

Précis

This paper is structured into 20 chapters of variable length. They are linked by the text's intrinsic, inner logic. If we look at it like that, the text is the actual decision-maker, the subject. It is the text deciding on the flow of chapters, by synchronic and diachronic criteria. Just by means of example, the first chapters were aimed at explaining the topic "landscape": the binomial landscape/nature, natural landscape/pictorial landscape, landscape/space etc. and last not least the topic "landscape-painting" from the concept point of view.

Chapters 1 to 3 stress the idea that landscape-painting makes good use of the geometric and spatial, of the tactile and colorful chain-links between the visual perception and the pictorial language. And yet, there are differences that spring to eye between the natural and the pictorial landscape in what regards the principles ruling structure. Besides the main difference (natural/artifex), the pictorial landscape lays out an intention and an (esthetic) meaning. Natural phenomena like the light, the color, the (natural) geometric or random shape, the texture, are bended into plastic and constructive assets to match an artistic view. Space is *the* characteristic of landscape. There is no landscape (nature) outside the spatial link between the natural and the pictorial landscape; there is no (landscape) painting outside the plastic world.

Trecento and *Quattrocento* offer true landscape samples on a plate, even when the pictorial configurations bring also narrative and allegoric scenes inside. Who could possibly deny the landscape reality of an admirable portrait such as "Federico de Montefeltro" by Piero della Francesca, and not risk being dismissed as narrow-minded when it comes to landscape-painting? Any such attitude would sin by omitting some worthy landscapes, but beside this, it would not be operational. It goes without saying that a painted work of art is never pure, but heteromorphic. Landscape-painting has this openness and this "spatial ending, open towards the endless" (Rosario Assunto).

Therefore, a painting so obsessed with space and with finding space-bound solutions as is the painting of the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento*, where interior and exterior architecture come aplenty as the prerequisite to solve issues of perspective, cannot be ignored when we research landscape-painting ever so briefly. Then, we also believe that architecture, the town, the marketplace are pictorial elements belonging rightfully

to landscape-painting. If we now broaden the viewpoint on landscape-painting towards architecture and town-planning, we do not risk excluding a number of great works of painting from the 1st part of the Renaissance from the landscape genre.

Chapter 4 (“Una cosa mentale”) refers to the inevitable link between the concept of “landscape” and that of “space”. Talking about landscape is always talking (culturally) about space (see the classic example of perspective as in the Renaissance). The perspective system promoted in the *Quattrocento* is an intellectual and rational system. It is rationale deciding on the sequence of pictorial back- and foregrounds and material; it is rationale willing the eye to follow a certain path. During the *Quattrocento*, there is an obvious pictorial pattern, where all paint information (light, color) is subjected to the intellectual reflection; it is not by chance that Renaissance “treaties” abound in speculations and ideas which we, modern men, may savor only as textual delicatessen. On the other hand, alas, history tells us that these treaties, *ars poetice*, have brandmarked European culture (by the 20th century, Cézanne was still fighting the aftermaths and perspective conceptions of his time’s way of painting). During the *Quattrocento*, the one-eyed “pictorial window” would dominate the Western painting; the “*prospettiva pratica*” would take on mathematics and geometry theories and relay them on the easels and frescoes of big artists who were only too eager to conquer the third dimension. In a nutshell, they were splashing huge pictorial talent out to serve mystic and intellectual fervor.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 discuss three big landscape painters: the Van Eyck brothers, H. Bosch and P. Bruegel. They were not randomly selected, as it was them who shaped the evolution of European painting for a good several centuries.

We also quote here a few of the now rooted standard formulas, such as “lights of the Septentrion” (Van Eyck), “an island of fictional realism” (H. Bosch) or “a magician of realism” (P. Bruegel).

Chapter 8 of this paper addresses the autonomy of landscape-painting. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the landscape *per se* already exists; therefore this chapter provides a panorama overview over the main European (North to South) landscape-painting schools and trends.

If we accept the idea of landscape in its broad and unrestrictive sense, we will notice four trends in the landscape-painting of the 16th and 17th century, all of them choosing no to differentiate between the perception of nature and that of formed art.

