

Symbolic and Pre-verbatim in the Languages of Art in the Early Twentieth Century

Oleg Valentinovich Bespalov

Institute of Theory and History of Fine Arts of the Russian Academy of Arts
Moscow, Russia

E-mail: bespalov.o@merlion.ru

Abstract—Symbolic practices in the history of art and in the general history of culture refer to a common cultural symbolism, its processing and multiplication. Another significant meaning-generating principle, which is fundamentally unreflected by man and can be called "pre-verbatim", is located before, between, outside words and, more broadly, outside signs and symbols of culture. The author explores how the turn in art from a symbolic principle to a pre-verbatim one proves to be an essential characteristic of the various modernism branches emerging at the end of the 20th century.

Keywords—modernism; symbolic; pre-verbatim; existential experience; poetics of the possible; plastic thinking; experience of distinction

I. INTRODUCTION

Symbolic practices in the history of art and in the general history of culture refer to a common cultural symbolism, its processing and multiplication. When we consider a symbolic principle in culture and art, it often comes together with another principle, a pre-verbatim one, somewhat based on the former and somewhat complementing it.

The term "pre-verbatim" is used here not in the customary and usual meaning, but in the meaning already included in modern dictionaries of philosophy and cultural studies, as an unreflected part of human existence. It should be understood as something that is located not only in words, but also between, behind, outside words and, more broadly, outside signs and symbols of culture [1] - outside linguistics and culture. Let us take a look at the manifestations of the pre-verbatim – the "real" (as existential) and the "possible".

II. PRE-VERBATIM AS "REAL" AND "POSSIBLE"

The pre-verbatim, as we have already noted, acts as an unreflected part of human being, a special environment, often unnoticed, taken for granted, but at the same time supporting human lives. It is associated not only with the forces of nature or the everyday world, which could be called a "hidden" source of human existence. It is also associated with art images, for example, mysterious ones with those natural forces represented in their full capacity. Thus, the sphere of the pre-verbatim covers a boundless world of natural and cultural phenomena that are not described by

transparent structures and well-established symbols, but nevertheless, constitute people's lives.

The pre-verbatim is an ontological phenomenon. This is what a person should see in the surrounding real world behind the symbols which he has already used to describe this world. The pre-verbatim in ontology fills the gaps between the characters, sees life and matter between the signs of reality. All of the above has to do with the dimension of the pre-verbatim which can be called a true reality, or existential experience.

Despite the relatively short history of the term, it should be noted that a person has always been able to experience existence and to emerge oneself into a meaningful everyday life. At the same time, this "trans-historicity" of existence can be grasped, if we focus on the very first and probably the most fundamental principle — the "miracle of our existence" given to a person with no prior payment. This is what people have always felt (perhaps not theoretically, but practically). One has always realized that they are living "in here and now", that they exist in the current reality.

The symbolic, that is the spiritual, meaningful, embodied in conventional signs and symbols, largely depends on a person, and a person can dispose of it at his or her discretion. Existence, however, is "an inconceivable gift, the only thing that does not depend on a person. Surely, one can destroy it, but they cannot create their own existence" [2].

This miracle of existence, the joy of being here at a particular moment of life is the only thing that people cannot give themselves, but what is given to them from the outside out of pure generosity, as if to compensate for all the troubles, sorrows and horrors that are given to a mortal man from elsewhere. This is what allows one to claim that even when fate takes away everything that they are, they can return something, create something, and enrich their own being.

Art proves to be a unique way to utilize a person's abilities, which come from realizing a miraculous nature of one's existence. So apparently, the phenomenon of existentiality is something special and individual that a great artist contributes and has always contributed to the art of their time. Unlike symbols, the existential is indivisible, no longer decomposable into atoms. Indivisibility is a crucial feature of genuine individuality, which was established as early as in the Renaissance.

Thus, the intention of the real existential is trans-historical, accessible to all ages and styles. However, it is modernism (and pre-modernism) that is actively interested in the matter, purposefully, not coincidentally, bringing the reality-existentiality (with its "miracle of existence") to the fore.

Modernism is also interested in the field of the "possible" (or the poetics of the possible) [3]. The issue of the possible is one of the most essential in a person's life; it directly affects both one's self-awareness and art awareness. The term "possible" means not only "potential", or "feasible", but it also has a meaning of a kind of rhizome in relation to a person's inner life, that is, the unfulfilled, but imaginable — "how it could have been different". In the latter meaning, the concept of "possible" becomes categorical.

