

Philosophical and Cultural Analysis of Oksana Chepelyk's Art Project "Refraction of Reality"

Iryna Maslikova

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Kyiv, Ukraine)
E-mail: i.i.maslikova@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9463-5223>

Svitlana Stoian

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Kyiv, Ukraine)
E-mail: sstoyan1974@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3975-8524>

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The article carries out a philosophical and cultural analysis of the creative works by Ukrainian artist Oksana Chepelyk on the example of her art project "Refraction of Reality". Ukrainian artist tries to reflect on the problem of modern human's existence in a technocratic world. The artist actively uses latest media technologies to visualize the total inclusion of a person in the technocratic reality. Despite the criticism of many modern thinkers, among whom the most radical position about modern art is taken by Jean Baudrillard, the authors this research justify necessity of improvement reality via new media technologies. The modern person, in particular the creative person, is clearly aware that it is impossible to change the surrounding reality with all its innovations, and it is only possible to adapt to these changes, using technologies to their advantage, minimizing their harm as much as possible.

Keywords: media art, media technologies, art project, philosophical reflection, refraction of reality, technocratic world

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Introduction

The modern technocratic world radically changes the human optics of world perception, immerses a representative of Homo Sapiens in a virtual space, which, in part, becomes the Procrustean bed – a trap for an overly trusting, uncritical consciousness. Human being gradually rationalized almost all areas of his life maximizing Cartesian way of thinking “I think, therefore I am”. Processes of rationalization of the world led to actively using different technologies, which began to build a new, more global and, at first glance, imperceptible, system of total dependence on the artificial world imperceptibly for a human. Today, the majority of people perceive the surrounding reality through the prism of their own monitor screen. This situation refracts the focus of our perception, distorts and bends the “face” of true reality in depend on many factors, regardless of a person’s desire. We all seem to live in the “kingdom of distorted mirrors”, where almost every individual has their own point of view, actually, a subjective perception of the surrounding reality. This way of perceiving reality gives rise to the idea of the existence of an infinite number of parallel universes, which may never intersect.

Philosophical technocratism of the art project “Refraction of Reality”

Oksana Chepelyk’s art project “Refraction of Reality” gives spectators the opportunity to experience this total dependence on virtual universes, total immersion in the dense web of technocratic reality as much as possible. Such a reality is no longer completely clear, especially it is not clear where human activities and movement begin, and where they end, and whether they exist at all. It is no coincidence that the author this project uses the term “refraction”, which is used in various fields of science for designation of a diffraction, curvature, shifting the focus of perception. It is not by chance that the author this project uses the term “refraction”, which is used in various fields of science for designation of a diffraction, curvature, shifting the focus of perception. In the context of the mentioned art project, a refraction seems to become a metaphor for a distorted perception of reality, which acquires more signs of simulativeness than authenticity. It is no coincidence that such an idea of confusion, non-obviousness appears in front of whoever perceives in the form of an innovative author’s object, which is, without exaggeration, the center of the exhibition space. Oksana Chepelyk extremely skillfully visualize the endless virtual labyrinth and the mind-boggling delusion of the Mobius strip into which modern person enters. Her large-scale installation seems to be frozen in the air in the large space of the exhibition hall of the Korsakiv Museum of Modern Ukrainian Art. The art-installation is placed in the rays of video projections, it gives the impression of an illusory veil of Maya, which hide the true reality from eyes of spectators. It seems, our dreams are unfolding in front of our eyes, they are fusing into a single whole the space of the conscious and the unconscious, the virtual and the real, the fictional and the genuine. When the light goes out, the beams of the projectors cut through the darkness with a powerful flow of visual information. Thus, the installation structure organically fits into the space of the viewer’s imagination, who also begins to wander through the ghostly, seductive labyrinths of the artificial world. Is it a trap? Can we say, developing Ernst Cassirer’s view, that it is a natural stage of the transformation of the symbolic world, which is a product of only human consciousness, which builds a powerful “Rubicon” between its being and the natural world? Or can we think symbolic world henceforth like something completely artificial, virtual? Are we still dealing with phantasms, hollow simulacra, which were mercilessly condemned by Jean Baudrillard? He, in contrast to Gilles Deleuze, did not consider the simulacrum like a discrepancy with reality, a dissimilarity

