Elaboration of a Visual Language. At the origin of Sequentialism in Art

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Abstract

This essay has its origin in the notes scattered in my "Sequentialists Diaries", written from the first years of the new millennium. These reflections on the artistic language aim to bring closer and make accessible the unprecedented sequentialist expressive dimension, able to reveal communicative specificities still in embryonic phase but rich of latent potentialities.

From the philosophical introduction to this visual language, we embark on a path of discovery of this communicative dimension, reaching the full awareness and mastery of the spatio-temporal elements of the signs, peculiar to Sequentialism applied to Art.

In view of the path taken so far, the further research will focus on the analytical and synthetic characteristics of the sequential grammar of pictorial signs, up to the further developments and various contaminations with other disciplines of the creative field.

Preface

In this writing I have collected, as far as I have been able to reconstruct, the chain of events that have contributed to the birth of my "sequentialist" consciousness; which, at a certain point in my life path, has resulted, in the artistic creation of a evolved visual language capable to reflect the communicative progress of our digital age.

Earliest Memories (1978-1986)

I remember well the first "signs" that fascinated me as a child: they were the slender shapes of cartoon spaceships. They stimulated me so much that – in the grip of excitement – I drew them, in front of the television, even before the program ended.

Growing up, as a teenager, I took with me this instinctive passion that I found even more intense in the slender silhouette "arrow-shaped" of the most modern fighter planes. Contrary to what happens in most cases, it was not the passion for flying that involved me, but the fascination – for me at that time still undefinable – of those pointed lines that "following a direction".

At the same time, I also began to feel the mystery of the passing time. Objects like the clock and the calendar, with their recurring numerical sequences, could make me think of something absolute, beyond the contingent reality, a rational and "calculable" dimension that at that time I perceived as unfathomable.

I don't know to what extent these embryonic experiences have contributed to my current artistic inclination for the spatio-temporal conception – the "count following a direction" – but looking back, I can't help but think that they have played a decisive role anyway.

The computer: from video games to programming (1986-2000)

Around the same time I started attending art high school, I became interested in computers. In the beginning, exclusively as a playful tool for videogames – the novelty of those years. When I was sixteen, they gave me a semi-professional PC and I began to study its programming. I was literally fascinated by the possibility of creating programs and graphic effects from simple

sequential lines of code: for me it was equivalent to the essence of creation. And, more importantly, this "sequential" language perfectly matched the design of Architecture, which at the time stimulated me enormously. But in the light of today, that was just a toy. The real breakthrough took place at the end of the university period (1997), when I began to interact with computers of the latest generation. A new world opened up for me, in which I decided to train my work: digital graphics. I soon realized that the computer skills acquired in this field were useful to me in the elaboration of the sequentialist grammar: they were two faces of one piece.

The stimulus of creation: in the beginning the Architecture, later the Art (1986-1997)

From a young age I felt in me, very strong, the impulse to creation. In the period in which I had to choose which high school to attend, I saw in the "design-construction" the field in which to develop this vocation still in the making. Therefore, the choice to attend the five-year course of Architecture at the Art Institute was an obvious consequence.

How much I loved, then, the great architects – Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright – who with their genius moulded imposing buildings from nothing. I felt spiritually related to them, especially with regard to the creative methodologie[1]: design. During those years, I did not give any importance to Art, I considered it an accessory, decorative thing, the opposite of the concreteness of architectural structures.

This point of view changed radically when, studying for the examination of Master of Art of the third year, I discovered the Impressionists. It was not the particular aesthetic impact of their paintings that won me over, but the pictorial theory[2] that supported them. It awakened in me that same sense of creation – but incredibly more intense – that I had tried until then only for architectural design.

The flame that ignited at that juncture, however, lasted only the period of the examination – not yet having the necessary strength to impose itself. Only later, at the end of my higher studies, did I realize that what attracted me both of architectural design and of pictorial theory was the common creative spark: a force capable of generating an evolved linguistic gap, by which it was possible to increase knowledge and multiply experiences.

I knew and had experimented, both at the Art Institute and at the Academy of Fine Arts, the various languages of art: from technical drawing to freehand drawing, from easel painting to installations; but none of these experiences had aroused in me a serious interest in the profession of the artist – in fact, during the years of study I had never, even for pastime, made something outside of school. I still didn't feel able to materialize my visions. I lived the art basically as a task entrusted to me to complete, that is without particular creative ambitions that went beyond the school environment.

