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## Philosophical interpretation of the visuality regime: convergence of culture practices, conventions, and experience.

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### Abstract

This work is devoted to the importance of the visual turn in the modern society, and to the fact, that the visual turn has drawn attention to the variety of existing scopic regimes and to the system of factors changing them. It deals with the nature of a contemporary dominant scopic regime in our society and gives the definition of scopic regime or, as it is also called, the regime of seeing. In order to get a broad picture on this issue, we are going to create the typology for analyses of scopic regime, where three main groups of approaches can be distinguished: phenomenological, psychoanalytical, post-structuralist and synthetic. The second part of the research will be focused primarily on the vision practice of the twenties of XX century. The implicit aim of the work is to create some kind of typology of scopic regimes, existing in the Soviet and the post-Soviet space, and to define the origins of these regimes. The highlight of the research is to reconstruct the local context of the visual experience description and the scopic regime at the modern age. In order to identify the basis for any scopic regime, the work makes several conceptual assumptions underlying the basic conclusions on this issue.

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### 1. Introduction

The majority of scholars concurs today that there exist American “pictorial turn” and European “iconic turn” (Mitchell, 2005). Today's academic community of Visual Studies appears to have significant divergence in the interpretations of these two “turns”; and apparently, there are differences of a joint impact on humanitaristics as a whole. It has been repeatedly observed that “iconic” (visual) turn has forced a certain part of the society to reflect about “how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see” (Foster H., 1988). Eventually, it turned out that the idea of «scopic regime” has been formulated (the term was introduced by Martin Jay(1993)). But for some reason the debates on this issue were opened up only in such communities where the scholars contemplated on the nature

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and types of repressed body and sight. Traditionally, here belong research works in such spheres as gender studies (L. Mulvey, 2000; G. Pollock, 2001; A. Usmanova, 2001), the Soviet people experience studies including visual component (Gornih, 2007; Grois, 2003; Orlova, 2012). The complexity and ambivalence of this experience has been emphasized just recently, but for as many as 20 years liberally thinking humanitarians have been speaking about focusing of sight, about the repressiveness of body, about “the Soviet”, and the main essence of these issues was, in fact, reduced to three phrases.

One part of scholars was still considering the range extension of the methodologies for the analysis of visuality as it is. Another part of specialists in Visual Studies believed for a very long time that the visual turn helped to identify the correlation between visual and textual in understanding the phenomena of culture and sociality, and it is its big advantage over the majority of other turns. But not all scholars are convinced that visuality opens the space of being beyond discursive approaches and analysis techniques. It is significant, on the one hand, what was really opened by the visual turn, and on the other hand, that the visual turn drew attention to the sheer variety of scopic regimes and to the system of factors changing them.

We will be mostly interested not in the essence of the visual turn, but in the nature of a contemporary dominant scopic regime in our society. First, it's important to give the definition of scopic regime or regime of seeing: it's a type of structuring and interacting of a complex set of visual codes, vision techniques, practices of visuality, coexisting in the same cultural space, they are historically mobile and varying according to a culture's sign structure and methods of representation.

## 2. The typology of analyses of scopic regime

It's essential to create a, and here three groups can be distinguished: phenomenological, psychoanalytical, post-structuralism and synthetic. What is more, the last one seems to be the most productive.

### 2.1. *Phenomenological approach*

The phenomenological approach was developed by the Western and the post Soviet, Russian scholars. This philosophical approach was the first to set up the problem of the nature of vision. In phenomenology vision is considered as the distinction of objects, as something, that defines “catching-differentiation” in mind. Ordering of objects, which is achieved in constituting, creates a world-view, allows us to see things existent.

If interpreted as a certain process of formation, but not as something formed, seeing implies the rejection of any single, universal point of view, of a distant side view. In phenomenology, seeing is understood as ontological foundation of human presence in the world (here-being). Seeing is such a process, which Leibniz understood as striving. Later, the ontological system, absorbing this energy of potential change of perspectives in differentiation/catching, was interpreted as “metastable” structure. The discovery of project vision, and, consequently, of project cognition, discovery of “eternal now” (P. Tillich, 2003) signified the end of the period of reflections on vision nature in this tradition. But there has been no any questions raised about the regime of seeing yet.

