HOW IS VISUAL ECOLOGY POSSIBLE IN A TECHNICAL ENVIRONMENT?

Valery V. Savchuk (a)*, Konstantin A. Ocheretyany (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod; Saint-Peterburg State University (SPbU), St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, vvs1771@rambler.ru
(b) Saint-Peterburg State University (SPbU), St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, kocheretyany@gmail.ru

Abstract

The text sets out the foundations and possibilities of using the visual-ecological approach to create a human-sized digital environment. By giving ourselves to interfaces and their technical requirements, we hope that we won freedom, time, and life by this. In reality, we can lose everything if the images we create will quantitatively express our technological capabilities to a greater extent than qualitatively deepen the actual human experience. We find ourselves in a situation like archaic, when a person, through the rituals and techniques invented by them, tamed their own dreams, fantasies and through them themselves, pacifying the demons of the imagination. Today, technical images are more insatiable than archaic demons, since they claim to massively intensify experience, but at the same time lead to an explosion of the imaginative, to burnout, chronic disinterest, and boredom. We produce images better than we know how to make them live. We have industrial technologies for their creation, but there are no body techniques adequate for their living. The theory should change the approach to technical images: think not about them, but together with them, about those techniques of the body and the worlds that they open, about the criteria and requirements that they set, about where they direct our desires and where they lead the inspired their dreams.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Media philosophy, technical environment, visual ecology

1. Introduction

The question of whether the body is embedded in the environment is a matter of ecology, but the technical environment is also an environment where the connections between objects are prescribed by technical and cultural criteria. To what extent does the media expand and suppress our sensibility? Are not the demands of technology and especially digital culture ripping us out of our own body, causing painful paralysis of will, dysfunction of moods, the impossibility of being present in the fullness of the present? All these questions are important precisely in the modern context when the imaginative factor is identified with the pragmatics of everyday life. We participate not so much in the production of events and meanings as in the production of images, which become true events and meanings for us, however, to the extent that these images express us, our true experience, to the extent they are a tool for concretization, clarification of ideas, intensification of the feeling of life, deepening lived experience.

2. Problem Statement

Modern cities are filled with redundant images - they are affective, ultimatum, imperative (Nikolaeva, 2021). Urban space tends to be flat, since it is oriented towards billboards and brand placement, it turns its streets into corridors from which someone else's desire looks at us with advertising. The consciousness of the city dweller, stigmatized by advertising, recognizes these characteristics as violence and, not knowing how to fight it, goes into a mobile gadget. Here, the images are not so much in hand as handy - and the tablet and smartphone become a training ground for grooming, stroking the image, flirting with it. We turn a big Other, into ours - a small, pocket one. However, it can be recalled that in humans, as in animals, grooming and feeding is not only a means of psychological relaxation, but also a form of addiction. The technical environment persistently strives for the screen form of representation, for digital technologies for creating a visual image: the existence merges with the flow of electronic images. But the screen factuality of the actual does not lead to awareness - at some point we find ourselves under the glass, since interaction through digital images turns out to be the interaction of digital images through people. Redundancy and suggestion of digital information entails loneliness, disunity of its consumers. The problems of loneliness and disconnection, which made themselves felt as soon as people began to live separately for the first time in their history, were aptly described by Saul Bellow in the early 60s of the twentieth century: "... lonely New Yorkers imprisoned in their rooms got into the habit of calling the police for help: "For God's sake, send a response team! Send someone to the camera! Help me. Touch me. Come. Please somebody come" (Bellow, 1992, pp. 205-206). Today, thinking that when we go online from the street we automatically fall into the sphere of freedom and creativity, we make a mistake, we simply turn the street into an attachment to the application, we do not make it a helper, but we simply leave the polygon of common cause, common responsibility, civil self-awareness in the hallucination of the figure. If we do not reflect today the factors leading to the need for the formation of a new discipline - media ecology, i.e., establishing what increases and what reduces human capabilities in the world of digital images, we will not build an up-to-date strategy for survival in digital reality, and it is no more difficult to drown in visual rubbish than every day.

