

EXTRACT: SHARON KIVLAND

We see her only from behind?

She is writing in a small dark notebook we only observe the corner of. Her elbow rest on the painting of a woman with a little dog. A Pomeranian.

...like in the Chekhov.

The portraiture is not quite contemporary.

Not quite?

It could be in the style of Patrick Proctor. Or perhaps Alice Neel. If it was Alice Neel it would be undeniable: a firm line, undeliberated. As Lord Nelson said: 'Never mind manoeuvres, always go straight at 'em!' No doubt the glance would be fiercely returned. If it was Patrick Proctor it would be weaker, less intense, more diffident, less convincing, more charming.

Can you describe it?

The woman is sitting at the centre of a large cream coloured armchair. She is wearing a light dress, dark blue with a simple white collar. The dog sits in her lap and rests its chin on her arm. It is a study from life. There is something about the eye of the woman and of the dog that gives it the urgency of a real exchange.

The woman with her back to us, what is she writing?

She is writing to a woman about a conversation about a work of art. She writes that her correspondent, a man whom she loved, says:

*'All I can do is tell the truth. No, that isn't so—I have missed it. There is no truth that, in passing through awareness, does not lie. I have done no more than touch on this, in view of my embarrassment where art—an element in which Freud did not bathe without mishap—is concerned. Please do not imagine that here—any more than elsewhere—I am indulging in some metaphorical game—that would be too puerile in view of the long and, God knows, serious enough terrain we have to cover. The two small arrows that you see indicated on the blackboard after *The Unconscious and Repetition* point towards the question-mark that follows. Think of what is pictured in the law of action and reaction.'*

The woman in the conversation asks what grounds it as praxis?

Then she writes her lover's answer, and all that followed: *'There is a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval. In this gap, something happens. I am not handling this topology very skilfully, because I do not have time—I have simply jumped into the deep*

end—but I think you will be able to feel guided. Certainly, this dimension should be evoked in a register that has nothing unreal, or dereistic, about it, but is rather unrealised.

There is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite?

It is always dangerous to disturb anything in that zone of shades. It is not the locus of the divinities of night. To resort to a metaphor, drawn from mythology we have, in Eurydice, twice lost, the most potent image.

Where is the background? Is it absent?

No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge—just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence.

Discontinuity, then, is the essential form?

If you know how to read them, you will see this threat in the apocalyptic frescos of Orvieto cathedral.

What does a woman want?

The appearance/disappearance takes place between two points, between the instant of seeing, when something of the intuition itself is always elided, not to say lost, and that elusive moment when the apprehension of the unconscious is not, in fact, concluded, when it is always a question of an 'absorption' fraught with false trails.

What is the point, then, of sustaining the theory according to which the dream is the image of a desire?

Everything is within reach, emerging.

And who would not have doubts?

First, the moment of seeing—which is not without mystery, although correctly enough defined in the psychological experience of the intellectual operation that is called insight. Secondly, the stage of understanding. Thirdly, the moment to conclude.

Well!

What we have here are those functions of contrast and similitude so essential in the constitution of metaphor, which is introduced by a diachrony. We do not know whether it is here that we shall find our Ariadne's thread. It is not the return of a form, an imprint, a eidos of beauty and good, a supreme truth, coming to us from the beyond.

Who masters, where is the master here, to be mastered?

What will become of the Vorstellung when, once again, this Repräsentanz of the mother—in her outline made up of the brush-strokes and gouaches of desire—will be lacking? I, too, have seen with my own eyes.

Nothing, perhaps? not perhaps nothing, but not nothing.

I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides. It is no doubt this seeing, to which I am subjected in an original way, that must lead us to the aims of this work, to that ontological turning back, the bases of which are no doubt to be found in a more primitive institution of form.

Must we not distinguish between the function of the eye and that of the gaze?

The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too.

What evidence can we really attach to this formula?

In this way one sees, in this unfinished work, the emergence of something like the search for an unnamed substance from which I, the seer, extract myself. From the toils, or rays, if you prefer, of an iridescence of which I am at first a part, I emerge as eye, assuming, in a way, emergence from what I would like to call the function of seeingness.

But what is the gaze?

From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure. Furthermore, of all the objects in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire, the gaze is specified as unapprehensible.

How shall we try to imagine it?

I have only to remind you of Goya, for example.

Is it not precisely because desire is established here in the domain of seeing that we can make it vanish?

Around the geometral perspective, the picture is organised in a way that is quite new in the history of painting.

What do you see? What is this strange, suspended, oblique object in the foreground in front of these two figures?

The two figures are frozen, stiffened in their showy adornments. Between them is a series of objects that represent in the painting of the period the symbols of vanitas. What, then, before this display of the domain of appearance in all its most fascinating forms, is this

object, which from some angles appears to be flying through the air, at others to be tilted? You cannot know — for you turn away, thus escaping the fascination of the picture. This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze.

But I don't understand...

It is not a question in painting of a realistic reproduction of the things of space — a term about which one could have many reservations. The secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. It is a use, therefore, of the geometrical dimension of vision in order to capture the subject, an obvious relation with desire which, nevertheless, remains enigmatic.

What is the desire which is caught, fixed in the picture, but which also urges the artist to put something into operation?

In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap.

How can we try to apprehend that which seems to elude us?

In the picture, the artist, we are told by some, wishes to be a subject, and the art of painting is to be distinguished from all others in that, in the work, it is as subject, as gaze, that the artist intends to impose himself on us. To this, others reply by stressing the object-like side of the art product. The relation between the painter and the spectator, is a play, a play of trompe-l'œil, whatever one says. There is no reference here to what is incorrectly called figurative, if by this you mean some reference or other to a subjacent reality.