Everything changed in 1997, during the last year of the Academy of Fine Arts – the one I had reserved exclusively for my dissertation. There came the fusion between the two creative dimensions on which I had formed: the rational and methodical one of the first architectural experiences and the artistic one, more instinctive and tormented, that I had cultivated in recent years. Something happened then that changed my relationship with Art forever.

I remember precisely that year, the thought of what I would do with my artistic experiences began to resonate in my head in an insistent and pressing way.

But it was not a practical working thought in the field of fine arts. It was something like a voice, a distant echo very difficult to focus, that I was slowly trying to materialize in my consciousness.

My interest grew exponentially. I tried to understand what Art was in the era in which I lived and where this renewed awareness would take me. I began a period of reflection, study and research that culminated in two events that would have been decisive for the future path I would take.

The first happened when, studying for the last exam of Art History at the Academy of Fine Arts, I came across the image of a particular painting. It was as if something had reconnected inside my head. The thousand thoughts until then confused, from that moment found a clear and defined path. The painting in question was "Paulo dressed as a Harlequin", by Pablo Picasso (fig. 1).

Fig. 1 - Pablo Picasso, *Paulo dressed as Harlequin*,
1924, oil on canvas, 130 x 97,5 cm., Musée National Picasso, Paris (France)
https://deartibusblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/09/
unoalgiorno-picasso-paulo-vestito-da-arlecchino/ (03/08/2018)
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

What struck me was not the subject or the composition of the shapes and colors, but the different areas of the pictorial workmanship that was organized in clearly legible stages. This feature distinguished this painting from all the others I had seen until then. It was certainly not a revolutionary cubist painting, but one of those intimate, familiar ones that the artist had made for himself.

Some parts, such as the lower one and the legs of the armchair, were just drawn with a light, nervous sign; others, such as the seat and the Harlequin costume, were sketched and filled with determination; finally, others, such as the face of the child, were perfectly finished.

Thinking about this "succession" of parts, the vision of an expressive universe full of possibilities flashed in my mind, an original communicative dimension that was just waiting to be explored.

The second event pushed me more consciously in this new direction. One day, while browsing through an art magazine, I was struck by an article about an exhibition in which some "unfinished" drawings and paintings by Paul Cézanne (figs. 2-5) were exhibited. The uniqueness of the event consisted in the setting up: the works were placed according to a certain sequence that allowed to see and understand the process of realization that had adopted the artist.
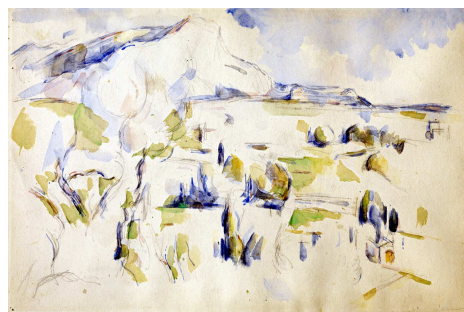

Fig. 2 - Paul Cézanne, *The Sainte Victoire Mountain seen from the Lauves*,
1900-1906, watercolor and graphite on paper, 31,9 x 47,6 cm.,
Fondation Henry et Rose Pearlmann, Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ (USA).
http://www.societe-cezanne.fr/2016/12/01/
deux-aquarelles-de-cezanne-de-la-fondation-jean-planque/ (03/08/2018)
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Fig. 3 - Paul Cézanne, *The Sainte Victoire mountain seen from Les Lauves*,
1904 approximately, oil on canvas, 54 x 64 cm, private collection, New York (USA).
http://www.deartibus.it/drupal/content/
la-montagna-sainte-victoire-vista-da-les-lauves-6 (03/08/2018), Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Fig. 4 - Paul Cézanne, *The Sainte Victoire mountain seen from Les Lauves*,
1904-1906, oil on canvas, 54 x 73 cm.,
Viktor and Marianne Langen's private collection, Neuss (Germany).
https://www.deartibus.it/drupal/content/
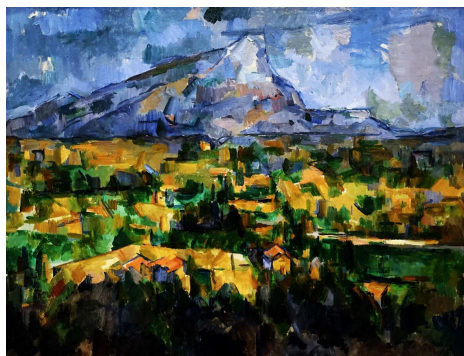la-montagna-sainte-victoire-vista-da-les-lauves (03/08/2018),
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Fig. 5 - Paul Cézanne, *Sainte-Victoire Mountain*,
1902-1904, oil on canvas, 73 x 91,9 cm.,
Philadelphia Museum of Art (USA).
https://smarthistory.org/cezanne-mont-sainte-victoire/ (03/08/2018)
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Crossing and analytically elaborating these two experiences, which happened at a short distance from each other, I developed a precise creative methodology: that spatio-temporal sequentiality (still at the embryonic level, at that time) from which all my future linguistic research would develop.

