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**AmurCon 2021: International Scientific Conference****VISUAL NARRATIVE AS A WAY OF CONSTITUTING IDENTITY**

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**Abstract**

The study aims to comprehend the potential of the visual narrative in the identification processes of the subject. The authors showed the limits and possibilities of the visual form of the narrative to form the image of 'I.' Visual narrative is designated as a modern form of discursive practice with distinctive characteristics. The scientific novelty of the research lies in a comprehensive analysis of the possibilities of visual narrative practices in identification processes that are carried out in the conditions of digital communication. The research methods were phenomenological hermeneutics and semiology. These approaches made it possible to problematize possibilities of visual narrative as a condition for identity formation and thematize it in the mode of personal eventfulness. As a result, the visual narrative has established itself as the leading form of identification practice of the subject included in the communicative context of modern digital culture. The communicative component of the visual narrative is characterized by a dominant orientation towards the Other, which, as a consequence, provokes simulation and loss of the author's position. Overcoming the limitations of the visual narrative, which is carried out within the framework of 'seen' and 'shown,' is possible under the condition of reflection of those discursive practices through which the modern socio-cultural space functions. A creative sense formation is also possible while narrating about personal life.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the assumption about the hypertext, visual, together with virtual nature of the modern cultural space (Berger, 2020; Kudina, 2021; Ollinaho, 2018; Schmidl, 2021), researches on human identification practices are especially topical. Language forms link the human "I" and culture into a unity that is realized with the help of these forms. Culture manifests itself in language and determines the conditions constructing a person's identity.

In the linguistic tradition, the autonomy of the transcendental essence of the subject is replaced by dependence on the Other (Breyer, 2018), the unconscious (Lacan, 2006), language stereotypes defined by the discourse of power (Foucault, 2010; Hepworth, 2016). The beginning of the linguistic tradition is associated with the formation of the linguistic sciences (semiology, semiotics), which considered language as a closed system with no exit from the outside (Barthes, 2010a). However, later a language proved to contain the possibility of creating human subjectivity, manifesting itself through linguistic forms. By appropriating 'forms of language,' through speaking, a person crystallizes his 'I,' expressing his subjectivity. Thus, language "continues" in the subject, and it must be considered an open system.

According to Heidegger (2010), a person can return to a genuine being through language. Language is the being into which the subject immerses and thereby provides himself with the possibility of ontological, authentic existence. In his turn, Foucault (2010) points out that identity should be considered not from the point of view of ontology but as something mediated and conditioned by textual codes and linguistic structures of the corresponding culture. According to Ricoeur (2007), a person realizes his ability to symbolize in language. Bringing symbols and meanings into the world is a vital property of human existence. By "signifying" the world, a person speaks about the world, and himself, constituting an image of the world and himself.

In the visual culture of the XXI century, the word sign is transformed into an image, a picture (Kirsanova & Korotina, 2020). Discursive practices become visual: "narration" corresponds to "showing" (Agamben, 2017). The screen is becoming an integral part of modern culture (Tulchinsky, 2019). For a contemporary person to tell about himself means to show himself. Thus, language should be considered a breaking through its isolation phenomenon, in which conditions for an event are created. Speaking the text, a person performs both the procedure of understanding and identification. Visual discourse has all the properties of a narrative. The image carries meanings that can tell someone about something. Thus, the visual narrative becomes meaningful in the identification processes of a modern person.

## 2. Problem Statement

Within the limits of the visual cultural tradition, conversations about the subject should be coupled with a dialogue about the specifics of visual discourse. The cultural space, which takes shape in a specific linguistic structure, is the starting point for the human identification process. In this regard, it is vital to understand the specifics of the forms of discursive space in which narrative identification practices by their nature occur. The narrative is a product of the dialogue between the world and man. A person internalizes stories from the world around him and weaves them into a story about him. At the same time, personal narratives have their individuality: in the process of narration, a person brings his meanings and

significance to the story (Arslanbek, 2021). As a result, there is a problem with the functional dimension of existing discursive practices within which the constitution of the identification takes place.