to it, but viewed it as an empty sign that does not indicate any reality at all. "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short circuits all its vicissitudes. (...) To simulate is to feign to have what one does not have" (Baudrillard, 1994: 2-3) According to Baudrillard, simulacra displace true authentic reality in modern culture, they capture all cultural spheres like metastases. The emergence of simulacra does not happen suddenly, this process goes through several stages, during which there is a change of three orders of simulacra. French philosopher described the specifics of transformation of simulacrum in his work "Symbolic exchange and death". Baudrillard considered contemporary art is a space of simulacra, which is a logical product of contemporary consumer culture. All artistic forms are now an artificial repetition and banal exploitation of everything, what already was earlier and was constituted the living body of culture. According to the opinion of the philosopher, the problem of contemporary art lies in its betrayal of the principle of reflection of true reality in favor of creation a space of hyperreality, the emergence of which means the death of art as such. This applies primarily to the field of visual arts, which is almost completely supplanted by the technological innovations. Baudrillard noticed in his work "The Transparency of Evil" that "art has disappeared as a symbolic pact, as something thus clearly distinct from that pure and simple production of aesthetic values, that proliferation of sign *ad infinitum*, that recycling of past and present form, which we call 'culture'" (Baudrillard, 2009: 15). Baudrillard categorically did not accept the cooperation of art with any new technologies because they lead to the fact that the principle of reality is renounced and the principle of indifference is supported by the viewer. Any hyperreality is the realm of simulacra, it is the death of art in which the soul dies, because only technological capabilities are needed for its creation, not an inspiration and a genius.

According to J. Deleuze, "if we say of the simulacrum that is a copy of copy, an infinitely degraded icon, an infinitely loose resemblance, we then miss the essential, that is, the difference in nature between simulacrum and copy, or the aspect by which they form the two halves of a single division the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance" (Deleuze, 1990: 257). Art, according to French philosopher has always been determined by a concentration and a focus on the reflection of the real experience. It is transformed in modern works into a space of total experimentation, appears like a chaos, a phantasm, where the simulacrum becomes the dominant "actor". "The impression of death, of the rupture or dismembering of life, is explained by the amplitude of the forced movement which carries them along. Thus, the conditions of real experience and the structure of the work of art are reunited: divergence of series; decentering of circles; constitution of the chaos which envelops them, internal resonance and movement of amplitude; the aggression of the simulacra" (Deleuze, 1990: 261). The space of art becomes an arena for the realization of the Freudian unconscious and Nietzschean Dionysianism, which burst out and throw off the masks. This is the result of the process of eternal return, which leads to the assertion of the total power of chaos as a result of the destruction of the myth. In this way, Deleuze removes the need to address the reality, which is refuted and undermined by the establishment of the power of the simulacrum.

Despite this kind of criticism, we understand that only time will allow us understanding perspective of improvement the technologies in deferent spheres of human life, gradually opening new horizons of vision of a new existence of a person in the world of new technologies.

In contrast to the radical demonization of the latest technologies by Baudrillard, M. McLuhan has high expectations for modern audiovisual media, thanks to which, it is possible to overcome the Gutenbergian fragmentation of the oral culture and the ear culture. The fragmentation of culture became dominant after the creation of the alphabet and the spread of writing, which cut off harmony syncretic-mythological inseparability of the pre-literate ear culture and led to the dominance of visuality. The media becomes connection links between fractions of culture in the modern age, which for McLuhan was marked by the dominance of electricity, and today is marked by electronics and the latest information technologies. The media combines visuality and audiality in the system of audiovisual culture, which attracts into its space all the communicative possibilities of scientific achievements. The emergence of the "global village", which was predicted by McLuhan even before the discovery of the Internet, also creates new conditions for the restoration of the multidimensional perception of the world and the emergence of a new symbolic reality of modern tribal culture under the influence of the latest media. "That is only the East-side story, for the electric implosion now brings oral and tribal ear-culture to the literate West. Not only does the visual, specialist, and fragmented Westerner have now to live in closest daily association with all the ancient oral cultures of the earth, but his own electric technology now begins to translate the visual or eye man back into the tribal and oral pattern with its seamless web of kinship and interdependence" (McLuhan, 2013: 52).

