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## PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, SCIENTIFIC – FACTORS OF ART PRESENTATIONS OF ANTINOMY «THE TRUE – THE VISIBLE»

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### Abstract

*This study characterizes the role of philosophy, religion, and scientific and technological progress as determining factors of conceptual changes in the art representation of discrepancies between “the true” and “the visible” in European culture from ancient to modern times. The application of structural and comparative methods of analysis makes it possible to define the art peculiarities of the display of symbolic contradictions between “the true” and “the visible”, which correlates with binary antinomy “top” – “bottom” and corresponds to the worldview orientations inherent in different eras. It is revealed that the loss of the meaning of Christianity, the intensification of scientific and technical progress, and the changes in philosophical vectors of European society brought about a reconsideration of the value system. Postmodernism with its philosophy and leveling of Christian ideas, development of digital technology, and the culture of Internet communication XX-XXI centuries destroys the possibility of differences between the concepts of “the true” and “the visible”. The concept of the dissonance between essential and formally receptive practically loses its meaning and the corresponding problem is deprived of its acuteness as the illusion (“the visible”) turns into a norm, synonymous with reality. “The true” is no longer necessary.*

**Keywords:** binary antinomy, culture, philosophy, religion, scientific progress.

## Introduction

The discrepancy between “the true” (the essential) and “the visible” (formally receptive) is expressed through the categorical opposition of “being and seeming”. Defining the main determinants and trends of the diachrony of its representation in European culture makes it possible to understand the significance of the phenomenon and reveal the nature of changes in the basic value coordinates associated with the conception of man and the world as a whole.

The present article aims to systematically characterize the role of philosophical doctrines, the Christian religion, and scientific and technological progress as factors that greatly influenced conceptual changes in the ways of representing the discrepancies between “the true” (essential) and “the visible” (formally receptive) in European culture (from the ancient times till the twenty-first century). This approach is directed at identifying the main trends to create a comprehensive representation of the issue, which does not involve a detailed, wide-ranging analysis of all of the abundance of the factual material, potentially attractive in the context of the subject of the present discussion. At the same time, the research results outline the ways for further multi-vector in-depth studies to provide full coverage of this complex and extremely interesting matter.

Scientists have repeatedly addressed this issue, focusing their attention only on some of its aspects, without pursuing the goal of making systematic, conceptual generalizations. The main subject of their reflection is the postmodern theory of simulacra and J. Baudrillard's ideas outlined in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. And it is through this perspective that the various phenomena of modern life, which testify to life's “elusiveness”, are considered: for example, *Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality: Myths and Realities* (B. Arnaldi, P. Guttin, G. Moreau (Eds.)), *Simulacra in the Age of Social Media: Baudrillard as the Prophet of Fake News* (J. Morris), *From reality to the hyperreality of simulation* (P. Barroso), *Phenomenon of Illusory in Visual Culture* (O. Pushonkova) and others.

The achievements of structuralism provide firm grounds for interpreting the subject of our scientific interest within the framework of the theory of binary antinomies as basic worldview coordinates. “The true” and “the visible” correspond to different, opposite extremes, fluctuating with the development of European culture from clearly defined boundaries to the destruction of the very foundations of the axiological hierarchy.

The application of structural and comparative methods of analysis makes it possible to define the peculiarities of the display of symbolic contradictions between “the true” and “the visible”, which are based on the extreme points of the binary antinomy “top” – “bottom” and correspond to the worldview orientations inherent in different eras.

## Method and Materials

One of the primary antinomies that form a person's picture of the world and society is the categorical pair “top – bottom”. Its variable specification is conditioned by the ideas of “valuable” – “valueless”, “significant” – “insignificant”, inherent in each society at a specific stage of its historical development. Based on the forms acquired by the corresponding contradiction, it is possible to draw conclusions about the values of a certain cultural environment.

