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© LARISA V. KUZNETSOVA

*Repin Saint-Petersburg State Academic Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture,  
Russian Academy of Arts  
laravk@inbox.ru; luckywk@gmail.com*

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### **SPACE-TIME CONCEPT OF AN IMPRESSIONISTIC PAINTING**

*SUMMARY. Exploring the Philosophy of an Impressionistic Painting field of research, this paper focuses on such kind of fundamental aspect as a problem of space and time. Novelty and objectivity of this research is in an attempt to find the origin of the space-time concept of an impressionistic painting within the framework of two philosophical systems: West European and Far Eastern (Japanese).*

*Research results substantiate our assumption that the category of impressionistic time and space reflects new mentality for European tradition, breaking through positivist limits of the age. The space-time concept of impressionists happens to be closer to the Japanese world perception and philosophical tradition (Zen Buddhism) in terms of its aims and choice of artistic devices, as well as interrelations between spaces of a picture, artist and spectator. The reviewed sources make it possible to conclude that impressionists for the first time ever abandon the European tradition of existential consistency for the unstable subject-temporal concept, confirming continuous cooperation between the categories of space and time, and dominance of the latter.*

*KEW WORDS. Space of an impressionistic painting, subject-temporal concept of French impressionists, C. Monet, extreme positivism (subjectivism and sensualism), Zen Buddhism.*

Impressionism was developed in an epoch of a general cultural crisis of the western European civilization. As a part of an “anti-positivist reaction” which was revealed “first in the philosophical thought, and then [...] in artistic life” [1; 26], it was a kind of “response” to the dominance of positivism and the centuries-old dictates of ratio [2; 115-116]. A new perception of the world created by the impressionism has been reflected in the impressionistic painting and, first of all, in one of its main components, the construction of space. According to A. Yakimovich, the space of a picture is capable of expressing indigenous representations of an epoch and culture [3; 6]. In the case of an impressionistic painting, the category of time is no less important, as well as its relationship to space. An attempt to find philosophical foundations of the spatial-temporal conception of an impressionistic painting in the frames of the two systems (Western European and Far Eastern (Japanese)) is the novelty of this research.

According to M. Dvořák, works of art by their nature are a concentrated expression of a specific common spiritual orientation of an epoch. He introduces the concept of “Late Antique Impressionism”, which is characterized by the following spatial characteristics: “tangible, plastically three-dimensional space is almost completely

eliminated. Figures seem to be originating — like shadows or ghosts — from somewhere in the surrounding, from infinite, unformed, free space” [4; 22-23].

P. A. Florensky broadly interprets the notion of impressionistic space binding impressionism primarily with the philosophical “background”. In his opinion, a tactile approach (typical of painting in general, and especially of the impressionistic painting) to the organization of space with the help of no lines but dots-smears, and hence colour stain and other textures, can be found in the works of Tintoretto, El Greco, partly Rembrandt, and Delacroix. “All of this tends to create a coloured medium which is passive, non coherent, devoid of design and, therefore, for its lethargy, is easily conformed to the composition. [...] This is the space of Descartes, completely filled with countless parts of matter with which it is [...] fully identified” [5, 29]. Ortega y Gasset also takes the theory of Rene Descartes as the basis to understand the impressionistic space.

In the essay “About the point of view in art” he considered impressionism as a kind of a culmination of the development of the Western European art culture, which began in the 17th century from a creative method of Velasquez in art and Descartes’ rationalism in philosophy. The 17th century is an epoch of “the origin of painting of the empty space. Philosophy is empowered by Descartes. [...] In the metaphysical foreground there is the only substance — a hollow, immaterial, peculiar metaphysical emptiness which is vested with the magical power of creation. Only space is real for Descartes, as emptiness is real for Velasquez” [6; 201-202].

Ortega y Gasset considers extreme positivism (subjectivism and sensationalism) to be a cultural analogy of impressionism in philosophy. “For two subsequent centuries subjectivism has been gaining strength, and by 1880, when impressionists began to fix clean feelings on canvases, philosophers, the representatives of extreme positivism, reduced all the universal reality to pure sensations” [6; 202].

Impressionists chose a lateral vision, a vision that is “out of the corner of the eye”, in which almost nothing remains of subjects because of their disunity. “Instead of a thing there is experience, that is the set of sensations,” in other words, of the subjective states “through or by which these things” are “revealed” to the artist [6; 198]. Thus, art is focused on the subject, and the point of view is in itself.