The Birth of Sequentialism in Art (1998-2000)

After school experiences, I could dedicate myself seriously and with all my being to Art. As it often happens in these cases, I knew inside of me what to do, but not how to do it.

I then decided to reorder my theoretical thoughts through writing. I started to collect, in the diaries, the various ideas and reflections that until then I had elaborated. Later, this material would be channeled into the website and thematic publications. Writing, on the one hand, helped me to articulate and focus introspectively the various stages of philosophical-artistic path, while on the other – in symbiosis with the realization of the works –, helped to direct the "sequentialist" expressive dimension outward.

To guide me on this path were – then as today – the writings of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. Of both, I was deeply struck by the creative methodology and innovative approach to a visual language capable of projecting itself towards original expressive speculations at the expense of acquired communicative purposes. Following Kandinsky, I began codifying a sign grammar – increasingly complex and intelligible – that shifted significant values from formal and chromatic aesthetics to spatio-temporal elaboration. Klee, showed me the way to structure the sequentialist language according to the guidelines of the organic "growth" of the signs; my goal was no longer the expressive image resulting from the genetic process, but the emotional readability of the realizing sequential paths, direct incarnation of the creative genesis.

I was thinking back to my high school days, when I had an instinctive attraction for the aesthetics of Piet Mondrian's works, so close to the architectural concept that I was so fond of. Now, all of this faded into the grand perspective of being able to create something linguistically vast and organic, able to evolve the known levels of communication.

Despite my artistic studies, it was only thanks to this "creative vision" that I decided to dedicate myself to the progress of Art in my time, in the absence of which, perhaps, I would have settled for a job inclined to simple creativity.

Being able to materialize a thought, making it "work" linguistically as a Work of Art, I think is the most difficult – and at the same time most stimulating – task for the Artist Creator.

A day like any other, completely taken by one of the many theoretical problems that awaited an answer, my gaze was drawn to something that unexpectedly struck me intensely. It was a "figure" that I had seen and reviewed hundreds of times, but that now turned out to be the solution to the linguistic problems that tormented me incessantly. Well, what was this revelation? Simply the "floral" decoration of a tile on the wall of my house (fig. 6).

Fig. 6 - photo: © ACA (Angelo Calabria).
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria.