I do not think so.

Expressionist painting, and this is its distinguishing feature, provides something by way of a certain satisfaction.

Beyond the appearance, is there a lack, or the gaze?

I am thinking of the work of such painters as Munch, James Ensor, Kubin, or even of that painting which, curiously enough, one might situate in a geographical way as laying siege to that which in our time is concentrated in painting in Paris.

Where does that get us?

It already gives form and embodiment to the field.

Is it in this direction that we must look?

Broadly speaking, one can say that the work calms people, comforts them, by showing them that at least some of them can live from the exploitation of their desire.

What is it that attracts and satisfies us?

Let us not forget that the painter's brushstroke is something in which a movement is terminated. It is by means of the gesture that the brushstroke is applied to the canvas.

What is a gesture?

Approaching the question in this way does not settle it.

Nevertheless, it is a rough indication worth making as a start.

At this level, we can get nothing more out of it—for it is a dead loss, with no gain to show, except perhaps its resumption in the function of pulsation. The loss is necessarily produced in a shaded area. One may go so far as to believe that the opacity...

But let us look at it more closely.

It is this part that closes the door, or the window, or the shutters, or whatever—and that the beauty with whom one wishes to speak is there, behind, only too willing to open the shutters again.

It is certainly love that provides its model. What better way of assuring oneself, on the point on which one is mistaken, than to persuade the other of the truth of what one says!

But this is not all I have to show you.

One dimension is eluded.

I would like to show you...

Is it an object of perception? From what angle do we approach it? Where does it come from?

I will present you with a model, which will have to be improved a great deal later, so take it as a problematic model. You can draw an image like those great balls in which the number to be drawn in a lottery are enclosed.

It is certainly very odd.

This is not the place to embark on a lecture, even a short one.

Where is all this leading? What does this mean?

For this sector at which the fields appear to overlap is, if you see the true profile of the surface, a void. This surface belongs to another. There is a second necessity that emerges

from this figure, that is, that it must, in order to close its curve, traverse at some point the preceding surface, at that point, according to the line.

You are rather preoccupied by it.

You must follow my thinking here. It's not simply a matter of turning things upside-down.

All this may be no more than a kind of game.

It is at the level of desire that we will be able to find the answer. In other words—for the moment, I am not fucking, I am talking to you. When we look at it more closely, we see that something new comes into play—the category of the impossible.

Personally, I see nothing against this. Let me say that if there is anything resembling a drive it is a montage in the sense in which one speaks of montage in a surrealist collage.

At the other extreme, there is interpretation. Interpretation concerns the factor of a special temporal structure that I have tried to define in the term metonymy. As it draws to its end, interpretation is directed towards desire, with which, in a certain sense, it is identical. Desire, in fact, is interpretation itself.

Ah, the pleasure of seeing.

Being seen? Is it the same thing? Where is the subject, where is the object? What one looks at is what cannot be seen. I will show you. It should be subjected, parenthetically, to serious scrutiny.

It may be that there is a veil here, that should not be lifted too quickly. What have seeing and being seen in common?

Indeed, this throws some light on that singular object. I will give you its materialisation at once. It obviously has an erotic function, which all those who have approached it in reality have perceived.

I wish to dwell on this for a moment.

Not at all—not at all—not at all.

I go to one side or the other, I don't care, one's as good as the other.

There must be something special about this.

This doesn't seem to amount to very much.

The thing is essential if we are to articulate properly—it immediately throws some light on very different regions—what is the sign of interpretation.

Is not this something quite different from the aim of knowledge? Does this mean that no knowledge is aimed at?

Personally, I don't feel very close to it.

There is something here that deserves to be illustrated.

It may seem that I am taking you a long way from the field of our experience. The apparent neutrality of this field conceals the presence of desire as such.

Mmm... Well... I cannot follow you in this direction because I think it's a short circuit.

I am not saying that I have resolved this question by formulating it.

Around what does it turn?

This pivotal point is what I designate—in a way, which, I think, will seem to you sufficiently justified, but which, I hope, as we progress, will appear more and more clear to you, more and more necessary.

It is never more than a way of avoiding the essence of the matter.

It is quite certain, as everyone knows, that no-one can claim to represent, in however slight a way, a corpus of absolute knowledge.

This is not the question. How often in our experience does it happen that we discover only very late some important biographical detail?

This obstacle is never lifted, nor ever to be lifted. If there is something that is situated at the level of the experiment of the conditioned reflex, it is certainly not the association of a sign with a thing. We have the model for a whole series. As usual, I must break off a train of thought in order to keep things within certain limits.

I almost blush.

There is no possible law to be given of what might be the good in objects. In the images of beneficent, favourable objects, we have found a certain type of objects which, in the final resort, can serve no function.

What could be more ordinary than to identify?

The intuitive use of these terms, on the basis of the feeling that one has of understanding them, and of understanding them in an isolated way as revealing their dimension in the common understanding, is obviously at the source of all the misapprehensions and

confusions. In the register of pleasure, then, we can make for ourselves an objectifiable foundation.

Subjective positions, then?

I am not committing myself. Let us move on.

How can we be sure that we are not imposters?

I would put a question-mark here—Is it a pact? Is it something else? What passes through this dimension?—in all the answers we get, we will always find this mark, by which is invoked the beyond of religion, operational and magical.

You should know what I desire in all this.

Remember what I articulated for you about the function of the gaze, of its fundamental relations to the ink-blot, of the fact that there is already in the world something that looks before there is a view for it to see, that the ocellus of animal mimicry is indispensable as a presupposition to the fact that a subject may see and be fascinated, that the fascination of the ink-blot is anterior to the view that discovers it. It is not so much our vision that is solicited, as our gaze that is aroused.'