

## MODERN AND POSTMODERN VISUAL PRACTICES IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

*В статье выявлены особенности визуальных практик в ситуации модерна и постмодерна. Продемонстрировано, что в ситуации модерна сохраняется дистанция между субъектом и объектом, тогда как в ситуации постмодерна разделенность зрителя и мира нейтрализуется в событии взгляда.*

**Ключевые слова:** *иконический поворот, взгляд, глаза, видеомания, видеофилия, фланер.*

*У статті виявлені особливості візуальних практик в ситуації модерну й постмодерну. Продемонстровано, що в ситуації модерну зберігається дистанція між суб'єктом й об'єктом, тоді як в ситуації постмодерну розділеність глядача та світу нейтралізується в події погляду.*

**Ключові слова:** *іконічний поворот, погляд, око, видеоманія, видеофілія, фланер.*

*The article reveals the peculiarities of visual practices in situations of modernity and postmodernity. It is demonstrated that in the situation of modernity, the distance between the subject and the object remains, whereas in the postmodern situation, the separation of a viewer and the world is neutralized in the event of a look.*

**Keywords:** *iconic turn, look, eye, videomania, videophilia, flaneur.*

The visual turn that takes place in philosophy, sociology and culture of the 20th century and manifested in the increasing role of images in everyday life has been called «iconic turn». The iconic turn is a shift in the sociocultural situation in which ontological issues are translated into analyzing visual images; it follows ontological and linguistic turns and fixes transferring from verbal to visual in communication media [2, p. 10]. The hypertrophy of visibility in modern life, the excess of images in all spheres of social existence of modern humans (in politics, culture, economics, mass media, show business, PR-companies, Internet, in advertising, on television, etc.) has given birth to a new reality or a new dimension in human existence which J. Baudrillard called «hyper-reality» or the reality of images that substitute for (or simulate) reality.

«*The World Picture*» by M. Heidegger. The beginning of the «iconic turn» was laid in the era of the Modern which Martin Heidegger called «the Age of the World Picture» [7, p. 57]. At the end of the XVII century, a new worldview composition was formed at one pole of which a subject was located, and, on the other pole, a «picture of the world» or a represented world-as-object, world-as-scene was placed: «the world becomes picture as one and the same process whereby, in the midst of beings, man becomes subject» [7, p. 69]. Perception of the world «as a picture», which can be studied and mentally «redrawn», was, in Heidegger's opinion, absent for earlier eras. An ancient human was a picture for mythical chaos-space, being absorbed, or «captured» by it: «Rather, man is the one who is looked upon by beings, the one who is gathered by self-opening beings into presenting with them. To be looked at by beings, to be included and maintained and so supported by their openness, to be driven about by their conflict and marked by their dividedness, that is the

essence of humanity in the great age of Greece» [7, p. 68]. A medieval human did not oppose himself/herself to the world as a subject to an object, he/she was a part of the world, occupying a certain niche: «For the Middle Ages, by contrast, the being is the *ens creatum*, that is created by the personal creator-God who is considered to be the highest cause. Here, to be a being means: to belong to a particular rank in the order of created things, and, as thus created, to correspond to the cause of creation» [7, p. 68]. And only in Modern epoch «man becomes the referential center of being as such» [7, p. 67], transforming himself into a conductor of things.