In our opinion, certain practices of media art – media installations, media performances, net art, etc. – continue to use the techniques of classical visual arts. So, in a certain way they become a logical continuation of the evolution of fine art, although they have significant innovative differences. Thus, media art becomes the basis for the creation of a new symbolic reality. The need for derationalization of art, which was practically devoid of a sensual component due to conceptual justification during the second half of the 20th century, is embodied in media practices by a holistic reunion of sensory and mental perception within the limits of a new media-symbolic reality. It is the need to return to the spiritual and symbolic dimensions leads to their rebirth in technocratic reality. As E. Davis notes in his work "TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Information Age," spiritual reality is not something that comes down to us from somewhere above. We reveal it to ourselves through our symbols, rituals, and acts of communication. And since cyberspace embodies and expands our mind, which produces symbols, it can mediate the sacred communication of people with each other, as well as the divine parts of ourselves, that we address in this space (Devis, 2015).

According to M. Dery, total rationalization, the process of which was launched during the Age of Enlightenment, could not displace the need for the irrational and sacral, which was embodied in the mystification of technology and the birth of techno-paganism, cyberdelic subcultures, etc. in the situation of the postmodern "death of God". The esoteric knowledge and arcane terminology, which are associated with computing, gives it an almost religious status in a world, which is increasingly depend on digital technology. The death of God meant the emergence of a new theology – the theology of technology for the "laity" (Dery, 1997).

In our opinion, such a symbolic humanization of both cyberspace and the sphere of media art within virtual boundaries (net art) and beyond them (media installations, video art, etc.) does not exclude acts of human faith into the existence of the transcendent with the help of technological techniques. That is what audience encounters in the art projects by Oksana Chepelyk. The artist tries to visualize in her media work "Meta-physical time-space" the process of internal activity of human consciousness, its ability to generate symbols and

produce internal meanings. The processes of symbol formation appear before a spectator in the kaleidoscopic dynamics of the transformation of the surrounding world, which breaks up into fragments and twists into a video maelstrom of symbolic and geometric forms. Another spatial installation by the artist "Portal. Neural network" also illustrates the complexity of the structure of the human brain, which, unlike the animal world, is capable of generating a symbolic reality. This reality creates a unique, original world of human culture since the beginning of time. These two works by Oksana are a very successful attempt to demonstrate and visualize the mental processes of the "birth" of symbols, which a spectator cannot see, but can only imagine with the help of the artist's creative imagination.

Corporeality and the latest technologies

Today, even human body ceases to be part of only the natural world. Apocalyptic predictions like "Terminator", radical forecasts of transhumanists, new breakthroughs in the scientific and technical fields and medicine, totally transform the body image of a modern person. On the one hand, the body acquires additional possibilities for survival (different prostheses and implants, artificial organs, etc.), and on the other hand, technologies bring closer and closer human being to the emergence of a new being, which is increasingly becoming a part of the artificial world rather than the natural. Bloody wars, mutilations, human tragedies which lead to transformation of the body, were reflected in Oksana Chepelik's painting series "Post-human" within art project "Refraction of Reality". The artist depicts her characters with prostheses, and that, however, does not prevent these people from being active, full thirst for life, against all the odds. In the same context, premature babies in incubators are also depicted. They get their chance at life thanks to new technological advances in the field of medicine, which significantly prolong the life of a modern person, compared to past times, and give chances of survival of those who previously did not have them under any circumstances. Thus, medical technologies are common good, despite all the nuances of our critical attitude towards them.