- A) The first trend – the Italian *maestri*: Leonardo da Vinci, Perugino, Correggio, Giorgione, Tizian, Tintoretto, Veronese etc. The landscape of the Italian painters is ideal, it is anthropomorphic and sensual. The shape is indirect, mediated by the godly gift of proportion. This shape is “[...] the static scenario of a drama-play with potentially multiple facettes, but which will always display the struggle of rationale or virtue to fight destiny: the light of history taking over the dark anarchy of fate” (G.C. Argan)
- B) The second trend – the Northern painters, mainly Dutch/Flemish: Bruegel, Patenir, Van Leyden. The Northern landscape springs to eye due to immediate and clear shapes of the elements of nature embedded into a “realistic” formative view, while simultaneously open and prone to the plastic metaphor and allegory which reshape reality in terms of meaning.
- C) The third trend – the French landscape, as painted by Poussin and Claude Lorrain. The French landscape is built abiding by sensual-rational criteria, even classical, which go as far as Cézanne.
- D) The fourth trend – the German landscape-painting school: Grünewald, Dürer, Altdorfer and later C.D. Friedrich. Here we find a strong sense of nature, whose forming force shall come as fiction landscapes, where nature is mean-wild and overwhelming. This kind of landscape equals a regression in what concerns the psychical order of things; which in its turn brandmarks a stylistic view that shall dominate all through European Romanticism and the pictorial “expressionisms” as “the art of expression” – which is quite the opposite of Apollinic and Arcadian art.

Obviously, though this classification works well for us in this paper, it is by no means infallible, seeing that any (pictorial) reality is always fluid and interchangeable. On the other hand, it is just as obvious that there are differences between the four trends of landscape-painting; these differences are driven by varying stylistic matrixes/beds, as well as by varying (but complementary) geographic and cultural backgrounds. In terms of landscape-painting, Europe is a spectacularly colorful polyptich.

Chapter 9 addresses the secularization of European art, a moment overlapping (not by chance) with the autonomy of landscape. In this paper, this idea would be the chain-link between the sense of nature and the pictorial representation of nature.

The “sense of nature” is an intrinsic feature of man of all times, whereas the pictorial “representation” is one part of the cultural and religious complex that shaped one epoch or another. Whenever the distance between the (landscape-) painter and nature decreases, there is landscape. But the history of European painting draws the different meanings of this “distance” into focus, and also “who” or “what” comes between the landscape-painter and the landscape itself. Take for instance the painting of the Italian Renaissance, with its examples of high narrative and allegoric fervor. Bruegel, the Humanist, tries it with a trick: his uncountable persons get to becoming elements/signs of a cosmic landscape. Indeed, the Dutch and rational (Poussin) landscape-painting of the 17th century is quite another rung of the evolutionary ladder of landscape-painting. One can state with no afterthoughts that this is the century of the autonomous landscape: enter landscape as pictorial genre - a sense of nature and a cult of the individual, which will keep the autonomous landscape afloat until short of our post-modern times, and a secularization of painting, too.

Before the autonomous landscape, painting seemed to be pretty much serving the authority of the religious sentiment. Accidental or not, the uprising of the sense of nature via landscape-painting seems to coincide with the melt-away of the religious sentiment and with the secularization of painting. The latter shall become individualistic and rightfully nurture the cult of the genius and of the artistic personality.

Chapter 10 makes use of the hermeneutical tools of psychoanalysis when it links landscape (nature) to the psyche. We think that it is absolutely necessary and also operational to psychoanalyze creativity when the creative ego and the very nature are obviously affected.

To add a psychology touch to the analysis of creation makes unveiling the sense easier and more proper than the formalistic way. How much of the unconscious breaks into a plastic image, what are its interior, intimate levers which make the painter choose the subject – here: the landscape? How much of the imagistic representations (plastic, pictorial) are ways to find the deepest ego (the unconscious) and/or ways to reveal/identify it due to another level of the psyche – is this the conscious?

It is obvious that there is a conscious/unconscious selection of the topic and that it is driven by the painter’s psychological need for identification. So identification would

then translate as the fantastic process by which the ego allows the insertion of an outer object. Any painting of landscape is basically a series of successive and repetitive identifications on the level of the imagination and image. In the case of real artists, “impressing” becomes a distinctive, personal style. In this line of thought, we shall have not a “landscape by Turner” or by Utrillo, but “a Turner” or “an Utrillo”.