On the one hand, the specificity of the modern cultural space offers a variety of landmarks and models for the formation of identity. The modern world is permeated with a large variety of texts. On the other hand, discursive cultural practices are visual by nature, which entails the human identification processes specifics. First of all, it is necessary to understand how the discourse of visual culture is organized and functions to understand the specifics of the identification processes of a modern person.

### **3. Research Questions**

The linguistic matrix of culture precedes the subject and determines the conditions for identity formation. Language helps subjects immerse in the cultural-linguistic code, in which, thanks to the symbolic matrix, the linguistic self-consciousness of a person is formed. The fundamental features that each culture contains in its structure determine empirical orders for the subject (Foucault, 2010). Cultural development is determined by the fact that a few cultural codes lose their meaning over time, become insignificant, and are replaced by new ones.

Narrative identity is realized through the integration of symbolic meanings of stories. A person, organizing his experience in the stories that are told, identifies himself as the object of the utterance. The shift from understanding to ontology determines the ability of hermeneutics not only to interpret the text of the Other but to self-understand. Interpreting the text, assigning its meanings and significance, the subject moves towards ontology. In the 'inoculation of hermeneutics to phenomenology,' P. Ricoeur (2007) attempted to analyze the existential situation. He deciphered a person's documents as his personal history.

In linguistics, identity is considered a discursive practice carried out by the subject, structuring himself, his identity in the context of discursive relations (Lacan, 2006). In modern culture, which M. Foucault (2010) designated as "the place of the end of metaphysics," conditions were created to comprehend the initial circumstances of human identification. The subject becomes "brought out" into the intersubjective linguistic space. A communicative intersubjective space is organized in the process of reading. It is when the worlds of the meanings of the author and the reader collide. The text ceases to focus on the author; it begins to broadcast more than the author wanted to say. In this sense, the semantics of the text is not characterized by constancy. The original meaning may change during historical development, and various interpretations are introduced (Gadamer, 2014).

Understanding the text requires interpretation efforts on the part of the reader. At the same time, Ricoeur (2007) suggests considering the text as something that refers not so much to the author's idea as to the reader himself. By carrying out work to identify meanings, the subject expresses his ability to understand the text. Interpretation of texts indicates the content of the subject's consciousness, which needs to be comprehended. It shows the specific person's ability to identify himself as the author of his statements. It is necessary to transform the text and recreate it as a person's work to form his identity. Modern culture has a narrative character. Without narrative identification practice, where the subject acts as the author of his life story and can organize his experience, giving meaning to the life trajectory for

which he is responsible, we cannot solve the problem of self-identification and self-presentation of the subject.

The post-Cartesian tradition, in which 'reality has spoken,' considers subjectivity as the events realized only when there is the Other. Placing intersubjectivity at the basis, representatives of hermeneutics, structuralism, and post-structuralism shift emphasis from identity, as a stable and unchangeable sameness, to the duality of nature. A person learns about himself through the Other. When faced with the text of the Other, a person knows something about himself in it. Through the text of the Other, a person learns and appropriates the meaning of his desires, which are subconscious. The subconscious, which is organized as the discourse of the Other, generates the duality of the subject, whose characteristics are instability, fragmentation, and decentration. The correlation of oneself with the subconscious creates detachment, but in this detachment, a person can get as close as possible to himself to what his 'I' is.

A person is forced to turn to the Other to recognize him. Since, according to Lacan (2006), the Other will always control our desire. At the same time, there is a gap in the subject between "how I see myself" and "where I seem attractive from." The task is to search for the one who is this Other, to which the subject forms his identity. By symbolic identification with the view of the Other, it is possible to transform identification from identity-based on "being-for-the-other" into the constitution of identity as 'being-for-oneself.'

