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IV. CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

The Transformation of Screen Culture As a Phenomenon of Information Age

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Abstract

The article raises the question of transformations of screen culture in the XXth–XXIst centuries. Screen culture as a phenomenon of audiovisual synthesis has gone a long way from the moment of its inception (photography, invention of cinema, later the development of radio, television, and video) to a wave of 'digital revolution' that has produced the new forms of screen art, manifested not only in the digitization of cinema, photo, and television products, but also in computer technologies, online social networks, etc. It was the screen culture that became the construct of such a phenomenon as 'virtual reality'.

Keywords: screen, screen culture, audiovisual synthesis, information age, digital revolution, media space, virtual reality, virtual culture

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1. Introduction

In this article, we focus on the screen culture as a phenomenon of the information revolution that has occurred in XXth–XXIst centuries. We analyze its transformations that have radically influenced the socio-cultural sphere. Many foreign and Russian scholars wrote about the screen culture as a unique phenomenon, among them: Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, N. Bolz, Marshall McLuhan, Gilles Deleuze, Manuel Castells, Niklas Luhmann, Kirill Razlogov, A. Fyodorov, Olga Shlykova and others.

The digital revolution at the turn of the XXth–XXst centuries resulted not only in a total transformation of the screen culture as such, but also in the creation of the global media environment, whose emergence is associated with a colossal and novel influence of the media industry extending in almost all spheres of public life and con-sciousness. The world screen became not only a mirror for the planetary life but also an original space where cultures engage in dialogues and polylogues.

American futurist Alvin Toffler, making the 1980s forecast of what the new media civilization would be like, noted: "Globalism, or at least supranationalism, is a natural expression of the new economy, which must operate across national boundaries" [6, p. 381].

Following his example, M. Castells acknowledges that the global media environment helps us understand that we live in the kind of culture "which is virtual in its essence, because it is structured primarily through electronically based virtual processes of communication. It is real (and not imaginary) because it is our fundamental reality, the material basis on which we live our existence, construct our systems of representation... This virtuality is our reality" [1, p. 237].

A Russian researcher I. Kondakov calls this quality of culture's world-wide presence 'globality', a configurator that defines a relation of one or another local culture to the unified global cultural and historical space, to the cultural practices of humanity in general. According to him, "culture's globality can be compared with its mentality. If mentality is the self-awareness of local culture (or civilization) as such... then globality is its awareness as one of the components of the world civilization in the context of the global semantic space" [4, pp. 39–43].

That fully refers to the global media space which is rooted in screen culture that, in Kirill Razlogov's opinion, has become "the key element in development and transmission of norms, customs, traditions and values... of people from different communities" [5, p. 13].

2. Screen Culture: An Audiovisual Synthesis

Screen culture is a special kind of culture tha is based on the synthesis of technology and creativity, sound and images, displayed on screen as its material medium.

The invention of cinema in 1895 and its dynamic proliferation that was followed by the spread of radio and television, video, personal computers, digital photos, and Internet; the experiments testing the artistic potential of color music, all sorts of audiovisual effects, a growing popularity of audiovisual technologies in all spheres of culture and everyday life – *all of these are the diverse forms of a single entity – the screen culture*.

During the past three decades, it have become evident that audiovisual communication has seriously challenged the printed word and screen art forms have gradually replaced the traditional ones or have become the new means of their reproduction. *The screen,* interacting with complex and ambivalent social processes, *has played a crucial part in the democratization of culture and the emergence of new cultural forms*. As

a result, the socio-cultural situation has changed, and media environment has undergone a significant transformation: a global environment emerged where the local ones used to be.

According to Kirill Razlogov, the notion of 'screen culture' has many dimensions: "It is the screen (including a computer display as well), which, by absorbing the audiovisual and imaginative potential of cinema (and then of television and video), and having enhanced and transformed them, becomes a material medium for the new kind of culture in all its aspects: informative, artistic and scientific." That makes screen culture one of the most defining phenomena of the XXth century which has left a profound impression on the socio-cultural practices practically everywhere around the world [8, p. 4].

So, what did the screen culture contribute? First and foremost, it contributed a new way to communicate based on every person's opportunity to freely enter the information space. Free distribution of information turned media space into a permanent meeting place for people seeking to belong in the vast world of information, and allowed them to experience multiple dimensions of different cultures, having become the foundation of new thinking.

Velocity, flexibility and reactivity of the new thinking is adequately supported by the well-developed toolkit of computer culture. Establishing a fully-featured and highly-charged feedback using polylogic screen can turn an individual's information space towards intellectual life, facilitating her or his proactive shaping of the cultural and social policies.