The narcissistic identification is powered by an identification of the meaning. Lacan places it inside language, “at the crossroads of speech and language”. The personality of the painter as creative ego identifies by **assimilating** the pictorial object (motif). The painter’s ego narrows the object “landscape” and allows impulses (affection) to thrive harmonious and expressively.

Chapters 11 and 12 base on G. Bachelard’s “material” theory of the imagination.

G. Bachelard rules in the ideal dynamics of imagination by conceptualizing it in line with the experimental laws; when he collects these rules under the name of “material imagination”, he unveils the way to “materialize” the imaginary: it is an ability of the material imagination to penetrate the fundamental elements of the material. This latter may be dreamed of, thought of by a creative imagination. Both the physiology of imagination and its imaginary product – the images – will bend in shape to abide by the laws of the four elements: **earth, water, air/wind, fire**. Each of these elements will shape a certain type of “material imagination” and work towards a special and also specific sublimation. Our interest towards the “material imagination” and its versatility inside the psyche –depending on the material shape it takes on- is justified by the kind of image it proposes.

But G. Bachelard also remarks that most of the times we have a combination of these types of material imagination; e.g. fire *vs* earth, wind *vs* water, earth *vs* wind. A material ambivalence will always have its double as ambivalence of the reality and the imaginary. It is no syllogism to draw from here the conclusion that there must be an ambivalence of the images as well. We can imply that these images are realities of the psyche. „When it is born, when it is in full bloom, inside us the image is the noun to the verb ‘to imagine’. Not its object. The world comes in to imagine itself by aid of the reverie of man”. Bachelard adopted this terminology from psychoanalysis only to subtle and smartly rekindle it as a phenomenology of creativity at work and explanatory.

We too, adopted and resized this *ars poetica* because we find it very efficient from an analysis point of view, namely when we shall classify by style and topology a few pictorial attitudes present in the art of landscape-painting. On the other hand, we are quite convinced that a certain type of image (landscape, n.b.) is always the product of a mobile and dynamic material imagination driven by a perceptive conscience which in its turn is activated by the materials of postmodern culture. „The value of an image is measured by the spread of its imaginary halo”, says Bachelard and this sentence is the very essence of it all: indeed, great landscape-painters can be spotted by the spread of this halo.

Chapter 13 bears the title „Nature and Landscape *versus* the Beautiful and the Sublime” and from the theory point of view bases its argument on Kant’s concepts regarding beauty and the sublime. As we see it, this Kantian perspective is the flagship of European pre-modern and modern art. Therefore, we aimed at linking the Kantian concepts of beauty and the sublime in with the evolution of the modern painter’s practice.

In the Kantian meaning of beauty, imagination is there to **create**, i.e. to **fantasize**, since it is aided by the infinity that meets the eye. This would then explain the formal and especially chromatic fervor of landscape-painters (from Turner to the Impressionists) or again Cézanne’s selflessness before Mount Saint-Victoire, stimulated by the “unique sensation” and translated as a long line of iterations. It is here where we must name (again) the author of the “Water lilies”, he who was literally obsessed with the free flow of water and light. The natural beauty as the object of painting relates to something which is **limited** and thus would equal **quality** and the **game of the imagination**. This particular meaning of beauty may be the paradigm of the classic, pre-modern and modern landscape-painting. And it is to this particular meaning that the state of (esthetic) pleasure, attraction and harmony links in.

The sublime addresses the kind of imagination which bears in it “an aim towards infinite progress” and raises the feeling of a supersensitive faculty - meaning that it addresses not so much the intellect, but the superior reason. Consequently, the sublime does not derive from perceiving the object (nature), but from “the state of mind driven by a certain representation which engaged the faculty of reflexive

judgment”. The sublime is not felt, it is **thought in** by a “faculty of the soul” that eludes sensorial touch.

Imagination broken into two halves; faculties of judgment spread to the two directions (beauty and the sublime); beauty reduced to esthetics and morale, the sublime raised to the absolute; Ratio (Spirit) revealing the idea.