A panoramic overview of the question indicates the conceptual significance of the phenomenon for the idealistic trend in the development of European philosophy. From the standpoint of objective idealism, the recognition of the coexistence of the ideal (“top”, “valuable”) and the material (“bottom”, “valueless”) is accompanied by an accentuation of the truth of the former and the deceptive appearance, illusoriness of the latter (replacing “the true” with “the visible” on the level of human sensations, ideas, knowledge). Thus, even in Plato's theories, the contradiction between the essential and the formally receptive is based on the opposition of the two worlds (“the world of ideas” that is “higher”, “true”, and “the world of things” that is “lower”, “illusory”), as well as on the conceptual symbol of the cave, dwelling in which gives rise to a distorted perception of the existing Truth<sup>1</sup>. The key points of Plato's theory were developed by representatives of Neoplatonism (for example Plotinus), and they laid the foundations for the further development of various trends in idealistic concepts of the following eras.

A form of religious worldview close to objective idealism is formed on similar principles. Its immanent axiological hierarchy is determined by the belief in the existence of heavenly life (“top”, “eternal”, “spiritual” that is “true”) and recognition of the transience of earthly life (“bottom”, “mortal”, “corporeal” that is “the visible”). It is due to the Christian religion that the antinomy “top” – “bottom” was firmly established in the coordinate system of the Middle Ages worldview, setting up the dissonance of “the true” (“the eternal”, “the spiritual”) and “the visible” (“the fleeting”, “the material”) as a fundamental truth through which man and the world are perceived. The idea of the immortality of the human soul is in logical concord with the concept of posthumous rebirth as a result of the loss of significance of the bodily form (“visible”, “low”) and the victory of the spiritual essence (“true”, “high”).

Since the choice of a person between “the true” (spiritual, providing eternal life in the higher world) and “the false” (material, mortal, earthly) is crucial in the context of Christian axiology, one can find ideas about the illusory character of the forms of human existence and their superficial reception, the inconsistency of “the true” and the “the visible” in numerous theological texts.

It is only natural that violating the norms of social behavior associated with a visual change of gender or status (substitution of the real with the visible) is treated by Christianity mostly in a negative way. One can find confirmation of this fact on the pages of the Bible. “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God”<sup>2</sup>. “Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress”<sup>3</sup>.

European literature reflects similar ideas; the analysis of medieval texts with the plots based on situations with substitutions of “the true” and “the visible” (disguise, deception, and so forth), aimed at

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. with an introduction by H.D.P. Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1905), p. 480.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy in *The King James Version of the Holy Bible* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2018), chap. 22:5.

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs of Solomon in *The King James Version of the Holy Bible* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2018), chap. 30:21-23

a fraudulent change of gender or social status, clearly reveals this (a detailed analysis of such plots is presented in the monograph by O. Nikolova)<sup>4</sup>. For example, the Catholic legend about Pope Joan, who pretends to be male, gets a good theological education, successfully ascends the Catholic hierarchy, and even becomes a Pope for a while. “Such a substitution is interpreted in an extremely negative way: the deceiver is presented as a victim of the devil’s temptation, her actions are motivated not by the desire to save her soul, but by the selfish desire for power”<sup>5</sup>. The same motive acquires a different coloring in hagiographic literature: it is evaluated positively, since “the dressing of a woman in man’s clothes is prompted by the desire to serve God”<sup>6</sup> (that is to enter a male monastery because there were no female ones at that time). In this case, the temporary replacement of “the true” by “the visible” is understood symbolically as a death of a person in one status (as an earthly, worldly creature) to transit to another standing (a person dedicating themselves to God), that is, as a rebirth for the sake of eternal (true) life.

