

# SEEING AN IMAGE – BEING-IN-THE-WORLD: THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN VISUALITY, SPATIALITY, AND AGENCY IN PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS\*

## Ilya Inishev

National Research University Higher School of Economics,  
Department of Cultural Studies  
M. Trechsviatitelsky per. 8/2, office 403  
109028, Moscow, Russia  
E-mail: iinishev@hse.ru

## Yuliya Biedash

National Research University Higher School of Economics,  
Department of Cultural Studies  
M. Trechsviatitelsky per. 8/2, office 403  
109028, Moscow, Russia  
E-mail: ybiedash@hse.ru

**Abstract.** *The article is dedicated to the revelation of heuristic potential of hermeneutic image conception within discussions on contemporary visual culture. H. G. Gadamer has analysed the image as the visual, spatial and social phenomenon expanding and thereby transforming the accustomed notion of iconic experience. The image is not primarily an object of research for aesthetics and art criticism, but a social phenomenon which has to be considered in its real and imagined character as well as in its interrelations with the lived world structures. By blurring boundaries between art and life in his image theory Gadamer opens up an array of opportunities for the analysis of iconic practices in all their variety: from science to theater.*

**Keywords:** *Gadamer, image, philosophical hermeneutics, space, agency, social icons*

## Introduction: retrieving the hermeneutic conception of image

No doubt, the problematics of the image and art experience has played a very important role in the phenomenological hermeneutics,

especially since it has been widely recognized as one of the most influential trends in the 20th century philosophy. In Heidegger's later philosophy, experience of art is one of the key regions where the event of historical truth that surpasses every subject's cognitive activities can take place. Gadamer considers the art and image experience as a general model for the hermeneutical phenomena and hermeneutical understanding

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that, on their part, were expected to offer a new paradigm of the researcher's self-consciousness in the humanities.

On the other hand, despite the high significance which the image problematics had for the founding fathers and protagonists of the phenomenological hermeneutics, it was embedded in the specific contexts of their philosophical positions. As a result, the hermeneutical theory of the image *per se* remained undeveloped and hence underestimated.

But what makes the review of the current state of affairs in hermeneutical reflexions on the nature of image necessary? What are the reasons for the elaboration of more or less autonomous and coherent hermeneutical image conception?

The answer is relatively simple and obvious: changes occurred in the contemporary culture in the latter two decades that can be summarized by such emblematic expressions as “visual turn”, “iconic turn” or “pictorial turn”. All these “turns” point out, in the first instance, the increasing proliferation of various forms of visual and iconic experiences in all dimensions of contemporary social life: from dominance of visual tools and forms in shaping our self-identities to inevitability of visual models in scientific research. Moreover, these formulas imply that the contemporary visual culture is an integrative factor of contemporary culture in general affecting all existing, even non-visual, media and kinds of experience. And last but not least, they mean the acknowledgment of the historical and anthropological roots of contemporary rise of visuality, which continue to have an influence upon recent cultural dispositions.

Thus, nowadays, in the age of so-called “visual culture”, the hermeneutical theory of image gains new urgency. It should be released from the “confessional” restrictions imposed upon it by its philosophical roots. It has to be put in a broader context of contemporary discussions about the social and cognitive nature of visual images and visuality at all. In these contexts, many important traits of hermeneutical image conception, hovering for a long time in the background of researchers' attention, would come to the foreground. In the first instance, it is the idea of structural interconnections between visual characteristics, spatial conditions, and communicative effects that make the hermeneutical image theory a strong partner in recent social-theoretical and philosophical debates about the contemporary (visual) culture.

In what follows we begin with brief reconstruction of transformative logic of phenomenology that led it from the “strong science” project to the broadly understood hermeneutical philosophy, or phenomenological hermeneutics (in the second section). Then we will examine the status and function of the question about the nature of the artistic image in phenomenological hermeneutics (third section), and finally – in the fourth section – proceed to clarification of the basic structures of image perception from hermeneutical viewpoint: the structural interrelation between perception, meaning, and spatiality in the visual image experience. In the concluding part we will outline the perspectives of application of hermeneutical image conception in the recent discussions about social functions of visual images.