### 2.2. *Psychoanalytical approach with elements of semiotics.*

The accentuation here is connected mainly with the problem solution of gender deterministic subjectivity; the dominance of voyeurism, scopophilia, the ideology of chauvinistic masculinity. Seeing is considered here again as a tool for forming subjectivity (Mulvey, 2003). Within this tradition the works of such scholars as M. Duane, S. Heath, J. Riviere contributed to the opinion that the seeing of a feminine spectator is radically different from that of the masculine spectator. But the possibility of a visual pleasure for a woman is there to be, and, despite the flexibility and multiplicity of processes of projection-identification, female subjectivity in the context of visual practices is being constantly put under threat (Pollock, 2001). According to the opinions mentioned above, seeing is somewhere between the poles of Imaginary and Symbolic, repression of gaze is associated with entering the field of Symbolic (Mulvey, 2003).

### 2.3. *Post-structuralism and synthetic approach.*

The appearing of this approach is associated with the concept of power-knowledge and power-vision, power and society, where everything is converted into an image intended for display. Vision regime is constituted by the

practice of organizing desire. So, therefore, desire control is what characterizes the modern control over the scopic regimes. Gaze is associated with the observation, classification, identification, differentiation. However, further development of these ideas contributed mostly to bringing such problem as gender imbalance to the fore. Here the following issues were given the special consideration: deconstruction of the top-down view, criticism of the vision regime, with its omnipotence of overseeing, where panoptic totalitarian system is created, the totality of vision is imposed, and woman becomes the object of desire, and no more. “Involvement in total performance is the necessity of co-existence in modern society, co-existence with other bodies, the same social and modified in accordance with the collective patterns and moulds, which are presented every day for identification” (Orlova, 2012).

Post-structuralism methodology, used, for example, by such scholar as N. Bryson, comes from the idea, that a culture creates a dense network of distinctive visual matrices, which constitute the regime of seeing, it is some culture construct, making visibility different from vision, and vision here is understood as a physiological, empirical experience. According to Bryson there is “screen of signs” inserted between retina and the world, a “screen” consisting of symbols, figures, fragments of discursive formations, perspectives, defining a vision in a particular socio-cultural environment. In all circumstances an individual is forced to decipher, decode the cultural world he is surrounded by, and so conventions, agreements, social consensuses are accepted, and there appears the possibility of organic existence within a complex system of signs, symbols. The main thesis of Norman Bryson is that vision is decentralized by a network or “tesserae of signification” which “comes to me from my social milieu”, and that “the viewing subject does not stand at the center of a perceptual horizon and cannot command the chains and series of signifiers passing across the visual domain” (Benjamin, 1996). These arguments are pivotal in our research.

### 3. Main conceptual assumptions for analyses.

In the series of articles we will consider the practice of vision regime using the example of the Soviet, post-Soviet, Russian society in the 20s, 30s, 40s, at the end of 50s - mid. 60s, 70s - mid. 90s. years of the XX century., the Noughties -10s of the XXI century.

This work will be focused primarily on the vision practice of the twenties of XX century. The implicit aim of the work is to create some kind of typology of scopic regimes, existing in the Soviet and the post-Soviet space, and to define the origins or roots of these regimes. Ideally, we would like to reconstruct the local context of the visual experience description and the scopic regime at the modern age. Although, there undoubtedly exist universal frames of this scopic regime and its manifestation. This thesis can be illustrated by the impressions of the last scene in the movie “Gone with the wind”, which was shown in Russia late enough, in the period of Perestroika. One of the last scenes, representing the main heroine wading through the devastated land, is absolutely adequate not so much to the aesthetics of Soviet cinema of that period, but to the practice of vision. The striking thing here is the extent to which, in a similar period of the Stalin era, representation and visualization of power, honor, ties with the land are identical in the Soviet and Hollywood moviemaking. And what is meant here are not the cinematic techniques, but the regime of vision. The special attention should be paid to the tools, resources, visual technologies which structured the regime of vision. The position of a Soviet observer was mostly formed due to the fact that the main dominant of visual policy coincided with the basic Ideological attitude in general, i.e. the utopian transformation of reality and creation of the semblance of the Soviet.