The possible is what is happening to a person in other forms of reality — apart from the reality itself. These other realities can and must be found to complete the picture of the world, where human consciousness actually lives. There are realities of thoughts, feelings, imagination. There is a reality of the past and its possibility (as it could have been). There is, for example a reality of a conversation with someone about something unfulfilled. There is also a reality of art.

At a certain point, the history of art grows distrustful of the real world, which forces artists to turn to the issue of the potential. This theme-line, proceeding from the late Renaissance through Baroque and Romanticism, at the beginning of the twentieth century comes to the art of modernism, which gets deeply involved in the possible realms of the pre-verbatim.

Meanwhile, the possible in a person's mind plays the same role as existential experience does in the surrounding reality: the possible in the spiritual space of a person fills cross-category voids, which are "outside symbolic values", with its own fullness.

Thus, the pre-verbatim-real is what is around us, something that does not catch the eye, so one needs to adjust their optics to see it. The pre-verbatim-possible is what inside us, in our mental settings, related not only to thinking and philosophy, but also to our inner life in a broad sense — with non-category or pre-category structures. Both of these principles (existentialism and the poetics of the possible) seem to be aimed at breaking cultural symbolism in the human mind and bringing back its true existence — "non-symbolic" being, being outside or before a symbol.

Another example of the pre-verbatim is plastic thinking as a whole, associated with both an artist and a viewer, that is, a person as a bearer of an anthropic principle in general [4]. Plastic thinking is interpreted as "non-verbal, non-conceptual", as "thinking in the matter" — thinking through senses, volumes, lines, light, shadow, colors. Here meanings are not introduced by an artist from the outside, but arise precisely as a result of plastic implementation, in the process of emergence of a "new materiality" of art.

Such an understanding of the essence of plastic thinking is very important for the modern understanding of the nature of art in general, which is now increasingly being recognized

as an independent "truth procedure" (as expressed by Alain Badiou [5]). It turns out that art is able to think on its own and in its own way, and, as a result of its events (art movements), "generates ideas and truths with individual works as their subjects". Aesthetics, in turn, ceases to deny art the immanence of truth, does not impose outside philosophy on it, and does not seek to make art its object.

These beliefs are extremely close to modernism: art has to cease to mean something, it has to simply "become", simply "be"! Truth is inherent in art itself, so no more symbolic interpretations (iconology, ekphrasis, etc. — everything that describes, but does not reveal). Based on the artistic experience of modernism, we can learn the maxim that art thinks by itself — without any symbolic and philosophical reflection. Modernism in this context — the search for materiality outside reflection and symbol — is trying to come to pure plasticity, that is, to stop thinking symbolically and focus on plastic thinking.

Perhaps that is the anthropological shift or breakthrough in modernism. Attention is now turned to the pre-verbatim, while the surrounding and previous cultures focus on the symbolic. Due to this anthropological shift, modernism "challenges" the interests of the art of the past — modernism has its own new interests now.

III. PRE-MODERNISM: THE BEGINNING OF DE-SYMBOLIZATION IN ART

Moving on to the specific expression of the above-mentioned components of the pre-verbatim in art, so favourably received by modernism, let us have a look at the following examples. Firstly, the two portraits, which rather belong to pre-modernism. Konstantin Somov's painting "Lady in blue. Portrait of E.M. Martynova", 1897-1900 (TG) is an example of manifestation of the phenomenon of existentialism in Romanticism. The overall romantic exterior in the painting (the vintage dress taking up half the canvas, the romantic landscape, the couple peacefully playing music in the background) contrasts with the expression of the lady's eyes, alarming and even tragic. Due to this contrast, we can see existentiality, the real, but not romanticized reality, incalculable, elusive, breaking through. Neo-romanticism seems to turn to existence, and, as if having breathed it in, rushes towards Realism.

Meanwhile, Realism succeeds when artists manage to use that existential motif in their paintings. Take, for example, Valentin Serov's "Portrait of Emperor Nicholas II", 1900 (TG). The emperor sitting half-turned, slightly stooping and bending forward, immediately turns into an ordinary person here and now. His tightly clenched hands impart existential tension to the image. The character's eyes seem to be asking the artist to finish painting as quickly as possible, and the viewer — to stop examining the portrait, as he finds this existence too tiring — the existence of posing and maybe also the existence of "being an emperor".

Impressionists also belong to pre-modernists, and a Russian researcher Nina Dmitrieva writes about the former

in her famous article about "the Peredvizhniks and the Impressionists". It is also about challenging symbolism in the current culture. As the author notes, "the Impressionists and the Peredvizhniks had a common enemy and, therefore, a common impulse for innovation: academicism and neo-academism with their unreality, conditional, standard beauty, outdated traditions, obsolete technology and the absence of a true national character". Here the author seems to be listing the components of the established symbolism.

