

UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN CLUJ NAPOCA

VISUAL ART FIELD

**SURREALISM AND THE REPRESENTATION OF
INNER SPACE IN PAINTING**

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

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DISERTATION SUMMARY

This dissertation aims at offering a synthetic and up-to-date image of a field so far rather briefly tackled in the theory and history of art ; a detailed analysis of the intrinsic causality of the appearance of

surrealism in painting (psychoanalytical motivations, inner functional structures of the human psyche), completed by a theoretical approach to the complex problems of what could be called the inner space of painting.

Problems concerning memory and rhythm, the inflation of fancy in modern European art (as well as obviously and necessarily its genesis and expansion) pointed out by defining chronological elements have naturally been resorted to so as to circumscribe as exactly as possible the genesis of this field. All the previously set forth references are focused on the area of surrealism on the essential reference and modulation points in this art's historical becoming. Since human behaviour is tributary to a phylogenetic past and subject to mutations connected with what's called "contemporary technological civilization" people's conduct in its progress being as a rule reflected and post –modern art on approach to the field of ethnology couldn't have been missing. Establishing man's place in the cosmos (his circumambient universe) as well as the interrelations of a holistic type between man , the fluctuating fields of subatomic worlds and possible macro-cosmic influences on the conscious and subconscious level of human awareness has seemed necessary to us.

The approach concludes with a proposition of possible scenarios for revitalising contemporary art, (reanimating it) so as to overpass nowadays" relative crisis, including the potential part of surrealism in this process.

CHAPTER 1. Space, memory and Rhythm in European Art.

The first chapter tackles the most complex problems raised by what is commonly called space. An inseparable relation between space and time is mainly established both from the point of view of nowadays physics and especially from that of the concept of "inner space in painting". The inevitable relation between the conscious in the genesis of that space, corroborated with the concept of "aesthetic awareness" is highlighted "signs", colours, devices, painting resorts (to a greater extent than any other art) to "imaginary spaces". Painted shapes guide us towards spatial contents which can't really be taken up. These are "ideal" spaces that our imagination can penetrate in different ways depending on the particular natured of our subjectivity. The forms which populate this space acquire various significances,

depending, again on one's imagination. It can't be asserted though, that through its confabulatory and "plasticizing" power art can stimulate imagination in its turn. Unmediated (concrete) reality seems to have, nevertheless the privilege of a "material feeling" achieved through tactile contact – a privilege which ceases when art offers pictorial relief by means of tones, colours, light, which interpenetrating, suggest to a considerable extent the collision between matter and space. One could unequivocally state that the art of painting has about it a dynamic quality which triggers a transmutation of structures wrought by imagination; this fine art conveys the sense of a "total" experience since it allows for one's going deep so as to render the world in "its spirit" rather than confine his contemplative eye to the surface of things. Pictorial spaces offers the concrete illusion of tridimensional space. Though human sight cannot go beyond that our mental structures (especially their affective side) can transcend to pluridimensional worlds.

"Imaginary spaces" are inevitably correlated with "pictorial time", in defining which one's bound to resort to the concept of rhythm, with all its variants and the part played by asymmetry in generating the inner dynamics of an art-work. Possible connections between the notions of rhythm and dynamics one hand and elements from the world of natural forms, with a potential mathematizing this field on the other hand are established. An important part of this chapter deals with the analysis of the human psychical structure, the role played by emotions in defining conscience, one's reception of the outer world and artistic perception.

The chapter concludes with a survey of the historical notion of "pictorial space"; starting from its treatment in medieval art, passing through the geometrical spaces of Renaissance perspective, followed by the time when space created through a "light – shade opposition" first emerged, with due attention subsequently paid to the special importance of the abandonment of spaces "rigidly" built up in favour of the spiritual "sensation" created by Impressionism Citing the space created by Cezanne; that of a reality "invented" by its creator is as inevitable in this respect as Vincent van Gogh's "colour" spaces, no less than the "surreal" ones of dream and mystery, or of the hallucinations which represent in fact a compulsory component of man's spiritual life. This recourse to the dimensions of "pictorial space", concludes with an approach to the boundless freedom proposed by abstractionism, as a premiss of the anti-authority

liberties taken by post-modern art. It's obviously a matter of relief for both the creator, who no longer follows the "rules of the game", being rather more of a subject than a mere object to them and the watcher who's granted absolute freedom in interpreting the object of his contemplation; the art work before his eyes. The notion of an "open work" interpretable in a quasi-unlimited number of ways by virtue of a process through which the work of art becomes a creative revelation of a boundless stamp emerges at this point.

CHAPTER 2. Gesture and Programme

Called "Prologue", the opening part of this chapter is centred on the notion of a continuous acceleration of an exponential type of philosophical, scientific knowledge with special stress on evolution in the field of arts. Whereas two centuries and a half were necessary for the phenomenal progress from the Renaissance to Baroque, the tempo of the changes increased considerably during the XIXth and XXth centuries. About 70-80 trends, styles, tendencies succeeded one another during the first 8 decades of the latter and a real explosion of freedom i.e. of individualism occurred at the end of the second millennium. This meant hundreds of new directions to be explored !

