

Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the

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To my parents and Jean

and

fascinating results. Not least, Russian thought has frequently put the emphasis on

What Mitchell calls “the tradition of denying temporality in the visual arts”⁴ can be attributed, to a large extent, to the impact of Lessing’s *Laocoön* (1766).

avant-garde painting as that of a “progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium”.³⁹ Modern painting “got rid of imitation, of ‘literature’”. In terms of pictorial perspective, the avant-garde breaks away from mathematically constructed

but to what upon the canvas may be seen”.⁴⁵ In a language, reminiscent of Hegel, Wilde says: “art is mind expressing itself under the conditions of matter”.⁴⁶

In the face of the acknowledged pre-eminence of poetry, Leonardo turned around the argument to prove the priority of painting. It is the poet who “may wish to rival the painter”,⁴⁷ but fails to do so, because, as we saw, the “voids” between words

exclusively in terms of either spatial or temporal features. This was the general import of developments in physics.

(Christianity and Culture) (2000). The English translation (1996) is not always precise, at times even incorrect, so I will use my own translation, when I think it necessary.

I will be suggesting that Florensky's "reverse time" betrays a conceptual ambiguity, partly due to the terminology which, most probably, was chosen to fit the theory of "reverse perspective", of which Florensky was the most influential exponent and which will be discussed in the following chapter.⁶¹ In other words, if

Art is mentioned by Florensky in that context as a *border-line case*, alongside with dreams. Both dreams and art belong to the realm between the two worlds.

Conclusion

In this chapter I

Chapter 2

On Reverse Perspective – a Critical Reading

Within the overall course of world art over the ages, linear perspective has been the

on this issue proceeds from a definition of order
 separation as ordered out of

In my exposition

sees the theory that informs Renaissance perspective as growing out of a certain,

by russians. The whole scheme is best to be considered within the context of a general movement of ideas at the beginning of the century. The problem here is whether

The same phenomenon occurs, for example, in numerous representations of the Bible, in which the cover of the book is depicted frontally but at the same time

There are two staircases leading to two entrances which in fact are on two lateral sides. The one on the right has the banisters placed at an oblique angle, but the entrance itself gives the false impression of a frontal view. This effect is again due to the perspective treatment.

O

unnatural heightening of the cranium”³⁴ to the canon of proportions in Byzantine and Byzantining art, where a module system was applied (the unit being the length

Figure 2.8 is a particular pictorial expression of Figure 2.7a and demonstrates

the horizontal. A good example of such deformation is the treatment of the back of the ancient

This is what frequently happens in representations of the chalice – as in images of *The Last Supper*

The rays of vision should be focused exclusively on the given object – in other words, there should be a “narrowed field of vision”.⁴⁰ Thus we return to what

A further peculiarity of ancient art is the tendency towards the levelling of

Third Stage: Boris Uspensky

The third step in the development of the theory of “reverse perspective”, after

“reverse perspectival” image once it is viewed from the correct position – this is what Russian theory on “reverse perspective” maintains. That this claim can in no way square with the other – of the representation of various aspects of an object which cannot be seen at the same time from a single point, no matter inner or outer – seems to go unnoticed.

Due to the importance assigned to the inner viewing position, Uspensky

very well be interpreted as a veil cast over reality beyond which shines the light of truth, beauty and goodness.

Uspensky's third condition is the observation that the most obvious effect of reverse perspective, in stark contrast to 100(9r)-100(perspective,)-100(is)-100(that)-rsGht aunalitos

Gombrich was justified in saying that the 'window' figure has won the world.⁵⁸ The application of these categories has been mechanical and I do not think it could prove justifiable on closer inspection.

An Alternative View: Karl Doehlemann

The line of thought on reverse perspective, as described so far, has been widely accepted. A recent book by Oleg Tarasov is no exception to the rule in that the author follows the guidelines, set by the trio Florensky ó Zhegin ó Uspensky.⁵⁹ It seems that Panofsky's N

be unable to achieve. Recognizing that “reverse perspective” is a modern term that cannot adequately describe what “happens” in the pictorial space of the icon Doehlemann offers his own explanation for the phenomenon. H

down both in science and art⁶². The “reverse perspective” of “ancient” Russian art was hailed as a prophetic kind of non-Euclidean geometry. It is evident that this argument suited the Russian aspirations of re-validating ancient Russian art as a counter to the Western naturalistic tradition. While reacting against Renaissance premises of art, much of the early twentieth-century theory of Eastern Orthodox art uses without modification concepts and categories deriving from Renaissance theory and practice. Thus, it fundamentally remains within the realm it purports to attack. The very notion of “reverse perspective” – as inverting the laws of linear perspective – is a telling example in that respect.

