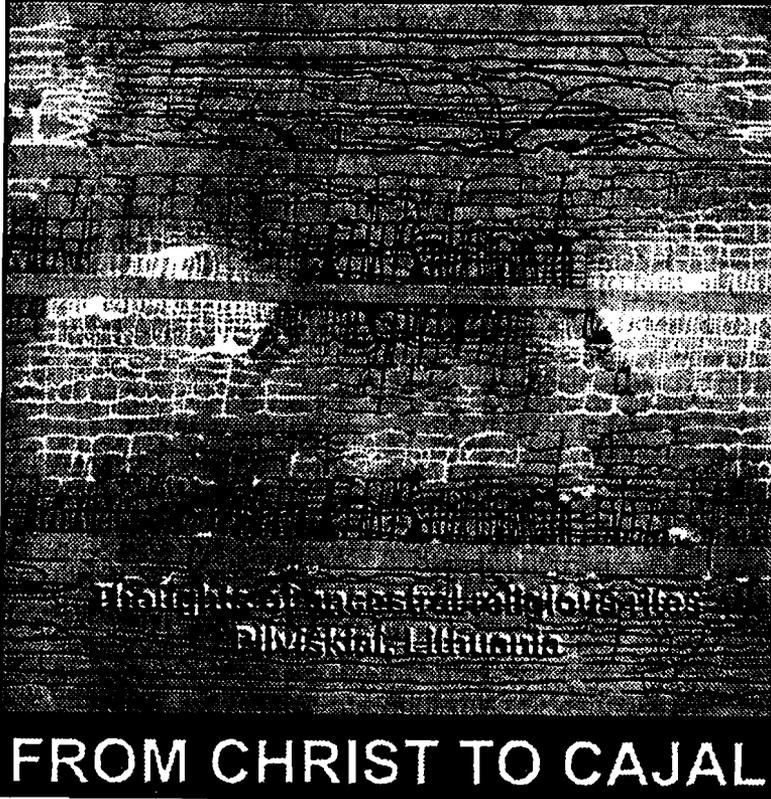


NEUROTHEOLOGY



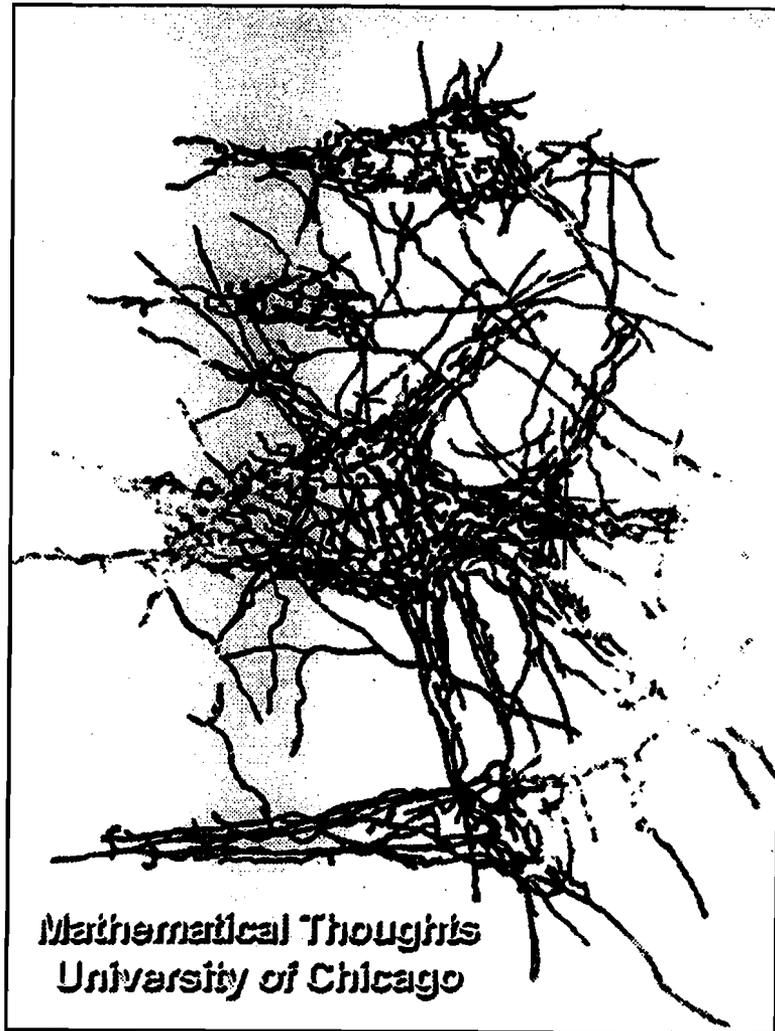
Audrius Plioplys. „Mathematical Thoughts. University of Chicago”.

