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**Photographic image as a communicative resource  
in contemporary Russian drama**

The phenomenon of photography increasingly fills the textual space of contemporary literature and, consequently, culture. In the mediatised world, photography as a form of art and artistic practice has attracted the attention of researchers who comprehend it as a specific way of seeing and creating reality, as a means of communication. Moreover, the conceptualization of photographic discourse in various forms and artistic practices allows the authors not only to manipulate the “post-photographic hyperreality” but also to create a different structure of an individual’s perception and an alternative model for identification of human consciousness.<sup>1</sup> In her dissertation, Elena Karbasova asserts that the main property of photographic discourse at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ability of mass media to create an alternative reality (or hyperreality).<sup>2</sup> The authors use techniques of photographic depiction in their texts to create multi-referential visual projections of the character’s consciousness, which in some cases are more informative than words. Therefore contemporary playwrights increasingly exploit the photographic discourse as a form of figurative filling of the dramatic text and as a metatextual commentary.

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Karbasova in her PhD dissertation *Photograph: Conceptualization of Reality* [Фотография: концептуализация реальности], (Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg National University, 2013), writes about this phenomenon, summarizing the opinions of many cultural studies scholars.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

What is more, such incorporation of photographs is employed to present a model of seeing and perceiving the reality by the reader.

The article analyzes the semantic potential of photographic images understood as iconic signs in the semiosphere of a dramatic text and as descriptions of photographs, ways of their perception, and the impact on the recipient. A photograph presented in the form of its description most often functions as a sphere of the protagonist's consciousness. The description comprises the way protagonists perceive the world, themselves and furthermore, the processes of self-identification. It chiefly refers to the photo image perceived as a symbolic visualization.<sup>3</sup>

I also analyze techno-images which function as part of the photographic universe producing the hyperreality. Additionally, the article scrutinizes various examples when the playwrights employ the photographs (slide show) as theatrical props which function as text and which are capable of replacing the action in the play.

In the article I analyze seven dramatic texts by Russian-speaking authors written over the past few years, in which it is possible to identify and describe the postmodern idea of a person's involvement in the content of the medium (created by photographic discourse).<sup>4</sup> The photographs (as well as the act of taking photos perceived as a means of visualization and as an optics of vision) are the objects of all these dramatic texts around which the action unfolds. I scrutinize the communicative resources of photographic images in Russian drama of the 21st century. I analyze the plays written by Alexander Stroganov, Peter Gladilin, Natalya Blok, Lilia Safikanova, Konstantin Steshik, Dmitry Bogoslovsky, Pavel Pryazhko, Liliya Safikanova, and Roman Vsevolodov. It should be noted that amid those Russian-speaking authors there are representatives of former Soviet republics. For example, Natalya Blok is Ukrainian, whereas Dmitry Bogoslovsky, Pavel Pryazhko, and Konstantin Steshik are Belarusian.

The article aims to analyze the issues which have been insufficiently researched, and to reveal (identify) the semantic codes of photo images

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<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Yampolsky, *Image representation. Course of lectures*. [Изображение. Курс лекций] (Moscow: New Literary Review, 2019), p. 226.

<sup>4</sup> Twenty years ago Russian-speaking playwrights did not use photographic imagery that often. However, the representative possibilities of photography were used to a greater extent within dramatic action (for example, in *The Suitcase of Nonsense, or Quickly Done Cannot Be Well Done* [Чемодан чепухи, или Быстро хорошо не бывает] (1975) by Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, or *The Czech Photo* [Чешское фото] (1993) by Alexander Galin).

in the text of contemporary Russian drama. Special attention is given to the capabilities of the phenomenon in organizing the dramatic action in monodrama as well as in full-length dramatic texts. In this study a photographic image is also perceived as a communicative resource used to trigger the processes of personal identification (of the character and the reader) as well as a ploy used to create a virtual picture of the world within the dramatic text. To investigate those issues it is necessary to present the theoretical views on multifarious aspects of photography in general, as well as on photoekphrasis in literature (dramaturgy) in particular.

As Barthes noted, “For the Photograph is the advent of myself as another: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.”<sup>5</sup> Such an approach contains a powerful performative message, materialized in the very act of (self)identification of the character. The photographic image, which merges the cultural practices of representation, reflection, reproduction, and creation, quite organically injects dynamism into the textual space of contemporary dramas and their stage representations. The readers’ imaginative abilities allow them to create and interpret encoded meanings.

