

PERAET 2021

International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»

**INTERPRETATION OF THE MYTH IN THE "PRINCE OF
CENTRAL PLANNING" BY V. PELEVIN**

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Abstract

The article analyzes V. Pelevin's novella "The Prince of Central Planning" resorting to the hermeneutic method. It presents the myth of a little man who, playing a computer game, perceives himself as a hero-Prince. Constant escapes from reality into the world of virtuality serve as a source of computer captivity of the hero and a failure in understanding the situation, which leads to a surreal vision when interpreting what is happening. The end of the game does not give the hero satisfaction, putting metaphysical questions in front of him. But he shies away from finding answers to them, plunging into a new game. In the artistic narrative of V. Pelevin, a new type of personality – an electronic nomad who is immersed in the technological environment - is anticipated. The constant expansion of the digital world captures the nomad in computer dependency and gives rise to electronic addiction. Being in a virtual environment and neglecting reality leads to the birth of a surreal vision of life, which is reflected in the existential myth of the nomad, where many episodes of reality are replaced by fantasy, quite possible ones, borrowed from the virtual environment. V. Pelevin's intuition about the modern electronic nomad, manifested in the 1991 novella, makes it possible to draw a conclusion about the transformation of the myth into reality.

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Keywords: Electronic nomad, myth, "Prince of Central Planning", surreal vision, V. Pelevin



1. Introduction

Nowadays, the myth, having the status of an eternal symbolic form, dominates in various social spaces, including politics, science, art and the media environment, which makes its research relevant. In comparison with ancient myths, the modern version of it, based on archetypal formulas, is undergoing changes. But it is still possible to find a synthesis of the general and the individual, the real and the fantasy, the objective and the subjective. The attractiveness of the myth today lies in the possibility of the appearance of its individual mode of existential orientation. For the modern personality, the myth turns out to be a convenient form of positioning the Self, which allows it to strengthen its social positions. At the same time, the individual myth is incomplete: it consists of fragmentary narratives, excerpts of which are created thanks to life situations and borrowings of what you like.

2. Problem Statement

Myths found in art, including in literature are among the sources of borrowings. The poetics of a literary text today is intensively influenced by computer discourse and is being virtualized. Taking the features of the text construction and the hero appearance algorithms from the digital environment, literature often anticipates the trends of reality. The modern literary myth surprises not with metamorphoses in the development of the storyline, but with the breakthrough of the artistic content into reality. The writer V. Pelevin emphasized in his interview that "literature programs life to a greater extent" (as cited in Genis, 2009). Note that some of Pelevin's texts are related to the actual problem of virtualization of consciousness, which he raised back in the 90s of the twentieth century, anticipating the appearance of the electronic nomad.

Analyzing the works of V. Pelevin, researcher Genis (2008) noticed that today people are "slowly moving into the universe invented by its author". The problem of changing the paradigm of thinking and intrapsychic reorganization of people, "slowing down" of the psyche, merging of different "realities" as a result of the introduction of computer technologies in "The Prince of Central Planning" novella is considered for the first time by Pronina (2003). The description of the electronic nomad is found in the works of Aroles et al. (2020), McElroy (2019), Müller (2016), Reichenberger (2018), Seliverstova et al. (2018, 2019), Iakovleva (2019) and Thompson (2019). These scientists reveal the way of life of a nomad, the blurring of the boundaries of his being, the peculiarities of work and leisure, alienation, existential privileges and problems.

3. Research Questions

What features of the modern personality are anticipated by the literary myth with the elements of computer reality by V. Pelevin?

4. Purpose of the Study

The search for an answer to this question determined the purpose of the study: the analysis of V. Pelevin's novella "The Prince of Central Planning" (1991).

5. Research Methods

The hermeneutical approach, which allows to interpret the work of V. Pelevin from the standpoint of modernity, is chosen as the methodological basis of the research. The novelty of the study lies in the fact that for the first time the Pelevin's myth about the little man is considered from the point of view of the dialectical interaction of myth and reality, as well as the author's intuitions that anticipated a new type of personality – the electronic nomad.