In the modern world, identification processes occur within the visual narratives, which have their specifics. In the conditions of total capture by digital technologies, modern society is in a constant exchange of information (Lindemann & Schünemann, 2020). Information in contemporary mass media is not only and not so much a classic text, but a visual series. Meanings are encoded not in texts but images. Images mostly correspond to the high rates of the information environment as a modern man has less and less time to describe, to tell in words. It is more appropriate to use photo and video material that captures the event and compensates for the lack of wording (Kilby & Lennon, 2021). A photo and video material are messages encoded through an image. Thus, the subject tells his story to the Other through visual content.

In the context of digital communication, the "visual" becomes one of the ways of constructing identity. In the digital communicative environment of modern society, the "visual Self" is presented in the form of photo portraits or photo content placed on different virtual platforms (Zappavigna & Zhao, 2017). The identity of a modern person is constituted within the framework of the dichotomies 'I am real' and 'I am visual.' At the same time, the "visual self" carries a tendency to be close to the "ideal self": the Self as 'I am,' aspires to the Self as 'I want to be.' Often this aspiration is gaining momentum, and the subject resorts to simulation. The gap between desire and reality is levelled by simulation, as a false picture is given for real for everyone. Such a situation is doomed: the result of a meeting with reality is often too traumatic.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The visual way of identity formation in modern culture needs to be comprehended. It is necessary to trace the connection of the visual narrative with such conceptual dyads as "real/ideal," "social/

individual," which also obey the rules of the narrative. The initial message of the research is that narrative discourse is self-sufficient and unfolds for symbolic activity as such. At the same time, visual discourse, in turn, presupposes intersubjectivity, which generates the duality of the subject, violating its self-identity. The authors highlight the possibilities of visual identity, through which "someone speaks to someone." They pay attention to the main characteristics of visual discourse, as eventfulness, intersubjectivity, and reference (Ricoeur, 2007). The purpose of this study is the explication the specifics of visual narrative as a way of identity formation in the modern cultural tradition.

## 5. Research Methods

In methodological terms, the authors adhere to the main provisions of phenomenological hermeneutics and semiology. This approach made it possible to problematize the possibilities and specifics of the visual narrative as a condition for the formation of a person's identity. Regularity is constituted with the help of the phenomenological method and hermeneutics, endowing the subjects with the ability to see unity where it is not given empirically. This regularity is set by certain thematization, making the subject of the study "visible" in the mode of meaning. The phenomenological method of articulation makes it possible to remove the very problem of completeness and validity of the description of the ways of constituting a person's identity in the schematics of science. It also allows structuring the visual narrative in the perspective of a personal event, that is, in the modes of existential feasibility and phenomenological completeness.

## 6. Findings

Narrative identity is dynamic. By integrating individual events into the history of a person's life, he restores the unity and integrity of the latter. By forming his life story, packed in a narrative, a person builds his image and identity. If a person carries out a free, comprehending activity in the context of a narrative, thus he acts as a subject of his life story, carrying out a narrative identity.

The need to comprehend the specifics of the visual narrative as a way of constituting an identity is set by the complexity of the ideological model that has developed in today's public consciousness. Images and visual constructions define the discursive cultural space. The ontological status of visual language has changed. For example, photography has ceased to act as a "certificate of presence" (Barthes, 2010b), and today it is no longer a meaningful reflection of the captured reality. A photograph is a constructed simulacrum that hides more than it shows.

The formation of identity by visual discourse has its specifics. Eventfulness, as the quality of narrative identity, is translated into virtual space and formed in visual constructions, which are revealed not by words but by images. From a primary semiological system (level of myths), photography has evolved into a modern secondary semiological system. Photography does not grasp, does not fix reality, but acts visually conveying a specific meaning for the viewer. Visual discursive practices do not always express something, sometimes they purely inform, and in some cases, they turn out to be an existential need to confirm their existence in the world. The image becomes a meaningful story, potentially containing the versatility and multivariability of meanings.