The major shortcomings of the theories on “reverse perspective” discussed here seem to be due to the adopted approach of describing the pictorial space in the icon in terms of linear perspective. Florensky implies that the value of Eastern Orthodox art lies largely in its adherence to the workings of human vision. Zhegin constructs his theory on the basis that each object in “reverse perspective” has its

The idea that the concepts forged for privileging the Renaissance could just as well function for the explanation of categorically different art forms is difficult to accept. The case of “reverse perspective”, I think, proves this assumption to be misplaced. Hegel’s urge that we approach phenomena from the standpoint of their own historically relevant categories should be observed more consistently. The present book will suggest a possible approach to the problem of “reverse perspective” in terms which were valid at the time of the production of the images.

Chapter 3

Registering Presence in the Icon

that of modern aesthetic formalism. Barber is aware of this distinction and says that form was not “an independent aesthetic attribute” for the Byzantine theologians, but rather “a cause for the icon”.¹⁰

the power of the visual in Eastern Orthodox religion. Since 843 and to the present the faithful celebrate one of most important feasts of the Orthodox Church, “the Triumph of Orthodoxy (on the First Sunday of Lent), in honour of the victory over Iconoclasm. The importance of the victory of the Iconophile party, however, goes beyond its immediate theological implications. It signals nothing less that the immense role that the icon was going to play in forging an Eastern Orthodox cultural identity. As Robin Cormack maintains, “from 843 onwards, the position was that to deny the icon was to deny the identity of the Orthodox believer”.¹⁸

ecclesiastical theory and practice”.³⁵

The views of the Church of Rome seem to have continued at least till the Reformation. Leonardo described the reaction to the sacred image in Renaissance Italy, which carries immediate reminiscences to Eastern Orthodox devotional practice. It is interesting to notice the idea of real presence in the image:

“Do we not see pictures representing divine beings constantly kept under

in his classical study on the subject.⁶³ Karel Innemee suggests in the same vein that

of images was never “entirely dependent on”⁷² on the cult of relics. The sacred

Classical Antique Sources

A

lived”.⁸⁸

After him I noticed Heracles in all his strength
A mere image, for himself (was) with the immortal gods.⁹⁹

It is obvious how naturally this notion of only partial participation of the original

should not be interpreted to imply that both belong to the same reality. I

conceptual distinction between idol and icon, which had piqued Christian thinkers for centuries. I

learn from pictures the model they should follow. Thus pictures are above all for the instruction of the people.”¹²

when St. Theodore maintains that “if one says that the divinity is in the icon, he would not be wrong” and yet “the divinity is not present in them [the images] by a union of natures, for they are not *deiŁed řesh*, but by a relative participation” (First Refutation, p.33). The nature of the identity is illustrated by the famous example of the impression left by the seal on wax (First Refutation, p.29), mentioned above. In his Third Refutation, Theodore the Studite states that “it is not the essence (*ousia*), but the form (*character*

Victor Bychkov maintains that the icon-defenders have proved unable to produce a *clear conceptual proof* for the existence of “similar” images or the relationship between image and prototype. As he says, “the thesis that it is the hypostasis that

problem of iconoclasm, conceived both broadly and with regard to the Russian sacred icon in particular, which was rediscovered at the time.¹⁵¹

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the signified. Florensky distinguishes between two thresholds of receptivity¹⁵⁵ of the symbol – an “upper” one, at which the symbol preserves some identity with the prototype, as in its ancient usage, and the “lower”, at which the ontological

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express in E

the icon “on its own” – i.e., apart from the spiritual vision – “is neither an image nor an icon, but a wooden board”.

was no longer seen as a container of presence.