6. Findings

The myth of a little man "The Prince of Central Planning" is the basis of Pelevin's narrative. The main character - Alexander Lapin - works as a system administrator in a state institution of the late-Soviet era. Striving to become significant, he is looking for opportunities to improve his existing social status, but he is trying to realize his need not in reality, but in virtuality. Playing the computer game "Prince of Persia", Sasha overcomes obstacles in the virtual world: "the goal of the game is to rise to the last level, where the princess is waiting" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 145).

In the storyline of the story, the real and virtual realities are constantly layered on top of each other, bringing confusion into the consciousness of the hero. Alexander, without drawing a boundary between the worlds, perceives the situation as true, turning into a character of the virtual world. This circumstance signals a cognitive failure in the mind of Lapin, who constantly confuses the I-real and the I-playing. Other circumstances also aggravate the split in the hero's mind: all the characters of the work play computer games (F-16 Combat Pilot, M1 Tank Platoon, Starglider), confusing virtuality and reality when interacting with each other. This failure makes it possible to characterize it metaphorically – as a system error that occurs as a result of a computer virus attack on a person's thinking.

The above-mentioned leads to a situation of computer captivity. The virtual world enslaves the hero, enclosing him in the space of the game cage. It has corridors with dead ends, stairs that go out from under your feet, mazes that lead to empty rooms. The exit from the cage of one game involves a transition to another, which contributes to a greater reduction of the hero, emphasizing the hopelessness and impasse of his situation. After completing all the levels of the computer game, the hero returns to the first game level at the end of the story. Sasha is disappointed. He begins to ask questions about the meaning of life, but does not take any action in view of the inertia of his state, constantly straying from the real Self to the playing Self. Sasha feels the need for happiness, but tries to find it in computer games. The absurdity of the situation leads him to the question: is everything that is happening to him real, or is it a computer game? "What do I hope for now? That at the next stage everything will change, and I will want something the way I was able to want before?" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 164). But a new twist in the game distracts him from thinking, leaving open questions and problems.

Pelevin's (2009) version of the myth of the little man was influenced by digital technologies that enhance the effect of the miraculous. The introduction of high technologies into the existence of the hero, leading to a systemic error in thinking, generates a surreal vision: "to achieve success in the game, you need to forget that you press the buttons and become this figure yourself" (p. 145). The duality of reality and virtuality turns out to be the source of the third world - the surreal, synthesizing them in

consciousness and leading to an unexpected interpretation of life. Genis (2009) notes, V. Pelevin can be called a "poet, philosopher and writer of the border zone": "he inhabits the joints between realities", and "bright artistic effects appear at the place of their meeting – one picture of the world, overlapping with another, creates a third, different from the first two" (p. 269). The border zone, which A. Genis discusses, is the interpretive layer associated with surreal vision. It includes "involuntarily perceived visual images and pictures that produce a more or less complete impression of objective reality, but do not have an external material substrate" (Solovyov, 1892, p. 249).

Pelevin's (2009) hero is constantly forced to move from phenomenological reality into virtuality: Sasha "went down the stairs... Suddenly, the stairs trembled under his feet, a heavy concrete block with four steps, as in a dream, went out from under his feet and a second later crashed with a bang into the flight of stairs on the floor below... There was only one way out – to jump into the unknown behind the left edge of the screen" (p. 152, 153). The transformation into virtuality and vice versa leads to a surreal vision, which is subjective: it is associated with the simultaneity of the individual's consciousness, which creates a favorable version of life with a positive self during interpretation. V. Pelevin's hero, identifying himself with the Prince, constantly forgets that he is playing with himself and controls a programmed character who is incapable of mental operations. The attitude to the Prince as a real person turns Alexander's life into a surreality: he is both Me and not-Me, I am real and I am playing.

The surreal vision in the Pelevin myth is born due to the use of computer game algorithms in the text that create the mythical miraculous. Any real action is transmitted into a virtual mode. Alexander Lapin is so virtualized that, forgetting himself, he turns into a Prince; a trip in a subway car is interpreted as moving through game levels; the Central Planning office (Gosplan), where he comes with errands, is transformed into a castle with a dungeon and a tower; the challenge is to rescue a princess who needs to be saved. The passage to the escalator through the turnstile is transformed for Alexander into a game cutting machine, which "was as real as anything is real at all", making him feel a long ugly scar on his back (Pelevin, 2009, p. 165). A walk with a friend Petya turns into an obstacle course: his friend "jumped over something from time to time", "deftly dodged something like a flying boomerang", "once fell to the floor and froze" (Pelevin, 2009, p.188).