One might legitimately wonder whether such a frantic increase in quantity would be paralleled by a qualitative one. The phenomenon is analytically approached from the angle of liberty and necessity, from that of rendering world – wide or globalizing artistic phenomena, as well as that of doing away with national peculiarities of traditional kind. The creative work accomplished during the latest decades is clearly dominated by an aleatory character seemingly subjected to an ever more tyrannical mimesis by virtue of which creation is increasingly replaced by destruction. Modernity (the state of being modern) is to an ever greater extent equated with the idea that any progress is a denial, which means a rejection of the past.

In our opinion (probably parallel with that of other researchers) nihilistic theories (variants of a certain anarchism) become dominating, without representing, however, a supreme revolt, or absolute negation in fine arts. Getting away from the past is outlined in the present chapter with reference to the tendency of turning art

into a (perishable), “consumption good”, undoubtedly influenced by market laws, such as that of offer and acceptance.

Special attention is focused on the historical references of modernity and on the genesis of post-modern art. Starting with Duchamp, this analytical approach to a history of negations resulting in affirmations passes to realism via abstractionism. The post-modern period is evoked through trends which resort to modern technologies (electronics, artificial light, informatics and computers, etc.) to the ever more rapid evolution of technical devices, in parallel with using offals, informal, perishable stuff, to a quasi-total giving up of traditional methods and finally to the dematerialisation of art through happening, action and performance. Corollary: art has been violently getting away from nature, from the idea of a possible creationism, from doubts no less than certitudes. Despite of claiming its detachment from the past, post modern art resorts to eclecticism, which indicates a decrease in its innovative capacity. Evolution is replaced by transition.

The epilogue to this chapter suggests the necessity of finding (while we're still able to) a way out of this contemporary crisis, if not absolute “nonsense”.

CHAPTER 3. Memory and Expanding Imagination

Starting from the premissis that modern art is producing an essential concept mutation, namely the discharge of reproducing reality by merely rendering what's visible so as to enter the field of spiritualisation , we have considered tacking an approach to the field of fancy and imagination necessary as a major possibility of rendering symbols and overpassing merely formal aspects. Shortly after the turn of the XXth century, formal means became unconventional both abstractionism and surrealism adjudicated distinct operation areas to themselves. Abstractionism reckoned colour and shape to be a “subject” in itself. “Surrealism expanded its sources of inspiration towards the unconscious and subconscious sides of the human psyche. A third way to be trodden along the in parallel with these was that of turning trite objects into art. Dadaism, which cultivated pure and simple nonsense can't be omitted in this respect. At the antipode

was situated the attempt to embellish everyday life through (Bauhaus and subsequently Design) art.

A tendency to dislocate plain reality by means of imagination was also manifest in the through mutations which occurred in the literature of the first decades of the XXth century, in music, poetry and (why not ?) in scientific concepts.

There is, however, no imagination without memory since the former implies the creative processing of an enormous quantity of stored (up data) some atavistic, others acquired through visual, auditory means, etc... The third chapter processes methodically both the resources of memory and the (partially conditioned), liberties of imagination. Elements of scientific knowledge of memory and the functions of psychism connected to it, the resources of the basic psychical function called affection (without which the elementary, logical, and therefore cognitive process is not possible either) have been tackled throughout. Aspects of the “memory-imagination-affectivity” triangle have been approached both in the field of arts and in that of poetics and early XXth century literature (Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, James Joyce and the interrelations between their creative work and that of visual artists, such as Kandinski, Andre Breton, Ernst, Dali, Magritte, Tanguy, Klee, as well as later on Tamayo, Matta, Chagall, and (why not?) Beuys, Benoit, Pollock, etc.

We have tried to establish to what extent end XXth century arts were rooted in the great forerunners achievements during the 20s-30s. A more careful analysis has led to the conclusion that post-modern art is volens-nolens a “mixtum-compositum” made up of insubordination acts committed by others of sixty-year-old negations moreover, that, without the forerunners resorting to imagination no contemporary eclecticism could have existed. Is there anything new under the sun? What did the XXth century add? Consumption art, mass-media pressure in promoting artistic models, globalization.

A series of references (personal concepts) on the limits and (ephemeral) successes of present-day art are comprised in the concluding chapter. We've reached the end of our attempt as synthesizing origins, destinies, theories and works in a few scores of pages. Resorting to the powers and the sources of memory would indeed seem in exhaustible in XXth century art and so would human imagination! That of man, in whose psychism the redundant fertility of fancy and the perpetual memories of a primordial mystery were implanted by the Lord.

CHAPTER 4. Man between two Infinities.

