



THE CHIFFONIER

- *Sergei Sviatchenko: Art, Archetypes
and Philosophy*

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Prologue.

"Sergei Sviatchenko is an artist constantly in flux. His shape-shifting art draws on the world around him, harnessing the cultural tides with twenty-five years of image-making. Sviatchenko speaks a unique creative language. His art sits somewhere between the known and the unimaginable – merging pop culture with politics, personal memory with collective histories, or architecture and science with the logic of dreams".

- Faye Dowling, *Dazed and Confused*

Sergei Sviatchenko strikes me as an artist who is comfortable with the fusion of contrasting elements. That is, an artist whose vision does not carve the world up into mutually exclusive categories. An artist whose vision speaks to people across time and space. Sviatchenko states that the 'purpose of [his] work is to find some sort of code', that resonates on an 'unconscious level' within people from both his generation and the 'new internet generation', in order to 'create the act of communication'. More specifically, he intends to 'create' this 'new visual language' by combining traditional collage methods with the new 'digital medium' of the internet. In his project entitled 'LESS' (a collection of multimedia photo collages), he encourages us as spectators to 'reflect upon the power of images and think about how meaning is attributed, exchanged and constantly contested'. That is, he encourages us to view an artwork's 'meaning' as a fluid concept; subject to different perspectives from different individuals and perhaps even within the same individual. His artworks thus seem to merge the familiar with the unfamiliar, the essential with the particular, and the traditional with the modern.



01. Crows from Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*. Source.

In particular, Sviatchenko refers to the notion of 'archetypes', as outlined in the Analytical Psychology of Carl Jung, as a primary source of inspiration, believing that it provides a 'nourishing basis for the creative imagination'. There are some who share Sviatchenko's interest in symbols, myths, dreams and the realm of the unconscious in general. For example, Michael Stratton, in his article 'Akira Kurosawa's dreams: creating an unconscious autobiography', examines the significance of eight dreams presented in the film *Akira Kurosawa's Dreams*. For Stratton, this film not only provides revealing insights into Kurosawa's life, but it also enables us to 'further explore our own lives through the viewing of the most primitive yet advanced aspects of ourselves – our dreams'.¹ Furthermore, he promotes the concept of 'dream appreciation' rather than 'dream interpretation' as he believes that the latter approach is somewhat 'reductive', 'leaving us with simplistic answers for symbols that may have many layers and resonate in different ways in response to different tones'.² According to Stratton, the 'shift in perspective' that occurs when we view the world and ourselves through the 'lens of a

Kurosawa's Van Gogh



work of art' or 'our dreams', 'can offer us a cornucopia of options for perception'.³ He thus seems to share Sviatchenko's view that an artwork's 'meaning' (for want of a better word) is fluid, rather than merely static and unequivocal.

On a broader level, perhaps what is most striking about Sviatchenko's artworks is his fusion of the eternal and immutable aspect of existence with its changeable and contingent aspect. On the one hand, he draws upon the Jungian notion of archetypes, that is, the symbols, myths and images that are embedded in the 'collective

unconscious' and that thus transcend time and place. On the other hand, he is also concerned with the evolution of these 'archetypes' through their confrontation and intertwining with the empirical aspects of existence, that is, the continually changing social, political and historical environment in which they are embedded. As Sviatchenko states, 'My memory keeps and reflects the historical and political events, music, style and art of the 1960s-1970s. Those powerful and important years break through from the unconscious and stimulate action'.



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- 02. Andy Warhol (Mao Tse Tung c. 1972).
- 03. Tom Wesselmann (Sunset Nude with Matisse Odalisque c. 2003).
- 04. Jasper Johns (False Start).
- 05. Yves Klein (Archisponge [RE11] c. 1960).
- 06. Richard Hamilton (Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing c.1956).
- 07. Robert Rauschenberg (Untitled c.1963).



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08. Santana. Source.
09. The Doors. Source.
10. Janis Joplin at Woodstock. Source.
11. Pink Floyd. Source.
12. The Beatles. Source.
13. Aphrodite's Child. Source.



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14. Walter Gropius (Bauhaus school, Dessau). Source.
15. Mies Van Der Rohe (New National Gallery, Germany). Source.
16. Le Corbusier. Source.
17. Alvar Aalto. Source.
18. Philip Johnson (Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts). Source.