How does it affect pictorial space? It is dematerialized. “The emptiness disappears” and in the forefront there is a “background of Velasquez’s emptiness [...] Painting tends to become flat as a canvas itself. Any echoes of former physicality and tangibility disappear” [6; 198].

Ortega y Gasset managed to find European roots of flatness in an impressionistic picture, both in painting and in philosophy. A more traditional view for art connects flatness with the influence of the Japanese artistic tradition, although according to the Japanese artistic tradition emptiness and flatness have a religious significance and serve as an important artistic function.

In Sumi-e painting the empty background should have been understood “as boundless space — the entire cosmos in which there is no emptiness” [7; 86]. All the elements beyond the bounds of the visible had to be connected by a viewer’s consciousness as it was required by Zen teaching. Unlike other schools of traditional Buddhism,

it was a “path leading — through meditation and concentration on the smallest details of everyday life — to enlightenment (satori)” [7; 84]. For meditation any object was used, helping to accelerate the process of realizing, for example, only six fruits of persimmon, giving the possibility for the believer to freely interpret and analyze the image [8; 28]. But it is, in fact, one of the basic tenets of impressionism!

Zen art served to awaken, activate spiritual growth of the believer, so the works of its masters relied mainly on the indication and the hint, requiring from the believer to make efforts to achieve personal enlightenment. An incomplete fragment or emptiness were included in the work, in order for “the spectator to intuitively complete the author’s intention, naturally perceive and supplement it with form and composition [ ...] In this orientation of Zen to the “enlightenment” any work of art is valuable only because it conveys life — always incomplete, torn, as a non-painted circle, barely readable, as the final touches of an almost dry brush which caught the mood and ephemerality with very subtle contours ...” [7, 84].

Incompleteness of work is a feature of an impressionistic painting, to which artists came consciously. An impressionistic picture created the feeling of immediacy, incompleteness and reticence and as a scroll of a Japanese master it demanded the maximum active position from a spectator. At that, like in the works of Japanese art, a person looking at a picture was involved in its space. Unrolling the roll on the floor, the master and the spectator looked down on it and became the participants of the image, merged with its rhythm.

It should be noted that the openness of the space was found both in the Western European Renaissance and in classical art. The examples of this “waiting” space [3; 7] can be the canvases of Raphael, Jean Fouquet, Poussin. “More active, exciting or drawing in space” [3; 7] was typical of the works of the Baroque epoch. However, there was a fundamental difference in the relations between the creator and the perceiver of his creation with open spaces of Western European and Japanese works of art. In contrast to the inside position of the artist and the spectator in relation to the space of a picture, characteristic of Japanese artistic traditions, a European painter and a spectator held an outside (external) position opposing himself to the space of a picture. An artist was its semantic center (due to the changes of linear perspective, the three planes of the composition), embodying a new European concept of a man’s dominion over the environment, the spectator was to a greater or lesser extent concerned, sometimes empathic, but still an observer from the outside.

Impressionism became an anthropomorphic and anthropocentric finale of the picture of the world [9; 31]. Unlike the typical of the Renaissance portrayal of an endless and extended space in its entirety, the representatives of a new tendency were interested in the image of shallow interiors and close spaces, which inevitably led them to the conversion to axonometric perspective. It should be noted that this vision was typical both of the Far Eastern tradition (the oblique or isometric perspective [10; 114] of Japanese prints), and in certain periods for the European one (an axonometry of the antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Proto-Renaissance). An impressionist, “repulsing from their common baseline axonometric vision” [10; 114], creates something

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of his own, basing on his own view of the world, thrown by the man from the crowd, “from behind of a neighbour’s back” [11; 26].

This is a view of a citizen, in which there shows itself a characteristic feature of the urban culture’s abundance and kaleidoscope of impressions, “the dynamism of life, higher sensitivity and sensitiveness to changes, the speed of movement with new vehicles, the diversity of colours and the brightness of clothes” [12; 80-81]. An impressionistic canvas is “a piece of the world, captured and structured by the artist” [11; 26], this is a fragment of a “broader natural whole” [12; 79], which is close to the Japanese worldview. The arts of far Eastern masters and young French artists were united by a common goal — the reflection of life in its constant variability and dynamics, which regularly made impressionists address, in their spatial constructions, the compositional arsenal of Japanese etching called Ukiyo-e: fragmentation, slice technique, «pars pro toto» etc. The refuse from a rectilinear perspective with a fixed point of view led young artists to the Japanese multiplicity of points of view, and the destruction of the Renaissance conception of “sustainable frontal space with the man in the center” [10; 112] led to the formation of an impressionistic conception of unstable space. An impressionistic canvas loses its depth typical of the new Western European art, or rather its depth as if changing a direction overturns onto the plane, creating an “effect of orientation of canvas inside out” close to the medieval European art [10; 114]. The direct perspective is deformed “as if taking its forces backwards to the front of the canvas in more real space belonging to the picture that is not diverted from the spectator but turns to the spectator “[13; 132]. One of the favorite effects used by impressionists for this purpose was a “rampant” space “emerging from the depths” [12; 94]. They often moved figures closer to the border of the picture plane, which caused a feeling they might go beyond its limits. Thus, the impressionists came to the openness of the space of the canvas specific for the Japanese artistic tradition, and as a consequence, to the involvement of the spectator in it.

