

A VISUAL TEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR: GENDER OPTICS

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Abstract. The article deals with the problem of visualising war as a socio-historical event in the space of virtual reality. In particular, the key visual modes of images representation in the visual text of war are recorded, using the example of a social network with the addition of gender optics to the analysis. A specific methodology for analysing a visual text in a social network is proposed and tested. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is a qualitative methodology based on the theoretical provisions of semiotic, structural, and gender approaches to text analysis. The method of traditional document analysis was used to collect empirical material. Based on the idea of myth and mythologisation of social space by R. Barth and the code of cognition by R. Eco, we have recorded the peculiarities of the visual text of the war: historical continuity, hybridity of meanings (mixing of incompatible meanings) and the emotional feature of the text as visually traumatic. The structural approach made it possible to identify contexts, genre diversity of visual images, and demonstrate the construction of chronological reproduction of events. The addition of gender optics has recorded trends towards a shift in the gender order towards mosaicism and situationality. Three visual modes of images representing the key participants in the ongoing war have been recorded. These are the image of a warrior, the Defender(he or she) — “Cyborg”, the image of citizens (civilians) — “Ukrainian Madonna”, and the image of the enemy — “chmonia”. The generalising visual characteristics of the first two images at the level of cultural codes representation include: hybridity, historical continuity, value saturation, visually traumatic experience, the idea of mobility, and emotional colouring. The third image is visually and meaningfully discordant with the other two.

Keywords: visualisation, visual text, image, visual code, connotation, denotation, semiotic analysis, semiotic system

Introduction

The social reality of a modern individual’s existence is increasingly becoming hybrid, namely a combination of different, sometimes opposing, objects and phenomena. Due to the rapid development of information technologies and cyber technologies, the space of an individual’s existence is becoming polyreal. The everyday life of a person seems to exist in two interpenetrating realities: objective and virtual, where visuality is the dominant mechanism of informati-

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on presentation. Humanity is immersed in a stream of images. This means that the visual is becoming almost the main way of presenting, representing, manipulating, perceiving and constructing social reality by an individual. Visual images surround us at every step of our life. The influence and manifestations of the visual in the world around us are diverse and more multivalued than ever.

In the scientific discourse, society is increasingly interpreted in terms that emphasise the saturation of communication and the human environment with visual content. Thus, Guy Debord speaks of the “age of the spectacle”, M. Foucault — of the “society of surveillance”, G. Böhm proclaims the “iconic reversal”, referring to the beginning of the age of images.

P. Sztompka identifies several social processes that have accelerated the proliferation of visual images in contemporary culture. Namely, civilisational and technical development, urbanisation, commercialisation and the emergence of the consumer society. The researcher even talks about the formation of a new type of culture — visual culture, which has replaced verbal culture (Sztompka 2012). The main marker of visual culture is that multilevel communication is based on images. «Images convey information, knowledge, emotions, aesthetic experiences, and values. They become the subject of conscious decoding, but also act on the subconscious» (Sztompka 2012, 32). Thus, the problem is not that visuality organises social space, but that it increases and intensifies the influence of images on the consciousness of an individual, whose perception is dominated by perceptual, not categorical thinking. The era of linguistic dominance in the discursive spaces of social reality is coming to an end. Scholars note a methodological turn to a specific tool — a way of seeing and perceiving social reality, and thus its representation. J. Baudrillard, analysing the Gulf War, states that due to the virtualisation of war, the logic of reality presentation is being violated. The war is unfolding in a new hyper-lippid logic of stimulating the real with the virtual (Baudrillard 2012). In today’s conditions, the space of war virtualisation is being expanded by the Internet, which makes it possible to observe the war in real conditions, to see what is happening there and now. The sense of time is changing.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has all the hallmarks of hybridity and its course is associated with the intensification and dominance of visual images in the virtual space. This is the war where the main instruments of struggle are not only weapons, but also disinformation, political propaganda, economic pressure, and terror. Visualisation is an essential mechanism and tool of the war. Visuality makes the war events demonstrative, real, emotional and shapes the perception of reality here and now.