From the analysis of this particular compositional structure, I perceptively elaborated a series of spatio-temporal sign paths, both regular and irregular, akin to the sequential linguistic functionality that I was developing. Starting from this model, I developed the sign-expressive coding from which the arrow-number paths would have sprung, the alphabet of an evolved visual language full of potential (figs. 7-10).
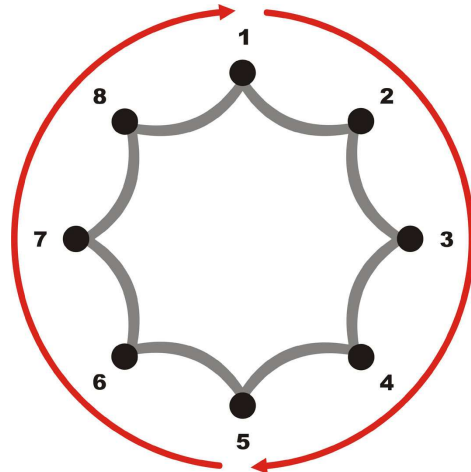
Fig. 7 - © ACA (Angelo Calabria).
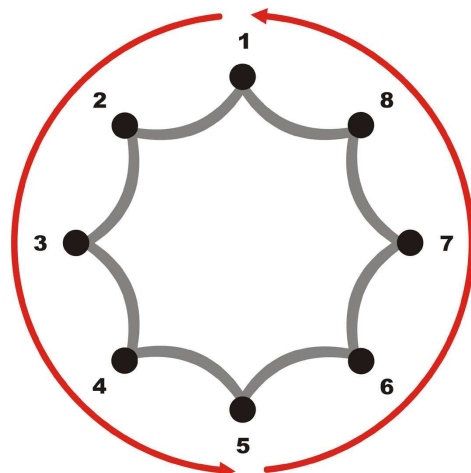Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Fig. 8 - © ACA (Angelo Calabria).
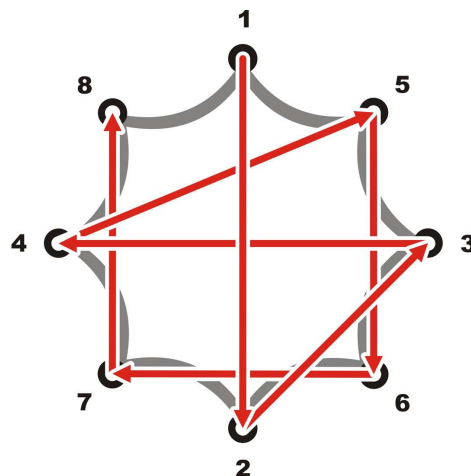Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Fig. 9 - © ACA (Angelo Calabria).
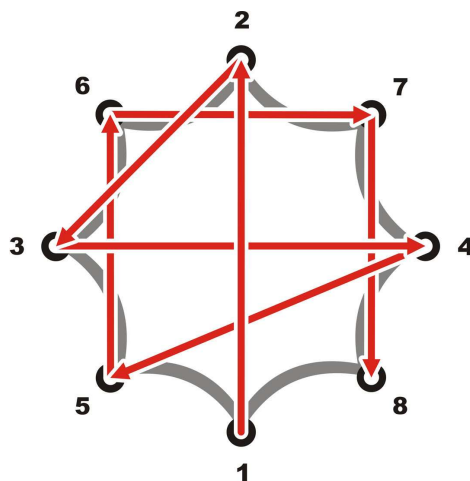Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

Fig. 10 - © ACA (Angelo Calabria).
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

At this point, one thing was very clear to me: the significant image had lost its monopoly in favor of a new content, a content to be discovered and elaborated through a grammar of spatio-temporal vectors, "created-counted" for each expressive path identified.

In my eyes a new visual semantics was revealed, similar to the digital reality that flows beyond the monitors that surround us. Not the "simulated" aesthetic product of a familiar and engaging reality, but the essence of the sequential processes of calculation that generate that same reality through the screens.

The discovery of the code: **The Matrix** *(2001)*

The Matrix movie, released in 1999, faces the dualism apparent reality / digital reality. The machines control humanity through a digital neuro-simulation – regulated in all its aspects by the "code" – that recreates a familiar everyday life capable of hiding the real and devastated post-nuclear situation. The story revolves around different characters who move – connecting and disconnecting continuously – between these two dimensions trying to free as many human beings as possible from the domination of machines.

Two scenes in particular caught my interest when I first saw the film.

In the first, the operator who controls the flow of the code from outside the Matrix, reveals to the protagonist that after so much time spent observing it, no longer sees on the screen sequences of symbols in constant processing, but can see, in their place, the simulated reality of the cities, streets and people that the code recreates (fig. 11).
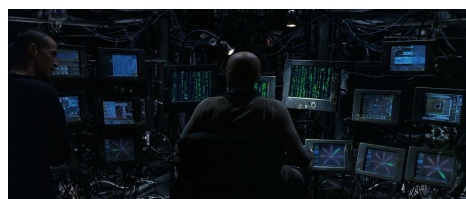

Fig. 11 - Jack Skoda, (05/09/2013),
All I see is ... (The Matrix), [File video],
Taken from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-GTcHZkfCs (03/08/2018).
The Matrix. Directed by The Wachowski Brothers.
Cast: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne. Warner Bros, Warner Home Video. USA. 1999.
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

In the second – which is the main scene of the film –, the protagonist becomes aware of his increased abilities within the coded reality of Matrix, and acquires the ability to "see" and "manipulate" the code to complete his mission (fig. 12).
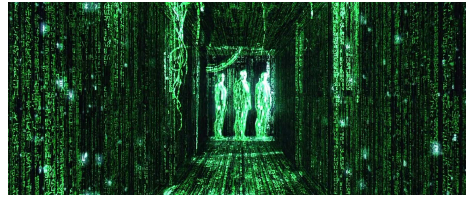
Fig. 12 - 30 Minutes movies. (28/11/2013). *30 Minutes movies: The Matrix*. [Video file].
Taken from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lPOXR4dXxDQ (03/08/2018).
The Matrix. Directed by The Wachowski Brothers.
Cast: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne. Warner Bros, Warner Home Video. USA. 1999.
Courtesy of Angelo Calabria

