

■ ■ ■ Screen Culture Ontology: towards the problem statement

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Abstract. We regard the screen phenomenon as a formative principle of modern culture. We have modeled the cultural concepts sequence representing the evolution of screen ontology: water – mirror – surface – shield – glass – portal – implant. The article covers (1) the issues of developing an integrated methodological approach to the interpretation of the formative, transmitting, and sense-making roles of the screen in modern culture; (2) systematic conceptual prognostications of screen transformational influence on cognition, corporeality, the aesthetic worldview of a modern man; (3) establishment of the “screen culture man” anthropological project formation in the contemporary world. A screen as a cultural phenomenon evolves and acquires expanded functions, revealing its own modes, the list of which is open-ended. Despite the fact that the formation of a screen phenomenon has not been completed, it is already obvious today that it is moving in the direction of a series of transformations of a screen-means into a screen-substance, a screen-object into a screen-subject, which inevitably levels out the value of a person looking at this screen, whose transformation occurs in the opposite direction to the screen.

Keywords: screen culture, media culture, media philosophy, medialogy

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Introduction. Since screen culture is often regarded in the narrow sense, only its separate elements have received proper understanding. Moreover, screen culture is occasionally narrowed down to only one of its elements. We use the term ‘screen’ in a broad sense: big screen in the cinema, television screen, computer monitor, phone screen, and screens of other numerous technical devices. From a culturological standpoint, the ‘screen’ appears as a multi-element system that transforms a human existence profoundly.

The screen is a trendsetter, social patterns creator. Outfits and hairstyles, makeup, automobiles, interiors are all dictated by the screen discourse of the XX century. The screen has become a formative principle of culture.

Method. Erkki Huhtamo, a media historian, proposed the concept of screenology – a new field of research that focuses on the screen as the essential element in contemporary media practices [Huhtamo]. Lev Manovich provides a comprehensive analysis of the screen as the main interface for communication and creativity [Manovich 2013; 2016; 2017]. The expansion of screen practices has mainstreamed the problems of mediation in culture. Most media studies representatives, who focus on the mediation problems, currently study the screen phenomenon in various manifestations. Our methodological approach most closely relates to Mikhail A. Kurtov’s research, where he develops an in-depth ontological analysis of the screen [Kurtov 2019a;b].

Phenomenology and anthropology are the methodological basis for studying the ‘implantation’ of the screen into human existence, since the authors are primarily interested in the screen as an artifact; man and traces of the screen impact on him. Such research optics allows one to see several modes of the screen already implanted in culture:

- 1) A screen to which a person comes;
- 2) A screen that comes to a person;
- 3) A screen used by a person as a tool (of communication, work, education, entertainment, game, etc.);
- 4) A portable screen that is gradually implanted into the human body (mobile phone, smartphone, etc.) and becomes an “anthropological prosthesis”.

The existentialist method plays a big role in this study when answering the following questions:

- 1) What is a screen Self?
- 2) Why does a modern man create a screen Self?
- 3) Why and how does a screen make the Self immortal?
- 4) Why is the on-screen existence of the Self so attractive and desirable?

Research Design. The paper covers the issues of developing an integrated methodological approach to the interpretation of the formative, transmitting, and sense-making roles of the screen in modern culture; systematic conceptual prognostications of screen influence producing metamorphosis in cognition, corporeality, and the aesthetic worldview of a modern man; establishment of the ‘screen culture man’ anthropological project formation in the contemporary world.

In this research, we sequentially:

- 1) Analyse the cinema screen as an element of transitional period culture that requires an instrument for semantic and ideological classification;
- 2) Comprehensively describe the role of the television screen as the media integrally implemented in the XX century culture;
- 3) Reveal the computer screen central function that consists in increasing virtuality spectrum extensively;
- 4) Define personal nomadic mobile screens as a continuation of human corporeality and an initial stage of acquiring a cybernetic body.

And as answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the essence of changes in culture that the screen expansion produces?
- 2) What is the specificity of the changes in the time, space, and movement made by the screen?