In the future, the idea of the deceptiveness of existence, the discrepancy between “the true” and “the visible” holds on in European tradition as the cultural figures tend to represent religious ideas and (or) philosophical theories of idealism with similar provisions. This happens most productively within the framework of two artistic systems: the religious Baroque (the seventeenth century) and Romanticism (the first half of the nineteenth century) oriented towards the achievements of idealistic philosophy. Baroque almost completely “inherits” the medieval, that is Christian system of values (the higher, the spiritual world is true, the lower, the earthly world with its temptations is visible, illusory), while Romanticism significantly transforms it by the requirements and philosophical heritage of the early nineteenth century. Despite its internal multifacetedness, German idealism, which laid the basis for Romanticism, recognizes the ontological status of the antinomy of “the visible” and “the true” in the light of the axiological superiority of “the spiritual” over “the material”: I. Kant’s idea of “visibility” as an “illusion” which “is impossible to avoid”, J. Fichte’s conceptual understanding of “illusion” (Schein), F. Schelling’s recognition of the true reality not of things and phenomena of the world, but only of their archetypes, that is ideas (Urgestalt), and so forth.

The art of Baroque and Romanticism prove the idea of the illusive nature of existence, the dissonance of “the true” and “the visible” on the levels of content and form. As for the content, it means the active approval of the following concepts: “life as a dream” (related to B. Pascal’s famous aphorism “Human life is but a perpetual illusion”<sup>7</sup>, “life as a theater”, “life as an illusion”, which are actively represented by artists and play an important role during the dominance of these cultural trends in Europe. Writers use fictional images (symbols, metaphors, allegories, grotesque) as formal means of representing these concepts, and build the plots of their pieces based on the motives of status-role change, disguise, pretense/unrecognition, delusional metamorphosis, when the

characters play other people’s roles, hiding their true essence behind the masks: their artistic world is a kind of transcendental theater entirely built on mystifications.

A good example in this regard is represented by the works of such Baroque writers as P. Calderón (especially his drama “Life is a Dream”), A. Gryphius, H. J. Ch. von Grimmelshausen; men-of-letters of German Romanticism such as L. Tieck, A. von Arnim, C. Brentano, W. Hauff, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and others. A detailed analysis of this question can be found in O. Nikolova’s monograph<sup>8</sup>.

It is noteworthy that the achievements of scientific and technical progress are negatively interpreted by Romantic writers, associating “technical” stuff with “dead”, hostile to “the true”, that is spiritual; mechanisms are depicted as threatening to a person who has a creative potential and a rich spiritual world. At the same time, the stories about the deceptive replacement of “the living” (man) with “the inanimate” (automatic device, machine)<sup>9</sup> were widespread in the literature of Romanticism. The deceptiveness of “the material” (as “low”, “dead”) is opposed by the truth of “the spiritual” (“high”, “alive”) representing the unattainable ideal that a creative personality strives for. The Romantic dual reality preserves the “top” (“valuable”, “essential”) – “bottom” (“valueless”, “visibly receptive”) antinomy and revives it in an altered form.

It seems expedient to advise against a simplistic interpretation of the tendency to reproduce the dissonances of the essential and formally receptive in European culture, against a false opinion about the lack of their representation in the art of other eras. Here we accentuate general trends marked by a significantly greater (conceptual) role of the phenomenon under study for artistic systems of Baroque and Romanticism. Situations built around the replacement of “the true” with “the visible” are also depicted in the literature of Renaissance, Classicism, Enlightenment, and so forth, but they serve mainly as artistic techniques for creating comic or adventurous narratives (motifs of travesty, substitution, pretension/unrecognition). Conversely, the writers of Baroque and Romanticism turn them into a means of expressing concepts of the world and man. Renaissance trust in the importance of the material and physical, Classicist-Enlightenment rationalism, the decisive influence of positivism on the development of Realism of the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe have a common affinity to recognizing the value of earthly existence and the possibilities of its adequate understanding; the natural result of this is the formation of a common tendency inherent in them to rethink axiological coordinates fixed by the binary antinomy (“top” – “bottom”) as well as a noticeable loss in the relevance of the idea of the illusory nature of the entities.

A new outburst of great interest in the conceptual creative representation of “the true” and “the visible” is observed in the European culture of the twentieth – twenty-first centuries, namely in the literature of Modernism and Postmodernism.

