

PERAET 2021**International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»****ANTI-MYTH OF BOOK: THE CONCEPT EXPLICATION IN THE
CONTEXT OF DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

Alexandra P. Filimonova (a)*, Shara M. Mazhitayeva (b), Dmitry V. Sizov (c)

*Corresponding author

(a) Buketov Karaganda University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan, alexfilia@yandex.ru,

(b) Buketov Karaganda University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan, s_mazhit@mail.ru,

(c) Karaganda Medical University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan, sdmitrijd-1577@mail.ru

Abstract

The article considers some characteristics of digital culture in their relation to modern artistic creativity. New information formats are reflected in linguistic conceptualization of the image of the book, in the nature of its picturing in literary works. Virtualization of the reality associated with the electronic information environment, communicative uncertainty allowing for different interpretations of meaning, destruction of objective statics and stability, and interactivity all are reflected in unconventional images of the book that devalue the ideas of book and world isomorphism and cultural word-centrism. The authors observe the reflection of these processes in the work of "non-digital" literature. Tolstaya's dystopian novel *The Slynx* can be read as an anti-myth of the book, a critical reflection on the traditional logocentrism of Russian literature. Such features of digital culture as hypertextuality and heterotropic space of the "universal library," the development of "anonymous cyber-personality" and "multi-personality," and disconnection from the meanings of traditional culture all reveal their specific manifestation in the novel.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Book concept, digital culture, dystopia, hypertext, intertextuality

1. Introduction

The modern information environment, formed under the influence of intensive digitalization of different spheres of human activity, has had a significant anthropogenic and socio-cultural impact; the digital revolution is accompanied by the development of a new type of culture. In a broad sense, digital culture not only includes phenomena directly represented in cyberspace, but also implies a general set of properties formed in the 'digital era'.

Digital culture can be seen as an emerging set of values, practices, and expectations ... This digital culture has emergent properties with roots in both online and offline phenomena, with links to trends and developments predating the World Wide Web, yet having an immediate impact and particularly changing the ways in which we use and give meaning to living. (Deuze, 2006, p.63)

The existence of the digital generation is determined primarily by the new properties of information and the forms of its translation. Described by Baudrillard, the virtualization of reality created by digital technologies—involving a rapid multi-vector circulation of information and permeability of information barriers – takes on a new dimension. It acquires the value of an authentic reality, and is formed as a "heterotopic space" (Foucauldian heterotopias) (Potter, 2017, p. 116), within which a transgression of the personal, social, and cultural spaces progresses. These processes are now a research objective in various fields of the humanities, something which indicates the relevance of this topic (Lally, 2018; Mata, 2021; Yékú, 2020).

The book often is called the first and most "natural" virtual reality created by humans. It is natural that, being the most widespread information and communication tool, and an important concept of linguistic consciousness, the book most convincingly manifests the changes taking place in this area. Acquiring new forms of existence in the digital environment, the book generates and reflects the forms of thinking and perception inherent in 'homo informaticus' in an emerging socio-psychological population.

The e-book as a way of recording and transmitting of written texts today successfully competes with printed objects of written culture, in which "the desacralization and democratization of reading has finally occurred and there is a rapid total digitalization that affects the channels of reader perception" (Bal, 2019, p.5). The importance of digital book formats as an information medium and means of communication, education, and socialization is steadily increasing. Consequently, the conceptual meaning of the book as a mental-linguistic construct is also transforming.

2. Problem Statement

The spread of electronic book formats as a new phenomenon of written culture, with their large information capacity, interactivity, and incorporation in the global digital information and communication space, effects how the book is presented and conceptualization in the artistic linguistic consciousness. The recognizable features of digital culture reveal themselves in the contemporary literature determining the ways of artistic representation, which makes them expedient for analysis as mutually complementary.