Pairs: beauty and the sublime, intellect and ratio.

The break: intellect-driven imagination makes **shapes**, while (infinite) ratio-driven imagination makes **ideas**.

Ratio wins over the faculty of representation (formalization).

Chapter 14 continues the analysis of the previous chapter and insists on a Kantian pair: “imagination of beauty” and “imagination of the sublime”. The consequences of this duality to modern and modernist art are huge. It is not by accident that this chapter bears the title “The Crisis of Landscape-painting is the Crisis of Modernism”. Kant’s idea of splitting imagination into “imagination of beauty” and “imagination of the sublime” announces the break, i.e. the crisis. We now witness the end of a long and glorious time which we call the era of aesthetics, of beauty. Only, the shapes and expressions of the sensitive object are devoid of strength faced with the Kantian sublime. To this intent, the trials of Mondrian or Malevich to provide the absolute with a shape, i.e. the very impossible according to Kantian analytics, are symptomatic. The sense of the sublime implies the **absence of nature**, because it’s a proven case that the spirit finds its landmark (the representation) in the idea, in other words in itself. The shapes, the painting belong to sensorial-intellectual representations and can therefore never depict sublime ideas. This inability to show means a lack of some kind, a symptomatic absence and this is precisely the breaking point, which translates as the crisis of landscape-painting and, in a broader sense, as the crisis of the very modernism.

The failure of the imagination of the sublime, in other words the failure of the imaginary of Wish/Lust (which the Kantian ratio calls) is felt throughout the evolution of modernist painting, including (or especially) in landscape-painting. Slowly, the „fictional function” (as Durrand puts it), meant as a “euphemistic change of the world” (same Durrand), shrinks in its cosmic and anthropologic dimension only to fall into formalism and materialism. We need only retrace the evolution/ involution of landscape-painting during the first two thirds of the 20th century, from Utrillo and

Maurice de Vlaminck, by Oskar Kokoschka, to Jean Dubuffet and Antoni Tàpies (of course, we count here Ion Țuculescu as well).

The spirit's inability to have a shape is obvious in modernist painting. We agree with Lyotard when he says that this inability must be replaced by a **displayable** way. This explains then the exaggerated painting of gestures, the extreme elegance of the *arte povera* and the expressive and materialistic fervor of the *tachisme*. These are all ways and methods tried by the imagination of the sublime in order to integrate the infinite into the material, as the visual alternative to "mathematic sublime".

We admit that the "landscapes" painted by a Wols, Fontana, Burri, Mathieux or Dubuffet are gems hard to equal, mainly in what concerns the pictorial practice, the chromatic subtlety, the dosage of paint. Could this be "Ground Zero" of modernist painting? Let us call here to mind the singular Antoni Tàpies, with his landscapes in bold-relief – sublime marks left in the element Earth. His landscapes in bold-relief will undoubtedly be *the* glam moment of the crepuscular art of painting.

Seeing the above, it is obvious that "The Crisis of Landscape-painting - the Crisis of Modernism" is part of nature's evolution, translating as the trials of sensitivity. The painters are sensitivity-come-alive who reclaim the concepts of ratio via the *ars poetica* of artists. Their practical and creative effort shall always be in the proximity of the idea-to-be, despite the distance separating the intellectual sensitivity from the *ratio universalis*.

Paradoxically, the aesthetics of the sublime finds its figurative expression elsewhere. This "new", this "accident" happening before their very eyes and claimed by modernist painting finds the most fertile ground to express itself in mass culture. Of course, we are referring here to the boom of *pop art*: right now, the myth of market economy, the myth of the antagonism capitalism/communism offer the best timing for the aesthetics of the sublime to express.

The effects of technological breakthroughs over knowledge (here we also include painting) are all-decisive. Time-wise, the modernist view is always at odds with the new media imposed by technology: taking advantage of the "information inheritance" would forever and irreversibly impact on the production of image.

The esthetic era of culture (art) is now history – which coincides in large parts with the times when modern painting ran out of the sublime.