<sup>4</sup> Oleksandra Nikolova, *Pseudomorphous Characters of Ukrainian and Russian Literatures in Late XVIII – the First Half of XIX Centuries (in the Context of the European Tradition)* (Zaporizhzhia: Zaporizhzhia National University, 2017), p. 63-64.

<sup>5</sup> Nikolova, *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Nikolova, *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Pascal, *The Thoughts*, trans. from the text of M. Auguste Molinier by C. Kegan Paul, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1901) p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> Oleksandra Nikolova O., *Pseudomorphous Characters of Ukrainian and Russian Literatures in Late XVIII – the First Half of XIX Centuries (in the Context of the European Tradition)* (Zaporizhzhia: Zaporizhzhia National University, 2017), p. 264-268

<sup>9</sup> Nikolova, *ibid.*, p. 299-230.



This tendency appears due to several factors: since the nineteenth century, the ideas of Darwinism as well as the scientific and technological revolution have stimulated the spreading of the theories of positivism, dialectical materialism, and atheistic existentialism, alongside the destruction of the values of the Christian religious system. Corresponding processes naturally lead to the deterioration of conservative-patriarchal foundations, which for a long time (in fact, since the Middle Ages) had ensured gender and status hierarchy in European society when “masculine” was thought of as “top” and “feminine” was treated as “bottom”; upper-class affiliation and wealth guaranteed correlation with “the top”, and lower-class attribution and poverty committed people to “the bottom”). At the same time, gender and status role inversions cease to be perceived as something exceptional (women not only dress in men's attire, but also begin to master traditional male roles), social-class reversal as a result of revolutions sanction radical transformation of the foundations of the social hierarchy (inversion is not a temporary violation of established rules, but the creation and approval of new, “fair” norms). Cultural figures of the Modernistic era demonstrate a strong intention to creatively grasp the corresponding transformations, which testify to the powerful tendency towards ruining the established value of the binary antinomy “top” – “bottom” in the aspect of the relationship between “the true” and “the visible”.

Modernism practically renounces religious ideas, the Christian concept of the world and man, as well as the idealistic foundations of worldview, which leads to the destruction of the very basis of the opposition of “the high” (“the true”, “the spiritual”) and “the low” (“the formal”, “the material”). At the same time, modernists, like their predecessors (writers of the Baroque and the Romanticism), continue to use conventional types of imagery, functionally suitable for creating a deep subtext, to represent their thoughts on this matter: complex metaphors, symbols, allegories convey the idea of the crudity of identification of “the true” and “the visible” (“everything is not what it seems”). Grotesque and fantastic, symbolic, metaphorical images point not so much to the secret Truth of the Higher World, but rather to its absence. Emptiness, as an ontological category, hides behind the deceptive cover of material existence. In this context, the works by F. Kafka and A. Camus are significant. The latter wrote about the literary pieces of his colleague: “Kafka’s world is in truth an indescribable universe in which man allows himself the tormenting luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing that nothing will come of it”<sup>10</sup>. The implication of replacing “the true” with “the visible” is lost because its axiological interpretation changes: the works of Modernism hint that there is no “true” behind “the visible”.

This process reaches its peak in the culture of Postmodernism, which has an ironic disposition towards Christian values and the principles of classical objective idealism; the postmodern concept of simulacra logically completes the review of the diachrony of the subject in this article. According to J. Baudrillard, “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”<sup>11</sup>. The simulacrum develops into one of the key categories and a leading artistic means in postmodern art.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien, (New York : Random House, 1955), p 82.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 1.

As O. Pushonkova points out, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

the phenomenon of illusory enters into critical discourse (G. Bataille, P. Klossowski, O. Kojève, J. Baudrillard, P. Virilio, J.-F. Lyotard, R. Barthes, and others), in which the crisis of representation is complemented by the crisis of reality. The idea of the discrepancy between concepts and reality makes both classical mimetics and classical identity impossible<sup>12</sup>.