As a possible conclusion of what has been studied in the previous chapters we've taken a last step meant to clear up a few questions. Granted that man's a small particle situated between an infinite macro-and micro-cosmos what's the relation between human consciousness and the universe? Would the definition of conscience and its way of working be comprehensible? The basic coordinate of human conscience is emotion without which people lose their capacity to discern, classify, rationalize of thinking and logic. Conscience seems to be a holistic phenomenon. To paint, to draw implies an outer projection of man's inner space subjected to "affective colouring" of a volitive type to a certain culture, to unconscious, just as a dream can do without the retina.

The "scientific" materialism dominating now a days world thoroughly excludes the fact that (as a sublimation of ineffable conscience) creation, which is of a transcendent character mediates our contact with the micro-cosmos, as well as other dimensions, the future, or the past, in other words with para-and meta-realities. Life and art are in the last resort absolutely inseparable.

In the sense Heidegger's definition of life (and implicitly art) is perfectly sound. According to it !:

" All that can be known by means mathematics is in a way on the outskirts of the cognoscible world, for cosmic abysses, no less than those of matter are were suburbs. The central and proper problem of knowledge as a whole, the essence of "what's it about ?", has a totally unmathematisable character. Mathematical thinking (i.e. almost everything in the field of scientific research based on it) enters total confusion when confronted with the "sense of value" in various phenomena being from an operational standpoint quite indifferent to the necessity of the occurrence advocated by phenomenism. If any thing, the indestructible dependence of the mathematical activity itself upon the finite character of the human being is to be blamed for this. Mathematicians and physicians have to pay for their splendid isolation as rewards the meanings of value through a neutrality which empoverishes their existence. In their confrontation with real life they

remain were outsiders. Though art is life, both art and life are unmathematisable.

Is man at the outset of this millenium in such control of positive knowledge as to reckon himself bound to discover absolute truths? Is the human experience accumulated during the historical millenia really useless and obsolete? Which are human victories in science and the arts? Are we striving for a total victory over nature? Does what seems irrational and mysterious have be thrown into the dustbin of history?

The chapter continues with a logical argumentation meant to show that human behaviour changed a lot in the XXth century and that the mutable conduct acquired during it estranged people from he sources of their original normality. Such new behaviour has entailed effects and triggered risks of an irreversible kind in the evolution of contemporary art, as well. Man has become very proud of his achievements in the field of science and technological civilization. To the extent to which he's contemplatively admiring his own creation he's proportionally despising the sources of life, the secret of its origin, becoming (as Heidegger puts it) confused by the sense of value in phenomena and indifferent to the mystery of their occurrence. All this megalomania and greed (utilitarianism and over-consumerism) is strikingly mirrored in the evolution of art. To the extent to which now a day's man has grown infatuated the artist has also exacerbated his narcissism by totally isolating himself from the addresses of the artistic phenomenon. As it is well known artists endowed with sharp creative minas of their own, have always been ahead of the common taste. For at least half a millenium , artists revolts have played in progress a part similar to that of social uprisings, or scientific revolutions and mutations of knowledge as a whole. Nowadays prototypical artist is no longer of a brooding disposition. Far from striving to be "understood", he rather means to "act".

Consistent with the modern way of life , his deeds (in which the "quantity" and the frequent changes of direction are predominant) accelerate exponentially, becoming more superficial. In this age glory has to be acquired by all means and in no time. Since those means are abounding in a world where information traffic has been subjected to globalization the common dream may easily come true. Within the limits offered by perishable and disposable item consumption, contemporary artists, rather proud as a rule, are no

longer interested in the remanence of their work, whence their resorting to perishable materials and working techniques; or even to art without material support, proceedings, performance, etc...

Already a component of their genetic code, infatuation is nowadays prefiguring the fate of art in the world of the future.

The corollary of this bird's eye view on surrealism, starting from its forerunners : prehistorical art , religious representations (Bosch, Bruegel, Durer), the beginnings of surrealism prosper (1910 -1840), and going on with the expressions of surrealism in the latter half of the XXth century, as well as in nowadays post-modern art. This approach is simultaneously (attempting to systematize, classify and reconsider on personal grounds the still viable potentialities of surrealism, all the more since in the light of modern research a great deal of mystery, seems to be hiding behind them, some pertaining to parallel realities (such as the existence of parallel spaces and simultaneous temporal coordinates). Did no man however, intuit these parallel realities thousands of years ago? Have not these para- or meta-realities been reflected in art? To what extent can surrealism (as a direction in exploring its multidimensionalities) still contribute to art revival?

The last part of this disertation proposes possible scenarios (of a more or less high degree of verisimilitude) with regard to sawing, or at least rendering viable art with its peculiarities. Revolutions of knowledge, the theory of catastrophes, resorting to primary sources – traditions myths, ancient beliefs- refinding God, knowledge of transphysical mystically revealed type have been considered too.

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