"The academic system was something of the same type everywhere... Everyone promoted the classical picture as a fundamental standard, understood a color as the 'illumination' of the picture, favoured the mythologized 'history painting' ..." [6]

In that context, the realism that both the Peredvizhniks and the Impressionists tried to find behind the "outdated traditions", which became the symbols of academism, is associated with the pre-verbatim reality in which there is still life and existence. "... It is easy to imagine," writes N. Dmitrieva, "how the young painters Kramskoy and Monet were feeling. Being almost of the same age, they would have understood each other well if they had ever happened to meet. They were equally repelled by the lack of sincerity. They both felt oppressed with the constant references to antiquity, following the canons, with the technical, formalized approach to art, and the fixed notions of "high and beautiful", opposed to "low and dirty", that is, alive" [7]. It is here, at this stage of the history of European art, that pre-modernists came up with the idea about the immanence of the painted life in the work of art itself.

The main creative difference between the Impressionists and the Peredvizhniks, according to N.A. Dmitrieva, was that "the Russian artists of the Peredvizhnik period always emphasized a distinction between "what" and "how", content and form, meaning and language — the distinction which, however, was not recognized by the Impressionists ... For the Impressionists, this problem simply did not exist, because their "how" was also "what", the new and unusually delightful experience of usual familiar things, which was their goal, their ultimate idea"[8]. Experiencing is the most important idea for a pre-modernist impressionist.

"And vice versa: an emphasis on the "plot", that is, on something invented in advance, artificially constructed, "composed", could, from the point of view of impressionism, interfere with sincerity and the fullness of art, its immersion in the real and visible" [9].

In this regard, it can be assumed that the Impressionists breaking with academism actually broke with such cultural symbols as "an academic way of seeing and depicting with its formality, memorization, and convention suppressing fresh and direct perception". Meanwhile, the Peredvizhniks protested mainly against the thematic side of academic symbolism. Nevertheless, they both were looking for their way to the pre-verbatim-existential, to being outside the well-established and outdated norms and symbols

As regard the possible as part of the pre-verbatim, which was of interest to modernism, a good example is the work of Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), who, despite his work dated the first half of the 19th century, could also be called a pre-modernist.

In his creative activity, Turner demonstrates a shift towards the poetics of the possible: from the image of the world authenticity to potentiation. The artist gradually comes to the idea that the authentic (actual) world is, in fact, much more than this authenticity. He is convinced that this authenticity is fragile and fleeting, that real authenticity can be captured only by offering at once many faces of this world or only one face, but multiplying in color lines and spots on canvas. Actually, this is how Turner's work prejudges modernism.

If we take a look at any of his early works, for example, "Fishermen at Sea" (1796), we will see that the painting is full of figurative authenticity; it fascinates us with its precision, attention to detail as well as the healthy strength and dynamics, which puts all those details — sails and masts, waves and splashes, figures of people and boats — into one perfect composition.

However, after some time, Turner comes up with a completely different type of painting with light and possible worlds potentiation. Take, for example, his "Colour Beginning" watercolor (1819) with solely color and light solutions. Even composition changes in Turner's later works show that the possible is gradually moving from the background of his landscapes to the forefront, as, for example, in "Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps" (1812). The background as a space to depict new possible worlds gradually turns into the main character of the artist's paintings — the space of the possible.

Turner is concerned not with reality and truth, but with the possible and the "different", that is, freedom, which he discovers. The freedom of seeing before implementing. Back in 1843, John Ruskin wrote about Turner: "From a technical point of view, his works have an effect that can be called a fresh perspective, in other words, allowing to regain the vision of a child who sees the world consisting of color spots, the meaning of which he is not aware of yet. Had the blind man been able to see, this is the way the surrounding would have appeared to him" [10]. As the world of the possible ...

IV. MODERNISM AS "A PROTEST" AGAINST SYMBOLISM: MATISSE

In the final part of our reflection, let us once again recall that we consider both the existential and the possible as manifestations of the same sphere of human existence - the pre-verbatim. In this regard, Henri Matisse as an artist of the beginning and the dawn of modernism, offers us the opportunity to both existentially immerse in an artistic reality, and at the same time, to potentiate new ones. It can be stated that starting from around 1905 for several years, Matisse was engaged in transforming (or even fostering) attitudes of the public to the pre-verbatim - pre-symbolic.