Sasha has a surreal vision of the hated boss Boris Grigoryevich. He seems to him now a fat warrior in a turban with a hypnotizing look, later "in an old blue kimono and green hakama, with a cap of a fifth-rank official on his head and a fan in his hand" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 219), after that as himself, fighting off "with a sword from a tiny Chinese with a child's face, poking at him with a pike at the speed of a sewing machine" (Pelevin, 2009, p.161). The surreal vision leads to the fact that Alexander is able to send Boris Grigoryevich from reality to virtuality: at the request of the boss, "when I shout, press the key", "Sasha poked the keyboard; there was a sharp whistle, something crunched, hit the floor and rolled, and then something heavy and soft fell" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 161).

It should be emphasized that the novel created in 1991 by V. Pelevin anticipates the life of people in the XXI century, the ways of their thinking and intrapsychic reorganization. The author created an image of an electronic nomad based on a computer game, whose identity was formed only in the late 90s of the twentieth century, and described his metaphysical states that were subjected to total subordination to high technologies.

An electronic nomad is a type of technologizing personality, in whose life, as a result of penetration into the being of virtuality, imperceptible intensive transformations occur. The nomad "begins to feel his "I" as multiple, non-identical at various moments of life" (Pronina, 2003). This is facilitated by the migration of the nomad "through the spaces of possible reality" (Iakovleva, 2019), where "instead of walls, screens, life subject, events, so-called media acts and information is presented" (Kutyrev, 2015, p. 167). He instantly shifting, escaping from the world and himself "into the void of Nothing", "not conditioned by nature, matter and society" (Kutyrev, 2015, p. 30). He believes in the reality of the virtual world, forgetting that "both the maze and the figure exist only for the one who looks at the monitor screen" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 190).

Reality is not fixed in the memory of a nomad and does not cause delight: "the sight of the evening city brought sadness", "something forgotten was remembered and immediately forgotten again" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 189). Strong emotions are caused by virtuality as a technologized Nothing: playing, Sasha "recoiled and covered his face with his hands – he did it completely instinctively, and when he realized that nothing could happen to him", "opened his eyes" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 158). The nomad, having turned away from reality with its meaningful life searches, constantly escapes to a more pleasant space provided by high technologies. It is virtuality that becomes the main habitat of the nomad: "five days a week, for eight hours" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 183). Here the nomad has the opportunity to move freely in any direction at a convenient time for him, to interrupt his movement, to hide behind avatars and mythizations, which makes the path unpredictable, and turns it into an elusive nature (Iakovleva, 2019). This elusive nature, alienated from its own life, literally splits itself into many Selves, each of which positions a nomad in different situations. Unconsciously, the nomad turns out to be addicted to virtual reality and the choices made in it.

The realities where the electronic nomad happens to be are intertwined with each other. The reality, combined with the closed space of the computer, whose network is constantly growing, leads to a loss of orientation and a sense of Self. The nomad has "extension instead of growth, and instead of speed – inertia as its result", "the body loses its norm and its stage", approaching the "stage of obsessive obesity" (Baudrillard, 2017, pp. 15, 37-38). The nomad turns out to be a hostage of computer captivity, acquiring electronic dependence. Information *spaces of torrents* pass through it. (M. Castels), which the nomad does not reflect over, becoming a meaningless *figure of emptiness* (M. Lipovetsky).

Realizing his position in society as a little man, the electronic nomad becomes the creator of his own myth, which increases its significance in his own eyes. The nomad functions mechanically, copying and replicating what he likes in his own myth, which he immediately forgets about. He believes in the superpowers of the Ego as a superhero ("he can jump and pull himself up, hang, swinging, on the edge and can even jump over stone wells with sharp spikes sticking out of the bottom" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 145)). It is the surreal vision that helps the nomad to create his own significance, so he feels disregard for statuses and all sorts of differences. The positioning of one's own existential myth in the networks becomes not so much a point of personal search for oneself, but rather an escape from one's own Self and the disappearance of the nomad with continued beingness (Iakovleva, 2019).