A modern person-subject turns into Observer of aesthetic «picture of the world», examining it with the help of optical instruments (telescope, microscope, magnifier), regulating illumination and looking for the most advantageous perspectives of the vision. The observer turns into an unconscious vision machine [3, p. 8]. The figure of the modern Observer is supplemented by the figure of Flaneur, a windy «onlooker», strolling along city streets and looking out for various «curiosities». «Such flaneur features are described by Auguste de Lacroix: due to extraordinary insight, he becomes the collector of unbelievable riches in a broad field of observation, where a vulgar passer-by sees only the surface» [3, p. 34]. The glance of Flaneur looking for spectacles and entertainment snatches from the surrounding «picture of the world» particular details, things or interesting faces and with idle curiosity «relishes» their unusualness. In M. Yampolskiy's opinion, the modes of seeing of the Observer and the Flaneur are in inverse relations: if the Observer prefers large-scale «picture of vision» that pleases the eye with relief and contrasts, the Flaneur's attention is attracted to «details», in particular, his interest lies in discovery of a unique thing that others have «overlooked». «The panoramic expansion of the Observer's view paradoxically goes parallel to concentration and narrowing of the vision of the Flaneur» [3, p. 48]. Both the Observer and the Flaneur are equally «opposed» to the world as subjects who voluntarily «objectify» the existence and abstractly «assess» its quality. At the same time, they are placed «outside» life spectacle (occupying «external», wait-and-see positions), uninterested in dealing with new state of affairs in the world around them.

*Look versus eye.* The postmodern stage in the «iconic turn» has spawned new figures and new modes of vision. The favorite concept in postmodern visualistics is the notion of «look», which has somewhat pressed out such visual concepts as vision and eye. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the eye serves only as «the support for the look» [9, p. 258] directing and orienting it on certain objects of vision. However, unlike the eye, the look no longer belongs to a human body – it transgresses the body, goes beyond it – it merges with things and persons, with objects of vision. The look does not belong to the eye, but to the world to which the eye is looking. Sartre described relation between the eye and the look in the following way: «eyes as objects of my perception remain at a precise distance which unfolds from me to them (in a word, I am present to the eyes without distance, but they are distant from the place where I «find myself») whereas the look is upon me without distance» [11, p. 258]. The eye is distanced from the world, while the look «without distance» is placed on surface of visible. By the successful expression of Jacques Lacan, «the gaze functions on the side of the object» [9, p. 106].

The concept of look allows distinguishing modern and postmodern visualistics. The

basis of modern visual philosophy is the concepts of the eye and vision equipped with optical instruments (a telescope, binoculars or a lorgnette) and distantly viewing objects of the outside world («Sartre defined consciousness that is external with respect to surrounding reality as «panoramic»... Distancing is one of important features of the panoramic consciousness, which is expressed in extremely alienated vision of the world» [3, p. 40–41]). In turn, in postmodern visualistics, the concept of look overcoming distance between *Me* and the outside world becomes the main one. The postmodern practice of vision presupposes the elimination of subject-object disjunction, the merging of the Looking Person and the Visible in phenomenon of attentive look.

A modern person turns into a tense, all-accepting, on-all-directed Look, open to meet a new video experience and to absorb any visual information. Reunited with the world, a Man-Look tries to understand visual reality, to comprehend its anatomy and mechanics. The consequence is the increased interest of a postmodern person to such visual forms as photography, cinema, theater, advertising, fashion, the structure of which he/she tries to describe. As the result, new philosophical forms appear in postmodern situation, such as philosophy of photography, philosophy of cinema, semiotics of fashion, philosophy of advertising, etc., which can be combined in the new genre of «philosophy of visual forms» (by analogy with Ernst Cassirer's «philosophy of symbolic forms»), i.e., philosophy interested in existence and functioning of visual phenomena.

*Videophilia and Videomania.* If a philosopher of Modern was primarily interested in such topics as nature of a human eye, methods for improving it, ways of organizing a better perspective of vision of external objects (i.e. subject-oriented problems of visualistics), a Postmodern philosopher tries to distance himself/herself from the problem of how-vision and to concentrate on questions of what-vision: he/she places himself/herself into the world of images and objects, looks at them, tries to penetrate into their visual flesh.