To proceed with my argument, a re-definition of "reverse perspective" will be worked out by referring to a strand of thought in Florensky, which the Russian author

of “a transformation of religious receptivity”³ into an aesthetic one. We will be

buililils, the three or even four aspects of the Bible, the treatment of the face in

The Theosophical Background

It has been suggested that the notion of the “Fourth D

phenomenon “as a whole” and not only in “one moment of its history”.⁵⁴ Modern man has lost exactly this ability to experience the world as a unified being.⁵⁵

“Seeing the World with the Eyes of God”

between time and eternity in Plato is one of antithesis, while the notion of eternity as everlastingness we encounter in Aristotle (for example, the *Physics*, 4.12–14).⁷⁰ Tamar Rudavsky interprets the *Timaeus* in the same fashion and points out the two words used by Plato – *aionios* which refers to eternity and *aidios*, which is properly translated as everlastingness.

essence of time is not motion, as Aristotle taught (Aristotle, *Physics* 4: time is the measure of motion). Rather, the essential characteristic of time is duration – “the life of the Soul is a motion of change from one stage of life to another” (*Enneads*, 3.7.11). Eternity, on other hand, is totally devoid of duration, it “does not get its being from any extent of time, but is “prior” to any extent of time” (*Enneads*, 3.7.6).⁸⁰ In short, time and eternity are opposed as something which is extended versus something which cannot be extended (*Enneads*, 3.7.2). The former belongs to the realm of becoming and the latter to the realm of being. The relationship between time and eternity is analogous to the relationship between Becoming and Being, Illusion and Reality, Lie and Truth. As Plotinus says, “you must not then

The Latin Tradition

Henri Bergson's distinction between metric time and the inner *durée* or the time

problem of defining the latter in human terms. When discussing the begetting of the Son the author maintains that it took place in “a non-temporal manner”.

architects “were exposed to the Scholastic point of view in innumerable other ways”.¹⁵³ In other words, it is suggested that while artists may not be explicitly aware of the conceptual meaning, works of art can nevertheless express unconscious attitudes that both artists and audience share. Whatever criticisms

for tomorrow our Lord *is* born”¹⁵⁹ (Christmas, Vespers service, 24th December), “Lord, you *have been* born”¹⁶⁰ (Christmas, Matins service, 24th December), “The Virgin *today gives* birth to him who is above being”¹⁶¹ (Christmas, Matins service, 25th December), “Christ *is* baptized, and *come up* from the water, with him *rais11 8is(, T)55(tu5aaT0 hco)55(tu5aextcember),)Tj -27.907 -1.2 2wat483 263.4884 524.*

raises it to the level of eternity, whereby it loses its very temporal characteristic and becomes something categorically different. Hans Belting touches upon the heart of the problem when he put the question: “in what way liturgy, and through lituand2 -a[(litT17.5ou(touch(expchar)37(erent.C2_ gs /TT11.451 19.82<003E> TdGS0 gs

but rather it “paralleled, commented upon, and expanded texts”.

artist's] vision, not turning from one thing to another but seeing without light, in a timeless image-breaking lightö.²¹²

Schopenhauer makes art of key significance in his overall metaphysical system and as such it serves a specific role, namely as a means to metaphysical truth. Thus, aesthetics, in a sense, takes the place occupied in Christian thinking by theology. Schopenhauer's notion of the non-specificity of aesthetic perception, which we will discuss below, is very similar in structural terms to the idea of God's

that I

repeats Plotinus when he says that “all original and primary thought takes place

time, for its creator the highest beauty and expression of his artistic volition”.²⁵⁸ He powerfully stresses the point that it is misleading to judge all art forms with criteria developed for dealing with classical Antique and Renaissance art. Such judgements are, according to Worringer, “absurdities and platitudes”.are14.015 700 5570 370.4179 593.

of Eastern Orthodox art and culture. I have attempted to “clear the ground” as

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Sample Analysis

An Analysis of Rublev's *Trinity* I

is characterized by a certain ambiguity of *pictorial space* and, by implication, of *pictorial time*.

An initial problem that faces us is that R

Rublev treats of a fairly common subject in medieval painting, but at the same time he combines elements of well-known iconographic formulae to a completely new effect. The subject is drawn from the Old Testament and refers to the episode known as Abraham's known as

With the pictorial means at his disposal, Rthe subjecthe of onAbraham'she Hospitality,

hands of the iconographers who were sufficiently experienced in technique to be

authorized by tradition and accepted by the Church to carry the presence of the prototype in the image. One of the aims of this book has been to define the nature of this presence, which I

There are at least two traditions of thought which subscribe to the basic principle of this understanding and which are of immediate interest for our purposes ó Byzantine theology of the icon with an antecedent in Pseudo-Dion

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