The up-to-date understanding of the visual as a text, as a visual space, and the specifics of visual data was initially interpreted within the framework of interpretative socio-philosophical concepts. In particular, those that focused on the world of everyday life, subjective meanings of social phenomena, the multiplicity of forms of everyday social interaction, asserted the need for the researcher to be “inside” rather than “outside” the phenomena of social life under study, and emphasised the unique sociological function of vision and visual competence of individuals (W. Dilthey, G. Simmel, C. Peirce, J. G. Mead, A. Schutz, I. Hoffmann).

The socio-philosophical reflection on the issues of vision and visual perception, reading the content of the visual, is reflected in the works by M. Merleau-Ponty, P. Virillo, R. Eco, R. Barth, P. Bourdieu, S. Sontag, J. Grady, P. Sztompka. The works by Ukrainian researchers Y. Martsyichuk, V. Bondar, I. Chudovska-Kandyba, V. Soldatova and L. Males are devoted to the analysis of the origins and theoretical and methodological basis of the sociological study of visual data. However, for the most part, these studies concerned visual images in objective reality. Other visualisation spaces have been little studied, and, therefore, require the development of theoretical and methodological approaches to the analysis of their specificity.

The purpose of the article is to study the visual space of social networks for the purpose of representing the events of the russian-ukrainian war. To realize the specified goal, let's outline the main tasks: apply the methodological provisions of visual analysis to identify typical visual images: the image of a warrior, the image of a citizen (civilian), the image of an enemy; to record the visual modes of the image, its significant features; to reveal the gender features of the visual representation of images of war in social networks.

Visual information is powerfully used to fight the enemy and inform the civilian population. Through visualisation, society experiences events, reflects and accumulates facts of social memory that will capture the horrific experience for centuries for future generations. Thus, «visuality» is the basic modus operandi of the contemporary sociality of the course of military events. It is a general principle of representation of the content, forms and structural elements of cultural content. Visualisation is the result of human activity but has different levels and spaces of manifestation.

Visual text, which is the term used in contemporary postmodern discourse for visuality, claims to be autonomous in terms of meanings and values. Visual text shows cultural trends, records cultural convergences, cultural transmissions. A visual text is a specific information reality that is objectively represented in poly-reality — virtual and objective, visually perceived and further interpreted in the form of discursive practices and narratives. It fixes significant images and symbols in public consciousness. It is important that the model of a visual text should coincide with the value and mental trends of the cultural space of its representation. Thus, a visual text has a subject and is aimed at presenting a certain objective reality, reflecting what society experiences, feels, and thinks.

Theoretical and methodological foundations

In order to outline the framework of the theoretical and methodological approach we have applied in our research, we emphasise that we will analyse visualisation in the Internet space. Internet visuality can be observed both online and offline in the space of social networks, platforms, chats, and online television. In our research, the theoretical premise is to understand the visual as a text, a narrative that represents a social event — the war. The logic of the study was based on a qualitative methodology that involves a holistic description, unification, and in-depth interpretation of visual images. The ideas underlying the theoretical and methodological framework of the study were based on semiotic and structural approaches. The basic, cross-cutting approach in the study was

the gender approach, the heuristic possibilities of which include the consideration of a set of symbols that characterise the social characteristics of “men” and “women” in culture (gender stereotypes, gender norms).

Semiotic interpretation is aimed at reading a system of signs that have cultural significance. Semiotic analysis is about establishing the mechanisms by which the meanings of images are realised by identifying and interpreting signs and image codes. Accordingly, the sign is the key unit of semiotic analysis. The logic of semiotic analysis was laid down by the linguist F. de Saussure, who explains the sign as a kind of system of designation of objects and phenomena, as well as their content. The relationship between a sign and what it denotes is general and typical for the culture of a particular group or society (Saussure 1998, 28029). Thus, signs are culturally conditioned, unified, which allows their consumer to understand the information.

