

Visuality as a key aspect of cultural experience transformation of a modern individual

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Abstract. The paper discusses the new paradigm of the modern society which the majority of scholars describe as “media society” which is characterized by the transformation of the cultural discourse of everyday life. Such transformation is associated with the “visual turn”, which has led to the changes in the functions and the status of images, different usage of the visual information. The highlight of the article is that the perception of the world by an individual is becoming increasingly mediated by the multitude of images provided by the world around us. It should be noted that there is a shift in the modern ways of perceiving from verbal to visual and imaginative. In the era of “reality media” everyday life with its current events, repeating solicitudes and established structure loses its steadiness and stability. It is continually subjected to transformation under the influence of high-speed and mobile visual images. New channels of communication, which are regarded as new media now, play a dominant role in everyday life reflecting the process of society modernization. These new media have brought about new modes of interaction, leading to a qualitative change in everyday human communication. Visuality as a universal characteristic of modern daily life has become a significant factor in the construction of social practices, lifestyles, habitus of a modern person and his identity. In the era of globalization and the “universal computer systems” the main topical issues of the visualization of everyday life require rethinking of methods of media images study that should be included in the broader context of interdisciplinary research.

1 Introduction

The role and the social status of everyday life structures is becoming increasingly important. It is happening due to the impact of information processes and communication technologies on our daily life. Today communication technologies are developing very fast. Modern people live in an ever-increasing flow of information. The ability to sort out and organize the incoming information is becoming more and more important. In the modernity that is changing constantly, the routine of everyday life loses its strength and stability. Multiple changes and upheavals, that take place in today’s information, cultural and social environment, bring about the constant transformation of life and culture of a modern person. Everyday life today is quite a dynamic phenomenon, associated with the emergence of new qualities of social life, such as technological change, globalization, consumer practices, mediatization, which are characterized by the saturation of visual images. However, the study of the everyday life in the context of the socio-cultural transformations remains poorly conceptualized and there is no full comprehension of the changes related to the

“information revolution” and the spread of new communication technologies.

2 Visuality as an integral part of everyday life

Reframing of everyday life in the second half of the XX century coincided with the “visual turn” in the humanities, which drew attention to the “externally observable face of everyday life” [1] seeing in it, according to P. Sztompka, “a strategic research resource for analysing and explaining everyday life” [1]. The significance of this phenomenon is determined by the fact that the visual (photography, cinema, graphic design, visual media images) is not just a supplement to the verbal forms of the world representation but the basic mode of existence of contemporary culture, the general principle of structuring its forms.

Visuality has become a way of designing everyday practices, communication and socialization of individuals. The visual environment of the modern media (television, Internet, magazines, advertising) creates the field for cultural identity formation of a person, and today new roles of the individuals are

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emerging which are characterized by the high involvement into consumption and creation of information.

This new approach to the use of the visual information has become the fundamental point of the cultural discourse transformation of everyday life. In the era of man-made images both painting and graphics were inseparable from space and time of viewers looking at them, visual perception was available for a narrow circle of connoisseurs. Nowadays, with the development of new digital media, it is not only the functions and the status of images that have greatly changed, but also the lifestyle of a modern person, ways of interaction with the media and means of communication. "Visual turn", which manifests itself in the growing role of imagery in the contemporary culture, demonstrates that visuality has not just become part of our daily life but has also penetrated in its very essence, along with posters, slogans and billboards; it forms a new visual practice of a person's everyday life. In the XX century visuality became the formation principle of the whole modern culture, evicting linear writing and replacing it by the flow of images on the screen, which combines oral speech, animation, written texts, and many other things together.

The world of signs, images, and interpretations is merging into the world of media, and the reality is acquiring the features of the media reality. It is indicative that in this new situation a dominant role in the daily life is played by the media channels such as TV, video and the Internet. A society can be regarded as a modern one when its main characteristic is information saturated by images which are widely produced and consumed. The perception of the reality is becoming more and more dependent on its representation by means of visual images. It should be noted that with the advent of visual means era the focus has moved from verbal ways of reality reflection to visual and representative ways. Such media as cinema, advertising, television, photography are becoming the main means of communication. These media provide us with information directly via visual, shifting words to the background. Visual images are shaping our comprehension of the world surrounding us. Modern media in their interaction are being dominant visual cultural forms which reflect the permanent process of the society modernization and qualitative change in the daily practice of human communication. The spectacle is not just a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images. The influence of the visual turn on everyday communication has come out not only in expanding the flow of information, but also in the internationalization of its scope.