Orientation towards ironic destruction of traditional religious axiological coordinates and basic antinomies in combination with principles of total relativism leads to the refutation of the very possibility of clear identification and opposition of “the true” and “the visible”. It is common knowledge that any category is treated as valuable only in pair with another, opposite, worthless counterpart: “top” has its meaning only because there is “bottom”, as well as “the real” acquires sense as opposed to “the illusory”. The concept of the dissonance of essential and formally receptive practically loses its meaning in the context of the postmodern ideology, and the corresponding problem is deprived of its acuteness as the illusion of “the visible” turns into a norm, synonymous with reality. “The true” is no longer necessary.

Scientific and technological progress along with the mass introduction of digital technologies play here a very significant role. In modern society, which spends most of its life on the Internet, the slogan “The visible means the true” is extremely essential. The tendency towards the loss of self-identity, which is traditionally associated with symbolic death (see Nikolova<sup>13</sup>), takes on gargantuan proportions, and the protagonists are often represented by tricksters, violators, and destroyers of established traditions, whose images are masks that change according to circumstances. A con artist often becomes a favorite character of most cultural products designed for the mass recipient.

## Conclusions

Hence, “the true” and “the visible” in European culture correspond to the extremes of the binary antinomy “the top” – “the bottom” (in ontological and social, as well as gender aspects) that reflect worldview coordinates. They alter in the course of the development of European culture as a result of changes in dominant philosophical ideas, the spread or destruction of the foundations of the Christian religion, and the development of scientific and technological progress. The philosophy of idealism (in its variations), and religious (Christian) ideas about the world and man related to it (in terms of recognizing the priority of “the spiritual” over “the material”) are among the leading factors contributing to the actualization of the relevant dissonances. Therefore, the phenomenon under study acquires conceptual significance in the art of the Middle Ages, the religious Baroque, and Romanticism with its idealistic worldview. It is reflected through symbolic/artistic forms that confirm the belief in the dialectical unity of the processes of destruction – restoration/renewal, the

<sup>12</sup> Oksana Pushonkova, The ghostly phenomenon as a phenomenon of modern visual culture. *Cherkasy University Bulletin: Philosophy*, 1 (2018), p.81

<sup>13</sup> Oleksandra Nikolova, Pseudomorphous Characters of Ukrainian and Russian Literatures in Late XVIII – the First Half of XIX Centuries (in the Context of the European Tradition) (*Zaporizhzhia: Zaporizhzhia National University*, 2017), p. 33-34.

mandatory victory of life over death as a result of the removal of contradictions between “the visible” and “the real”. The corresponding artistic systems are characterized by the desire to express ideas of the complexity and deceptiveness of “the real” (“life as a dream”, “life as an illusion”, “life as a theater”) through fictional images that create a deep subtext as well as through motives of disguise, substitution, and deception. “The essential” is thought of as “valuable”, and “the visible” is treated as “valueless”, which also affects the interpretation of substitutions and deceptions in the social life of these eras. Intensification of scientific and technological progress brings about the destruction of religious (Christian) values, changes in ideological and philosophical vectors (the role of materialistic-rationalistic theories increases), a gradual rethinking of class and gender stereotypes, the ruin of the foundations of the axiological hierarchy necessary for opposing “the high” (“the true”, “the spiritual”) and “the low” (“the visible”, “the material”). Since the late nineteenth century in society and art, there has existed a tendency to interpret this dissonance outside the context of traditional religious axiological norms. While in the culture of Modernism the ephemerality of the “visible form” is connected with the emptiness hidden behind it (artistic means of representation are fictional images with subtext), Postmodernism destroys the possibility of differences the concepts of “the true” and “the visible” (replacement of traditional images by simulacra, actualization of the trickster type). The development of digital technology and the culture of Internet communication also make great contribution to this.

The authors of this article suppose that the study has broad perspectives of further investigation, connected with the possibility and expediency of researching the determinants of trends, the specifics of representations of discrepancies between “the true” and “the visible” in other national cultural contexts (in the comparative aspect as well), detailed analysis of individual manifestations of this phenomenon in different spheres of modern social life.

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