According to the observations of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Alfred Schütz, Natalya Bogdanova, Olga Boytsova, the features of photographs can be successfully implemented in other types of cultural spaces. Furthermore, according to Yuri Lotman’s theory, a rhetorical situation arises at the junction of two different “semiotic languages.” When the principles of one semiotic sphere enter another, it is essential that “one or another significant structure preserves its connection with its natural context” (it concerns, for example, the theatrical gesture in the painting or the “picturesqueness of the theater”).<sup>6</sup>

The nature of the rapport between the photographic images and the characters’ utterances in the dramatic text broadens the artistic repertoire serving to represent the imagery in the works of contemporary Russian playwrights. Especially the traditional semiotic spheres of imagery mutually enrich and transform each other in the texts of modern culture

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Yuri Lotman, “The Language of Theater (On the Problem of Iconic Rhetorics)” in: *Theses on the Semiotic of Culture and Art* [“Театральный язык и живопись (К проблеме иконической риторики)” в: Статьи по семиотике культуры и искусства] (Saint Petersburg: Academic Project, 2002), p. 400.

to such an extent that their primary meaning is often preserved only in the perception of the reader/viewer.

When referring to the possibilities of photographic images employed in contemporary drama, I follow J. Heffernan's understanding of this concept as a visual image receiving a secondary verbal representation.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently, I take into account that the phenomenon implies a code conversion from one language to another or, as Elena Tarannikova specifies, "the transfer of artistic information from an analogue code system to a symbolic one."<sup>8</sup>

The ability of photographs to serve as a means of intersemiotic process is particularly expressively used in the latest literature focused on interdiscursivity in the broadest understanding of this phenomenon. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that photographic discourse manifests itself differently in various genres of lyrics, epos, and drama. Furthermore, researchers have only started to become interested in this problem. Hence, there are not many studies on photographic imagery in lyrics. Nevertheless, the pioneering works allow us to understand the scope of possible realizations of this intersemiotic artistic resource. This is particularly important for me because in many contemporary plays it is possible to discern elements analogous to lyrical ways of creating the picture of the world, in particular a visual representation, which becomes a metaphor for the poetic view of the world<sup>9</sup> and which often fulfills a fundamental role in the dramatic plot. In addition, as the researchers point out, in poetic texts the photographic image and the written word often turn out to be complementary; they mutually reinforce the effect of visualization. A similar phenomenon occurs in contemporary drama. Photographic discourse often serves as a catalyst for other poetic resources. Malkina and Samarkina in their works analyze photography as a visual technique used for constructing literary texts. Concurrently, they pay attention to the phenomenon referred to as transgression of vision, presented in the method of perception and reflection according to the

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<sup>7</sup> See James Heffernan, *The Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Elena Tarannikova, *Ekphrasis in English Poetry* [Экфрасис в англоязычной поэзии], Synopsis of PhD dissertation (Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg National University, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Maria Samarkina, "The Photographic in Lyric Poetry: Setting an Issue" ["Фотографическое в лирике: постановка проблемы"], *RSUH/RGGU Bulletin. Series: History. Philology. Cultural Studies. Oriental Studies*, Vol. 2, No 1 (2018), pp. 24–25.

technical capabilities of a camera.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Malkina and Samarkina have identified such important aspects of this problem as the modes of creating a grotesque image of the world through photoekphrasis, the transformation of the subject and his point of view when identified or dissimilated with a photographic image, the role of the context in creating the subjective organization of the lyrical work.

During the analysis of the dramatic texts I shall develop and clarify some observations of the above-mentioned literary scholars on the methods of deformation of the chronotope in the poetics of the text. According to Malkina and Lavlinsky, those distortions arise due to the discreteness of the photographic mode of representation, the role of the photographic metaphor used as a core structuring the picture of the world.<sup>11</sup>

I consider it possible to implement these observations in the analysis of dramaturgy, especially in monodrama in which the emotional value of the context is vital as it helps to understand the changes of the protagonists' consciousness compared to their perception of the world in the past reflected in the photo.