SCOPE OF AUDRIUS PLIOPLYS' ART WORK EXPANDS

I would like to remind you that the artwork of Audrius Plioplys had been dominated by the most pure elements of conceptualism. During an exhibit in 1981 he displayed a work about a point. He drew a point on a piece of white paper, erased it, signed it, framed it, and then exhibited it. Later, as he was writing and publishing his medical-neurologic research articles (he is a neurologist), he took his published works, framed them and exhibited them. That was a slightly more firm conceptual thought demonstration than the erasing of a point. With time, Plioplys decided to incorporate into his art, photographs. Just the fact that the works were exhibited, raised the value of the images to that of art. It must be admitted that in fact this is true art, because one of the hallmarks of conceptual art is the courage of the author to sign his work. When Plioplys started visually photodocumenting his outdoor works, that was another step away from pure conceptualism, another step closer to the incorporation of aesthetic elements into his art.

In the current exhibit at the Balzekas Museum in Chicago the colors used and the beauty of the works nearly totally overwhelm Plioplys' prior bare-boned conceptual art. Abstract conceptual ideas are actually more abundant in this exhibit than in previous ones, but this show is also extremely beautiful.

The beauty lies in the primary colors (yellow, red and blue) and secondary colors (orange, green and purple) sparkling in the total context of the exhibit. In the center of each work are visible neuronal and neuronal network drawings made by the Spanish neuroanatomist Santiago Ramon y Cajal at the beginning of the last century. (For his neuroanatomic discoveries, Cajal received the



Mathematical Thoughts
University of Chicago

Audrius Plioplys. „Thoughts of ancestral religious rites. Piliškių, Lithuania”.

Nobel Prize in 1906). Over a photographic base of his own artistic photographs (Plioplys enlarged Cajal's drawings, and subtracted them from overlying colors, using computer techniques), these images barely are visible, barely emergent through the thin neuronal threads. But they in fact are there and are present, as if they were deeply submerged visual memories. In these kinds of comparisons, in addition to Plioplys' ever present conceptual thoughts, there is the presence of ever growing and developing aesthetic concerns. The works are beautiful and are secretive. What do they mean?

The primary theme and purpose of the exhibit is to find the relationship between human consciousness, materialism, and the mind's created objects' spirituality. Plioplys tries to do this using two investigative approaches by delineating memory and abstract thought processes.

The phenomena of memory is represented by the author by overlaying two images one on top of the other—behind the webwork of neuronal threads is hidden an actual real-life photographic image. The titles of the images are written directly on the works themselves: "University of Chicago", "Mexico City", "Pilviskiai, Lithuania". These are places where the author himself has visited and where memories are still ever present in his mind. The author pays much attention to the nervous system. Eventhough it is a physiologic entity, it is nevertheless capable of defining elements which can jump well beyond their own limits, such as to autobiographic recollections from the past. This is a great jump into another sphere of existence. The capacity of memory to fix nonmaterial elements—such as the march of time into the past—means that material objects assume spiritual qualities. Memory is a consequence of a combination of matter and spirit. In the exhibit, nervous system networks and the underlying remembered art works do not fully accent the relationship between them. The viewer must conceptualize and decipher the relationship. Plioplys does not clearly express his own opinion about the spiritual nature of memory, because he knows that in life, and in the academic world, the relationship between matter and spirituality is not fully delineated. Researchers continue to disagree amongst themselves. One group feels that purely physiologic processes can explain consciousness, and another feels that this phenomena must be ascribed to a totally different sphere of activity removed from material existence, usually termed spiritual. By comparing neuronal activity and the phenomena of memory, Plioplys states this relationship as a fact, but from the organization of the exhibit it is not clear which of the two arguments concerning the spiritual and memory he himself supports. However, that becomes more clear when we approach matter—neurons, nerve terminals and concrete life visualizations—in combination with human abilities that greatly exceed that of physical matter: abstract thought processes.

The title of the exhibit incorporates theological terminology: "Neurotheology: from Christ to Cajal". In the works themselves, using handsome lettering, philosophic, theological and visual thoughts are written: "Mathematical Thoughts, University of Chicago", "Thoughts of ancestral religious rites, Pilviskiai, Lithuania." These titles, overlaid on top of pictorial images of nervous system networks and remembered visual images, mean that the organism itself, which works according to ordinary material principles, is capable of evoking purely spiritual effects. But that is not all. Plioplys's art accomplishes one further, even higher jump into the upper spheres, than even the spiritualization of human mental abilities. As witnessed in the title of the exhibit, he speaks about that which takes the human spirit further beyond itself—into transcendence. Fearlessly, the author tackles theological issues, in an attempt to show that with the use of neurologic networks it is possible to aspire to seek contact with the Absolute Being, which itself transcends the limits of the material universe. Several neuronal networks are entitled "Theological Thoughts". That is, the nervous system creates thoughts about the divine. In one work, there is a quotation from the Gospel of Thomas: "Jesus said, 'If flesh came into being because of spirit, that is a marvel, but if spirit came into being because of the body, that is a marvel of marvels'" (Gospel of Thomas 29:1-2). Extending their hands and arms into realms that do not belong to them, into transcendence, neurons far exceed their own capabilities. How that happens is a secret of secrets. Nevertheless, the capacity of exceeding one's own abilities is a fact of human existence.

Audrius Plioplys, having wandered through the most complex labyrinths of material existence, speaks through his art works: the material world is not everything, above it floats another Existence. Eventhough we approach it as if through a fog, it is nevertheless real. The neurons and neuronal networks that we see through the microscope produce a whole that is considerably more than the sum of its individual parts. (Translated from the original Lithuanian.)