## **Structure and event, being and image: phenomenological hermeneutics on the way from ontology to cultural theory**

As is known, in the history of the phenomenological movement there was a sequence of substantial turning points, each of which made its own contribution to the modification of original profile of phenomenological project. The turn to the life world problematic that occurred in the late 1910s in the university courses of both Husserl and Heidegger was probably the most important among them. The very term “life world” suggests surpassing the initial theoretical self-understanding of Husserl’s phenomenology which from the very beginning took the idea of a singular act of consciousness directed toward a particular object as its starting point and at the same time as a basic concept of phenomenon. Since then neither an act of intentional consciousness, nor a particular object given to it, i.e., a phenomenon, serves as a starting point and the main subject of phenomenological analysis. Our perceptual and cognitive activities prove to be already embedded in the manifold horizons and potentialities that support and restrict them at the same time. But, according to Husserl, these horizons and contexts are invariably of perceptual and cognitive nature, leaving historical and social-communicative presuppositions out of consideration. It is quite symptomatic that Husserl preferred to speak about *natural attitude* rather than *everyday experience*. “Natural”, in the given context, connotes both “naïve” and “non-historical”, while “attitude” means a feature of a subject. On the contrary, the very notion of everyday

experience foregrounds historicity as well as priority of communicative relations over perceptual ones.

Young Heidegger makes a decisive step toward unrestricted recognition of the phenomenological relevance of the life world without reducing it, like Husserl, to the mere guiding function (*Leitfaden-Funktion*) in the context of explication of more deeply rooted structures of transcendental subjectivity.

For young Heidegger the life world is not something situated in front of the analyzing consciousness. On the contrary, we are “always already” entangled in a ceaseless process of the world articulation which takes place beyond any theoretical statement and attitude. Moreover, our subjectivity, our ability to maintain identity through many experiences springs from these articulation processes, and preserves in it their vestiges.

In other words, our ability to see things around us follows “our” pre-theoretical articulation of the world and self, not the other way around. The disclosure of the primary world structures is, according to Heidegger, an effect of some everyday experiences, and it takes place in and as these experiences themselves.

In his first course of lectures (1919) Heidegger offers an example of convincing phenomenological, and at the same time pre-theoretical, description of an everyday perceptual experience, an experience of seeing the lectern. According to Heidegger’s interpretive description, what we see in this case is not a set of the isolated material objects arranged in the given physical space. As Heidegger puts it: “I see the lectern in

one fell swoop, so to speak, and not in isolation, but as adjusted a bit too high for me. I see – and immediately so – a book lying upon it as annoying to me (a book, not a collection of layered pages with black marks strewn upon them), I see the lectern in an orientation, an illumination, a background” (Heidegger 2000: 60).

Thus, it is important to mention that, on the one hand, in his lecture Heidegger follows Husserl’s favorite mode and object of phenomenological description (seeing a material object), but on the other hand, as opposed to Husserl, he underscores principally *holistic*, pragmatically motivated, performative and interpretive character of everyday visual perceptions. In the contexts of everyday experiences the visual perceptions are principally environmental and immediately meaningful. “This environmental milieu – Heidegger writes – (lectern, book, blackboard, notebook, fountain pen, caretaker, student fraternity, tram-car, motor-car, etc.) does not consist just of things, objects, which are then conceived as meaning this and this; rather, the meaningful is primary and immediately given to me without any mental detours across thing-oriented apprehension. Living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, *everything has the character of world (italics supplied)*” (*Ibid.*: 61).