Such scholars as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Guy Debord, T.J. Mitchell, K. Silverman, Jean Baudrillard, G. Pollock also pointed out to the dominant role of visual aids in the creation of new communication. According to Guy Debord, the modern society is «the society of the spectacle, which *"is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally spectacular"* [2], where there is the total domination of images: "our whole life is surrounded by

an immense accumulation of spectacles" [2], which can be understood and interpreted in terms of their new function as fully fledged goods. At the same time, the media culture is characterized by high information capacity, images broadcasting mobility and their availability. In the age of the globalization, the apparent simplicity and efficiency of the language of visual images make our communication faster and more effective. There are two trends in the modern culture visualization: on the one hand, the continuity of communication technologies, and, on the other hand, the creation of the new visual image iconicity as a kind of a world view. The visual reality, as a product of cultural construction, is subjected to the interpretation or "reading" as any verbal text is. But the problem is that there is no any universal method or approach to the analysis of visual images. Researchers point out to our limited ability of discussing the images of the modern world, which are characterized as being high-speed and elusive. According to Jonathan Crary, the researcher in the field of visual studies, the increased interest in the visual signals only that the moment has been missed, and an academic community is always late with a discipline definition, if this discipline has vision as its subject [3]. Moreover, the occurrence of a great number of the word-combinations (iconic turn, pictorial turn, imagic turn, visual turn), which are often considered as synonymous, indicates the terminological difficulties associated with the determining of the image as a medium, but also the problem of the institutionalization of a new discipline know as Visual Studies. In other words, the study of the visual context implies a broad interdisciplinary research of media images, existing today in the everyday life of a modern person. The new media give rise to the new ways of social interaction and communication which are mediated through the exchange of visual images, photos and "likes". In other words, there have appeared new forms of social existence and new social values such as "collective visual experience" and "networking".

3 Changes in personal and social values under the influence of visual images

It would be no exaggeration to say that we live in the age of mass reproduction of visual images, and their impact on the various spheres of our life is overwhelming, the everyday cultural content is filled with visual narratives. For example, the analysis of the popular mobile application Instagram, wherein users could exchange their photos made in everyday life, shows that visual images can serve as the form of communication. The systematic variation in people's interaction today resulted in such a phenomenon that this application from a mere entertainment has become an integral part of everyday life and everyday communication. Different amateur photos posted on the social network include a variety of situations of everyday life. People post the food they eat, memorable family events and family relationships, their travelling experience, even their pets

and new outfit, etc.). The idea is to share your experience and emotions with the whole world, to get as many "likes" as possible. Such communication of users by means of visual images is replacing the usual habitual exchange of written texts, saves time and speech effort, and allows the users to fix the moments of their everyday life. Today, narration goes through visual images, which accompany and even replace the text. The routine of everyday life, some peculiarities of ordinary relationship get fixed visually, spatially and temporally. Users could observe some kind of a "documentary diary" of events, which get their value because of this fixation. By fixing these routine things the social media users promote some basic ideas such as "my mobility," "my creativity", "my success", and this, in fact, is a continuous process of self-identification through the story created by images. The main feature of the visual content in Instagram is a "lifestyle", which is the demonstration of the attributes of a beautiful life reproduced in the personal photoshops (children, holidays, family) and selfies (self-portrait photographs - pictures of oneself made by a smart phone). Self-documenting in the Internet has become a truly viral in nature (55 million photos are published daily), ordinary people act as paparazzi and celebrities, and stars are keen to stress that they are just ordinary people engaged in everyday activities.

The users of social networks seek new ways of socializing their every step, and everything that they read, listen and watch during a day, as well as people they meet and places they visited becomes visualized and fixed. Today we could observe the growing popularity of micronarrations, which are the stories created by individuals about themselves with the help of visual images as each message in the Internet is accompanied by some kind of an "iconigram" or "news photo". According to Roland Barthes, visualization becomes a "companion-information" [4] and often compensates the insignificance of the event itself. Furthermore, the user does not need to interpret the visual message due to its conciseness, clarity, availability and speed of the transmission. This tendency reveals the blurring of distinction between the private and the public, the personal and the nonpersonal. The new media bring about the new public values and such things and notions as love, sex, family relations, etc. are becoming not sacred anymore, and they are exposed to everyone's viewing. Such a high "public interest" to private and innermost things is not new in our culture, but every era has its limits of the public admissibility into the sphere of private.

According to Anthony Giddens, "The modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from all traditional types of social order, in quite unprecedented fashion. ... forms of social interconnection which span the globe; in intensional terms they have come to alter some of the most intimate and personal features of our day-to-day existence." [5]

Thus, wish for documenting life, fixing its trivial moments, keeping a kind of a visual diary of a person's private life and exhibiting it for public viewing leads to the change in the identity and personalization algorithms.

With the development of new media there happens a significant anthropological shift and a "multipersonality" of an individual is emerging, playing different roles and having many incarnations and variations of identity.