Findings. Several screen modes have been implanted into the culture:

The screen the person comes to. It is the screen of a cinema hall, that one needs to plan, allocate time and purchase a ticket to attend. The subject possesses relative autonomy with regard to that kind of the screen. In addition, the viewer in the cinema is not passive: he or she has decided to come to watch this particular film, and in the decision-making process reveals his or her educational level, aesthetic taste, simultaneously improving himself or herself. The screen in cinematheques, and then in cinema halls in the XX century became a medium for translation of the cinema as a synthetic type of art. The big screen is customarily associated with the cinema, which has become a new synthetic type of art, that was the reason for the speech habit of calling cinema halls theatres being developed. The large screen still retains intermediary, purely instrumental characteristics.

The screen that comes to the person. It is television, that in the middle of the XX century entered the private everyday world of every person. The television screen is highly aggressive and suppresses the activity of the viewer: the news is already selected, the presentation of facts is evaluative, highly suggestive techniques are adopted or invented for television advertising.

The screen the person uses as a tool (for communication, work, education, entertainment, games, etc.) It is the monitor of a personal computer. Nevertheless, if the television screen 'disperses' images, assessments, clichés, the computer screen drags the user into another world.

The portable screen that is being gradually implanted into the human body (mobile phone, smartphone, etc.)

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

From time immemorial, humankind has been dreaming about the ability to possess information providing the knowledge on what happens beyond the personal space boundaries that frequently coincided with the home boundaries. If nowadays, the screen culture, represented by the generation of gadgets, computer monitors, television screens, billboards, is the source of such an experience, it used to be the water element that originally performed the screen's function. Magical power was attributed to the water element due to its reflective quality. Magical power renders anyone wishing knowledge of the future and makes the information rooted in the present and the past available. Therefore water became an object used by fortune-tellers, soothsayers, and the justice system among them. Let us remind ourselves of the Middle Ages when a way to obtain exculpatory evidence for a woman convicted of witchcraft was to throw her into the water. Only, in case she did not drown, the terrible charges were dropped.

At a later date, the mirror started to perform this function, providing its owner with access to the information closed to others, whereas in Pushkin's fairytale "The tale of the dead princess and the seven knights..." such a magic mirror not only visualizes the present but also verbalizes the information in the act of communication with its mistress. Significantly, in this tale, the subject communicates with the object that is nothing but a simulacrum imitating the presence of the interlocutor, which ends tragically for the subject. Even though the mirror helped the tsarina cope with the problems interfering with her plans for some time, it was the mirror that she received the information about her stepdaughter's happy marriage from that resulted in the evil stepmother's death.

Making another type of prophecy was associated with portrait painting. That was embodied in "The Portrait" by Nikolay Gogol and in "The Portrait of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde. In the latter case, the portrait represents a window into the character's inner world. This world was invisible to outsiders and uncovered exclusively at the portrait level. The portrayed person retained his enchanting attraction and beauty while his inner world was undergoing deformation and decay. Furthermore, such an experience ends tragically for both the protagonist of "The Portrait of Dorian Gray" and the character in "The Portrait" by Gogol.

Significantly, today there is a growing awareness that the means of creation, storage, and transmission of information within a culture never serve exclusively as information carriers but affect the viewer through the information content. Therefore, Marshall McLuhan's idea that regardless of the content information support provided by screen technologies inevitably affects the individual and the society itself [McLuhan: 6-14] is shared by representatives of various professional communities: psychologists, educators, philosophers, culturologists, including experts in the field of screen arts. This problem is equally acute in artistic creation. Let us name some foreign and domestic films by way of example:

- "Brazil" directed by Terry Gilliam (the United Kingdom, the USA, 1985);
- "The Matrix" directed by the Wachowskis (Australia, the USA, 1999);
- "Dark planet" directed by Fyodor Bondarchuk (Russia, 2008);
- "Divergent" directed by Neil Burger (the USA, 2014), etc.