3. Research Questions

In 1992, archaeologists discovered several petroglyphs dating from the 7th millennium BC until the 7th century AD in the southeastern part of Algeria, which included an ancient image called "a mushroom shaman with a bee face". At the time of its creation, the Tassilin-Adjer plateau was not yet deserted, and the locals were on the verge of domesticating livestock. The interest in the image is, however, not so much the bee's face or mushrooms growing from the body of the shaman, but rather the fact that he is surrounded and braided by abstract images that have replaced "primitive realism". The shaman is mesmerized by the power of abstraction. In 1981, British archaeologist Andrew Sherrat introduced the concept of a by-product revolution, a technological and economic restructuring that would forever change the lives of ancient communities. Instead of slaughtering animals for meat ("primary use of the resource"), "pastoralists began to keep them for renewable secondary products such as milk, cheese, wool, as well as for transport and traction" (Manco, 2019, p. 138). But isn't technical imagery just the same byproduct we have yet to master? Hence there are a few research questions.

1) What if we go further and assume that the secondary product revolution is initially the ability to use the secondary product of consciousness as primary? The man stood firmly on their feet when they tamed their dreams, hallucinations, images, when abstractions entwined them, but did not confuse, becoming a kind of second skin - a protective space suit for immersion in imaginative abysses. But those were the dreams of a man - the return of the repressed, but not absolutely alien. Today our fantasies are stimulated not by starvation or drugs as in the archaic, but by technology.

2) What if technology multiplies the powers of imagination so much that they cease to belong to us? After all, the projected fourth industrial revolution, with its distributed ledger technologies, neural networks, 3D printing and big data, threatens to make algorithmic solutions that are technically correct, but impervious to human thinking. Actions will be ahead of meaning. The same is true for images - will technically produced images need to be tamed in the same way as a person once tamed their own dreams?

3) How to tame dreams, born not so much in collective experience, but in the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution, in the network and numbers? What if the new God looks at us not from the collective dream (or fancy) of humanity, but from big data - traces left not so much by us as by our technologies?

4. Purpose of the Study

Visual ecology analyzes the dominant images that invisibly enter the construction of the gaze, disciplining it and forcing it to see the world in a certain way. Attention to the activity of the context, nature, involvement in history is initiated by the responsibility for the future. The absence of media ecology is tantamount to a lack of context, they cause tactile or visual deprivation, an increase in visual debris, interference with perception and feeling, preventing a person from entering the general field of communication, replacing social connections with technical imperatives. The absence of an ecological approach to media means the impossibility of a peaceful existence with the technology we have created. We have yet to master the images that we create, otherwise they will create an environment of excessive anxiety or total boredom: for now, we are more likely to feed the images created with the help of new

technologies with our activity, the dynamics of life, and not them to us. In the conditions of intensification of life, they, on the contrary, should become plastic means, a necessary recreational resource. What conditions must be met for this?

5. Research Methods

Technical imagery modifies body techniques and totally changes the pragmatics of life. Whatever we see, we put our body into this vision: spatial orientation, available options for movement, an arsenal of bodily practices. We see what we are adjusted to by the evolutionary race, we see from our biological past. But technologies are rooted in the future, therefore, we put the past psychophysiological dynamics of our own body into the images they create, at the very moment when they secretly modify it for the future. In the network and digital, we may not meet our own body - and this will lead to an uncontrolled growth of speculative pseudo-entities - giving nothing and demanding a lot. Therefore, to understand the potential of visual ecology, several techniques related to the interpretation of bodily experience should be considered.

1) The method of topological reflection. The digital image apparently removes one of the fundamental interactions of the Universe - gravitational. We cannot resist the pull of the digital image until we recreate it for conceptualization, until we recreate the context and link the growth of digital suggestion to the possibilities of the environment.

2) The method of somatic epistemology. The body is a cemetery of signs, it bears the meta of processes from which it is culturally and technically excluded, but they continue to work, constitute a cultural archive of the body, and new technologies often correspond not to practical intentions, but to actualization of archived experience, which suddenly becomes important in a new environment.

3) The method of empirical constructivism. Thinking over the evolutionary conditions of digital objects, the principle of their construction from information data in the world of algorithms and glitches, considering the peculiarities of human experience.