In our everyday perceptual experiences, what we usually see in the first instance and immediately is not an arbitrary array of the particular material objects but the meaningful whole, i.e., the world. Materiality within our everyday visual experiences is not separately perceptible but always embedded in the meaningful whole that we find ourselves

permanently in. What Heidegger calls “the meaningful” is, in turn, something visually palpable, manifesting itself only within the practically motivated and oriented seeing, which thus cannot be reduced to the bare visual perception. The meaning here is not something that lies beyond the factual environmental experience itself. In this regard it seems quite appropriate to call the dynamic and factual intercoupling of the experience and the experienced a performative medium that is an indissoluble complex of at least three aspects: meaning, space, and action. Performativity manifests itself also in the character of an event indispensable to the environmental experiences in Heidegger’s sense. The event means here in the first instance the radical enhancement of the experiencing subject’s facticity. The more deeply we immerse in the factual, i.e., historically and socially determined exercise of environmental perception, the more originally the world, that is, “the meaningful” discloses itself. Increasingly performative and factual perception of the meaningful should be understood as a kind of movement toward the primary. It is remarkable that Husserl has always moved in the opposite direction: from the given (factual) to the universal (structural). There is a strong correlation between intensity and event-character of environmental live experience and primordially of world-disclosure. So, environmental experience occurs not so much in the world but as the world itself. Hence, the environmental experience as a basic mode of the everyday pre-theoretical perception has no periphery. *It is factual but not regional*. It means that this kind of experience is the source of each regional

differentiation as well as of all possible distinctions between the singular and universal. Both differentiation and distinction become possible only as a consequence of the objectification process building a constituent part of our everyday experiences. Further, an isolated perception is both an essential part and ontological ground of so-called theoretical attitude, resulting from the thematic and modal switching within the everyday perception experiences themselves (from a diffuse dwelling in emotionally tinged environment to the focused perception of a singular object). Essential to those experiences is not the distance-keeping toward an object but a radical entanglement in familiar, sensual and, at the same time, meaningful environment (world).

Gadamer goes several steps further in the same direction, that is to say, toward the radical review of the idea of autonomous thinking. At the same time, these steps prove to be the steps on the way from phenomenological-hermeneutical ontology to a kind of hermeneutical theory of culture.

As is known, Gadamer has taken up and developed Heidegger's early notion of irreversible facticity of human existence. But unlike Heidegger, Gadamer considers facticity in the first place not as an object of theoretical analysis but rather as a practical task, as a primary environment that a human being should make him or herself practically familiar with. Moreover, he places it in – and even identifies with – a wide range of everyday practices. In this regard philosophical hermeneutics grants more autonomy to everyday experience, more independence from analyzing conscious-

ness. In ontological sense, this autonomy means that the irreversibly opaque everyday life remains inescapable and permanent “source of the self” including both scientific and philosophical one. In epistemological sense, it means inadequacy of any reflexive approach to the *events* of world disclosing that, despite their transcending pragmatic connections with everyday life, remain its integral part.

Among many examples of such events we should mention in the first instance, following Gadamer, experience of art, which he thinks of as a kind of meaningful spatial experience occurring amidst everyday life. In the next section we will discuss the genesis of Gadamer's notion of the spatial nature of art, or artistic image in the context of his hermeneutical project as well as its relation to the non-artistic space experience.

### **Play, structure, image: performativity and mediality as key features of the hermeneutic image conception**

As is known, Gadamer begins his path-breaking reflexions on the nature of understanding of cultural meanings with ontological analysis of the experience of art, mainly exemplified by its visual forms. This analysis fulfills an expository and, first of all, methodological function in Gadamer's hermeneutical project. In *Truth and Method*, where it embraces nearly whole first part of the book, it serves the purpose of introducing an idea of specifically cognitive potential of some cultural experiences beyond methodological strategies of the Humanities. But what kind of truth and epistemological experiences does Gadamer

have in mind, speaking of a knowledge beyond method? How are truth and event in Gadamer's hermeneutical theory interconnected?