On the whole, the screen and the information both transmitted and received through the screen serve to some extent as a shield that divides the opposing sides.

Another shining example of screen culture is certain parts of the British television series "Black Mirror" created by Charlie Brooker in 2011, which demonstrate that an individual's interaction with the screen turns into a refined barbarism for them. The problem of the impact of information technologies on the sphere of human relationships becomes the common thread running through the several seasons of the series. The film director clarifies that the name "Black Mirror" is a reference to the black displays of electronic gadgets that today are thoroughly integrated into the everyday of modern mankind. "If technology is drugs, and they really are like drugs, then what are the side effects? The borderline between pleasure and discomfort is the scene of my drama

series *Black Mirror*. You will find a black mirror on every wall, on every table, in every palm: a cold and shiny TV screen, monitor, smartphone”¹.

The topic of the theme cited is illustrated by the fact that the series has received critical acclaim and gained recognition from common people. Moreover, the series keeps being filmed and the fifth season premiered in 2019. Perhaps, the satirical thrust of the problem also reveals itself in the novel of Russian writer Viktor Pelevin “*Generation P*”², in which “the author explores the processes of manipulation of consciousness, does the artistic study of the mechanism of imposing certain mythologems on the person” [Seidashova: 100]. Subsequently, the novel enjoyed a rebirth in the film of the same name by Viktor Ginsburg, released in 2011³.

However, in the late sixties of the last century Guy Debord offered the most derogatory criticism of screen propaganda, which received wide support from readers. The key concept of the author’s research is the society of the spectacle engendered by the spectacle. J. Baudrillard [Baudrillard 2002] called it the consumer society, the main feature of which is the simulacrum. G. Bataille [Bataille] introduced the concept into scientific use. According to him, the simulacrum represents an illusion generated by simulation as a copy of something that does not exist and has never existed. In this context, we are talking about the fact that modern television changed the screen into a kind of ‘portal’ open information window⁴, and nowadays it is not the person who projects the image onto the screen, but the screen itself glows⁵, radiates and broadcasts (projects) images onto the person.

The screen of a personal computer monitor, being also a kind of ‘portal’, changes the flow vector and hence it drags a person into the virtual world through games, various networks (the Internet itself is an information network, various thematic forums, diaries, social networks, etc.): “The modern screen is on the verge of extinction, dissolving in virtual reality” [Ogurchikov: 11].

The screen of mobile phones, smartphones and other devices, in our opinion, expands the human body, adheres in some way, becomes attached to the user’s body.

¹ Black mirror: Charlie Brooker interview // Channel4.com, 11 February 2013 [el. source]: <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/black-mirror-charlie-brooker-interview> (accessed: 30.05.2022).

² Transl. to English by A. Bromfield: Pelevin V. (2001) *Generation P* / Babylon. Faber & Faber.

³ *Generation P* (V. Ginsburg, 2011): <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/104893/> (accessed: 30.05.2022).

⁴ Viktor Pelevin in *Buddha’s Little Finger* aka Chapayev and Pustota (2008) notices sarcastically: “Television is nothing but a small transparent window in the pipe of a spiritual garbage chute”.

⁵ A switched-off television set with a black screen or a screen without a picture (with white noise) is also not a neutral object. The power of suggestion it possesses is, perhaps, even stronger than of a working TV screen. In Russian postmodern literature this paradox is often described, for example, in the texts of V. Pelevin, S. Minaev, etc.