The problem of impressionistic space can be fully comprehended only in relation to the problem of time.

In classical paintings, even for a dynamic composition, an instant was portrayed as “everlasting” [14; 40], which was the aesthetic realization of rationalism. On the contrary, impressionists tried to achieve the effect of transiency.

In an effort to convey on a canvas the quick flow of time they were not the first in the Western European tradition. A similar task was being solved in the previous century by Watteau. But, in contrast with the continuous character of its flow in the works of impressionists, the time in the paintings of Watteau is discrete. Comparing one of his works with “Dance at the Moulin de la Galette”, I. E. Danilova comes to the conclusion that Watteau, remaining motionless, “watches the flow of time,” while “Renoir himself is in a temporary stream” [14; 66]. Thus, the dynamics of impressionistic paintings is expressed not through the images of the motion of an object as in the classical picture, but “through the dynamics of an external environment — the space of a picture as such, the space of an artist and a spectator” [12; 87]. The same can be said about the subject of the image. Resting or moving as a permanent whole

in the space of a classical painting, in an impressionistic painting the subject merges with a “temporal flow” and changes “its guises in it” [12; 91]. And, while impressionists (Renoir, Monet and others) use the movement of light as a means of fixing the temporal flow in paintings, the space itself becomes unsteady like distances in Monet’s pictures “disappearing” in a misty haze and in a game of light” [15; 161].

B. P. Vipper sees one of the main trends in paintings of the 19th century in projecting the temporal characteristics on spatial ones. According to him, the method received its theoretical justification in the works of Delacroix, and was realized completely in the works of French impressionists, for whom the quickness and simultaneity of perception served as a guarantee of optical unity of a picture [16; 254]. Moreover, Vipper came to the conclusion that in the conception of the new trend, the victory of time over the space was carried out [17; 21] as illustrated, for example, in impressionistic series. “Its manifestations can be found in the original “shading” of the third dimension in Monet’s spaces and emphasizing the forth one — not in the depth of space, but in its fluidity, continuous variation, permanent emphasis not on the subject, but on its “temporal shells” [12; 89].

Developing the problem of impressionistic time, V. N. Prokofiev comes to the conclusion that impressionists are interested in time not in its “discrete development” [18; 394], not in an “instant” but in “a transition [...] from one time point to another” [13; 120], in other words, the process of transformation of one moment to another, which indicates the unity of purposes of impressionism and Sumi-e painting.

Thus, in the categories of impressionistic space and time a new worldview for the European tradition is reflected, which overcomes the limitations of the positivist epoch. Despite the opportunity to discover the origins of space (emptiness, flatness, openness, axonometric perspective) and time (quick flow and continuity) characteristics in the philosophical and artistic traditions of Western Europe, the temporal-space conception of an impressionistic painting is in many ways closer to the Japanese worldview and philosophical traditions (Zen Buddhism).

To achieve a common goal with the Japanese masters — the reflection of life in its constant variability and dynamics, as a fragment of natural whole — impressionists did not only use the arsenal of artistic means (primarily compositional techniques) of Japanese prints, but also adopted the relationship of spaces of a painting, an artist and a spectator.

From an accepted stability of being in the Western European tradition impressionists firstly moved to the Japanese multiplicity of viewpoints and to the unstable subject-time conception: an unstable open space (often unsteady in Monet’s works) with the effect of overturning the depth inside-out, with the continuous process of transition from one moment to another, with the merging of an artist and the subject with a time flow and with the motion of light as a means for painting the latter. By their canvases the artists-innovators claim the continuity of interaction of the categories of space and time and the dominance of the latter, as evidenced by the series of Monet’s paintings.

Thus, the impressionism overcomes Renaissance traditions in understanding spatial-temporal relations and generates the artistic paradigm of a new century — the 20th century.

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