3. Research Questions

New trends of the electronic era are naturally manifested in such significant components of culture as the linguistic world image, linguistic consciousness, and their reflection in literature. The characteristics of digital culture reveal their commonality with the features of modern artistic thinking, which are becoming more evident in the style and forms of intellectual and artistic creativity, “the concept of the literary has changed because the concept of the human has also evolved” (Baelo-Allué, 2019, p. 113). This is relevant not only to so-called ‘digital’ literature with its technically mediated hypertextuality, multilinearity, multimodality, interactive and ludic new media, but also to ‘offline’ literature. It can be argued that even before the widespread distribution of digital, online, and media literature, the properties of the new culture become actual as a subject of artistic reflection, elements of literary conceptual landscape, and artistic techniques in offline creativity.

4. Purpose of the Study

The article aims to consider some properties of digital culture in their relation to the peculiarities of modern artistic thinking, to observe the influence of new communication and information formats on the conceptualization of the image of the book, and its implementation in the literary text of “non-digital literature”.

5. Research Methods

Methodologically this paper is based mainly on procedures of conceptual analysis (Tarasova, 2019), communicative stylistics (Bolotnova, 2021), and intertextual analysis of literature texts (Arnold, 1999).

6. Findings

Historical transformations of the book artistic perception are obvious in the metaphorical language as “metaphors are rooted in the culture of a nation and reflect their cultural beliefs and values” (Chita & Stavrou, 2020, p. 117). Traditional metaphors depend on the perception of a book as a physical object. They include such figures as “life as a book”, “world as a book”, “nature as a book”, “man as a book” etc. Such metaphors dwell on the ideas of the substantial unity of the world, manifested in the conceivable integrity, achievable completeness (meaningfulness) of the phenomena likened to the book. “The printed book represents the holistic dimension of culture” (Ojamaa & Torop, 2020, p. 67). It presupposes the presence of the Creator's meaningful creative will, revealed through the Divine Word. In the European literary traditions, this conception supports the cultural myth of the sacred nature of the book, the messianic role of the Word.

Non-traditional metaphors associated with the morphology of the virtual digital culture are no longer based on the objective certainty and completeness of a paper book. They create different forms to describe the new reality, relying on the virtual space of the digital book, its non-materiality, dynamism and interactivity of its text, its ability to interact and intersect different texts within itself (hypertext).

The full meanings of an e-book can be accomplished only in interaction with other ones within the electronic library. "The digital platform allows for the synthesis of divergence and convergence and creation of a conceptual whole on the basis of a series of fragments and interpretations" (Ojamaa & Torop, 2020, p. 68). Textual completeness and linearity are devalued by the possibility of endless transitions and links to other sources, which together form the hypertext of a potentially existing "all-embracing book," laced with multiple intertextual associations.

Such dynamic metaphors that actualize the incompleteness, multidimensionality, and instability of the book are symbolic images of the "Universal library", "book as labyrinth", "book as sand", and "book as sphere" (Ivanova, 2013, p. 42). The non-traditional metaphors reflect the atrophy of clear connections with the meanings accumulated by the previous culture, which in the context of the "Universal library" undergo modal and semantic re-accentuation.

These processes are subjected to artistic reflection in one of the modern anti-myths of book, in the dystopian novel *The Slynx* by T. Tolstaya. Dystopia as a genre explores the potential consequences of the trends progressing in the current society, "presents unpleasant social, political and technological tendencies of the modern world" (Khalil, 2020, p. 139). The novel depicts a world formed as a result of the catastrophic consequences of technological progress and a new socio-psychological population of the Golubchik society which has forfeited connections with the previous culture.

In the novel, the concept of "book" is explicated through introducing "book words" from the previous culture. The hypertext of the "all-embracing book", correlating with the phenomenon of technically mediated interactive communication, is embodied in the consciousness of the main character. In his search for the "master book", Benedikt forms both a physical and a mental analogue of the "Universal Library" with numerous intertextual inclusions and references that permeate the entire speech fabric of the work. To perceive the text, it is important not only to identify these intertextual elements, but to understand what relations they develop with the new text, how the traditional understanding assigned to them in the culture is transformed in the receiving context.