To answer these questions, we will undertake a brief critical reconstruction of Gadamer's argument regarding the epistemological implications of art experience. In our reconstruction, we will go through three stages marked by respective key concepts: play, structure (Gebilde), and image (Bild).

### *Play*

Gadamer chose the "concept of play" as his "starting point", because of the role that this concept played both in modern aesthetics and anthropology. We would add that another reason for this choice was an intermediate and transitive character of the phenomenon of play. In a sense, it belongs to two worlds simultaneously: being one of our social everyday experiences, it, at the same time, transcends them, forming a kind of quasi-autonomous sphere. Michael Foucault called such practices heterotopy: the performative places that being parts of the given physical and social places are, nevertheless, able to transform them. We will call this feature of play mediality, thereby expanding respective motives of Gadamer's thought. This term matches well with what Gadamer aimed to do in the first place, namely to "free this concept of the subjective meaning" (Gadamer 2004: 102).

Gadamer achieves a desired effect in two ways. One of them is phenomenological description of the play process, which is considered to be a genuine "subject" of

playing. The play is substantially *performative*. It is a process, which, once launched, immediately follows its own logic and purpose. The player is not a "leader" of the whole process, but only one of its structural components. Thus, performativity proves to be one of the key features of the process of play. The second way to overcome the subjectivist meaning of the concept of play is its "trans-regional" interpretation. This means that Gadamer insists on non-human, or universal, character of the play phenomenon. Moreover, from this notion he draws methodological consequences that consist first of all in necessitating an overturn of traditional perspective on the phenomenon of play and game. The human play is to be considered an integral part of the wide range of the play phenomena, including the play of animals and even inanimate objects in natural environments (*Ibid.*: 105).

To support his thesis, Gadamer refers to biology that acknowledged the insufficiency of the notion of a biological purpose for "understanding the form of living things" (Gadamer 2004: 108). Thus, according to Gadamer, the "self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature", including human beings both as social and natural entities (*Ibid.*: 108). Actually, Gadamer's notion of play is aimed at blurring ontological boundaries between the natural and social, the animal and human, at least as to phenomenological conditions of their primary appearing in the horizon of our experiences. This thesis could be supported by such a characteristic of play as a having of "its own proper spirit" (Gadamer 2004:107). We are inclined to construe this notion in terms of bodily emotional

presence (different kinds of mood), being articulated in different ways, in accord with various kinds of play performances. Hence, we can speak of both “diachronic” and “synchronic” perspectives on interplay between biological (or natural) and human (or social) aspects of human games and play. In other words, there is a historical continuity as well as structural contiguity of “natural” and “cultural” elements in human plays. Human play is not just socially constructed and territorially limited in its origins and scopes, but grows out of and remains genetically connected to a wide range of play phenomena, from play of “water and light” to sport games and artistic performances.

### ***Structure (Gebilde)***

But what is a distinctive feature of human play, especially artistic one? In which aspects do artistic performances differ from the play of animals?

From our viewpoint, Gadamer gives to this question quite a revolutionary answer. Extending his own, although not sufficiently articulated, notion of continuity between animal, or natural, and human games, Gadamer sees the difference between human and non-human games as *structural* one. Among other things, this means that these two sorts of games differ *gradually, not categorically*. Human games, i.e., the human kind of self-representing experiences, are just a stage in the process of (self-)structuration inherent in the game phenomena.

So, drawing on Gadamer’s reflexions in *Truth and Method*, we can distinguish at least four stages in this imaginary struc-

turation process: (1) different kinds of the play appearances in inanimate nature, or the vegetable kingdom; (2) various forms of play behavior in animal world; (3) human games and plays; and (4), as a separate stage, artistic performances. These stages follow the logic of increasing repleteness, autonomy, or mediality, and performativity that were inherent features of game phenomena as such from the very beginning. Let us briefly explain these features before we proceed to discussing the specificity of artistic plays, i.e., art experience.