The priority of screen culture has grown globally. And *the global Internet network has become a world-wide communication mirror-screen reflecting the life of the whole planet*. At the turn of the XXIst century, we have seen the emergence of a new type of people, living in the virtual online world rather than the real one.

Screen culture has its own language and sign system, which is closely linked to the technologies. It develops since audiovisual communication is a sum of artistic and technological aspects. Screen creativity today isn't limited only to cinematic art – it extends to different forms of television (on-air broadcasting, cable, satellite, digital), computer display and mobile phone, gadgets, tablets, smartphones, etc. At the same time, the language – a signifying semiotic potential – shared by these technically diverse audiovisual communications is, generally speaking, identical, despite the variety of their specific features (for example, a wide screen of a cinema, direct communication effect of television, multi-functionality of a mobile, etc.).

Semiotic structure of audiovisual sequence remains the same, because the screen language is technologically effected in two ways. On the one hand, this interaction is direct, immediate; it broadens the range of graphic and expressive means. On the other hand, it is an indirect and mediated development of the new socially functional forms of screen. While during the decades of cinema monopoly the development of cinematographic language was determined primarily by the necessity to tackle certain artistic challenges, the arrival of television and computer technologies led to the prevalence of generalized communicative practices, which stabilized the semiotic mechanisms and slowed down the speed of their overall progress.

Therefore, having examined the unique features in the development of screen, that is, audiovisual, culture, which is a form of spiritual (artistic) and material (technical) production, we can state that this type of culture has taken a leading position in the global media space and exerted a great impact on society. The ones that are among the most influential for the XXIst-century audience are television, computer technologies and Internet.

3. Screen Culture and Virtualization of Reality

So, what has the screen culture contributed? First and foremost, it is a new way of communication based on the individual's opportunity to freely enter information space. Free distribution of information turned media space into a permanent meeting place for people seeking to belong in the vast world of information, and allowed them to experience multiple dimensions of different cultures, having become the foundation of new thinking [2].

In the preface for the Russian edition of his book Internet Galaxy, Manuel Castells, an American sociologist, is emphasizing that "Russia is in the middle of several transformative processes. One of the the most significant ones is the technological and organizational transition to information society. Wealth, power, social welfare and cultural creative potential of Russia in the XXst century will greatly depend on her ability to promote the model of information society, adopted for her own values and goals" [1, p. 5].

Also, the Internet is a cultural phenomenon hat influences both the politics and the communication sphere. "Internet was originally created as a tool of free global communication," argues M. Castells. "It isn't just a metaphor. It is a technology and a functional tool" [1, pp. 6–7].

We would like to stress that throughout human history people have been always interested in the existence of parallel worlds, including the artificially created ones. However, a desire to scrutinize the processes by which the new reality is being constructed became manifest only in the age of technical revolutions and rapid development of ICT.

Attempts to grasp the 'otherness' of virtuality were made as early as in antiquity. In 1990s the notions of 'virtual reality', 'cyberspace', 'virtualizing the mind' and others have gained such popularity that we can hardly imagine sociocultural sphere without them – be it theoretical research or real life practice [2].

The impact that virtuality is exerting on modern culture is dramatic. It enables a smooth transition to the 'network' society (M. Castells), as well as establishes the direct and equal connections of everyone with everyone, providing institutional structures with an opportunity to consider personal requests with more precision and exactness.

At the same time, modern humanities tend to accentuate the fluidity and uncertainty of reality – the 'virtual' phenomena, that is, everything that is tied to mental, spiritual and symbolical world. Moreover, we can agree that game, illusion and chance as variations of pseudoreal existence "become the mindset dominants of modern culture; everything turns into an element of... risky and playful experience including commerce, politics, sociocultural practices" [7].

4. Conclusions

Having analyzed screen culture, we have explored not only its transformation from the cinema culture to the television culture, video culture, and finally computer and Internet culture. We have also showed that the screen culture is nothing else but the construct of 'virtual reality' and, therefore, a virtual culture as a special environment for a contemporary individual. The defining specific features of virtual culture, which allow cybertravellers to create their own virtual worlds, are: an opportunity to independently model virtual space through personal scenarios; personal foundation of virtual culture (since it is different for every Internet user); and an open nature of inner cultural mobility.

At the same time, virtual culture can be analyzed as part of the 'real world' culture that is developing according to its own plan and has its own characteristic features and an authentic space. Using the structural and functional approach, we can define the

main functions of virtual culture as: informational, cognitive, communicative, compensatory, creative, integrative, mediatory and socializing. And we have agree with those scholars who find compensatory function to be the dominant one. Its quintessence can be formulated as a unique 'compensation philosophy' – the one that replenishes all those things, which are missing in objective reality and are integral elements in the individual's perception of axiological and ideal (mythological) world.

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