Thus in modern times the screen functions from the inside out, the screen now is not to protect a person from the elements, but on the contrary is to let the information element into one's life, to serve as a portal that the flow runs through. In the last decade called the noughties and at present time the direction of the flow has changed, now humans 'implant' themselves, their existence into the screen, project their lives onto the screen by means of the screen, in an information space. "The new mythology of the screen with its total penetration into all areas of human life creates virtual worlds. This happens thanks to the Internet, as the modern screen is directly related to the Internet. The viewer has an imaginary (virtual) space in which he or she can stay for a long time. This is where all the achievements of modern globalization processes are embodied" [Ogurchikov: 8]. On the one hand, the screen integrates people into a global society, but on the other hand, it seals a person in a capsule on his or her own (together with the screen), detached from other humans. Although the illusion that the screen connects a person with everyone at once at any time, and with whomever one wishes, is colossal. "The 'tribe', where everyone sees all, and all see everyone, is replaced by an 'association of individuals' existing independently, alienated from each other, entering into communication and any contact through multiple mediations", writes Vladimir Polyektov [Polyektov: 70]. Thanks to the implantation of the screen into the existence of each human being information sphere is rapidly expanding, therefore, the number of people included in it is increasing. Previously unbreakable boundaries of different cultures are blurred, consequently, it threatens the function of the dialogue [Ogurchikov: 12].

Thus it is evident that the screen has been significantly integrated into modern human's existence, being assigned a clever and precise status of the "icon of the 21st century" [Negodaev: 280], although only a decade ago the screen culture used to be discussed as "the culture of the future" based on microprocessor information technology; a fundamentally new type of culture generated by the computer revolution [Yatsenko: 516]. On the border of the 20th and 21st centuries, the speed of change in culture is such that we have been living in this 'future', many fantastic images of the late 21st century are now the everyday world. However, today most frequently the screen culture implies the Internet, computer games, etc. "The modern screen creates a new mythology of a man focused on possession and manipulation, forces him or her to meet the social standards and demands" [Ogurchikov: 6].

From the media history perspective, it becomes evident that the screen was consistently and rapidly incorporated into the private life of the subject of culture in the 20th century. With the invention of the cinema and the advent of the cinematheque in European cities, the person had to come to the screen and thus possessed relative autonomy. However, even the large screen of the early 20th century transformed the foundation of cultural existence. The image of the continuum changed dramatically; both time and space appeared to have been subjected to man. "Increased amount and importance of visual communication that has overwhelmed the individual testifies to the growing proportion of the collective mythological consciousness, appealing to an

imaginative perception of the world. As a rule, the rationale is presented to the viewer in the form of images. This model, primarily, encourages a person to blend the conceptual and images. In this case, there is no separation between the subject and the object, the object and the sign” [Ogurchikov: 12]. When reality is perceived through the prism of cinema, time could be stopped, returned, moreover, large segments of history could be quickly jumped over, events could be scrolled faster. The idea is depicted vividly and with subtle irony in the film “A Man from the Boulevard des Capucines” (1987) by Alla Surikova¹. Miss Diana Little, the female lead, says to Mr. First: “Oh, Johnny, I want it to be like a movie, please, do the editing!” From our standpoint, it exposes an image or model of a person, whose existence has been already transformed by the screen. The expression “I want editing!” represents the essence of the central desires of an individual in the second half of the XX century and today. Time and speed are considered more important factors than space and place, therefore we assume the predominance of temporality in the perception of reality of a modern person, which was partly formed by screen art.

Philosophers who describe virtual reality claim that the category of time is replaced by the category of speed. For instance, the concept of dromocracy (the power of speed) by Paul Virilio [Virilio 1988; 2002] asserts the superiority of ‘now’ over ‘here’ in the “third interval” culture associated with the speed of light communication in virtual space. Virilio focuses on the ‘critical transition’ of modernity. The main critical factor that induced the radical transformation of the world is the revolutionary application of modern technology, telecommunications and computer systems that radically transform the perception of the world, the entire environment of human existence, its geography and ecology, the organization of the social field and political practices. Virilio’s kinematics of culture is rooted in the speed of light being the limiting speed of data transmission and broadcasting. The speed of light of electromagnetic waves, according to Virilio, radically changes human perception, originally adapted to function in space and gravity as the physical limitations of the speed of bodies. There appears the interval of light as a ‘third interval’ (the first two are space and time). Here, according to Virilio, things do not just become highlighted, made visible, but their environmental reality and their perceptual construction emerge at the speed of light. In the genealogy of technologies the ‘third interval’ appears following the other two intervals of space and time: the technological development of the geographical environment (space) is followed by the development of the physical environment (time, electricity) and then by the environment of light. At this critical transition, the usual topography of individuality and social space (space-geography, time-history) is being replaced by ‘teletopical commutation’ via network connections and means of telecommunication [Galkin: 118]. The world now is being embodied in the surface of screens, in a network of switches, receivers and transmitters [Virilio 2002: 46]. Virilio asserts that the ‘space-time’ that occurs only in