One of the ways to re-actualize the meaning of the pretexts included in the novel is a false authorship. Modern communication spaces have created such a phenomenon as digital anonymity – the functioning of their participants as virtual cyber personalities. The possibility of false identification and attribution leads to mass falsifications in the digital information space, for example, to circulation of pseudo-original texts attributed to some authoritative "media personalities." One recent example of this kind is a viral poem on the quarantine, disseminated under the stated authorship of Pushkin, actually written by Urri Grim, a web poet from Kazakhstan.

In Tolstaya's novel, false attribution becomes one of the important artistic techniques. Fragments of literary works are attributed to the only author – Fyodor Kuzmich who acts as the creator of all the poetic texts available in the Golubchik's world. This illustrates the logical conclusion to a process that is widespread in the digital society, establishing a monopoly on describing and evaluating of reality, on the truth and the Word (which is evident in the selective censorship on popular Internet platforms). The speculative postmodern 'death of the author' is clearly realized in *The Slynx* as "the murder of all authors" – the forcible erasure of them from the infosphere.

The hypertext in the novel is driven by the main character. Benedikt is a Scribe whose duties include copying old printed books under the new authorship of the Greatest Murza. This is an obvious allusion to numerous characters in dystopias (primarily a canonical character of Orwell's 1984, who is also professionally involved with rewriting texts), the linguotype of which can be indicated as "homo scriptorem" – a writing person.

However, the hero of Tolstaya's dystopia initially has no claims to original creativity. This is a new modification of the socio-psychological type, which reveals a commonality with the "information man" of digital culture illustrating how "dystopian elements evolve under the political and historical reality of the moving times" (Hodge, 2020, p. 2). As Luks (2020) argues, "the main selfhood-shaping aspects which accompany the spread of digital environments <...> are the fragmentation of selfhood in online environments; the impossibility of developing or expressing originality; wide-spread dependence on the content offered by digital environments; and damage to mental capacity" (p. 266).

The creative intentions of the "writing person" are reduced to semantic adaptation to the new context of the already written texts which then become part of his own speech repertoire. This justifies Benedikt's fundamentally secondary, quotational consciousness which illustrates the typological citationality of postmodern creativity where "thought, knowledge, and culture, in general, are increasingly determined by the language, discourse, and texts of past eras" (Omarova et al., 2018, p. 77). This echoes aspects of the so-called "network multipersonality", for which the eclectic corpus of other people's texts serves as a means of self-identification and self-expression in cyberspace. However, the previous books describe already non-existent, lost or transformed cultural landscapes. In the quotational, "interpretive" consciousness of Benedikt, re-actualization of the meanings assigned to the key pretexts of Russian and world culture occurs.

Let us consider how this happens when the texts of A. S. Pushkin, the central ideologeme of the novel, are introduced into the narrative. For Russian literature "Pushkin's text" has the peculiar status of a resonant 'supertext,' serving as the popular citation fund of a typical member of Russian culture. The Golubchik world destructs and transforms the words and meanings of the Pushkin's text, subjecting it to various transformations – grammatical, semantic, orthoepic, and graphic.

The Pushkin word embodies in the novel the concept of the Divine Word – the main myth of Russian culture, rooted in the idea of the world and man as the Book of the Creator. Pushkin's famous line "Glagolom zhgi serdtsa lyudey" is traditionally perceived as a declaration of the divine origin of the Word and the Poet's high mission. In the novel, we observe how the phonetic transformation of Pushkin's "glagol" (word) into its quasi-homonym "glagol'" (the letter of the ancient Slavic alphabet) leads to a further altering of the complex of meanings associated with the poetry.