We can find a certain support of Saussure’s ideas in the works by R. Barth, who analyses the semiotics of the image, sign, and myth. Through the understanding of myth as a certain coded system of signs (semiotic system), the meaning of the image is revealed. Contemporary Western society is permeated with myths, and any subject can create and be a myth. The philosopher argues that myths can be not only something verbalised, but also visual forms — photography, cinema, art. It is no accident that the scientist calls visual images a myth. A myth has a structure: a sign, a meaningful thing, a signifier, it presents ideas, influences people’s minds and changes reality (Barth 1970).

Regarding photography as a myth, the philosopher suggests dividing the characteristics of photographic images into *studium* and *punctum*. The *studium* is the rational and informational component of the image — it is what can be attributed to the documentary function of photography — the objective reflection of the world. *Punctum* is what touches the viewer, what makes the image special for him or her, according to Barth, it is what «pricks» the consciousness, shocks. *Punctum* is the artistic, emotional part of an image. So, for example, a photograph can be valuable because of the information it contains, or because of the emotions and impressions it evokes, or both. The important point in Barthes’ analysis of the image is the discovery of ways to construct an image through separation of connotation and denotation. Denotation is everything that the image informs us about, the literal dimension. To identify the denotation, a simple look is enough, because the denotation represents the surface layer of the image. Whereas connotation is a more hidden understanding of the image: associations, emotions, thoughts that the visual image evokes, so connotation requires deep analysis, because it relates to a hidden deeper layer that requires careful analytical interpretation. Thus, each picture, according to Barthes, has informational and symbolic images that can be read and the meaning can be fixed (Barthes 2011). The theory of myth and semiotics of photography proposed by Barthes made it possible to outline the methodology of analysis, namely, to record and interpret visual images in terms of continuity in time (historical significance), addressability, the number of signifiers, signs and what turns cultural, historical and social content into facts and is imprinted in the minds of consumers of visual information.

The ideas of U. Eco, who insisted that visual symbols have nothing in common with linguistic signs and are independent units of study, proved to

be interesting and heuristically significant for our research. According to Eco, the image in a photograph is nothing more than something similar to reality. Reality is recognised only because we have a coded set of expectations that corresponds to it. There is a certain code by which we get to know the meaning of the image. In order to read a sign, it must be: visible (optical), ontologically occurred, conditional, and correspond to the code of time (period, epoch). U. Eco treats the sign as completely arbitrary, conventional and unmotivated. Its image is reconstructed from mental representation and from the specifics of perception carried out by the subject. According to U. Eco, the iconic sign is defined by the property of isomorphic similarity to its object: it creates a model of relations between graphic phenomena (line, shadow, spot), which is homologous to the model of perceptual relations that are built when observing or recreating an image of an object in memory. The iconic sign, Eco emphasises, does not reproduce the properties of the object being displayed, but the conditions of its perception. We recognise an image by using a recognition code in our imagination, which separates the main characteristics (essential properties) of an object, its most important cognition (identification), memorisation and transmission in communication. Ugo Eco insists on the importance of contextuality in image creation, especially for the viewer. The contextuality code is a rather significant criterion for analysing visual images on the Internet, according to the idea of our study (Eco 2004).

The structural approach proposed by P. Sztompka significantly complemented the analysis of the visual image. The idea of structuralism is that the elements of the system are structurally connected and have relations, and therefore influence. Thus, according to P. Sztompka, the visual image shows and records the manifestations of social life and is a sign of structures, and its interpretation is based on the identification of hidden meanings in the observed structures. The researcher's idea is to look at the visual image and discover the deeper meanings through the INIS elements that make up the social structure: I – interaction, human activity; N – normative structure acceptable in society, culturally dominant normative and value components, social rules; I – ideal structure – ideas of society (myths, beliefs, worldview, national character); S – structure of opportunities to achieve life's goods – wealth, prestige, power, education, health (Sztompka 2012).

When studying photos, P. Sztompka offers a discursive way of reading the content alongside the semiotic and structural ones. Each image has its own viewer and is oriented towards him or her, especially in the case of photos. The latter consists in interpreting the way the image is seen. The viewer not only perceives the images that the author of the image represents, but also creates and modifies these meanings, creates other so-called discourses.