At the Autumn Salon of 1905 in Paris (founded in 1903 by Rodin and Renoir as an alternative to several annual exhibitions of the latest achievements), Matisse presented a series of small landscapes and portraits that stunned the viewers with an unnatural rave of colour. The public met those works with hostility, and most of the critics' reviews were particularly negative. His works were called the embodiment of disorder, a rough and irrevocable (which speaks for itself) break with tradition.

Then, in March 1906, at the Society of Independent Artists, they exhibited Matisse's new big picture "The Joy of Life". It presents a radiant view of some happy Arcadia: languid virgins, a couple holding each other in a warm embrace, a young man playing an ancient flute, and people dancing a round dance. Everything seems to be joyful, but "impossibly strange". The figures are made with a complete disregard for the scale and lack reasonable proportions. Some of them are even painted with a thick colored border. It is not clear how they are related to each other, and whether they are related at all. The color is dazzling, extremely bright. The image was not supposed to be related to reality or any semblance of it. With its bright and juicy colours, the painting stood out, as there was nothing to compare it with" [11]. Similarly, Matisse freely used the rules of perspective: on one level, he had figures of different sizes arranged. This technique made one get lost in the space of the painting. Indeed, it was impossible to draw any symbolic parallels with regard to "The Joy of Life" — the viewer was perplexed again.

The elimination of what kind of reality by Matisse can we talk about here? What does the artist himself offer the viewer in return? Isn't it the potential reality instead of the usual, symbolically transparent one?

"The Joy of Life" is not comforting, but alarming. It awakens the viewer, does not give their eyes a moment's rest, and keeps hinting at some inaccessible in the familiar world "miracle of existence", which beckons one to enter new potential worlds.

"There are two ways to show things: one is doing so straightforwardly, and the other one is skillfully evoking memories. Moving away from an actual image of movement, one attains a greater beauty and grandeur" [12], — Matisse writes about his principle of creativity — about the appeal to memory, imagination, non-direct perception.

Later, in March 1907, at the Society of Independent Artists, they exhibited only one of Matisse's paintings, but it was even more radical. It was "Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)". Its appearance at the exhibition was followed by an "agonized cry"— for the third time in a row, from year to year things followed the same pattern. However, Matisse would stay the course. He was ready to challenge all the "convenient" to the viewer, well-established artistic laws and techniques, plots and themes. To challenge it with his creativity, but not with manifestos or radical actions.

It seems logical that at this time Matisse starts talking about the aesthetics of "blinding". The public also met this aesthetics with caution, at first — during the scandalous

display of "The Dance" and "Music" at the Autumn Salon in 1910. Many people were struck by the decorative abundance of these canvases — the colour poverty and richness at the same time. In this technique, there was also unexpectedly a lot of anxiety, an existential anxiety — enveloping and inevitable. We can say that the color of Matisse, which, according to the artist, should be abundant in the painting, is an existential color. Later on, unexpectedly, this existentialism was transferred by Matisse even to the still-life genre, proving that a still-life can be no less alarming than the works of many other genres. The first such still lifes were "Seville Still Life" and "Spanish Still Life", painted the same way as "The Dance" and "Music" on request of Sergey Schukin, a collector and the artist's benefactor.

These canvases, like everything else created by Matisse, at least at that time, are not too simple and convenient to perceive: it is difficult for the viewer to look at their wild arabesques and flashes of colour for a long time. It seems that everything in these paintings rotates, nothing stands still. The center of the paintings is indefinable — the viewer has to look at the whole visual field at once, as it were, "gestalt" (and, therefore, "antisymbolically"). The viewer has to rely on peripheral vision and loses control over the field. The most important thing here is that contemplation occurs without a symbolic emphasis on the main thing. That is why everything dissolves in existential anxiety. The existentiality of these and many subsequent still lifes of Matisse lies precisely in the anxiety that they cause in people who are used to the well-established symbolism of consciousness.

V. CONCLUSION

We can say that Matisse, as well as other modernists, each in their own way, lead the viewer into the pre-verbatim-existential, challenging the symbolically oriented consciousness by giving the viewer freedom and an immense resource of potentiation.

Then the Expressionists, partly the successors of the poetics of Matisse, went on to the modernist arena, challenging the symbolic languages of art even more. They thought with a plastic metaphor — transformed lines, colours and shapes of reality [13]. Later on, the aesthetics of the Expressionists themselves was challenged by Dada artists. This is the internal logic of the development of man together with their art.

To conclude, we can say that modernism destroys symbolism in accordance with its ultimate goal. However, in the end, it unwittingly creates a new symbolism. It is important, though, that, having realized that, modernism tries to escape from this new symbolism once again. Modernists' restless striving for desymbolization is the most essential thing here.

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