This is all the more important as there have only been two works published about the photo images in contemporary Russian drama. They analyze some aspects of photographic discourse perceived as a form of communication, and a set of utterances in the dramatic text manifesting its performative potential,<sup>12</sup> and its metatheatrical functions.<sup>13</sup>

Following aspects are taken into consideration when analyzing photographic images in the poetics of the plays of the abovementioned authors:

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<sup>10</sup> See more about this, for example, in: Maria Samarkina, "The Grotesque in the Lyrics on Photography" in: *The Grotesque and the Fantastic in Culture: Visual aspects. Collection of Articles* ["Гротеск в лирике о фотографии" в: Гротескное и фантастическое в культуре: визуальные аспекты. Сборник статей] (Moscow: Ridero, 2017), pp. 83–89.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Samarkina, "The Photographic in Lyric Poetry", pp. 22–27.

<sup>12</sup> Sergey Lavlinsky, "Photodrama: Artistic Structure and Creative Potential" in: *Dialogue of Consent: Collection of Articles* ["Фотодрама: художественная структура и креативно-творческий потенциал" в: Диалог согласия. Сборник статей], eds. Olga Fedunina and Yuri Troitsky (Moscow: Intrada, 2015), pp. 404–412.

<sup>13</sup> Nina Bochkareva and Kristina Zagorodneva, "Photoekphrasis in 'The Suitcase of Nonsense, or Quickly Done Cannot Be Well Done' by L. Petrushevskaia" ["Фотоэпиграмм в пьесе Л. Петрушевской 'Чемодан чепухи, или Быстро хорошо не бывает'"], *Perm University Herald. Russian and Foreign Philology*, Vol. 9, Issue 4 (2017), p. 117.

1. The use of photography as a form of artistic organization of the action in the play, as the plot-forming component of its poetics.
2. The use of photography as a device (ploy) serving to implement the character's (self)identification in the poetics of the play.
3. The use of photography as a way of communication with the reader/viewer, revealing the author's rhetorical strategies, and imposed by the specificity of the semiotic sphere of the photographic image.

Let us proceed with the analysis of the manifestation of photographic images in contemporary plays by the authors, in the context of the three aspects.

Photographs functioning as iconic signs constitute a fundamental element of Dmitry Bogoslovsky's play *Points on the Time Axis* [Точки на временной оси] (2016). They also may be perceived threefold: as plot-forming elements, as different ways of perceiving, and possibly as manifestations of the author's/character's/reader's presence in the dramatic text.

Eight photographs-narrations organize the action in the dramatic text. They are incorporated into the text based on the principle of the text within the text, provoking personal inspirations in the reader's mind.<sup>14</sup> Based on Barthes's concept on the general, informative (stadium) and personal (punctum) aspects, the emotional tension of a given episode comprises a personal experience evoked by one of the eight photographs.

The photographs (functioning as iconic signs) are placed in the dramatic text after the scenes consisting of exemplary to drama dialogues and stage directions. The photo precedes an author's summary which contains a certain idea, provoked by the story and the picture correlated with it.

Thus for example, the sixth picture, or *The Sixth Point*, as the playwright outlined at the top of the scene (above the picture), represents a situation in which a family (parents and children of preschool age) partakes in a protest in Bucharest. The photograph briefly commented upon by the author:

The child passes the balloon to the police officer. He continues to hold his father's hand, and when the police officer takes the balloon, for a moment a chain is formed, the force of which is very difficult to describe. At

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<sup>14</sup> Dmitry Bogoslovsky selected the eight photographs for his play from the famous series "40 best photos in 100 years", accessed August 15, 2019, [https://rosphoto.com/best-of-the-best/40\\_samyh\\_emocionalnyh\\_fotografij-1218](https://rosphoto.com/best-of-the-best/40_samyh_emocionalnyh_fotografij-1218).

this moment, all the concepts of statehood, politics, power, and other useless from the children's perspective nonsense fall apart. And this chain is stronger than any steel.<sup>15</sup>

The focus of perception seems to be located in the child's gaze. The presence of the photographs in the text "activates" in the reader's consciousness the channels of the iconic, the medial and, of course, the visual mode of communication. The photograph serves as a kind of relay, ensuring the communicability of the dialogue, the author's commentary, and the representation. The connection between the signifier and the signified is closed, i.e. the picture turns into the field of interaction of everyone involved in this performative act. A "third space" emerges by virtue of the photograph. It cannot be correlated neither with the subject nor with the object separately.<sup>16</sup> Such a technique of mutual reinforcement of the meaning of the history presented in the dialogues, the photographic image and the author's final comment enables an expansion of the space of artistic imagery in our imagination.