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19. Andrei Tarkovsky. Source.
20. Ingmar Bergman. Source.
21. Akira Kurosawa. Source.
22. Michelangelo Antonioni. Source.

While Sviatchenko's artworks seem to seamlessly fuse change with changelessness, this fusion between these two apparently contradictory elements has not always been seamless in the philosophical tradition. It would perhaps be interesting to explore these notions of archetypes, change and changelessness (that are suggested in Sviatchenko's artworks) by tracing them back to their philosophical roots. To this end, I will discuss the philosophy of Plato, Heraclitus and Nietzsche. Plato's 'Theory of Forms', which is crucial to his *Metaphysics* and *Epistemology*, presents us with one of the earliest notions of archetypes. For Plato, 'forms', being divine, immutable and eternal, are 'special entities' that 'exist outside of space and time and that are both the objects of knowledge and somehow the cause of whatever transpires in the physical world'.⁴ These 'forms' are 'universals', in other words, 'feature[s]' or 'propert[ies]' that can be 'shared' by 'many' or a few things.⁵ A paradigm example of a Platonic 'form', which is particularly relevant to art, is Beauty. According to Plato, only those who are able to differentiate between the 'idea' (i.e. the 'form') of 'absolute beauty' and 'objects which participate in the idea' (e.g. beautiful paintings, flowers, people, etc.) possess 'knowledge' (rather than mere 'opinion').⁶ Furthermore, only these people may be called 'true philosophers' or 'lovers of

PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS		
	OBJECTS	FACULTIES OF MIND
NOUMENAL OR INTELLIGIBLE WORLD	The Good	Intelligence, knowledge
	Mathematical Ideas	Thinking, understanding
PHENOMENAL OR SENSIBLE WORLD	Sensible objects	Belief
	Images	Imagining

the vision of truth'.⁷

In contrast with Plato's emphasis upon the realm of eternal and immutable forms, Heraclitus (as he was interpreted by Plato) presents us with the 'flux doctrine' or the idea that the 'material' or physical world is continually changing.⁸ (Please note that Plato's interpretation of Heraclitus has been the subject of much debate over the years.) Nietzsche's notion of 'becoming' bears Heraclitus' imprint. For Nietzsche, 'movement' possesses 'real *immortality*',⁹ in other words, what is unchangeable is change itself. He thus (rather poetically and

cryptically) describes 'becoming' as the 'everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is'.¹⁰

In fact, it is probably Nietzsche who links art, change and changelessness in the most interesting way. He encourages us to view the 'world' in which we live as a 'painting' that is continually '*evolving*' and ourselves as the 'painters' of this 'world'.¹¹ Unlike Plato who views painters unfavourably as being 'imitator[s]' who are far removed from the 'truth',¹² Nietzsche thinks that this 'world' that we have painted with

our 'moral, aesthetic, and religious claims' is the 'result of a number of errors and fantasies', but nevertheless contains a 'collected treasure of our entire past'.¹³ As the abovementioned statement suggests, Nietzsche is not overly concerned with the dichotomy between truth and illusion. Truth, for him, is simply a human creation or construct, the 'sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding'.¹⁴

The question remains as to where we could situate Sergei Sviatchenko's artistic vision in this philosophical collage. As an artist who, in Faye Dowling's words, 'is constantly in flux', perhaps Sviatchenko is attempting to capture this ever-changing and fundamentally human world of art in his collages and films. A world wherein meanings and symbols are simultaneously solidified, eroded and propelled along the ever-flowing river of time. A Heraclitean world wherein 'You cannot step twice into the same river', but also a world containing both eternal, Platonic forms and tangible, sensuous delights.

SERGEI SVIATCHENKO: LESS



Собирая звёзды на пальцах,
как белый снег на траве.
Перебирая воздух в губах
Холодных как лёд.
Ты выплюнешь всё
Слоистой водой,
И поплывёшь как бездомная рыба во тьме.
А еще разрешишь всем встречать свет вчерашний.
И звёзды. Не на земле, а на твёрдой прозрачной
Серебряной воде.

Sergei Sviatchenko





The largest canvas I've ever seen,
moved at 24 frames per second
and spoke to me in French.