Supported by the phonetic change, the new image is generated through metaphorical transfer by similarity of the shape of the letter "glagol" and the hook, leading to the association of the Word as divine instrument of truth and enlightenment with a terrible tool of suppression and physical violence: "Vernyy kryuk, zagnuty, kak bukva "glagol"! Glagolem zhech' serdtsa lyudey!"¹ (Tolstaya, 2004, p.356). The abstract metaphorical meaning (to inspire with a poetic word) is transformed to a direct one (to use an instrument of violence). It is important that the secondary semantic components of the two images are

¹ "His trusty hook, bent like the letter, Glagol! "With words to burn the hearts of men!"

preserved, supporting the identification of the ultimate beneficence of the divine "Glagol" and the bloody "glagol'". Benedikt, who mutilates the Golubchiks to withdraw old printed books, sees himself as an incarnation of paramount power, legitimized by the sacred Pushkin's word.

The contradiction between the meanings attached to this quotation in the cultural consciousness and its new interpretation generates 'defamiliarization' (in Shklovsky's term). Benedikt's indefatigable desire to master the books of the former culture leads him only to greater degradation. Deprived of their original ontological status in the minds of native speakers, texts become completely inaccessible to perception and comprehension: "kniga tebe ne vprok, pustoy shelest, nabor bukiv"² (Tolstaya, 2004, p. 313).

Another impactful way of introducing quotations in the novel is the cento construction or "intertextual hypertextuality." Thus, Benedikt's monologue, in which he tries to seize the meanings of life:

*Tak, verno, i pushkin tvoj koryachilsya ili kukushkin [...] Chto, chto v imeni tebe moyem? Zachem kruzhitsya vetr v ovrage? Chego, nu chego tebe nadobno, starche? Chto ty zhadno glyadish' na dorogu? Chto trevozhish' ty menya? Skuchno, Nina! Dostat' chernil i plakat! Otvorite mne temnitsu! Il' mne v lob shlagbaum vlepil neprovornyy invalid?*³ (Tolstaya, 2004, p. 309)

In this centonic construction, there are no obvious xeno-indicators; the quotations are not marked. The monologue is attributed to Benedikt, who suffers from his inability to master the book. He again refers mainly to the Pushkin text, which is interspersed with lines by other authors. Pushkin appears to be that reputable "media personality" to whose authoritative word Benedikt rushes with his main "eternal" questions (recall the modern example of using Pushkin's authority to deal with worries of covid quarantine), paradoxically asserting the unity of the two linguistic and cultural universes. At the same time he emphasizes his own authorship: "Ty, pushkin, skazhi! Kak zhit'? <...> Kto tebya vrazhdebnoy vlast'yu iz nichtozhestva vozzval? – YA vozzval! YA!"⁴ (Tolstaya, 2004, p. 289). Such an interaction with other people's artifacts has been fully developed in interactive network creativity which encourages a recipient to influence the development of the work becoming a co-creator.

Thus, Benedikt, the Scribe, is reborn into Benedikt, the creator. Tolstaya has a new version of the thesis "Pushkin is our be all" - "I am Pushkin". Therefore, the argument that the novel subverts the classic myth of Russian literature of the enlightening Book, which cannot influence the primitive consciousness, is correct but one-sided, not taking into account the ambivalence of postmodern novels. Pushkin's text, while remaining "unpacked" for the hero, nevertheless retains its status of a paragon. Due to its flexibility and high degree of "communication uncertainty," it is able to serve as an origin for a personal myth of a new artist. It paradoxically asserts the possibility of continuing of Pushkin, and, therefore, of national culture regardless of ways of reading Pushkin's words, it is still exist as an ultimate code symbol.

² "Books are of no use to you. They're just empty page-turning".

³ "That's how your pushkin writhed, or mushkin <...> What is in my name for you? Why does the wind spin in the gully? How many roads must a man walk down? What do you want, old man? Why do you trouble me? My Lord, what is the matter? Ennui, oh, Nina! Grab the inks and cry! Open the dungeon wide!"

⁴ "Tell me, pushkin! How should I live? <...> "Who was it, with iniquitous power, called you forth from nothingness?" It was me, I called you!"