6. Findings

Let us pay attention to the following fact: theology did not turn into a retrograde safe area of knowledge after Kantian or Nietzschean criticism but became one of the sources of intellectual and socio-political restructuring of society in modern times (Agamben, 2011), in fact, it implicitly entered technology, through discipline, attitude to work, new organization of experience. Technological requirements replaced theological ones (and today we expect from technologies, then revelation, then salvation, then immortality), at the same time, theology lost its monopoly on the interpretation of images, and the image, since the beginning of the intellectual revolution of the 16th century, more and more leaving the power of theology, again became untamed, technologically enhanced, and took to the streets, amazed the newly emerged masses, changing their lives for a long time. The technical image and social masses are contemporaries and symbiotes. In the 19th century, conveyor production, calculating and analytical machines, the multiplication of printed photographic graphic forms led to a new subjectivity, a technologically modified "I", in which experience was refracted as one's own. In the 20th century, cinema

considered the experience of optical media and became a tool for constructing reality considering the increased flow of images. In fact, it prepared a person for a new visual experience and became an instance of taste. In the 21st century, innovations such as computer interfaces have put the technologies of editing - speed up and slow down, zoom in and out, filtering and interaction - that have emerged in cinema into the hands of the user, inspiring new techniques for self-care. Responsibility for the ecological balance of media was also placed in the hands of the user, who remained so only in name, in fact, one was supposed to be a designer of a new reality and an editor of a new experience. The interfaces, as it were, made it possible to screen the experience, place it on the desktop, and, through various programs, carry out deconstruction. However, the more interfaces provide us, the more they demand from us (Ocheretyany, 2021). We must shift our focus and think not over digital images, but with them. It is not enough to place it on the screen, protected by interfaces to make a digital image habitable. It is necessary to let it into one's body and develop body techniques that are adequate for its living: behavioral, mental, social, instrumental, etc. Since the technological revolution requires a counter-revolution of secondary products, or non-utilitarian techniques, one of the key anthropotechnics here is the computer game (Ocheretyany, 2019). It is it which can become one of the key platforms for the design of media-friendly technical images and digital shells. Let us take games seriously and consider the environmental problems of the digital image they solve.

Firstly, the digital image is quasi-tactile, it pretends to be touched, but itself cannot be touched, we are doomed to slide on the glass of the screen, and the less we touch the image, the more we ourselves are open to being touched by it. By analogy with the concepts "image-movement" and "image-time" by J. Deleuze, used to analyze the experience of cinema, Lenkevich (2021) introduces the concept "image-touch", which reveals a special haptic, rudimentary for modern man behind the optical resource but can be updated through technologies for managing and controlling digital images. The world of life, not only in aesthetic, but also in ethical coordinates, lies between the touch and the reciprocal touch (Boothroyd, 2009), so the haptics of game controllers returns the lost dimension for collective interaction into numbers. Through the energy-intensive and stress-resistant use of tactility, adequate to the digital environment and human psychophysiology, we can outline the ethics of digital design as we previously raised questions about the ethics of industrial design (Flusser, 2016).

Secondly, if digital technologies change the entire social environment (Trufanova, 2021), then games change the use of tools, turning them from means of production (and therefore from means of discipline, coercion, necessity) into means of understanding (and hence - arbitrariness), and therefore change the attitude towards the digital image, allow communities to consolidate, restore the rights of experience at the level of emotional participation in common doing and vision of the ultimate goal, and therefore act as a means of researching the anthropological capital released by the new technological era. What media education can use or abuse (if the environmental aspect of working with the image is overlooked) (Savchuk, 2020).

Thirdly, now the digital image, in the absence of proper practices for its development, either gets bogged down in interpretations, or becomes an object of naive belief. Games, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of certain ages, i.e., using age itself as capital (Iversen, 2014) allows for a balance between multitasking, adaptability, action and feedback. Thus, digital images can be tamed in collective

interaction using the resources of all generations, as once archaic images of dreams and hallucinations were tamed simultaneously in riddles and myths (a speculative resource of past generations), and in round dances, competitions, games (the practice of youth and the forces available to it).

Fourth, the important ecological problem of the "aging" of the Earth's population (an increase in the average age) will be solved along the way. We age because of the images we have seen. They endow us with redundant experience: we have seen all vices and all catastrophes, like all joys and successes - but to what extent this vision coincides with a full-fledged presence in the event (Lenkevich, 2019). Biblical patriarchs died old and satiated with life - on the one hand, we are always inexperienced, but on the other we have already seen everything. Cognitive capitalism is technologically focused on attention overload and the production of added emotions (Kolesnikova, 2019). The visual ecology of the digital environment can counteract this trend. Combining the experience and knowledge of different generations in game interaction is a fight against the satiety of life, for the sake of balancing past knowledge and new experience.

Fifth, computer games, participating in the development of artificial intelligence (Fizek, 2018), also modify natural intelligence to understand artificial conditions (Latypova, 2020). Since we interact with the digital environment not so much to do something, but also to experience the emotion of what was done, and emotions often determine behavior and are tied to images by the product of digital imagination, games teach how to work with emotions released by new technologies (Latypova, 2019). Through learning to control emotions, enhanced by the attractiveness of a technical image, the plasticity of the social body increases, which, of course, is reflected in economic processes, which are largely based on trust, solidarity, and the search for consensus.