The complementary relation between the word and the iconic sign, as Samarkina noted, reinforces various cultural codes and conventions in the readers' perception. The verbal and the visual in the dramatic text mutually influence the interpretation of each other since the documentary (i.e. black-and-white) photos set off a chain of associations in the readers' mind. Photographs are primarily related with cinema and historical chronicles.

In my opinion, in the case of such an imposition of codes inherent in different types and fields of art, it is possible to achieve the optimal effect of emotional stimulation associated with the author's intention without losing artistic integrity. Such an effect is lost and the integrity of the play is subjected to destruction when the playwrights reject the traditional dramatic text or when they attempt to replace it with photographs. The recipients perceive metatheatricity of photographic discourse differently when reading the dramatic text, and during the stage performance.

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<sup>15</sup> Dmitry Bogoslovsky, *Points on the Time Axis* [Точки на временной оси], accessed My 22, 2019, [http://dramacenter.org/upload/information\\_system\\_25/1/9/3/item\\_193/information\\_items\\_property\\_227.pdf](http://dramacenter.org/upload/information_system_25/1/9/3/item_193/information_items_property_227.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> A similar space, designated by the playwright with the concept of "between" is described by Nina Sosna in her work *Photography and Image. Visual, Opaque, Spectral* [Фотография и образ. Визуальное, непрозрачное, призрачное] (Moscow: New Literary Review, 2011).

I shall analyze in detail several plays in which photographs and the method of their reception contribute to the (self)identification of the protagonist (character) and the recipient. In Lilia Safikanova's play *Confusion* [Смятение] (2019), which the playwright labels as "a monoplay for an actress",<sup>17</sup> the reminiscences of the photographs taken by the protagonist (Victoria) and their connection with the scenes from famous works of art trigger active processes of self-awareness. Hence, the author implements the scenario of revival of images in memory by means of their photographic translation. The protagonist ponders on randomly taken photographs and on the influence of previously seen paintings of them (for example, her photograph provisionally titled *After the Rain*). The photographs evoked in Victoria's mind the memory of her passion for Savrasov's art. The juxtaposition of the past and the present perception of the world, and herself in it, sends Victoria back to a state of creative activity. The metaphorical "photographic translation of memory"<sup>18</sup> resurrects the protagonist's experience of perceiving his own past and his participation in creating images. As a result, the playwright puts the emphasis on tactile sensory.

It is worth juxtaposing the role of photoekphrasis in the dramatic action of this monodrama with the role of painting and photographic metatext in classic Russian prose of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (e.g. in works by Ivan Turgenev, Vsevolod Garshin, and Ivan Bunin).

In those texts a photograph is often presented as a prism reflecting the external reality from the narrator's point of view. Having examined the dynamics of photoekphrasis in the Russian literature of Realism and Avant-garde, beginning with Nikolai Gogol's *The Portrait* (1835), Stephen Hutchings noted some interesting changes in the optics of narration. In particular, his observations on the retrospective modality in Bunin's prose<sup>19</sup> reveal that graphic arts often served as the main code, allowing the interpretation of the state of the hero's consciousness, including a

<sup>17</sup> Lilia Safikanova, *Confusion* [Смятение], accessed May 22, 2019, [http://www.theatre-library.ru/authors/s/safikanova\\_liliya](http://www.theatre-library.ru/authors/s/safikanova_liliya).

<sup>18</sup> I use the expression of Innokentij Urupin from his article "Photography in 'The Gift' by V. Nabokov. From the Memoirs to Language Skepticism" ["Фотография в 'Даре' В. Набокова. От воспоминания к языковому скепсису"], *Die Welt der Slaven*, LVII (2012), pp. 213–236.