Postmodern visual practices are presented in two modes: *mania* and *philia*. A person practicing the *video-philia* is in love with spectacleness and imageness and this person is their subtle connoisseur. Videophil has a refined aesthetic taste, paying attention only to those visual phenomena that are either marked with a talent stamp, or are capable of causing an «aesthetic shock», to encourage reflection, to make one understand his/her place in the video world. Videophil is extremely picky about video material; if his/her eye finds a talented visual (photographic, theatrical, cinematographic, etc.) work, he/she will try to «plunge» into its flesh, to fully experience the smallest visual nuances, to absorb all the shades, texture, relief of visual images. Videophil (like cinephil, theater-phil, photophil, telephil) is inscribed in spectacle as in a certain habitat and is a part of it. He/she is so dissolved in spectacle that it becomes a part of himself/herself [4, p. 301].

Videophilia/cinephilia/photophilia/telephilia is an «ideally narcissistic experience» [4, p. 301]. Videophil falls in love either with pictures in which he/she recognizes himself/herself or in those in which he/she meets his/her Alter-ego that can excite and disturb by its dissimilarity and strangeness. Videophil looks at image as in a mirror trying to catch in it his/her sorrow, his/her love, his/her suffering. Videophil consciousness has a super-plastic structure: when looking at video images, he/she becomes what he/she looks at, transgressing his/her body and incarnating into what is seen: «accommodating a film as

locus, an empathic fusion with this locus turns me into a copy of the film. The films that the cinephil sees form uniqueness of his/her personality» [4, p. 313]. Videophil is multifaceted and superficial, – he/she perceives, interiorizes everything that pleases his/her eyes. «Entering the image», «accepting the image», «becoming the image» express the essence of his/her existential practices.

Videophil refuses to manage/manipulate image-reality (hyper-reality), – on the contrary, the image-reality manages/manipulates him/her. Videophil prefers to occupy peripheral viewers' positions focusing the look «inside» image, to which he/she is attracted by invisible magnets: «instead of point of view, a cinephil [Videophil] chooses what he/she calls «general immersion», instead of localization of a viewer in cinematography – fantasy of «transparent viewer» [4, p. 301].

The look of a postmodern human can also function in the mode of *video-mania*. Videoman craves to see turning into a theater-goer, cineman, showman, star-man. All day long he/she is ready to watch TV, movies, view glossy magazines, contemplate faces and bodies of models, artists, pop-stars, without satiating, not quenching his/her visual thirst. Videomania involves a postmodern person in the cycle of visual impressions, directing him/her to a new experience of visual forms and spectacles, setting before him/her an unattainable goal – to see and interiorize everything that is in the world – all the wonders, all the beauties, all the masterpieces, all the faces, all the bodies. Unlike Videophil, Videoman tries to occupy the visual center: just he/she (and not the director/photographer) generates the film, the photo, the play and gives rise to all these by the fact of his/her presence in the auditorium (at the exhibition) and by the act of looking at images. «By watching the film I help it to be born, I help it to live, since only in me will it live, and since it is made for that purpose: to be watched, in other words to be brought into being by nothing other than the look» [10]. Despite its strongest (narcotic) dependence on visible images, entering a kind of «symbiosis» with them, Videoman at the same time wants to manipulate the video world, leaving for himself/herself the opportunity to destroy it (by «closing his/her eyes»: «the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium and I only need to close my eyes to suppress it» [10]).

Videoman's look inspired by the desire to see everything is unconsciously identified with a video/photo camera. His/her look tries to reproduce the process of video recording, recreating director/photographer/operator vision, feeling himself/herself involved in video action (note that in this case we are talking just about merging with the camera, identifying with it, whereas in modern philosophy the optical technology has been considered only as an addition, as an «extension» of the eye, but not as its substitute). An excellent psychoanalysis of «identification with the camera» was offered by Christian Metz: «And it is true that as he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can't do anything else than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (framing) determines the vanishing point» [10]; «Releasing it [film], I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, which points and yet which records» [10].