*Repleteness*, a term borrowed from Nelson Goodman’s philosophy of art (Goodman 1968), means in the present context the increased integrity of play situation, which, in its most pure manifestations such as artistic performances, forms some kind of convergence of allegedly heterogeneous entities: actions, objects, thoughts, and moods. In many games we are hardly in a position to separate out the particular elements from the whole play situation that is a replete network of these elements, without destroying it completely.

*Autonomy, or mediality* of play is to be understood both topologically and genetically. On the one hand, each game is a kind of autonomous territory, which obeys its own rules, and transforms everyone’s self-consciousness who participates in it. Forming new – other – space (real and imagined at the same time), the play reveals its own normativity and transformative (and in this sense, emancipative) potential in relation to the codes of everyday life. It loosens (in form of carnival, for instance) established social orders supported by the forces of daily routine. As Gadamer puts

it, “the player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him” (Gadamer 2004: 109). In addition, play both comprises and dissolves all categorical oppositions such as subject/object, place/world, and space/time, structuring our thought and practice. On the other hand, play, as a kind of heterotopy, discloses itself as an origin of all possible dispositions in our thought and experiences.

The playing field is not so much a substantial formation as a relational one that should be analyzed in action-oriented paradigm considering spatiality as dynamic phenomenon. Precisely such an approach to space is elaborated within the phenomenological hermeneutics, i.e. by Heidegger and Gadamer. Space is not a substance, but a complex of relations and linkages. And – as a spatial dynamic phenomenon (*Spielraum*) – play should be considered in terms of action and agency. It does not mean, however, any activity. Action, according to Heidegger, is always a kind of orientation within the substantial linkages of the lived world. It is always an answer motivated by the situation of the lived world that a human, as the Being-in-the-world, is “always already” involved in. For this reason Gadamer writes about primacy of play over the consciousness of players:

Hence the mode of being of play isn't such that, for the game to be played, there must be a subject who is behaving playfully. Rather, primordial sense of playing is the medial one. Thus we say that something is „playing“ (spielt) of somewhere or at some time, that something is going on (im Spiele ist) of or that something is happening (sich abspielt). (Gadamer 2004: 104)

*Performativity*, a term originating from speech act theory, stresses the productive aspect of play. Process of play performance always brings about something significant or meaningful that has not existed before it. “Surplus value” of a play performance emerges from the new spatial conditions, produced within it. The game is a “closed world”, which does not exist beyond play performance. In other words, performativity is a complex interconnection of act and space. Hence the productivity aspect of play performance is obviously interconnected with the question of an individual's acts and agency. The agency is here essentially desubjectivized. The player's action dissolves in the whole of the performance as its part, obeying the logic constitutive of this whole. The four stages of the structuration process mentioned above differ in configuration of these three components. The ultimate or terminal point in the structuration process, and hence its inherent possibility, is its self-disclosure, or, as Gadamer puts it, “its ideality”.

“Ideality” is precisely a trait that distinguishes human games from non-human ones. It means a heightened interconnection of the above mentioned key structural elements of play situation, and is not understood in the Platonic sense. “Ideality” as a late stage in an imagined, that is, theoretically reconstructed structuration process, in turn, finds expression in factor of spectatorship. Spectator here is not meant to be necessarily a person, but rather a structural moment of game constellation. And if we take into account the essentially performative character of each game, we can draw an important conclusion already at this point of



our reflexions: seeing and acting constitute a strong link within human games. Thus, as we will show in what follows, a kind of spectatorship inherent in human, especially artistic, game experience is not identical with visual, or ocular, perception. Seeing game performance here comes close to being familiar with it, not so much in cognitive as in bodily-emotional sense.