In order to identify the basis for any scopic regime, it is necessary to form several conceptual assumptions:

1. Vision, view, visualization are in close connection with power, power-knowledge, this process conditions producing and reproducing of subjectivity.
2. Since the early 18th century subject (visual observer) is understood as a place of convergence of visual practices, conventions, knowledge-power. It was conclusively proved by Jonathan Crary (1992).
3. The modern culture has such conditions, where “making seeing show itself, putting it on display, and making it accessible to analysis” is reproducible and forced action (Mitchell, 2002).
4. Scopic regime, or, to be precise, scopic regimes do not represent an integral system, there are quite noticeable

gaps, nonlinearity of development, collision of angles, desire to dominate inside the system of norms and conventions, created by representatives of official culture (Crary, 1992).

5. Any act of “staring” is determined by culture, and is actively involved into shaping of sociality and social order, and it is much more effective than all other cultural resources (Mitchell, 2002).
6. The specific optical regime - visualization of the invisible – is to be included in the arsenal of cultural skills of the person in the Soviet era, where the key requirement was to see the implicit, hidden behind the horizon or a mask.

#### **4. The twenties of the 20th century.**

In the USSR, the twenties are considered as the epoch of the utopian designing, as the time of the intensive formation of a specific system of conventions in the symbolic universe of culture. All the scholars reckon that in the 20s there appeared not just new photography, but “new vision”, or new representation of objectivity, and even “new objectivity” itself (Garland-Thomson, 2006). For contemporaries it was not surprising. All this was yet more proof that visual forms and reality are in a complex interdependence with each other. There is still the problem concerning the degree of influence of visual practices on social ones, and that of reality on visibility. This issue will repeatedly occur in both photographic and philosophic communities. But at the moment it is clear that photography is used as a design tool also. The photographic image is one of the assembling elements, with the help of which the fragments of imperfect present (fixed by a camera), together with all other tools of the world transformation, are fusing into an integral designing mechanism. Such elements also include a visual text, abstract geometric graphics, the architecture of that time; here also belong park structure, Moscow metro, cinematograph, posters. All this can be interpreted as an embodied manifestation of a desired Symbolic order, visual way of anthropological design.

At the twenties of the XX century the era of the real change came. This time photography initiates changes not only in visual practices. But there is no need to list all of them. Art pretends to be something more than just art. Changes affect the whole society. Artists become photographers and photographers become artists. Artists of Soviet and European avant-garde are more attracted by designing instead of copying the reality; they are not simply involved in the project of the future, but they do create it. Photography appeared to be in the “forefront of the avant-garde”, although it is, of course, more closely related not to the visibility of future, but to the visibility of “here and now”. This coexistence and interaction is understandable; manurgaphic art is giving way to more advanced technologies, photography comes to be regarded as a genuine medium, the guide to the future.

Avant-garde artists actively use this medium and try to create some other visual forms instead of art. The experiments of Alexander Rodchenko, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Andre Kertesz were not limited only to the play of light and shadow. These artists made experiments with crossing and fusing of different layers of reality, frame positioning; sometimes it was achieved by shifting the focus of shooting, sometimes by special use of shadows and highlights, sometimes by means of multiple exposure shot.

#### **5. Conclusion.**

By all means, invention and creation of photography was meant for capturing the uniqueness, singularity, but in reality it created copying, secondary image. In addition, there was something that changed the situation of interaction between actor and reality, photographer and nature. We should agree with the statement, that “it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye; “other” above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious” (Vershovskii, 2009). Nevertheless, designing the reality by means of the “photo eye” is here to be, and it has become a powerful tool of converting the reality in general.

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