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## VIRTUAL-DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT AS A PHENOMENON OF MODERN CULTURE

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The article analyzes the modern aspects of virtual culture associated with the creation of a modern virtual environment as a reflection of reality. Technology is a generative force that transforms culture. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one more type of information culture arose caused by the development of computer technology and the advent of the Internet. By means of audiovisual format and information, the so-called "virtual" (imaginary) reality is created, addressed both to the individual and the mass consumer. The authors consider virtualization and digitalization of culture, which revived its relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic, the cultural sector is in a hurry to adapt events, exhibitions and experiences for a fully digital audience.

Key words: virtual environment, virtual culture, pandemic, virtual opportunities, digital interest, virtual media.

### **[Н.Л. Вигель, О.Ю. Жуковец Виртуально-цифровая среда как феномен современной культуры]**

В статье анализируются современные аспекты виртуальной культуры, связанные с созданием современной виртуальной среды как отражения действительности. Технология представляет собой порождающую силу, преобразующая культуру. На исходе XX в. возник ещё один – информационный тип культуры, вызванный развитием компьютерной техники и появлением интернета. Средствами аудио-визуального формата и информации конструируется так называемая «виртуальная» (воображаемая) реальность, обращённая как к личности, так и к массовому потребителю. Авторами рассматривается виртуализация и цифровизация культуры, возродившая свою актуальность во время пандемии COVID-19, где культурный сектор спешит адаптировать события, выставки и опыт для полностью цифровой аудитории.

Ключевые слова: виртуальная среда, виртуальная культура, пандемия, виртуальные возможности, цифровой интерес, виртуальные медиа.

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Since the advent of COVID-19 and the resulting self-isolation, thousands of museums, cultural institutions, festivals and global events have temporarily ceased operations, leaving empty streets and a worried audience. In a sector that exists due to personal affection, the loss of an audience is catastrophic, but it should be noted that in this situation, performers, institutions, galleries, even entire art exhibitions go to the digital format, using streaming services and virtual reality, demonstrating "live" concerts in the Twitch game application, organizing dance parties on Instagram and launching online spaces. Virtual reality began to occupy the place of reality.

Virtual reality created by the means of audiovisual capabilities and information has become the collective notion of many phenomena of modern culture, reproduced in various high-tech manifestations such as the global Internet and the media landscape. The new type

of modern information culture, caused by the development of computer technology, the advent of hypertext and the improvement of a computer product using various formats of graphic communication, needs to be analyzed analytically. The status of "virtual reality," which has not received a sufficiently clear scientific justification, is perceived contradictory in the minds of users and requires constant culturological analysis.

The permanent problem of "virtual reality" in the public consciousness, of course, refers to culturological issues. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the invention of telegraph, photography and film screens, culture became an object of expansion on the part of new audiovisual and electronic means of communication (cinema, radio, television) [1]. Thus, technology is the generating force that transforms culture. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one more informational type of culture arises, caused by the development of computer technology and the advent of the Internet. By means of audiovisual format and information, the so-called "virtual" (imaginary) reality is created, addressed both to the individual and the mass consumer. This new reality, like other speculative categories, does not lend itself to simple perception. The philosophy of culture is just beginning to reveal the "virtual environment" as a phenomenon of modern culture, and the possibility of the existence of this reality in various technological manifestations increases every day. The foreseeable future thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic has become real.

When addressing the history of human culture, we observe that all human culture from the creation of the world is essentially a virtual phenomenon.

Almost all culture produces:

- a) Simulacrams – pseudo-things, differing only in various symbolic significance; (let us compare history: artifact - fake - copy – simulacrum);
- b) Simulations – pseudo-actions, actions simulating "utilitarian functional actions";
- c) The construction of a mythological picture of the world, where all internal connections are "repeated" and "explained" by the usual social connections of the person himself. (For example, all the most fantastic virtual characters live and act strictly on the human program. Otherwise, we wouldn't be interested in them);
- d) Description of this pseudo-structure – literature, philosophy, art, etc. [1].

By the way, it is here that you can find the fundamental difference between culture and social life itself, for the most part, dealing with the utilitarian and practical aspects of existence.

Virtual reality, from the word *virtus* (Latin) means "potential, possible, power, energy" and also "pretended, imaginary".

Virtual reality itself is an artificially created environment in which you can penetrate, changing it from the inside, observing transformations and experiencing real feelings, you can enter into contacts with other people and with artificial characters. Therefore, the types of virtual reality can be determined by its basic forms when real non-existent objects, i.e., simulacrams, are manipulated.

The manipulation itself has a pseudo-form in the form of a game and takes place with any objects where the action is aimed at imitating real activity, it also includes all rituals and rites that have a symbolic, demonstration meaning that is simulation, when a narrative is built with the conscious purpose of creating invented or unreal content.