<sup>19</sup> Having analyzed the photoekphrasis in Bunin's short story *At the Source of Days* [У истока дней] (1906), the author of the monograph came to the conclusion that the old photo portrait in its attempt to resurrect the past distorts the present reality. This phenomenon is reflected in the narration since it establishes the relation-



situation of bifurcation (“fragmentation”) of the hero’s mind. Thus, as a result of the perception of the past depicted in the photograph, the hero of Garshin’s short story experiences personality disorder.<sup>20</sup>

The dramatic text is characterized by the absence of the narrator’s view. At the same time, specific elements of narration contain the protagonist’s reflections on her condition in the past when she was taking those photographs. A certain detachment from the stream of reflections and Victoria’s attempt to comprehend herself in the past by restoring her view of the world (the view of the photographer’s creative personality) allows us to note the distance between ideal self-representations in the past and the skeptical ones in the present. Thus the reference to the photographs in this monodrama acquires the effect of a multiplication of views, i.e. it contributes to the differentiation of “I” and “the Other” in the heroine’s consciousness.

For Victoria in her current state, the gaze of a once attractive man seems distant, tired, and unusual. Furthermore, his role in this attempt to reenact a memory turns out to be traumatic, as it resembles an invasion into her personal, well-established space. Even the idea that it was he who initiated the situation by inviting her to take part in the photo exhibition alienates the heroine from herself in the past and makes her reluctant to return to that time:

And who only invented photography! What a calm life people had led before that. They did not take photos and no pictures reminded them of the one they would like to forget.<sup>21</sup>

The inner action of this dramatic text focuses on the ways of capturing the changes in the heroine’s perception. Concurrently, the act of looking at the photographs activates the memory and becomes the main means of personal identification and awareness of the lack of readiness for change. This idea is reflected in the very title of this monodrama, *Confusion*, impressionistic in regard to the mode of conveying Victoria’s feelings.

The description of photographs and their perception fulfills a similar role of an impulse for changes in the protagonist’s consciousness in the

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ship between narrated time and narrating self (cf. Stephen C. Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen C. Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture*, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

dramatic text *A Man – a Woman – a Gun* [Мужчина – женщина – пистолет] (2004) by Konstantin Steshik. The character's utterances (The Man) are printed in italics in the text and constitute part of the dialogue with a woman who had once loved him (The Woman).

The photograph of the French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo in the main role from the movie *Breathless* [À bout de souffle] directed by Jean-Luc Godard became for the protagonist a freeze-frame of someone else's great, but completely unattainable life:

[...] A piece of France ... something very fresh, vivid, real ... even a bit dangerous. You know, it is like a peephole, just like in a door.<sup>22</sup>

The freeze-frame from the movie displays details which elude the attention of the viewer. In this case, it concerns the gun hidden in Belmondo's pocket. This specific element anticipates the dénouement of the action.

In Steshik's dramatic text the character's description of the photo from the movie contains the perspective of culmination and dénouement. The reader's attention switches from the events (the scenario of the character's death) to the way of perceiving this photographic representation and its role in the course of the action. That is how the protagonist recalls the power of impression of Belmondo's photo: "I do not know why, but he had struck me so much."<sup>23</sup>

In Steshik's play the description of the act of seeing the photo fosters the moment of the character's (self)identification in the eyes of the once beloved, yet abandoned Woman. The photograph of a brilliant actor does not compensate for the absence of what he desired in his life. He acts out or imitates the image and position of the Other (Belmondo from the photo) in the eyes of that Woman. To prove his stepping into the role (the authenticity of the action), he shoots himself. The protagonist perceives the Woman's presence as an opportunity to mimic happiness:

I only ask you to help me a little bit! ... To simulate somehow a bit of real happiness ... at least for a moment ... to be outside the door ... even if not for real ... but just to believe [...].<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Konstantin Steshik, *A Man – a Woman – a Gun* [Мужчина – женщина – пистолет], accessed May 11, 2019, <https://www.ziemic-performa.net/wp.../07/.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The photograph is used here as a substitute for unlived experience or, to be more precise, as a substitute for a simulacrum representing the protagonist's illusions about the Other. Such a ploy dynamizes the monodramatic utterance and creates the effect of reverberance of voices, an effect of a certain presence of another subject in the character's utterance. The communicative strategies of rejection and "appropriation" of the Other presented in these two plays are also of interest in connection with the nature of the representation of the Other through the perception of photography viewed as a media product and movie text. The photos in both plays allow the playwrights to represent more vividly cultural stereotypes, including those of mass culture. In this sense, the photographic representation of Belmondo's image has become a simulacrum of itself, reflecting the ways in which ideas emerge in society. Hence, photographic discourse stimulates the processes of personal (self)identification of the characters as well. Moreover, in analyzed plays, it contributes to the narrativization of the way of perceiving in a situation of different relations between "I" and the Other. The perception of photographic image functioning as a unique statement allows the playwrights to introduce the mechanisms of communication, in this case, with the reader/viewer, into the dramatic text.