In our study, we focused on the possibilities of two approaches to the analysis of the visual (semiotic and structural) and developed a visual analysis matrix, which was used to analyse the visual text of the war as represented in the social media of Ukrainian society (see Table 1). The matrix is the basis for the analysis and is open to supplementation with criteria, which was done in the course of the study.

The cross-cutting and dominant criterion is gender, which involves recording representatives of gender groups in society and visual markers that represent

Table 1. Matrix of visual analysis components

Context/ environment	Object (psychological traits)	Action/ interaction	Socio-cultural interpretation
The Russian–Ukrainian war. Location of events — front, rear, city, village, state institution, private home	Man, military, group of people, equipment, buildings, nature	The plot. Fighting, helping, defending, moving, dancing.	Clothing, national accents, psychological intentions (gestures, facial expressions, gaze), emotions, gender, stereotype, social attitudes, norms

social characteristics. We consider it expedient to fix the image at the level of representation (reflection of external reality — the context (ideological, cultural) in relation to the visual image) and invocation (internal content of the text, the image itself, the identification of the general and specific in the plot, cultural meanings).

Applying a qualitative methodology to the analysis of visual reality involves the use of flexible information collection tools. In our research, we used the method of informal (traditional) document analysis, which does not involve a strict procedure for quantitative selection of information units, but is based on a typological type of sampling that does not provide for a clear quantitative fixation of the units of analysis, but instead establishes them according to the criterion of content saturation (information is repeated). In this case, the units of analysis are photographs and short videos (messages/shot-video).

When applying this method, it is important to focus on the logic of selecting the data carrier. At the first stage, we selected the space where visual images were represented, relying on the objective data from the study of the Ukrainian media space related to the sources from which Ukrainians most often consume information. According to the Internews study, social media is the main source of information for 55% of Ukrainians, and 85% use the Internet on a daily basis. In 2022, Telegram became the main social network for both news consumption and communication. 60% of Ukrainians use Telegram to receive news (Ukrainian media use and trust, 2022). Based on this data, we focused on further selection of visual content on Telegram. It is worth noting that a preview of about ten Telegram channels (including, for example, BBC NEWS Ukraine — <https://t.me/bbcukrainian>) confirmed the hypothesis of partial duplication of content. Among the numerous channels of this social network, we selected the one that was targeted in terms of content — the Russian-Ukrainian war, and had a fairly large number of subscribers — Real War. Ukraine (1319942 followers) and the period of posting visual images from February 2022 to February 2023. During this period, about 10,000 images of the war were posted on the channel (2022–2023).

Results and discussion

The application of the methodological approach proposed by us for visual analysis involves a detailed description and interpretation of signs and codes representing visual images posted online. The structural approach allowed us to structure the images according to certain criteria. The cross-cutting criterion for reading the meanings of visual text is gender, which is recorded in each group of images by the dominant image.

At the initial stage of the visual analysis of the war, we noted two significant characteristics related to the content and its emotional component. We called the first one “visual trauma”, because the images captured the traumatic experience, the tragic events of the war, which are associated with the tragedy in the life of every Ukrainian citizen. Of course, viewing visual content related to the war chronicles is a traumatic experience. A person cannot help but be sensitive to the images of wounded adults, children, animals, ruined cities, chronicles from the frontline, the tragedy of evacuation, shelling and its consequences.