7. Conclusion

The culture emerging from the digital revolution reflects general trends in the development of socio-cultural paradigms in the digital age. The change in book format as the most important means of information and communication determines the nature of the conceptualization of the image of the book in the linguistic consciousness and artistic discourse, which is manifested in such properties as interactivity, heterotropy, hypertext, network attribution, modification of the author and recipient relations, communicative uncertainty and deprivation of the meanings generated by the former culture. In *The Slynx*, the concept of "book" is a key element of the semantic structure of the text, the discursive and stylistic embodiment of which serves as the main basis for constructing the author's "anti-myth" of the book. Incorporated citations organize the hypertextual space of the text. The ways they are contextually transformed and semantically re-actualized reflect the author's idea of the nature of the social evolution. On the one hand, the inability of the book as a carrier of cultural meanings to structure a new valuable reality, or to restore the lost connections with the previous cultural paradigms, devalues the logocentric paradigm of the European culture. At the same time, the unity of the "all-embracing book" of the national linguistic and cultural universe becomes the basis for the creation of a new artistic monomyth.

References

- Arnold, I. V. (1999) *Semantika. Stilistika. Intertekstual'nost'* [Semantics. Stylistics. Intertextuality. Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta.
- Bal, V. (2019). Audiochtenie kak sovremennaya modifikaciya sluhovogo chteniya [Audio Reading as a Modern Modification of Auditory reading]. *Bulletin of Tomsk State University. Cultural Studies and Art History*, 36, 5-12.
- Baelo-Allué, S. (2019). Transhumanism, transmedia and the Serial podcast. *International Journal of English Studies*, 19(1), 113-131. <https://doi.org/10.6018/ijes.335321>
- Bolotnova, N. S. (2021). *Kommunikativnaya stilistika teksta* [Communicative stylistics of text]. Flinta.
- Chita, A., & Stavrou, Ch. (2020). The Metaphor in Literature and the Effect on Translation. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 19(2), 117-142.
- Deuze, M. (2006). Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture. *The Information Society*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Hodge, P. (2020). The Contemporary Dystopian Reality of Slavery and Modern Capitalism in Octavia Butler's Parable Novels. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 12(5), 1-7. Retrieved May, 2021, from <https://rupkatha.com/V12/n5/rioc1s6n5.pdf>
- Ivanova, A. V. (2013). Ontologicheskaya Semantika Knigi [Ontological semantics of book]. *Teoriya i Praktika Obshchestvennogo Razvitiya*, 11, 40-44.
- Khalil, H. (2020). The Construction of Time, Place and Society in 21st Century American Dystopia Fiction: A Corpus Linguistics Analysis of Deixis. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 26(2), 139-157.
- Lally, R. (2018). The Ontological Foundations of Digital Art. *Eidos: A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, 4(6), 27-35.
- Luks, L. (2020). The possibility of overman in the context of digitalised life. *Methis. Studai Humaniora Estonica*, 21(26), 237-267.
- Mata, J., & Breogán T. (2021). Young people confronting the challenge of reading and interpreting a digital world. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 14(2), Retrieved May, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.905>

- Ojamaa, M., & Torop, P. (2020). Cultural heritage December and digital reading: between book and platform. *Methis Studia humaniora Estonica*, 21(26), 51-68. Retrieved from <https://ojs.utlib.ee/index.php/methis/article/view/16910>
- Omarova, L., Kalimullin, A., Grudtsina, L., Korzhuev, Yu., & Zhukova, M. (2018). Philosophical anthropology in postmodernism. *XLinguae*, 7, 76-85.
- Potter, M. (2017). The Tarob and the Sacred Oat. *eTropic*, 16(1), 112-124. Retrieved from <https://journals.jcu.edu.au/etropic/article/view/3569/3458>
- Tarasova, I. A. (2019). Kognitivnaya poetika [Cognitive poetics]. *Infra-M*.
- Tolstaya, T. (2004). *Kys'* [The Slynx]. Eksmo.
- Yékú, J. (2020). Deference to Paper: Textuality, Materiality, and Literary Digital Humanities in Africa. *Digital Studies*, 10(1). <http://doi.org/10.16995/dscn.357>