The existential understanding of the communicative mechanisms between photographic techno-images and the viewer is scrutinized in the works of Vilém Flusser regarding the transformation of the program of participation (cooperation of viewers in the process of communication with photography perceived as a media reality). He asserts that the techno-image magically restructures our reality and reverses the "global image scenario."<sup>25</sup> Flusser also regards the photograph as a magical model of the viewer's behavior: "To be in the photographic universe means to experience, to know and to evaluate the world as a function of photographs."<sup>26</sup>

The photographs often appear in the plays as a media reality. Thus the pictures posted on the Internet, accompanied by ratings (likes) and comments in Natalya Blok's dramatic text *Topless Photos* [Фото топлес] (2015) create a media reality. The dialogue between two teenagers who have feelings for each other (Kira and Artyom) presented in a form of exchanged photos which immediately become the property of media reality

<sup>25</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

(and, hence, the property of the classmates) is filled with ritual gestures, containing reactions to the message captured in the images. In such gestures a certain magical model of behavior may appear: the users (in this case, Kira and Artyom's friends) are in the grip of the "photographic universe", i.e. they learn the world, collect experiences, and evaluate actions based on the functions of photography.

Artyom's gesture – a request to Kira to send him a topless photo of herself – receives an unexpected response: the photograph of the naked chest creates a new hyperreality. After it was shared and rated the media reality "created" an unexpected consequence: the news that a desperate Kira had committed suicide spread on the Internet. The hyperreality induced the mythologized state of "the escape to nowhere" as a form of simulacrum. Since Kira's classmates had no idea that the information about the suicide was false, it instantly spreads on the Internet.

The establishment of hyperreality on social networks has become threatening: like a mythological monster, the media reality was ready to devour the images and the quasi-reality which it had created. As indicated in the stage directions, Artyom is bombarded with photos of topless girls. One may think that the evil generated by Artyom on the Internet turned into a natural disaster:

There is a flash mob on social networks. All the girls post topless photos on their pages and write "Guess whose?", "Everyone has breasts", "What dude, haven't you seen breasts?", "Here, check out the tits". Everyone sets the hashtag "Kira, I'm sorry!". Artyom updates the main page and it turns into an endless set of photos of breasts [...].<sup>27</sup>

In such a phantasmagoric hyperreality the performative potential of photographic states production manifests itself. It allows the recipients to outlive the experience of learning and assessing the world and themselves "based on the functions of photography."<sup>28</sup> The image in the photograph and the photograph itself, as Flusser, "not only acquires a reproductive character but it also creates itself."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Natalya Blok, *Topless photo* [Фото голые], accessed May 11, 2019, [http://www.theatrelibrary.ru/files/b/blok\\_natalya/blok\\_natalya\\_2.doc](http://www.theatrelibrary.ru/files/b/blok_natalya/blok_natalya_2.doc).

<sup>28</sup> Flusser writes about such a property of the "photographic universum" perceived as a means of programming society for the magical behavior in Vilem Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, p. 70).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

The ability of photographic images to produce hyperreality determines the very structure of the action in the play. It contributes to the formation of the reader's/viewer's communicative gestures, adopted in the sphere of media reality. By virtue of such gestures, described in the stage directions, the addressee is drawn into the reference field of the utterance. It is also possible to recognize illocutionary strategies addressed to the recipient. Moreover, the way of addressing the reader/viewer is narrativized. The play indicates the sensation that everyone, i.e. the characters and the readers/viewers are part of media reality, as the following stage directions eloquently illustrate:

The school corridor. The doors to the classrooms. The schoolchildren stand in two groups – girls separately, boys separately. They do not see each other. They have smartphones in their hands. Artyom holds a tablet.<sup>30</sup>

The power of photographic images used in the dramatic text extends to the creation of hyperreality, breaking out of which turns out to be quite difficult. In her dramatic text Natalya Blok achieves the effect of excluding the subject from the reference field of the quasi-media reality. In the finale, Kira regains her own identity by removing herself from the photographic universe, despite the fact that it takes place in a situation of an illusory suicide generated by media reality.