We need techniques for working with the body and mind that are adequate to the new technological environment to perceive new images - an example of this are computer games and those practices that move from them to non-game contexts.

7. Conclusion

Visual ecology is not the ecology of an exclusively iconic resource; on the contrary, it speaks of the harmony of the acoustic, tactile, and interactive to create a favorable visual environment. Consequently, visual ecology poses the problem of responsibility for the context of images, for the meaningfulness of the organization of space and the consequences of the technologies used for imaginative well-being - since imagination is not only our friend, but also an enemy. It requires determination in taming the image: struggle, repression of arbitrariness and prohibition (for example, such as the ban of outdoor advertising in São Paulo). It pretends to rid the technical interaction with images from the exploitation of touch and, by shifting attention, will focus on the interference. If a person seeks to find new skin in electronic media, it should not only be their protection from experience, but a guide to direct experience. Paradoxically, the constant flow of digital images increases the diversity and boredom of what has already been seen. Boredom is a sure sign of the absence of pain, our principle of gravity, not feeling it leads to a loss of the will to endure everyday life. Visual ecology should also consider the significance of the negative in the situation of forced euphoria caused by technology: to replace speed, adaptability, interactivity, etc. (all these are rather technical than human criteria) in the design and

replication of digital images, questions should come about how they modify a person's imagination, how they inhabit his body and into which worlds they introduce.

Acknowledgments

References

Agamben, G. (2011). *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*. Stanford University Press.

Bellow, S. (1992). *Gertsog* [Herzog]. Panorama.

Boothroyd, D. (2009). Touch, time and technics: Levinas and the ethics of haptic communications. *Theory. Culture and Society, 26*(2-3), 330-335. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409103123

Fizek, S. (2018). Automation of Play: Theorizing Self-playing Games and Post-human Ludic Agents. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds, 10*(3), 203-218.

Flusser, V. (2016). Is there an ethics of industrial design? In V. Flusser (Ed.), *On the state of affairs. Small design philosophy* (pp. 75–79). Ad Marginem Press.

Iversen, S. (2014). Play and Productivity: The Constitution of Ageing Adults in Research on Digital Games. *Games and Culture*, *11*(1-2), 7-27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014557541

Kolesnikova, D. A. (2019). The economy of attention in the age of mental capitalism. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Philosophy and Conflict Studies*, *35*(4), 563-568. https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2019.403

Latypova, A. R. (2019). Game Artificial Intelligence as a Medium of Social World. *International Journal of Cultural Research*, *1*, 46-61. https://doi.org/10.244311/2079-1100-2019-000004

Latypova, A. R. (2020). Between mutation and glitch: digital evolution of media. *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science, 57*(2), 162-178. https://doi.org/10.5840/eps202057228

Lenkevich, A. S. (2019). On the Way to Media Esthesis: Production of Presence in Computer Games. *International Journal of Cultural Research*, *1*, 20-33.

Lenkevich, A. S. (2021). "Are You in Your Body?!". The Study of Biopolitical Interface Design. *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies*, *3*(2), 141-165. https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v3i2.160

Manco, J. (2019). *Ancestral Journeys: The Peopling of Europe from the First Venturers to the Vikings*. Yazyki slavyanskikh kul′tur.

Nikolaeva, Z. (2021). The Identity Feature: the Emergence of the City. *Journal of Frontier Studies, 6*(1), 144-159. https://doi.org/10.46539/jfs.v6i1.258

Ocheretyany, K. (2019). Komp′yuternyye igry: formy tsifrovogo opyta [Computer games: forms of digital experience]. *Voprosy filosofii, 11,* 66-77. https://doi.org/10.31857/S004287440007354-4

Ocheretyany, K. (2021). From Behavioral Design to Reverence for Life: Care Policies for the Digital Environment. *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies*, *3*(2), 166-193. https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v3i2.145

Savchuk, V. V. (2020). Mediaobrazovaniye – epifenomen tsifrovizatsii [Media education – epifenomen of digitalization]. *Voprosy filosofii*, *5*, 83-86. https://doi.org/10.21146/0042-8744-2020-5-83-86

Trufanova, E. (2021). Private and Public in the Digital Space: Blurring of the Lines. *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies*, *3*(1), 14-38. https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v3i1.130