¹ <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/45463/#!watch-film/4d9bf19d9df32784a21104fc457b354a/kp>

'real-time perspective' beyond time and space is being shaped. The speed of light overcomes the limitations of 'space' settled back in the Renaissance, and for the first time the global, unified real time that dominates over space is being revealed at the speed limit. According to Virilio, only rays of the present-presence pass through the monochronic filter of global temporality; chronological time of the past, present and future gives way to chronoscopic time, which is determined in the modality of exposure on the before-after vector (to be exposed means to be tele-oriented, tele-present at the speed of light, to be tele-existent) [Galkin: 118]. The speed of light allows overcoming the limitations of gravity. Thus, telecommunications create a "third horizon" (the first is the visible physical border of the sky and the earth, the second is the psychological horizon of memory and imagination). In other words, it is the 'transparency horizon' represented by the square horizon of the screen (television, monitor), "provoking a mixture of close and distant, internal and external, disorienting the general structure of perception" [Galkin: 118]. Here, according to Virilio, the laws of special active optics apply. Unlike conventional passive optics of direct light and visual contact with matter, active optics organize all perceptions, including tactile, and not only a visual perceptual series. It produces trans visibility through the transparency horizon [Virilio 2002: 47]. In this case, the classical philosophical consideration of duration and length, as Virilio believes, is no longer enough. Virilio prefers to talk here about the special optical density of the third horizon. The physics of speed is transferred by Virilio to a kind of perception psychology. The perceptual system of humans undergoes profound changes. Trying to orient perception along the 'third horizon', a person experiences a shock of perception, 'mental shock', dizziness. Virilio calls this state "a fundamental loss of orientation", when relations with the Other and with the world are fatally destroyed, as though there is an erasure of individual identity, a loss of reality and a fall into madness. The human face a fatal bifurcation of his existence in the world. The life-journey of a nomadic person or a trajectory person is regarded as an alternative to the sedentary being of a 'civilized' person, captured by the irresistible inertia of the world of objects and his subjectivity, closed in the immobility of a receiver connected to telecommunication networks. Another bifurcation line is represented by the technological cloning of a living person generated with the virtual reality technology when sensations of the virtual objects 'located' in computer cyberspace are perceived with the help of special helmets and suits, although the objects here are essentially nothing more than computer programs. Virilio sees this as a technological version of the ancient myth of a doppelganger, a ghost, a living dead. The ultra-permeable active optics of time-light produces, according to Virilio, a new type of personality, torn in time between the activity of daily living 'here and now' and the interactivity of the media, where 'now' prevails over 'here'. Active optics dissolves the environment of human existence, that results in derealization and disintegration. Sensory organs are paradoxically simultaneously improved and disqualified by technological prostheses. Virilio writes about the colonization of the view, about the industrialization of vision and the cultural prescription to see [Virilio 2002: 102].

The following procedures for ‘implanting’ the screen into the existence of modern man that result in the bifurcation of human existence, claimed by Virilio, are evident even apart from culturology:

- 1) Quoting words, gestures, poses, lifestyles, behaviors transmitted by movie stars, television idols, famous virtual world characters;
- 2) Impersonation (inhabiting a character, cosplay, parody);
- 3) Materialization (production of models, character dolls from cinema and computer games);
- 4) Expansion of the screen universe into the space of literature (games, fanfics);
- 5) Viral marketing, representing film characters as real people (creatures);
- 6) Augmented reality and ‘telepresence’ technologies;
- 7) Mockumentary (pseudo-documentary film). Fake news appearance as a concomitant phenomenon. Social networks users and bloggers actively replicate and spread information as real facts, without thinking about their veracity.