What distinguishes artistic game experience from the rest of game phenomena is precisely this “transformation into structure”, “in which human play comes to its true consummation in being of art” (Gadamer 2004: 110). Transformation means here not a continuum of modifications, but a momentary qualitative change. It is important to mention that this change should not be understood as a kind of rapture or even demolition of the basic structures of play as an integral part of world experience, but, on the contrary, it is their radical intensification which ends up in heightened self-presentation of world’s primary interrelations. For Gadamer, the self-presentation of artistic play coincides with the self-presentation of the world in the sense of Heidegger’s “Being-in-the-world”. Hence, the art performance is an event of the world disclosure, occurring amid everyday life.

So, this change takes a direction opposite to the traditional vector of artistic imaginary: not away but toward the everyday world, making it visible as a meaningful whole. In this sense, we could even say that in the case of artistic experience we deal not so much with some kind of event occurring in the world as with an event of the world disclosure, which, nevertheless,

remains an integral part of our everyday experiences. Art, according to Gadamer, is an integrative moment of everyday life, one of its possible forms, mistakenly detached from it by modern aesthetic theory. Arguably Gadamer’s attitude to aesthetics is not so far from Jacques Rancière’s statements about the nature of aesthetics, according to which “‘aesthetics’ is not a new name for the domain of ‘art’. It is a specific configuration of this domain” (Rancière 2009: 7). Moreover, Gadamer’s reflexions on the nature of art bear a strong resemblance to Wittgenstein’s notion of the language-games as the forms of life. “Artistic games”, too, represent a strong interconnection of meaningful agency, lived spatiality, and heightened self-presentation, or structural wholeness of the game constellation. The emergence of such an interconnection in context of art experience is precisely what Gadamer calls “transformation into the true”, and that is an epistemological effect of artistic play constellation.

### *Image (Bild)*

As we have seen, Gadamer’s notion of the experience of art goes beyond the conception of art established both in modern aesthetic theory and everyday consciousness. Art works, according to Gadamer, are “the being there [in German: Dasein] of what is presented in them” (Gadamer 2004: 129). This means that, among other things, what gives an artwork its specifically artistic, or, more generally, aesthetic status is not the intrinsic qualities of an artifact but its place and function within a complex situation called above the artistic performance. This performance establishes spatiality of its

own, and embraces both subject's behavior and constellation of related objects. Art is neither a fact, nor an object, but an event belonging both to the local everyday contexts and relevant historical tradition. Such belonging, however, is a kind of mutual dependence. Social and cultural contexts, in turn, are being actualized, normalized and maintained in various social performances, among which art experiences, for many reasons, enjoy paradigmatic status. Gadamer's "open" view on the artwork manifests itself most clearly in his conception of image.

Indeed, the concept of structure (*Gebilde*) for Gadamer is connected semantically and substantially with the notion of image (*Bild*), and that, obviously, opens a broad perspective for applying the idea of performative spatiality to the problematics of the image in and beyond specifically artistic contexts. Of course, the semantic links are visible only if we use the original terminology. As to substantial linkages, we will try to explain them in what follows.

From our point of view, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer has two reasons to introduce the question about an image in the context of his hermeneutic reflections. First reason is methodological one. What has been previously discussed in *Truth and Method* in the context of transitory, or "performing" arts, i.e., the experience of art as an event of (self-)presentation of the world, should now be confirmed with regard to statuary arts. Another and much more important reason is Gadamer's thesis about the universality of an image that, supposedly, doesn't contradict the historicity of this concept. This balance between universality and historicity was achieved by virtue of the paradigm shift

in the philosophical image conception, pronounced by Gadamer. Instead of the picture, decoration, once discredited by the modern aesthetics, should come to the foreground as a point of reference in the contemporary image theory.