The Sequentialism in Art, of reflection, generates a linguistic "vision" able to penetrate the reconstructed reality that we see through the monitors, getting to "manipulate" – in a spatio-temporal key – the code of signs in order to create an expressive range of significant sequences resulting from the symbiosis of communication between human and machine.

The discovery of the philosophy of sequentialism (2002)

In those early years of intense research and experimentation, the problem arose of how to define what I was aiming for. Taking my cue from the concept of sequential phases, which I had analyzed in the paintings of Picasso and Cézanne, I focused on the idea of "project" (which was well suited to the technical-design nature of my high school studies), and for some time I developed the theoretical part on this premise.

I soon realized, however, that the concept of "project" mainly indicated the embryonic phase of something to come. This term could not describe the linguistic essence that I wanted to communicate. So I thought about the expressive functionality that my works should have: the sequential property.

The term "sequentialism" came to pass by itself. Who knows if something with that name already existed. Google3, search... here it is! I had found the philosophy of sequentialism by prof. Achille C. Varzi4. I immediately contacted him and explained the results of my theories. He was intrigued by my work and sent me some of his publications on the subject. Reading them, I immediately realized that the sequential paradigms of this particular philosophical theory were well suited to the spatio-temporal functionality referred to linguistic property of the sign that I was working on.

The discovery of spatio-temporal content (2002-2006)

After a hybrid start, contaminated by linguistic structures already acquired, I began to elaborate the sequentialist semantic core. Proceeding both analytically and synthetically, between theory and experimentation, I finally arrived (sometimes with many efforts of thought) at the communicative essence to which I aimed: the meaningful-expressive spatio-temporal content. I found myself then – I had a clear perception of it – on the threshold of a dimension that perhaps no one had ever crossed, penetrating beyond this border.

At the beginning of my research I found, in the works of other artists, elements that could have some relevance with the concepts of sequence and calculation on which I was working, but explained, almost always, in an elementary and limited way, that is, not linguistically structured. I was aiming for something syntactically and grammatically intelligible.

So what was this original content that I was trying to bring out of my work? It was the lifeblood of the work: the sequential-realizing path of the signs. Every direction that the artist elaborates mentally/manually through the different graphic sequences, can be followed-counted in the same way by the observer, who shares in this way the feeling of sequential stratification that slowly, sign after sign, allows you to access an evolved linguistic dimension, today still difficult to understand in all its potential.

The sequential short circuit between gestures and perception – which characterizes this spatio-temporal sign system – generates a precise "digital" expressive matrix that, in its infinite combinations in different directions, is able to reveal a horizon of new communication possibilities theoretically unlimited.

The ability to "understand the number that is in all things" in a sequentialist key (2007-2011)

To fine-tune this complex theoretical part, I practiced for a long time, and often intensely, in order to refine the particular eidetic-sequential ability that would allow me to "see" and "count" the spatio-temporal directions – static and dynamic – that reality revealed to my visual consciousness. It took many years of intense concentration training to master this renewed expressive faculty, in order to transform it into the visual language I aspired to.

As I proceed in the elaboration for sequential phases of a work, I feel a specific "stratified" sensation growing in me, which is not linked to the external or inner result of what is being formed before my eyes. It is a particular "emotional spatio-temporal scope" that develops counting one sequence after another, within specific expressive dimensions put into operation by signs (arrows, numbers and units) and by studied pictorial sequences. In the past, this energy-information guided me almost unconsciously, while over time it became more and more clear until it became the underground sap that today supports my creative practice.

I believe that for the Art of our era, the time has come to consider the relationship between the Artist and Nature (external or internal that is) as completely "defined" in all its facets, and to turn our vision towards a new linguistic interaction: the one between the Artist and the Digital Dimension.

The problem of content

The spatio-temporal paths of the artwork convey "sequential narrations", (pictorial) discourses enclosed in an original emotional dimension of the content, until now hidden from our eyes and now accessible to our most evolved sensibility.