The second characteristic is more of a methodological feature and is related to the fact that when analysing traumatic content, it is important to have a sequence in viewing it, the so-called photo and video chronicles. The visual text is a reflection of the course of events, which made it possible to establish the correspondence of signs and codes to meanings. This makes it possible to track the course of events, the information activity of participants, emotional tension, the decline in tension, and the activity of war participants in general. For example, the first day of the war was February 24. The images of the first day of the war look very emotional, tragic and tense. The first images are at 05.55 am on the Real War channel. Ukraine is the consequences of Ukrainian cities bombing. Then the UN Secretary-General’s address to the president of russia, the address of the President of Ukraine V. Zelensky to Ukrainian people, which later became regular every evening and continues today, addresses to communities by city mayors, addresses by the military about the situation at the front (these are not official military streams), a large number of photos from the places where enemy missiles hit. Photos of civilians affected by shelling, their photos look particularly tragic, the main image code is pain, fear, uncertainty. Photos of people queuing up at the military registration and enlistment office. There are also photos of destroyed housing, high-rise buildings, rescuers, and columns of enemy military equipment. Later, in the afternoon, photos and a shot-video of the official address of the military command, the minister, were added. At that moment, there appeared the photos of the first captured soldiers. . These young men dressed in military uniforms with russian symbols do not look like military men at all. They are dressed untidily and look confused. A photo of the enemy’s destroyed equipment. A separate content of this day is a photo of the movement of the population — columns at the customs, columns of cars on the roads, which represents the beginning of the migration of the country’s population, but no one imagined that it would last for so long. In the evening, there are photos of numerous rallies in different countries of the world in support of Ukrainian people (Georgia, the United States, and, surprisingly, russia).

Or, after a large-scale bombing in Ukraine, photos of the aftermath of the tragedy, photos of the victims, the wounded, photos of volunteers, shot-video of representatives of the military administration, air defence command. It should be noted that the method of establishing a chronological sequence based on visual documents is quite informative and significant enough to establish the image-event-intensity relationship. However, in our study, we focused on decoding the images of the plot of the visual text of the war.

So, the outlined genre diversity of image content is as follows: photos, selfies, selfie shots, story videos, infographics, and photomemes. The latter is a separate genre of Ukrainian laughing culture that became popular during the war as a form of experiencing the tragedy at the level of public consciousness and requires a separate scientific study.

The following subjects of visual text were identified by content: queues of people (at the military registration and enlistment office, ATM, at the border), columns of cars, military, people moving, stories of journalists, a story of a military man, a group of military men, a story of a civilian from the scene, from a bomb shelter, comments of citizens, excerpts from a press conference of the president, representatives of law enforcement agencies, representatives of the presidential administration, mayors, representatives of the international community, explosions and the aftermath of the bombing, events at the frontline, images of broken military and civilian equipment, images of corpses, captured soldiers, statements of prisoners, photos of collaborators, advice from paramedics on first aid, actions in case of shelling, photos of the front pages of world publications about the events in Ukraine (“Daily STAR”, “Mirror”, “The Daily Telegraph” and others).

The review of the visual content of the telegramchannel for the period in question and its analysis allowed us to generalise and identify three main images that, in our opinion, are the main participants and representatives of the war. These are the image of the warrior, the image of the citizen (civilian), and the image of the enemy. We have presented collective images and recorded modes of representation in the visual text of the war, adding a gender component to the analysis of meanings.

The gender optics of the visual text raises the issue of the gender component of the image representation, the transmission of gender stereotypes and gender equality. Historically, there has been a stereotypical opinion in the public consciousness that war is only a man’s business. Indeed, the power and systemic foundations of the military sphere are built by men and for men. But in modern warfare, we are observing significant shifts towards gender equality. A lot of work has been done at the legislative level to ensure that women’s rights in the military are exercised, particularly in terms of positions and professions. Power relations are being redistributed. The work is being continued on adapting military uniforms for women and addressing their domestic and hygiene needs. Thus, a woman is noticeable in the visual text of war. The main social role of the military is to protect society. The rules of war dictate a gender order based on the principles of gender equality.

The image Defender — “Cyborg”. The main character in war is the warrior — the defender. In Ukraine, since 2014, after 242 days of defence of Donetsk airport, the defenders have been popularly known as Cyborg — half man, half

machine. The name was given to the military for their strength, fortitude, indomitability, fierce will and endurance. The image of Cyborg embodies the idea of hybridity, both of the war and its participants. The events of the war take place in the age of rapid development of technology, robotics, and artificial intelligence, and on the other hand, a full-scale war does not reject the traditional warrior who lives in a trench and fights with mechanical weapons. The image of the Cyborg acquired historical and national connotations in Taras Shevchenko's depiction of a cyborg. With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, this image acquired the actual meaning of temporal continuity, connection with the historical events and figures of the past, and hybridity in terms of a combination of different characteristics. The image continues to be filled with visual connotations. It is this image of the Cyborg that will be imprinted in historical and social memory for posterity.