One entire century of modernist art, nurtured under the flags of novelty, of the noun/author and motivated by the aesthetics of beauty/the sublime is now questioned. The mass sermon of the absolute, which promoted the great works of painted art during the first half of the 20th century, is now shadow-cornered by the pragmatism of technological and consumerist myth. For the moment, concepts like „spiritual reality” or „sensitive shapes of the in-/visible” risk being labeled as old-fashioned buzzwords. The Kantian transitivity of the sense of beauty and of the sublime was immediate and had settled in as universal principle. It also links art with the sense and judgment for good taste, which obviously were in a process of change. Seeing that the art of paint was in a constant swing between the “beautiful” and the “sublime”, it also was in a position to negotiate its conceptual or non-conceptual belonging to one of the two Kantian ideas, always considering its respective affinity.

Chapters 15 and 16 analyze the vagrancies of art and creativity during the big shifts of mid-century 20, the spread of the consumerist myth and the “democratization” of art by an (almost) infinite number of iterations.

Art melts away in consumer society, this big esthetic anthropophagus. The multiplication of art by reproduction, its suction into consumer kitsch in uncountable replications leads to a weariness of the art squashed in “cans of culture” and it is transcendental no more. With originality blurring to make way for a multiplication of the imaginary museum, with the original destroyed and the fascination for art gone, art dissolves. A new set of –say, social-esthetic- rules become dominant in the era of communication and consumption.

We witness the thinning of meaning to the advantage of “information”, we witness the physiology of an art that communicates in real-time. Art critic shifts towards the sociological (anthropological), political and informatics analysis.

Mass art requires multiplication, repeats. Thus, manipulation of shapes, of styles or even hiding the original becomes the means to please the art market. Any masterpiece is likely to become the object of multiple, no infinite, takeovers and iterations. Great classic painters (Rembrandt, Rubens, Velázquez) had anticipated the need for multiplication. In modern Europe, this idea of multiplication was put forth by Monet and Cézanne: driven by inner esthetic needs, they have iterated their preferred motifs sometimes even obstinately. For an illustration of the aforementioned, see Monet’s „Hay Cocks” and „Cathedrals” or Cézanne’s „Mont Saint Victoire”. One must admit

that, beyond the strict conditionings involved by a very personal *ars poetica*, iterations of certain motifs may sometimes be just the answer to specific requests of the market.

This is the prediction of a new pictorial era, where the work of art blurs to vanishing, while paradoxically becoming multiple and reproducible in the core. The work of art is subjected to a new operational mechanism in the name of a social value of the art, of its distribution. “Copy” and “shift” be thy name, result!

The most important representative of this shift is Andy Warhol. He uses information esthetics and the idea of the “painting machine” deliberately, so as to answer back to consumerism with similar language. The artist (author) identifies with the “painting machine”. It is not by chance that Andy Warhol builds his Factory observing the rules for the construction of a plant meant for industrial production. To the „destruction of the author” adds the destruction of the object, as the hypocritical “waste product” of classic semantics. The ready-made and the „democratization” of creativity as proposed by Warhol and Beuys overlap with the end of art’s esthetic era. By now, all objects are granted access to the Imaginary Museum.

J. Baudrillard undertook a clear-minded analysis of the phenomenology of creation in this time of democratization-aided-by-the-machine and of sacrality-come-undone. It’s an “end of the art” expressed in excess production, even if this means risking to oust seduction and illusion from the game that creates visual shapes. Beyond this end, we find a universe of fetish objects, “i.e. of objects which, much like the fetish, have no references, no meaning, no real cultural value; objects which are located on this side or on the other side of the esthetic. We are free to imagine a systematic overflow of ritual, fetish or magic objects – much like the universal gadget, why not? – or plain technical objects, or multimedia electronic craftsmanship objects, total counterfeit world in virtual reality – which is itself a huge gadget and will abruptly end image not just as depiction, but also as alternative illusion” (Baudrillard, 2001).

The last **Chapters, 17 to 20** go deeper into the analysis of postmodern and contemporary catch-up stage. The resurrection of past formulae has indeed a decisive influence on landscape-painting (too).

Postmodern painting is neither conservative, nor *avant-garde*. Postmodern painting has fallen to some kind of peace with modernist and pre-modern *-isms* and sometimes

it even conveys the impression that it aims to finalize, to redo and to have all forms of a certain type of sensitivity unveiled once and for all.