Obviously, in the first place, such an "imaginary" reality, as well as art, is able not only to create another "space-time," but also to include a person as a participant and creator "reliably". Moreover, this "space-time" is built by a person according to his own laws, which are understandable and accessible to him.

However, these wide-ranging interactive opportunities for new activities also lead to new problems of virtual reality related to human psychology. This also forms a new problem of building the whole picture of the world of our time.

Of course, the obvious and progressive "gap," into which the "potentially possible" reality increasingly goes from reality in the modern world, is due to most of the development of technology, computer systems. But virtualization itself has been familiar to a person for a long time. After all, a game, rites, rituals and even an etiquette are also types of virtual reality, more precisely, virtual forms of behaviour [1].

It is known that the very concept of "virtuality" comes from mechanics, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it denoted a certain experiment, which took place deliberately in created and limited conditions and to confirm or verify real facts.

In literature, the concept of virtual reality is present earlier. Medieval scholasticism used this category in the process of rethinking the paradigms of Plato and Aristotle.

But in human life, such a reality began from the moment words appeared. "In the end, language is a form of replacing real objects and events with their symbolic names, words, i.e., simulacrum of real objects and events" [1, p. 15]. Further, according to the scientist, the world of words significantly displaced the world of reality. Philosophers, theologians, and later scientists began to deal more with words, and not with real entities that they denote. Things-symbols, that do not have an applied purpose and serve only for symbolic high-status designations, began to invade and get settled in reality. This includes military insignia, and tsarist attributes of power that visibly embody the virtualization of the outside world. Then, this included simulation "processes" such as ritualized behaviour, social games, imitation actions. Now we have free access to computer capabilities to create our "own" virtual reality, which, incidentally, are also becoming limited in view of huge demands of the required capacities. However, at the same time its essence does not change.

Perhaps new technologies of "imaginary" reality will only add languages and forms to it. At present, virtuality is actively being introduced into the sphere of artistic and aesthetic culture, and the concept of "virtual reality" is increasingly included in everyday life. Increasingly, the concepts of virtual reality, virtualization are found in various types of art and in culture as a whole.

During his popular 2015 Ted Talk, immersive artist, entrepreneur and director Chris Milk suggested that virtual reality could someday become the "ultimate empathy machine," but despite an initial surge of interest in 2015 during the launch of the Oculus Rift headset, immersive media primarily remained niche. Now, with social distancing, technology is going through something like a renaissance.

A striking example of virtual opportunities is the broadcast of the performance of the Metropolitan Opera and the Cleveland Ballet on St. Patrick's Day from the Boston punk band Dropkick Murphys, and additional groups created worlds specifically for VR. Now you can even take a virtual walk through the spring flowering landscape of the New York Botanical Garden. The pandemic, incredibly, opens the golden age of virtual media by fulfilling the initial promises of digital technology, offering new life and unprecedented access to some cultural artifacts, some of which were previously financially or physically inaccessible. While the world has never felt more physically isolated, digital media has offered a bridge as well as an exciting range of impressions.

David Zwirner Gallery, the first to launch online rooms in 2017, also experienced a surge of digital interest on both its platform for watching, David Zwirner Online, and the Dialogues podcast. Last year the gallery began exploring platforms of online rooms as part of a major redesign of its website. The innovations of online exhibitions are to use the voices of dealers and the curatorial team to create multimedia environments that really connect the artist and the context in which they did their work. This is only the beginning of a new era of acquaintance with art through the digital worlds.

Before COVID-19, digital space was almost always considered as an afterthought for expanding the audience beyond physical spaces [2; 3; 4]. Cultural programs are usually developed primarily for personal audience or on-site experience, and then transferred into

Online using video recording or a series of images on the Internet for documentation purposes. Now, when physical spaces are no longer a priority, the cultural sector is in a hurry to adapt events, exhibitions and experience to a fully digital audience. This achievement requires attention to egalitarianism: almost every home has a mobile phone and a computer, but very few have traditional VR headsets, which indicates the growth of video broadcasts, Google applications and conference tools that can be easily watched. For digital innovators, the perspectives of creative and technical vision and the chance to experiment openly are broadened. For everyone else, this is an intensive course in sorting digital marketing.

Virtual worlds created by a person or a group of like-minded people become the property of the whole society, which allows us to talk about increasing the creative ability of the individual and developing a new type of identification. Homo Interneticus acquires the status of Creator, but this is not always adequate for the formation of responsibility and sanity. The virtual world reflects the real world, which provides it with these knowledge and skills, but far from always reproduces the system of prohibitions and regulations that restrain the permissiveness of real activity. This is what makes the virtual world the object of the most careful study and analysis and makes this kind of research extremely relevant.

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