In a number of plays containing photographs, the phenomenon of representation of images, as well as communication through them, is thematized. In Peter Gladilin's dramatic text *The Photocameras* [Фотоаппараты] (2009), the photographs taken by two unborn human embryos, which by some miracle managed to acquire an autonomous existence from the mother's organism, became a sign of their presence in the world.

Even the fact that their images did not appear in the photo becomes the way of their communication with the world. Nevertheless, such a "virtual" photograph (that functions as a non-representational simulacrum) can evoke the recipient's activity, and the experience of the state of non-presence can be perceived as an existential component of the category of the Other in a situation of (self)identification. The picture on which the characters-fetuses did not appear became a real fact. It has left a trace, an imprint of their activity. The description of photographs in this play is

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<sup>30</sup> Natalya Blok, *Topless photo*.

intended to evoke in the reader's/viewer's consciousness a sense of reality of the existence of two fetuses: Toporkov and Govorkova. Furthermore, the dramatic text conveys the message that only by dint of capturing wonderful moments in the photos the characters perceive the meaning of their existence.

Thus for the Butterfly (one of the female characters of the dramatic text) who can see the embryos, moments captured with a camera constitute her entire short life. The need to remember those moments, even at the time of her death can represent an attempt to overcome the demise. The rhetoric of the utterance contains the author's clear desire to convince the reader of the value held by every moment of life.

The implication of the very short existence of the fetuses, measured in days, is reflected in the creation of an unusual photo in which the reflections of the embryos did not appear. However, an appeal to the audience of the Biennale placed under one of the photos stated that its contemplation would bring them joy: "After you see this photo, you'll become absolutely happy, because you will see something infinitely beautiful, and then you will know the truth".<sup>31</sup> A similar epiphanic effect of the experience of perceiving photographs incorporates a rhetorical message for the viewer, aimed at raising his or her attention to the presented problem.

The phenomenon of photoreception is also thematized in the play *Black, White, Accents of Red, Orange* [Черный, Белый, акценты Красного, Оранжевый] (control prints in 2 acts) (2014) by Alexander Stroganov, a playwright and psychiatrist from Barnaul. The ploy of photoreception, implemented in the dialogue between the author, the characters, and the reader/viewer, creates the basis of the dramatic action. Sergey Lavlinsky rightly asserts that the recipient witnesses the process of reflection of the aging photographer Plaksin. This phenomenon takes the form of "the stages of the hero's self-determination," although the photographic perception<sup>32</sup> is presented and realized as theatrical.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the visual axiological basis of photoperception, isomorphic to the theatrical

<sup>31</sup> Peter Gladilin, *Photocameras* [Фотоаппараты], accessed May 22, 2019, [http://www.theatrelibrary.ru/files/g/gladilin\\_petr/gladilin\\_petr\\_10.pdf](http://www.theatrelibrary.ru/files/g/gladilin_petr/gladilin_petr_10.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> As it was noted in the introductory part of the article, the researchers associate a similar phenomenon with poetic photoekphrasis (see, for example, Samarkina, "The Photographic in Lyric Poetry").

<sup>33</sup> Sergey Lavlinsky, "Performative aspects of drama by Alexander Stroganov" ["Перформативные аспекты драматургии Александра Строгонова"], *New Philological Bulletin*, No 1 (20), (2012), pp. 45-55.

action, determines the aspect of representation, i.e. the interaction of multiplying subjects of perception (on the control prints) produced by the photographic action of the subject – the photographer Plaksin.<sup>34</sup>

Lavlinsky associated the performative aspect of this phenomenon with the transforming creative impact of photography, in particular of the “control prints”, whose color marking constitutes the “visual-performative gesture”<sup>35</sup> indicated in the title of the play. The utterances of imaginary characters (all of them, apparently, are figments of the old photographer’s imagination) represent the theater of what was seen and captured with a camera. These utterances are quite often extremely emotional and concise (they consist of one or two words). The metatheatrical context of the author’s commentary is incorporated in the stage directions, which offer the reader/viewer a certain way of interpretation or participation in the events they experience. Such a context can be recognized already in the opening stage direction:

Later on, as you become acquainted with the characters of the play, possibly you may realize that you have met them before. In these photographic etudes. So. White atelier. Control photos. And now also voices. Do you hear the voices? The Voices – important actors involved in the play. The voices are not theatrical, amateur, just like the presented photographs.<sup>36</sup>

In Stoganov’s work dramatic text reflects the ability of control prints to display the picture of the world. This concept acquires symbolic character, spreading to all spheres of life, including Plaksin’s family relations.