We see images of the military in real military conditions in the photos and shot-video on "The Real War. Ukraine" channel. Photos are in selfie format or in groups. This is the soldier who is on a real battlefield, where his life is threatened at every moment. He is real, his goal at the moment is to exterminate the enemy. He/she is confidently holding a weapon. His/her hands, face, clothes are dirty, indicating the reality of the events. Or, on the contrary, the uniform looks neat, the ammunition is up-to-date, which gives the impression of strength, courage, and readiness to perform combat missions. The uniforms are marked with Ukrainian symbols and chevrons, which are the symbols of the brigade. The faces show fury, seriousness, confidence and fatigue, even if the face is wearing a balaclava (the eyes show). The beard adds a special brutality and masculinity to the appearance of the soldier. Confirmation of successes in the war and masculine behaviour can be seen in photos of soldiers with prisoners. In the photo, you can immediately feel the striking difference between the men in terms of their appearance and posture. Ukrainians look confident, strong, often smile, and rejoice in success. The photographs of wounded soldiers are emotionally complex and at the same time life affirming. There are few photos of soldiers smiling, as if to imply that life goes on and it is momentary. The photos of military weddings are also imbued with a positive mood. Both spouses are often military in these photos. They are wearing uniform, or partially national dress, the woman with flowers. The location of the image is a church, nature, a dugout, a hangar. The photo seems to proclaim that life goes on in war, even when death is near. You have to live here and now. We included photos of soldiers with their families, children and animals, as well as photos of soldiers undergoing rehabilitation in prosthetics in this life affirming group. The themes of visualisation of soldiers with animals and dancing soldiers acquired a special meaning in the context of the search for differences between «we and they (the enemy)».

The first shot-video of the military is a confident appeal to the public with words of reassurance and conviction that everything is going in the right direction and is under control. The important message is that the situation is under control. This visual message to society is very important during the war, because the victory depends on the military. The image of a female soldier does not appear often, but it does not differ fundamentally from a male soldier (only in terms of external gender designations). Still, the dominant visual modus

operandi of war as a visual text is the military man — a warrior — courageous, hardened, militaristic, humane, knowing his purpose in modern clothes and ammunition that corresponds to the uniform of the modern army.

The second generalised image represented in the visual text “Ukrainian Madonna” is the citizens of Ukraine, civilians who were in the country at the beginning of the war. In our opinion, the generalised symbol of the image that embodies motherhood, humanity, care and life is a photo of a mother feeding her child in the subway in Kyiv. The artist M. Solomennykova painted this photo and gave it a sacred meaning. The painting was called “Ukrainian Madonna” (2022). The painting has gained popularity in the public space because the codes of its visual content refer the viewer to religious values, the sanctity of motherhood, reflections on the future continuation of life, protection and security.

The general impression of the visualisation of civilians is the tragedy of human life, fear, grief and movement. We immediately read the codes of movement represented in the visual content. The world seems to have moved and people are running away from bombing, destruction, and death in fear. The plot of the photographs is revealed both through the demonstration of personal tragedy and collective trauma. The photos of people affected by the bombing present the horror of the tragedy — a peaceful life ended in an instant. These photos show wounded adults and children, often with animals because they cannot be left behind. The photos from shelters, in particular the subways of Kharkiv and Kyiv, are also very meaningful. The people in the photos were sitting next to each other on the floor. The figure, the confused look, the torn clothes speak of fatigue and danger up there. The scale, depth of the tragedy and the atrocity, evil, genocide are captured in the photos from the bombing sites. One of the numerous photos, the image of a pregnant girl who was pulled out of the rubble of a maternity hospital, was seen by the whole world.