The socio-cultural procedures mentioned above attract public interest, and as a result, are included in the arsenal of ideological and commercial structures. The screen is a powerful tool for manipulating and controlling mass and individual consciousness. Culturologist Pavel Ogurchikov states categorically that the reality is deliberately distorted with the help of the screen, the mass consumer is being transformed into an object of political and ideological manipulations. In addition, the researcher evaluatively argues as follows: “Screen culture constructs the reality of the viewer by mythological techniques, ‘tames’ the culture with the help of novelties of modern technology, shapes the functioning of each potential consumer of screen culture products required for society. The ultimate goal of this process is the transformation of the viewers into a controlled crowd, the erasure of personal features and the impossibility of satisfying creative and spiritual needs that go beyond the borders outlined by the screen” [Ogurchikov: 9].

The future of the discussed screen culture has arrived since the screen is located in the center of a person’s life, whether he is working or entertaining, resting or receiving education, shopping or organizing political activities.

Almost everything in a modern person’s life is concentrated on the screen or around it. We are interested in the ongoing processes of the screen active integration into modern culture. In our view, the non-terminological expression ‘implanting’ accurately and voluminously conveys the specifics of the process of transforming the existence of culture.

Conclusion. Globally, widespread screen communication methods give rise to new forms of sociality. The essence of this process lies in the substitution of previously stable, productively functioning practices, rules, regulations, laws by their digital similarity, copy, metamorphosis, which leads to a total simulation of human life.

The following user identities are among the most enduring simulacra initiated by a personal computer screen:

- heroic;
- sexual;
- status;
- ethnic;
- professional.

Screen consumption develops an illusory confidence in the unlimited availability of any content at any time, which consequently forms a false attitude of consciousness associated with such concepts as omnipresence, accessibility, freedom, one's own immortality, impunity, control and manipulation, which generally contributes to the growth of anomie and anhedonia.

Along with the unconditional value of the Internet, which expands the possibilities of a creative person, the global network creates a precedent for the absorption of the intrinsically human in a person in a situation of knowledge dominance over understanding. Acting as an artificial model of spiritual space, entry into which does not require any effort and is easily accessible on one condition – the availability of money, such a substitution paralyzes the natural need for spiritual development, contributing to the consolidation of material dissatisfaction. As a result, the readiness to adapt the surrounding reality to oneself turns out to be more relevant than the readiness to change oneself.

A “screen man” is a species of homo sapiens that shows the following characteristics:

- hypertrophy of the visual channel of perception;
- clip thinking;
- the ability to mimic based on cultural clichés and artistic stereotypes;
- acquisition of personal and social identity through screen images;
- lack of boundaries between reality and screen reality;
- dominance of mass consciousness over individual consciousness.

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■ ■ ■ Онтология экранной культуры: к постановке проблемы

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Аннотация. Рассматривая феномен экрана как системообразующий принцип современной культуры, автор предлагает последовательность культурных концептов, представляющую эволюцию онтологии экрана: вода – зеркало – поверхность – щит – стекло – портал – имплантат. В статье рассматриваются (1) вопросы разработки комплексного методологического подхода к интерпретации формирующей, передающей и смыслообразующей ролей экрана в современной культуре; (2) системные концептуальные прогнозы трансформационного влияния экрана на познание, телесность, эстетическое мировоззрение современного человека; (3) установление формирования антропологического проекта «человек экранной культуры» в современном мире. Экран как явление культуры развивается и приобретает расширенные функции, раскрывая свои модусы, список которых бесконечен. Несмотря на то, что формирование экранного явления не завершено, уже сегодня очевидно, что оно движется в направлении ряда превращений из экрана – средства в экран – вещество, из экрана – объекта в экран – предмет, что неизбежно нивелирует ценность человека, смотрящего на экран, трансформация которого происходит в противоположную экрану сторону.

Ключевые слова: экранная культура, медиакультура, медиафилософия, медиалогия

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