How does the reference of the visual narrative manifest itself? A story on a social network is told for the Other. On the one hand, this Other can represent an abstract figure, and on the other hand, actively direct the subject. In visual communications, the history of an individual is included in a public semiotic system. Everything that passes into a semiotic system expands the power of the Other. The other, whose presence may not be explicit, is present in a person and translates through him the criteria of norm and non-norm. The orientation of the visual narrative to the Other generates a vulnerable identity as a socially acceptable image. Not to get the status of marginals or isolates, the history of a person is packed in the form of normative discursive practice. The subject who practices visuality is always concerned that his image is correctly read. It is crucial for him, what is manifested through the image, to be perceived by the Other in such a way that there is a kind of restoration of the signified and the signifier in the visual construction of the language. Since the ability to read is limited by understanding, the visual narrative has a risk of a gap between what is heard and how the perceiver reads it. The subject turns to the Other to overcome alienation, to be replenished in his image, but finds himself in frustration.

The intertextuality of visual discourse, where one image refers to another, generates a space that requires neither the recipient nor the communicator. Visual culture organizes anthropological questioning specifically: 'What difference does it make who speaks.' The author's space turns out to be 'empty,' its function is to select the necessary visual language and the organization of a particular discourse. The subject acts as a 'scripter' who does not express his 'I' as a single-centre but only "marks" the semantic field. Nowadays, questions about the subject's activity and his authorship centre on the origin of the produced discourse. The visual images of the modern world refer not to the author but a "status of the discourse" and its position in cultural space. The sphere where a person exchanges messages due to his needs and desires determines the formation of visual narrative.

Discursive cultural practices are woven into the visual body of a person who is constantly forced to change his visual appearance, complementing and changing the stories already told with new information. The subject who chooses a particular social practice internalizes its structure. In the case of a permanently converting visual flow, a modern person finds himself in a situation of visual schizophrenia. The flow of images establishes a path opposite to that, in which identity as self-identity is possible, alienating a person from himself.

Regarding all this, it is necessary to raise questions about the conditions of the possibility of freedom, the possibility of constructing an identity within visual discourse. Overcoming the problem of visual narratives is possible within the limits of the potential of human independence, which, according to Foucault (2010), is set by the ability to reflect on those discursive practices that are not transparent to consciousness, but through which the cultural and social space functions. Reproducing oneself in the context of narrative experience correlates with the reproduction possibility of oneself as a new text. By connecting understanding and reflection, the subject resists the discourse of power, which contributes to identity formation as a self-reference.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that inside the narrative structure, the subject is endowed with the ability to build his identity actively. With the help of an utterance, the subject undergoes an identification process, organizing his experience into unity.

The visual narrative has its specific characteristics. The shift of emphasis on visual discursive practices allows us to go directly beyond the traditional linguistic space of linguistics and is not limited strictly to the rules of utterance construction and text composition. The "visual" overcome the verbal text, having its potential. The properties of narration characterize visual narrative. It is the "giver of presence," that is, being, in which an event appears as existing. The visual narrative in this way contains meaning and significance; can keep personal eventfulness in "presence" (Heidegger, 2010).

In conclusion, we note that inside the narrative structure, the subject is endowed with the ability to build his identity actively. With the help of an utterance, the subject undergoes an identification process, organizing his experience into unity.

The visual series is the information form that organizes communication in the network in most cases. The image carries meaning and significance. The visual narrative also becomes decisive in the identification processes of modern man. This identification method is more focused on the Other. With the help of images, a person tells the story of his life to the Other. When visual practices form an identity, there is a risk of gaps between what is heard and how the perceiver reads it. The person is concerned about how well the Other will perceive and read the message. There is a risk of alienation when incorrect reading provokes an appeal to simulation to pass the approved (desired) as reality; photos are processed technically, and video content is commented. As a result, the ontological dimension of the visual text is lost. Instead of expressing and reflecting his inner Self through images, the subject points to the status of discourse that is fragmental and split.

Overcoming the limitations of the visual narrative, the fragmentarity of the Self within the framework of "seen" and "shown" is possible under the condition of creative semantic formation and reflection of those discursive practices through which the socio-cultural space functions. When implementing identification activities, the subject reflects within a holistic, metaphysical context.

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