4 Aestheticization of everyday life in the "experience society"

Another special feature of the modern media is immersiveness, active influence on viewer's emotions, creating the effect of presence and involvement into happening on the screen. This involvement spreads onto other forms of consumption. Getting a product or a service alone is not enough. Today a consumer needs getting experience alongside a certain product and service, either it is a media product or any other product in a shop. Every modern event implies the presence of impressions and emotions. The impressive, emotional component is now an integral part of media and entertainment industry. It permeates all spheres of entertainment and culture from images in social networks to art museum exhibitions. According to T. Krens, the director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the modern society is undergoing a discursive change, that is, the change from diachrony to synchrony. He gives the example of discursive changes in museums. The encyclopedic museum, for example, is intent on telling a story by arraying before its visitor a particular version of the history of art. The synchronic museum, if it's possible to call it so, would forego history in the name of a kind of intensity of experience, an aesthetic charge that is not so much temporal (historical) as it is now radically special, the model for which, in Kren's own account, is, in fact Minimalism. Kren says in relation to his revelation that has reshaped the way a modern individual looks at art: the demand a modern viewer now put on it, his need to experience it along with its interaction with the space in which it exists; the need to have a cumulative, serial, crescendo towards the intensity of this experience; also, the need to have more and a large scale [6].

Gerhard Schulze examined this phenomenon in detail and coined a term very popular with the media: "Erlebnisgesellschaft" (event-oriented society) [7]. This is a society which craves enjoyment, craves positive experiences. Schulze states that people's motives and attitudes have undergone great changes since the post-war period. Products today should have more than just a practical value like durability or utility. People are willing to pay almost double the price for a smartphone just because they admire its image and design. Holding an iPad 4 in his hands, a modern individual feels a shiver of excitement and joy, so today products are not just used, they are loved [8]. For a modern consumer it's the experience that really matters. Of course, modern society cannot be reduced to consumption-oriented hedonism. Rather, it is guided by the eudemonistic motive of the correct life. The question of how one should live has become common property, and images today impose a certain way of life [9].

Visual images give us access to the multiplicity of human experience and human behavior. One of the instruments used by the modern media is framing. The framing effect is the concept in psychology, describing that presenting the same option in different formats can alter people's decisions. Framing comprises a set of concepts and techniques on how to present the information about the reality in accordance with existing in the recipient's mind background knowledge. Visual images contain a wealth of information, much of which the viewer processes unconsciously. According to the professor of psychology P. Ditto, « information consistent with a preferred conclusion is examined less critically than information inconsistent with a preferred conclusion, and consequently, less information is required to reach the former than the latter » [10]. So, it is the way information is presented and the certain techniques of presenting information influence how the audience feels about this information and can affect the judgments the audience makes about the information. Framing is also a common mechanism of controlling the audience's attention, and the rigid framework of human relations associated with the structure of everyday communication. Visual frames of modern media are connected with numerous daily activities and actions of a person: body care, meals, apartments' design, shopping, celebrations, holidays and so on. But usually, the frame structure involves such elements as aestheticization of wealth, health, strong and slim body, beauty, success, progress and mobility. A modern individual is exposed to a continuous «stream of images" every day and this has led to a paradoxical situation when "it's not we who look at the images, but it's the images looking at us". Today a great deal of the things and events that construct our everyday life has been already "assigned" by visual images, for example, shopping for certain kinds of goods, booking a hotel or communication with friends and relatives. Thus, visual images create a certain veil between a man and the world, they impose visual dominances.

5 Conclusion

Visuality has deeply penetrated into everyday life and resulted in the aestheticization of it leading to the growing value that aesthetic perception has assumed in the actions and choices of everyday life. One of the peculiarities of modern media is involvement into the experience in which excitement or action is sought as a constant state. This peculiarity is propagating in visual images being pivotally new and influencing greatly the social and cultural transformation of the modern society. The aestheticization of everyday life is being manifested in the "experience society". Today we could oversee the general revaluation of experiences as a central focus of cultural, social and economic activity. Modern society has no hierarchies, regulations and no any stable system of values. "The "experience society" ultimately has to be seen as a part of a huge movement of democratization. With the increase of both income and leisure, more people can and must engage with techniques and

practices of the self-freedom to choose is also the obligation to choose." [11] The individual gets involved into the process of experiences production, selects the parameters for an event and actively participates and observes all the stages from the production stage to the stage of consumption. He pays for the unforgettable life moments, that is, for his own feelings and emotions that are acquired along with a product, service or participation in a definite event [12]. To have and to share an experience has become an influential motivational force in our lives clearly articulated in many aspects of our culture. Assuming this viewpoint, we could say that we live in a culture of experience. Modern society is striving for getting emotions and experience, as some sociologists like Schulze rightly notices: "taking pleasure, delighting, enjoyment has become a job, a work" [7].

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