THE MNEMONIC UNCANNY: CATARINA PATRÍCIO’S DRAWINGS

We humans are, inevitably, our memories, both personal and collective. Nietzsche contrasted this condition with that of the animals, apparently unburdened by their individual histories or cultural and historical traditions. Above the drawing of a typewriter is the inscription “I can remember absolutely everything, young man. That’s my curse.” And below we read “That’s one of the greatest curses ever inflicted on the human race. Memory.” Shades of Borges’s “Funes the Memorious.” Like many of Catarina Patrício’s images her drawing recalls a visual landmark of our cultural memory while questioning that signature faculty. The words are spoken in Orson Welles’s iconic film Citizen Kane, which is a quest to distill the truth about its eponymous subject through the recollections of multiple subjects. Despite this witness’s confidence, the notoriously labyrinthine and multi-perspectival film leaves viewers to puzzle over its enigmas – or perhaps to relish memory’s ambiguities, its différance? The blank paper in the typewriter could remind us that Plato asked whether writing itself was a poor substitute for active memory and thought. The scene of chimpanzees surrounding a pissing boy’s statue (reminding us of Brussels and the EU?) parodically evokes our memory of another unforgettable movie, Kubrick’s 2001. There an ape is startled by a mysterious plinth into tool use that eventually leads to human evolution and space travel; here the chimps are fascinated by the opportunity to enjoy a golden shower. Will future lords of the Earth be adventurous astronauts or kinky bureaucrats? Memory is affirmed in “Still the Origin of the World,” Patrício’s sly homage to Courbet, that winks to Magritte. “THIS IS NOT KANT” cautions us against either vulgar reduction or the over-theorization associated with the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s fetishization of the painting, which he hid beneath the screen of another. Most of Patrício’s drawings are in markedly softer focus than the stills to which they refer, reminding us, as Freud well knew, that memory and dream are closer than our waking pride wishes to admit.

Gary Shapiro

Tucker-Boatwright Professor of Humanities and Philosophy, Emeritus

University of Richmond