The more clear and readable these paths are, the more direct and accessible the sequential sensations that guide us through them will be (in this case we will have a category of artworks called "Contiguous / Dimensional"). The more these paths are subtle and structured, with an articulated legibility, the more the sequential sensations they produce will be rich and indefinable (in this case we will have a category of artworks called "Non Contiguous / Multidimensional").

These paths can be composed exclusively of single directions that follow one another neatly, or from a wide range of directions capable of interacting with each other – accompanying, opposing, hindering, implementing, etc. – and able to create, as a result, an unlimited range of stratified and complex spatio-temporal meanings. An unclear and not immediate readability of the signs (the linguistic "recognizability"), should not be considered an obstacle to the content, but a further expressive possibility of that particular path; possibility that leads to further significant facets of the content under consideration.

You will learn to look at the referential or aesthetic aspect of shapes and colors, no longer only as marks of a recognizable expressive reality or a composition of sensitive elements, but you will find that every single part traced – belonging to an arrow sign, to a number sign, to a unit sign, and consequently to one or more vector sequences – constitutes a spatio-temporal junction to which to connect to access a new way of experiencing, through Art, the digital reality that surrounds us, vehicle of more advanced sensitive knowledge.

All my work, described in these first publications, aims to make accessible that sequential spatio-temporal dimension – of the real and the virtual – so peculiar of our communicative age. A multilevel sign universe, able to reveal us further and infinite spiritual experiences child of linguistic symbiosis with the digital code.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Moving from the general organisation of [urban planning] to the single building, the essential elements that must standardise it have been effectively considered by Le Corbusier at five points:

1) The house must be raised on pylons (pilotis), made of reinforced concrete and therefore far from the ground, with the garden passing under it.

2) The garden must also be above it. While for centuries the roof was built with slopes to quickly eliminate the rain avoiding infiltration and, accentuating the inclination (in the northern countries), also the snow, the reinforced concrete allows the flat roof, rather concave, because subjected to the possibility of "cracking" for the climatic changes, it needs to maintain a constant humidity, with the only condition that the solar pavement is protected by sand covered with thick slabs of cement at enlarged joints sown grass; so, on the roof, the gardens will bloom.

3) Since the house is built with reinforced concrete by means of pillars, the function of the load-bearing walls ceases and therefore the need for the walls of each apartment to insist on those below; each floor can be structured by freely moving the walls.

4) For the same reason windows can run from one end to the other, like a continuous band, entering light and air.

5) And for the same reason the facade is free, it can be advanced or set back from the supporting pillars; it is only a light membrane of wall or glass.

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Piero Adorno, "The Functionalism: Le Corbusier", in *Italian art. Its Greco-Roman roots and its development in European culture*, Publishing House G. D'Anna, Messina-Firenze, first edition January 1986, vol. III (From the eighteenth century to the present day), pp. 584-585.

[2] The great specificity of the impressionist pictorial language lies above all in the use of color and light as the main elements of vision. Most of the Western pictorial experience, with some exceptions, has always been based on the representation of forms and space. The intent of the impressionists is to reproduce the visual intensity that is obtained from a direct perception of reality and to do this they adopt the following techniques:

1. use only pure colours;

2. do not dilute the colours to achieve the chiaro-scuro, which is completely absent in their canvases;

3. combine complementary colours to enhance the luminous sensation;

4. never use black;

5. shadows are also colored.

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Januarts, "The technical revolutions on color and light", In *Impressionism*, 28/02/2011, p. 2, http://www.januarts.it/dis_arte/arte/TXT/impressionismo_schema.pdf (08/11/2020).

[3] Google LLC is an American company that offers online services, with headquarters in Mountain View, California, in the so-called Googleplex. Among the large amount of products or services offered are the Google search engine, the Android operating system, the Chrome OS operating system and web services such as YouTube, Gmail, Play Store, Google Maps and many others.

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Wikipedia, s.v. "Google (company)", in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, last updated 28/10/2020, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_(company) (14/11/2020).

[4] Achille C. Varzi (Galliate, Italy, born 8 May 1958) is an Italian philosopher. An exponent of analytical philosophy, in Italy he is known mainly for his research in logic and for his contribution to the rebirth of studies in the field of

metaphysics and ontology.

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Wikipedia, s.v. "Achille Varzi (philosopher)", in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, last updated 20/06/2020, https:/it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achille_Varzi_(Filosofo) (14/11/2020).

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