The constant change of the formats of being, the lack of a goal in real life, the seduction of illusions and simulacra in a virtual environment leads the nomad to pessimistic conclusions: "on the one

hand, life is getting more meaningless and worse, and on the other – absolutely nothing in life changes" (Pelevin, 2009, p.168). Note that the understanding of life in the electronic nomad is surreal: it includes many episodes associated with virtuality and displacing moments of reality. Isolation from reality, immersion in the virtuality and fantasy of consciousness, which draws impressions from the techno-environment, lead to the primacy of surreal vision. The nomad begins to think surreally, wedging episodes of computer plots into his life. As a result, his life takes on the features of an imaginary possibility. The situation is aggravated by the feeling of *deja vu*: the nomad is constantly faced with the question "where he has already seen what is happening", "but he cannot remember where and under what circumstances" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 167). Transitions from real spaces to virtual ones without a reflexive attitude to them lead to the virtualization of consciousness and a surreal interpretation of what is happening. The nomad is characterized by getting rid of the disliked episodes of reality and replacing them with virtual fantasy fragments. But this trick does not satisfy the nomad: when he spends so much time and effort on the road in a virtual environment and finally reaches it, he can no longer see everything as it really is... There is really no "case itself" (Pelevin, 2009, p. 209). As a result, the nomad forgets how to adequately see the world and himself, more precisely, "he cannot afford to see" reality (Pelevin, 2009, p. 209). All the metaphysical tosses of the electronic nomad, most clearly manifested in the transitions between the real and virtual worlds, the surreal vision of being that gives rise to existential myths, are doomed to failure. A nomad who has undergone cognitive dissonance loses the sense of his own being and the skill of adequate perception of reality, which exposes the crisis of his being and a pessimistic attitude to life.

7. Conclusion

The myth found in the works of modern art contains the decreasing potential. The absurdity of the artistic situation, described by V. Pelevin in the "Prince of Central Planning" in the early 90s of the twentieth century, turns into the everyday life of a modern individual who becomes an electronic nomad. He constantly crosses the boundaries of reality and virtuality, which gives him pleasure, allowing him to avoid unpleasant situations.

In V. Pelevin's text, the elements of a computer game that are wedged into the narrative contribute to the surreal vision of the hero – a little man who identifies himself as a Prince. Simultaneously with this confusion, surreality is created, which is characterized by a distorted perception of the world: for example, reality is replaced by a game space in which metaphysical meanings are sought. V. Pelevin's hero lives in reality and the game with illusions of his power, but constantly returns to the initial level, emphasizing his insignificance and lack of development. The myth allows the little man to turn into a hero in his surreal interpretation of life. But V. Pelevin's hero, achieving the goal in a computer game and increasing the game status, realizes their illusory nature, not worth the effort, time and sacrifice. This is a myth about a little man, inert and disappointed in life. His life strategies are limited by the framework of the game reality, which does not develop him, leaving him at the same level.

The mythical situation born in V. Pelevin's literary text suddenly turned into reality. Modern society has begun to live in a digital format, playing with a mixture of real and virtual layers. Today, a new type of personality - the electronic nomad - begins to think of reality virtually, bringing elements

from the techno-world into it and masterfully combining them, which creates the effect of surreality and gives birth to a personal existential myth. This leads to a violation of the perception of the Self/Others/world, the transformation of behavior algorithms, lapse in the memory and the emergence of a surreal vision when interpreting what is happening. The above stated, makes it possible to talk about the dialectic between myth and reality, where the myth in the future acquires the features of reality, and reality, going into the past, becomes a myth. The surreality of what is impossible to imagine and think in the present, thanks to high technologies, becomes true. A literary myth that anticipates the events of reality suddenly turns into reality. The question arises: is the myth so fantastic? The answer to it is as follows: reality, dominated by high technologies, becomes surreal and the manifestation of the mythical is possible in it.

Acknowledgments

The article is funded by the Kazan Innovative University named after V. G. Timiryasov

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