The epigraph to the text fulfills an important role in the structure of the internal action. This statement is attributed to Leonardo da Vinci: “The air is filled with invisible images of things – all you need is a reflective surface to make them visible.”<sup>37</sup> In the course of action, the control over the process of multiplying reflections is lost. Leo and Sev, the duplicates of Plaksin and Smekhov reflected on the mirror surface appear from nowhere (or, as the characters think, from the mirror). In a sense, they can also be considered the products of the control prints. Leo and Sev’s dialogues

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Stoganov, *Black, White, Accents of Red, Orange* [Черный, Белый, акценты Красного, Оранжевый], accessed May 22, 2019, <http://www.stoganov.ru/texts/> (position nr 52).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

raise the question: how is the vision directed in relation to the reflecting surface?

**LEO.** Are you looking in the mirror from the inside or outside?<sup>38</sup>

The presence of reflected images resembles the Theater of Absurd in which the idea of the subject of the action and the utterance is lost. In the course of the stage reflections, Plaksin's consciousness and his way of perceiving the world are increasingly exploited as the material for the emergence of new projections and reflections. The presence of Plaksin's Voice is most often indicated in the play as the only physical marker of the character's presence. It is the Voice that informs about the autonomy of the photographs from the subject taking them. The bodily tangibility of the Voice enters into the stage interaction with the imaginary items (test photos). Concurrently, according to Plaksin's belief, the control prints always contain the personal view and the presence of the subject who took them.

Such an interactive behavior of the playwright invites the reader/viewer to participate in a certain theater of endless reflections, wherein the audience's perception undoubtedly is one of the most important reflecting instances. The self-generating imagery reflected in this perception produces meanings from itself. Concurrently, the performative resources of the utterance stimulate the interaction of creative and receptive participation of the reader/viewer.

To sum up, the saturation of the poetics of contemporary Russian plays with photographic images can be regarded as a certain way of acquiring the experience of participation in the action for the reader and the viewer. Photographic discourse contributes to the extension of the space of dramatic action. The playwrights in the analyzed texts refer to the reader's and the viewer's personal experience and to the set of ideas (stereotypes) they hold. A photographic image becomes an object and a catalyst for a dramatic collision. The representation of the way of seeing is themed and constitutes the plot-compositional basis in a number of dramatic texts. Photographs and their perception in monodramas often allow the playwright to theatricalize (dramatize) the processes of perception of the Other in oneself. In many plays, the reference is made to the Other perceived as a simulacrum.

It is worth emphasizing the unique role of mythologization of hyper-reality in such dramatic texts. Hence, the photographic images contribute

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



to the presentation of fictional discourse in the play which refers to the perceiving consciousness as to a product of media reality and to the mechanisms of creation of the readers and the viewers who participate in this performative act. Furthermore, the way of perception (vision) in the play is themed due to the inclusion of the recipient in the reference field of the utterance. The recipient's knowledge of the features of the photographic image, perceived as the law by which the action develops, is problematized. Concurrently, the character's (self)-identification is carried out and the recognition of the creative power of media reality which functions as a photo universe drawing into its worlds takes place.

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**Nataliia Maliutina**

**Photographic image as a communicative resource in contemporary Russian drama**

The article analyses photographic discourse in contemporary Russian dramatic texts as a specific way of perceiving and constructing the reality, as a means of communication, and as a metalanguage. The conceptualization of photographic images in the dramatic text enabled the scrutiny of specific artistic ploys and photographic techniques applied. The article reveals the nature of correlation between the visual perception of a photograph incorporated in the dramatic text, the characters' utterances and the author's remarks. The photographic image fosters the rejection or the "appropriation" (recognition in oneself) of the Other by the characters. It also allows for the implementation of the communicative mechanisms used to create the hyperreality of the photo universum. The performative potential of the photographic discourse of the dramatic text materializes itself in such a hyperreality.

**Keywords:** photographic image, media reality, identification, way of perception, play

**Słowa kluczowe:** fotoekfrazza, rzeczywistość medialna, identyfikacja, sposób percepcji, sztuka