I couldn't believe that a canvas
could speak to me (in French)
but it did. And it looked so much

like Paris that I thought I was there.
(But canvases always lie, even the
ones that skip and chat like schoolgirls.)

Corinne Marchand sat in a café,
(un cliché)
Flickering, crying, dying away.
(c'est nausée.)

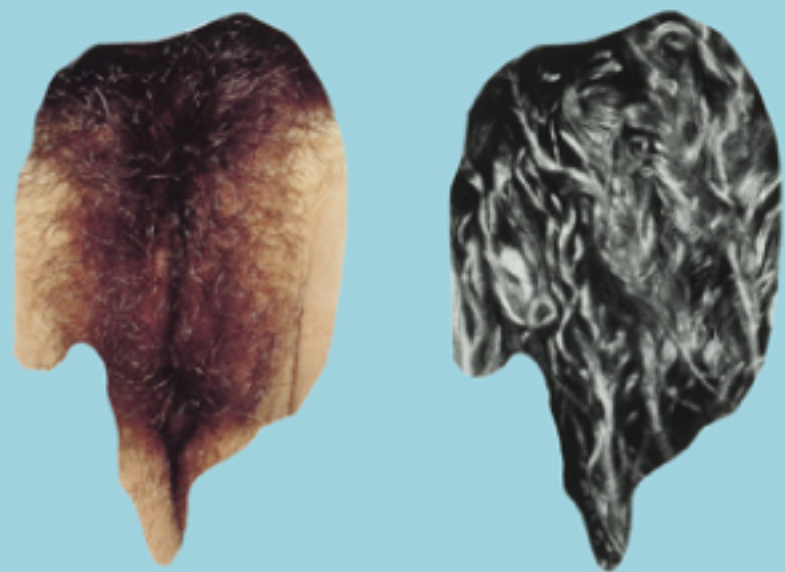
Liam O'Brien











My eyes are open to this world.
You are having an affair with the television.

I am a supporter of the local arts.
Your voyeurism is not bound by locality.

My dreams are filled with inspiration.
Your dreams are of actresses and tentacles.

One night, I went out under the stars
One night you got so drunk you painted

And contemplated wine, music, beauty,
All over your walls, your stereo, your girlfriend

Til Venus kissed me, and brought me home.
You ran outside screaming, and everyone saw.

Liam O'Brien



Музыка
Раскрывая руки
Закрывая двери
Проходя через щели
Забывая окна
Выходя через солнце
Завернувшись тенями
Заходя в тишину
Наслаждаясь звуком
Сжимая пальцы
Открывая двери
Застревая в проходе
Превратившись светом
Выходя на звук
Всё это вместе
Ни что иное
Как музыка
для чувствительных
и ранимых особ

Sergei Sviatchenko









The wheels complain,
the gravel sprays,
back today,
no delay;
"trains are art,"
I heard you say;
never argue,
that's the way.
Pursue the new,
end the day;
stay in my seat,
all day, all day.
Magazines
to keep me sane,
but it's all the same,
at end of day.
Train moves,
art moves,
again and again.
Go, train,
go, time,
away, away.

Liam O'Brien











Быть

Бросать палки на лёд
и смотреть.

Бить лёд ногой в надежде пробить.

Плыть вдоль по реке

В надежде спастись.

Спасать себя в надежде

Простить.

Бросать, бить, ползать и плыть
в надежде быть.

Sergei Sviatchenko



Thirty-six, twenty-four, thirty-six:
she's made seven films, I've seen six.
She's won three awards, I've won none
So I worship her in the August sun.

I am married to her, in my dreams;
we live with Pollock, Neutra, Eames.
I'm twelve foot tall, have arms like eels
My eyes are fire, my teeth are steel.

Liam O'Brien





*Взбудоражив палкой отструганной гладкой,
Прохладно-кисловатый привкус муравьиных гор,
Ты вонзил ногу в трепещущий рай и лес,
Протараненный сумашедшими глазами как больной.
А уходя, закрутив облака как бумагу над лесом с
остатками воздуха, солнца и лет,
Ты крался назад по жирной траве как по маслу,
Следя за теми кого уже нет.*

Sergei Sviatchenko

23. Sergei Sviatchenko
(Street & White). Source.

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