Postmodern imaginary draws on a web of stylistic conditionings. Thus, all too often relating to the shapes established in the past really means a full **rewriting** of the pictorial model. The multiplication of artistic production, the technically enhanced reproduction (copies), the ready-made are prerequisites for no more clear distinction between production and consumption, between creation and pastiche. The art forms, art itself is turned to raw material, to be used for the new cultural productions; these art forms will be reformulated, manipulated and recycled according to new codes and information networks. The very painting cannot but surrender to the trend: we have seen it coming; the signal was given by Andy Warhol. Pictorial practices often reuse shapes that have already been produced.

More often than not, today's artists **program** rather than compose shapes – before shaping a raw material, they much rather use what's already there: in a world of consumption products, they use pre-existent shapes, signals already given, buildings already built, paths already marked by their predecessors. Artists no longer think of the artistic field as of a museum that is the keeper of works of art to be quoted or transgressed, as the modernist ideology of the New would like it, but certainly as a conglomerate of storehouses full of tools waiting to be used – heaps of data to manipulate, to direct and to re-exhibit as new.

By virtue of these contemporary cultural practices, the art of painting addresses two areas: reality and **pictorial tradition**. We believe that the reaction of practitioners towards these areas is not so much parodic and intertextual, but rather nostalgic and wishing to catch up. Said attitude implies knowledge of history, it implies that painting looks back on a prestigious historical tradition.

Starting with the Impressionism, painting has evidently fought its standing against photography. The invention of photography did not mean that painting had vanished, quite the opposite, it released painting from the duties and obsessions to reproduce reality. The consequence: painting developed auto-reflexively to the utmost.

Postmodern painting rewires itself with tradition – romanticism, realism, the epic, a taste for the narrative – based on an ongoing and complex intertextuality. There are many challenges and issues and they match “the investigation of specific behaviors

when faced with a specific change, a questioning-in-context of the ideological assumptions”.

Therefore, the scope of landscape-painting must be revised and reevaluated. Landscape-photography must catch reality by force of its ever more hi-fi technology. Add to this an area open to all possibilities of research, i.e. visual language or language of the cultural and community identification. Landscape-painting is freed of its ideological function, but still has an important role in what concerns research and knowledge as it operates from within the language. The photographic image ranks within esthetics but it can also transgress it. The photographic image is more a tool of the political and social event, of the news – which in its turn is a trans-esthetic area, an area of hardship and of the day-to-day without a halo attached; it is the image-document, the image-testimony. In this latter case, we speak of a **fragment**, of a **cut-out** from a certain reality. The fragment taken from reality must act as a “window to the world” and also as censorship inside an *hors cadre* that makes reality (nature) continuous. More often than not, this way to capture reality by snippets is surprising and unveils a state of conflict. Conflict implies narration and narration can be found inside the fragment of reality – conflict of graphics, of the light, semantic/symbolic conflict, of rhythm etc. The fragmented photographic show-off reveals the craving for a photographic scenario, for a tell-tale of events via language.

What is the role of pictorial landscape in the contemporary era? Examples of landscape-painting from contemporary art converge greatly towards a “new realism”; closing reality in by photographic or digital means converge greatly towards a cleaned, purified image, where “beauty” is a synonym of “presence”. „Painting multiplies the number of plots, the techniques of theory, only to unveil and play with it”, says Lyotard. We don’t know to what extent landscape image would prefer getting rid of the substance of the material of painting, but we can suppose it would not, since the substance is ever-returning, as we have seen.

To sum up, landscape-painting is the driver for the identification of the ego. And identification is *the* principle by which the ego receives its imaginary drawing. From the Renaissance and till photorealism, the various types of pictorial/landscape imaginings are basically various ways in which the ego is projected, never forgetting the psychoanalytical filter. Indeed, such identification is always heterogeneous, multi-vocal, and sometimes unpredictable. Inside language, of course this process comes

with technological and culturally predetermined images, mostly heteroclitite images. This game of the ego is no less than the game of the imagination, i.e. the auctorial instance easing our way towards the symbolic via language. The landscape *per se*, as a full-time component of reality (and virtual reality, too), will always provide varied models -including cultural models- prone to new challenges.