Modern media researcher Neil Postman points out, that technology gives something and technology takes away something (Postman, 2011). When we calculate effects, it is always necessary to understand what we get more – a result with a "plus" sign or with a "minus" sign. It is no coincidence that the images of babies, who are fed centrally through artificial tubes, become a certain personification of the universal "connection" of a person to the global system of manipulative technologies. This process starts from birth a baby and thanks to technologies will and desires of human being are totally joined to a well-thought-out scheme of world control. So, technologies give a new possibility and technologies take away a freedom. They increasingly invade the territory of human personal space, to use a phrase of Erich Fromm, imperceptibly taking away a freedom in exchange for a security. Person becomes an obedient blind man, who follows a guide to an abyss, like in Bruegel's famous painting. Unlike Bruegel's blind people, modern people are equipped with new gadgets and technologies in the spirit of the times. Unfortunately, these gadgets are unable to save completely people from a fatal fall.

Maybe everything is not so tragic? Maybe we succumbed to Baudrillard's charms and total pessimism also distorted the real optics of our perception of the reality? Where to look for the truth now, when we do not know what is the true reality today? What and where is a natural or an artificial world, a virtual or real space? We can ask a young person, where does he or she feel better, what is the real space for him or her? We think the answer no longer shocks us; we intuitively predict their choice. And just as Laocoon and his sons died trying

to warn the Trojans about the danger, so our prophetic premonitions about the reverse side of technologies are most likely doomed to perish. Oksana Chepelyk depicts in her work the image of the ancient character twisting to a deadly funnel of distorted reality. The artist reflects on a heartbreaking dilemma – how not to lose yourself in the extremely complex, transformed and sometimes unreal world of manipulative technologies. How to preserve the ability for critical thinking, how to use only the positive aspects of scientific and technological progress without falling into delusion and avoiding numerous temptations. Oksana Chepelyk constantly seems to walk on a razor's edge, actively uses the latest media technologies in her works, presenting them in numerous foreign art projects. At the same time, she entirely understands the danger of crossing a shaky boundary – a border between herself and rest of the world, which blurs the line between the human, the natural and the artificial dimension of life.

We are reflecting on these questions together with the author of art project, and by that we powerfully actualize our own critical thinking, direct its efforts to the most transparent analysis of the situation in which we find ourselves. This situation is complicated by the war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and it inevitably leads to the process of maximally narrowing human rights and freedoms in favor of the principle of total control and manipulation, which based on universal fear. Human wanderings in the technocratic labyrinth continue, but still people hope to see the light at the end of the tunnel which will lead them to a space of balanced existence of a natural and an artificial, a real and a virtual, a human and a technocratic world.

Conclusions

Thus, the research of Oksana Chepelyk's work gives us the opportunity to draw the following conclusions:

1. The modern technocratic world radically changes the optics of human perception of the surrounding reality. In contrast to the past linear perception of time, the concept of multiplicity of vectors of possible development of events emerges. All this affects the character of human life, as well as the specifics of modern creativity.

2. Oksana Chepelyk's art project "Refraction of reality" becomes an artistic reaction to the technocratization of the surrounding world. The concept of "refraction" becomes a metaphor for a distorted perception of the reality, which acquires more signs of simulativeness than authenticity.

3. An analysis of the positions of both radical critics of the latest technologies and their supporters is carried out. J. Baudrillard and J. Deleuze's approach is presented through the prism of the principle of functioning and essence of simulacra in modern culture. In contrast to their critical position, another view is demonstrated, which is connected with M. McLuhan, E. Davis and M. Dery, who try to find the most optimal way for the coexistence of technology and modern person.

4. It is noted that Oksana Chepelyk's art project "Post-human" demonstrates the influence of the latest technologies directly on the human body, which partly combines both natural and artificial elements (for example, prostheses). Their use is aimed at facilitating the lives of people with injuries and disabilities and this is a positive side of the latest technologies.

5. Based on the statement of N. Postman, the authors also come to the conclusion that the latest technologies both give and take away. And it is incredibly important for a person to be aware of all the pros and cons of such interaction.

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