Another visual subject also has a denotation of activity and movement — the photos of volunteers. The values represented by the subjects of the photos are striking. People unite, help each other, show compassion, care, and humanity. These are images from the bombing sites, locations in the city, hospitals, schools, shops, where people are helping to clear the rubble, handing out food, working, studying, playing. The visual text captures the image of the terrible tragedy of war for civilians. The photographs are dominated by women, children, and rarely men. The gender optics leans towards the dominance of female visual content and meanings.

The last visual image we have identified is the image of “chmonia” (the enemy), which symbolically summarises the visual text according to this criterion. This is a photo of a real-life prisoner who looks confused, helpless, miserable, untidy. He is small in stature, giving the impression of a mentally retarded person (2022).

Photographic images of the enemy are mostly photos of captured or killed soldiers, or official photos of soldiers who were captured or killed, usually officers. Russian symbols are rarely seen in the background. In photos with the enemy, we can easily see that there is no bravado, courage or heroism. Their posture and gestures show it to us. All the prisoners look confused, gloomy, untidy. The photos are of men. There is no image of a female prisoner of war.

Of course, these photos contrast with the photos of Ukrainian defenders. This is exactly how the image of the enemy should be in the visual text of war. In order to raise the morale of the soldiers, optimism among the population and unwavering faith in the Victory.

Conclusion

Thus, as a result of the study, we have presented generalised trends in the visualisation of war on the Internet and recorded the key visual modes of visual text images. Firstly, we note that the visibility of social space is gaining significant advantages over objective reality. Modern humans are increasingly immersed in virtual space, a meta-reality that is completely saturated with visual content. Visibility, visual information organises social space, gives meaning and changes the way people consume information, and therefore the way they think from categorical to perceptual, clip-based

It is obvious that the social reality of human existence is hybrid. It is through visualisation that social interaction takes place. The Russian-Ukrainian war is taking place in such basic conditions of sociality. Visualisation is an essential tool of war. Visuals capture the course of events in the war, even in real time, fill them with emotional colour, and make them real. Hybridity is the key feature of sociality, the background of text creation/reproduction, and, on the other hand, the constructive content of the visual text that we have examined in terms of capturing images and meanings.

Secondly, since the visual text is located in virtual reality and is little researched, we applied a comprehensive approach based on the qualitative methodology of social reality analysis. The semiotic and structural theories of text analysis were used as the theoretical and methodological basis of the study. Based on the idea of myth and mythologisation of social space by R. Barth and the code of cognition by R. Eco, we have recorded the following features of the visual text of war: historical continuity, hybridity of meanings (mixing of incompatible meanings) and the emotional feature of the text as visually traumatic. The structural approach made it possible to read the contextuality of the visual text, to separate and demonstrate the possibilities of chronological reproduction of events, and to record the genre diversity of visual images.

The addition of gender optics is a heuristic background that allowed us to record trends in the visualisation of gender equality in the context of war. After all, it is stereotypically believed that war is a “man’s business” and that women have no place in the army. Thus, we have recorded generalised trends of shifting the gender issue towards gender equality. Women are “visible” as soldiers on the frontline. Similarly, we observe images of a man in the home front — a volunteer, a father with children, a husband and a family. The visuals demonstrate that the events of the war mix up gender roles, destroying stable stereotypes, because human life is subject to one single goal — to survive. So, the events of the war significantly undermine the traditional gender order, which is becoming mosaic and situational.

Based on the results of viewing the visual content of the network, three visual modules of images representing the key participants in the ongoing war were summarised. These are the image of a warrior, the “Cyborg”, the image

of citizens (civilians), “Ukrainian Madonna”, and the image of the enemy, the “chmonia”. The generalising visual characteristics of the first two images at the level of representation of cultural codes include hybridity, historical continuity, value saturation, visually traumatic experience, the idea of mobility and emotional colouring. The third image is visually and meaningfully discordant with the other two. It has opposite characteristics at the level of representation of cultural codes: traditionalism, social disconnection, repetitiveness of the image, inexpressiveness, greyness, artificiality of emotions, cultural deprivation and impoverishment.

We propose to focus further research on the visualisation of war on the analysis of the representation of the power of discourse and discursive power in virtual space in the context of international socio-political relationships.

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