergency does he respond? To what invisible yet irresistible call, which is visible in his answer, does he respond?

What does Cătălin Petrișor do? Artists "orchestrate" their art, transforming it through its plastic form into a way to access spiritual subtlety. Thus, what does Petrișor do *with* painting and *through* painting? What does he attract to painting that allows him to modify or reinstate the medium?

First, his subtle, austere, calm, and thoughtful art exhibits highlight and activate the painting itself, thus transmuting the painting's post-historical situation into a unique chance for the viewer. Cătălin Petrișor works upon the painting; the painted surface of the canvas becomes something in which one can intervene, something which can be broken and cracked. It becomes a surface for re-drawing and re-construction that re-establishes the conditions for the spiritual act of image-making.

Second, the moral lesson suggested by his "archaeological" paintings is that one can intervene at any time. Nothing is to be covered; one can still delicately write above painting, splitting, shredding, and digging for meaning. We can also cover that which covers us; anyone can re-write history, that thing which keeps re-writing us. By covering something, we uncover it. In Petrișor's work, both actions are performed within the same picture.

Petrișor establishes the depth of the picture upon the surface of the painting, through a vertiginous, immediate continuity devoid of the illusion and alibi of any regularizing perspective. It is an immediate abyss that yawns next to us through the image. As human figures, we are the abyss, the revealing crack, the frame within the frame, the scene. Petrișor shows us ourselves, subjecting us to the difficulty and asceticism of no longer being able to hide from ourselves. The painting assumes our memories and hopes which, though they represent constraints, make up our only chance. Petrișor places us next to ourselves. To break through the picture, Petrișor opens the figures, tearing apart the apparition so that the vision of a new beginning can be revealed. Hence, the motif of the bird, as an angelic herald, flies and communicates within the paintings.

Petrișor draws on, over, and in the paintings; he redeems art and painting through drawing, the outline, and re-delineation. The painting thus becomes both a medium and a place, a topological space, not of refuge, but of struggle and strategic retreat.

“We will call ‘spirituality’ then the set of these research, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modification of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.” [2]

The struggle in Cătălin Petrișor’s paintings is mainly a spiritual one, dealing with spectral apparitions, false images, and phantasms which cannot be fought. These struggles are conducted visually; the phantasms and apparitions as artificial and induced visions need to be counter-attacked and laid to rest, broken by the images themselves. Drawing is the haunting beginning that returns, ghost-like, but figures hope and the future. The specter that haunts Petrișor’s images is the beginning that now approaches, that is to come. This beginning does not come at the end of days, but immediately. This beginning is always sitting right next to us, but we cannot see it and it haunts us symbolically to awaken us to the dream.

Petrișor does not rule out or level away the painting, but reduces the painting to the sobriety of the original outline. The outline breaks the canvas into an abyss, so as to re-draw the world in black and white. The entire painting is brought to the service of drawing, an original ontological drawing. Post-apocalyptically or post-historically, painting becomes a medium for sketching the world, changing the artist’s own history.

Drawing is a prospective specter that haunts the image, because for Petrișor everything is brought into a sketch, or a “rough draft” as it was named at the dreamy dawn of modernity. For instance, Novalis wrote “the universal draft” or *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* in the first years of the period of great German idealism and absolute romanticism. [3]

Drawing haunts an un-lived, alternative history, a past that is not past in as far as it was never present. The drawing and the outline are abandoned and aborted through false completions and rash, short-lived achievements. Literally and metaphorically, when the drawing is covered by color, it has been betrayed. However, the drawing comes back discreet and all the more phantasmal. The painting is haunted by the unfinished, infinite, abandoned, and obstructed rough draft. It is therefore treated as an “archaeological” equivalent of history itself; it is something that contradicts, covers, colors, abuses, betrays, precipitates, and aborts the original drawing. By drawing on the painting, Petrișor performs an assertive post-utopian and implicitly post-critical intervention.

In Cătălin Petrișor’s works, sight, which is always dreaming and fantasizing, has the therapeutic significance of a cleansing, the moral rectification of the dream and imagination. Sight is the medium by which we see, or spontaneously paint, the images of reality. Dreaming or viewing, that is, the representation of the real, needs to become severe, responsible, and more akin to an architectural plane; this is one could call the ethical fantasizing. Our relationship with ourselves is constantly dreamlike; we dream the reality in which we live and we dream ourselves within it. The dream gives us these representations.

Therefore, what does Cătălin Petrișor do with painting and by painting? Where is his intervention as a post-utopian and post-critical artist? He re-appropriates and refuels the dream, combating external, forced, and artificial dreams that are intensely, abusively colored and utterly loaded. These dreams have come to slay the imagination and the ability to dream and fantasize. The dramaturgical painting of Cătălin Petrișor is an ascetic effort to specify the imagination and

cleanse the dream as medium and an instrument for knowing and representation, active binding with the world, and plastic intervention in history.

As a stylistic but not critical post-modern citation, Cătălin Petrișor's work has a discreet, implicit, non-discursive polemical relationship with Surrealism. Petrișor seems to be painting, technically speaking, so as to re-elaborate the miraculously revolutionary relationship between the Surrealists and the dream. However, Cătălin Petrișor's compositions reflect more of Caspar David Friedrich's austere and tense romanticism than Surrealism's divagation; the regenerative regression of sight and the imaginary régime is even more radical than it seems.

Petrișor belongs to a post-critical epoch, struggling against prefabricated social dreams and ready-made phantasms. He embodies a new, productive epoch that transforms the deconstructive revelations of the preceding critical epoch into positive, constructive principles.

Cătălin Petrișor's pictorial and meta-pictorial actions prepare the painting, so as to make it re-enter, transfigured, into history as a privileged medium for the construction and reconstruction of dreams. Through extraordinary moderation, Petrișor's painting reawakens us to the dream, redrawing the constructive, ontological place and redefining the role of the dream. "This is a work of the self on the self, an elaboration of the self for which one takes responsibility in a long labor of ascesis (*askēsis*). *Erōs* and *askēsis*..." [4]

As an artist from Eastern Europe, Cătălin Petrișor retains the tradition of the spirituality of art specific to the "off-modernity" of the region. [5] However, he reinstates this tradition outside of the religious significance which has dominated the definition of spirituality from Greco-Roman antiquity until today.

References

[1] [2] [4] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France. 1981-82*, Edited by Frédéric Gros, General Editors: François Ewald and Alexandro Fontana, English Series Editor: Arnold I. Davidson, Translated by Graham Burchell, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 15-16.

[3] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, Translated, Edited, and with an Introduction by David W. Wood, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007.

[5] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001.