*Social Voyeurism/Exhibitionism.* Videomania deals with the phenomenon of social

voyeurism understood, in the widest sense, as any desire to see the «back side» of events, to know what people would like to hide from eyes of others, to observe such spectacles, whose participants may not guess about the presence of spectators. At the social level, voyeurism manifests itself in the desire of a postmodern person to know everything about personal life of movie stars, pop stars, famous politicians and economists; in the daily tracking of Internet/TV reports about everyday life of celebrities; in interest in non-public photos and video of pop idols. The phenomenon of tele-voyeurism attracted attention of Pierre Bourdieu: «In the 1990s, because it must reach the largest audience possible, television is intent on exploiting and pandering to these same tastes. It does so by offering viewers essentially raw products, of which the paradigmatic program is the talk show with its «slices of life». These lived experiences come across as unbuttoned exhibitions of often extreme behavior aimed at satisfying a kind of voyeurism and exhibitionism» [5, p. 48]. To contemplate what belongs to the personal and intimate sphere of another life is the short formula of social voyeurism, which modern Videoman suffers. In the work of C. Metz «The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema», one can find psychoanalytic description of spectator's voyeurism: «the institution of the cinema requires a silent, motionless spectator, a vacant spectator, constantly in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state, a spectator at once alienated and happy, acrobatically hooked up to himself by the invisible thread of sight, a spectator who only catches up with himself at the last minute, by a paradoxical identification with his own self, a self filtered out into pure vision» [10]. Voyeur is reduced to a pure ability to see, he/she is distanced from the object of viewing and, at the same time, he/she merges with it through an uninterrupted act of looking. The view of the voyeur transgresses his body-eye and settles in surface of the viewed. Videoman/Voyeur is an ideal figure of postmodern visualistics that turns the body into a greedy and insatiable subject of vision.

Social voyeurism is closely connected with phenomenon of social exhibitionism manifested in the desire of a modern person to attract looks of other people, to be «in sight» of all. The formula of social exhibitionism is simple: the more I am successful and popular, the more people look at me, watch me, imitate me, copy my image, look after my personal life. And, on the contrary, if I want to become popular, I must collect, accumulate looks of others, build up visual capital, expose myself, sell my image. The consequence of exhibitionist logic is the prominence in the modern world of precisely those social actors and precisely those professions that are oriented toward accumulation of visual capital (a new kind of social capital measured not in monetary units but in «assembled» looks) – these are actors, singers, musicians, dancers, models, boxers and so on. To figures of intellectuals who own the minds of contemporaries, a figure of a culture-man should be added, who aspires to collect glances of the audience [2, p. 11].

*Visualized writing.* The «iconic turn» is manifested not only in total interest in reality of images and visual forms, but also in style of writing practiced by postmodern authors. The texts of postmodern thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault are extremely visualized; their content is transmitted not so much through rational logical computations or abstract-ideal symbols, as through images and visual metaphors that have a topological structure and physically-sensible relief. Hence, the

heroes-concepts of Deleuze become a «fold» which has visualized spatial graphics; Alice who can unfold and fold as a «telescope»; Humpty Dumpty who is a kind of philosophical paradox. Figures of Foucault's visualized texts are the Mad, Overseer, Physician, Offender, having their own modes of vision. Baudrillard expresses the most difficult philosophical ideas through visual images such as the «black hole» (=modern electorate) or «desert» (=philosophical portrait of American society). Pierre Klossowski in the article «Of the Simulacrum in Georges Bataille's Communication» considers «Bataille's contempt for the concept», which «speaks and expresses himself in simulacra of notions» [8, p. 147], in mentally visible and experienced states of laughter, joy, hop, sin. Such a visualized and topographical style of thinking Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari called thinking by means of conceptual personages (rather than logical concepts) [6].

Visualistics of the era of «iconic turn» radically differs from the visualistics of previous eras. Ancient and medieval visualistics are focused on searching the ways to achieve an enlightened state in which contemplation of the Highest Good/Deity is possible; Renaissance visualistics interests in visionary practices of artists [1]. However, the physically-carnal world – its visible relief, color and consistency – is turned out field of visibility of philosophers of pre-modern times, but gets into the focus of postmodernists. If the visual interest of pre-modern thinkers is oriented on the transcendental, the mental look of modern and postmodern thinkers is focused on the immanent – on the visible surface of real things.

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