The concept of the picture prevalent in recent centuries cannot automatically be taken as a starting point. Our present investigation seeks to rid itself of that assumption. It tries to find a way of understanding the mode of being of a picture that detaches it both from aesthetic consciousness and from the concept of the picture to which the modern gallery has accustomed us, and it tries to recuperate the concept of the "decorative," discredited by the aesthetics of experience. (Gadamer 2004: 129)

The image, thus, according to Gadamer, is not a thing but a process, a life-world event whose structure can be described in terms of play, i.e., in terms of mediality and performativity. The advantage and heuristic potential of this approach lies in the fact that Gadamer does not limit his analysis of the phenomena of play and image to the sphere of aesthetics but consider them in the broader context of everyday life (as life-world phenomena), revealing in such a way their social and anthropological significance.

### **Iconic Agency: Towards Hermeneutical Theory of the Social Imaginary**

In this section we will discuss the main structures of the image, hermeneutically understood as dimensions of related experiences, which we will call the iconic ones. Then we will proceed to examining the heuristic potential of hermeneutical image

conception in the context of contemporary social theory. Precisely structural traits of images revealed in *Truth and Method* made hermeneutic conception of the image a very useful theoretical tool in recent debates about the functions of various images in social theoretical contexts.

### ***Images as enhancers of (social) Being***

As we have mentioned above, Gadamer is well aware of the tension between the diversity of historical images and ontological, that is, universalistic claims of his theory. The way that Gadamer reduces this tension is his adherence to the notion of an image as a structure, or structural configuration that involves all elements of our experience, including ourselves, in the transformative process. The main outcome of this process is seeing something particular (an object or complex situation) as presenting the collective, that is, social meanings. In other words, we have to differentiate between an image (or artwork) as a historical artifact and as a form of experience. This differentiation of two notions of an image implies not a contradiction, but rather a genetic and structural interconnection between them.

Like in the case of artistic play or performance, in the case of “image perception” we are not dealing with the objects endowed with specific (i.e., artistic) qualities. We are rather getting involved in disclosing the human world. And this interconnection of world (as, of course, universal) and disclosing process (as situated and historical) manifest overcoming the above mentioned tension. Thus, for Gadamer, the image is not an object but both an event and its effects.

What belongs to these effects in the first place is the enhancement of our Being, or, as Gadamer puts it, an “increase in being” of our connections to the world and to each other as social entities (Gadamer 2004: 129). In other words, due to such events and experiences, the world becomes more livable.

In the second part of his reflexions on the nature of an image, offered in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explicitly implements a paradigm shift from the notion of art and artwork to the phenomena once marginalized in classical aesthetic theory, such as architecture and decoration. Both have a set of methodological advantages over so-called artworks. The most important one is the blocking of established aesthetic attitudes, that is, demolition of differentiation between aesthetic and substantial aspects of the world experience. We are hardly able to differentiate a building from its environment, whether urban or natural, and thus separate architectural presentation from the space presented. Hence the impossibility to distinguish between aesthetic (or decorative) and functional aspects of the experience of the building as well. In this case, the perceptive experience of an object (a building) merges at the same instant into the manifestation of space. An image, according to Gadamer, does the same work. And only our uncritical adherence to the idea of artwork, understood as a separate object in the context of subject’s perception, makes us blind to it. For this reason, Gadamer offers a notion of decoration as a “full-scale model” of artistic (iconic) experience:

The nature of decoration consists in performing that two-sided mediation: namely

to draw the viewer's attention to itself, to satisfy his taste, and then to redirect it away from itself to the greater whole of the life context which it accompanies. (Gadamer 2004: 129)

### ***Hermeneutic conception of an image in external contexts***

Now we would like to sketch out the contours of the possible application of Gadamer's notion of an image within the recent discussions about social functions of images.

A few years ago American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander has pronounced "an iconic turn in cultural sociology". Moreover, he has proposed an idea of "iconic consciousness" as a sociologically relevant factor, which "occurs when an aesthetically shaped materiality signifies social value". Alexander defends an idea of a sensual experience that is able to transmit meaning, sometimes using quite eccentric formulations: "The surface, or form, of a material object is a magnet, a vacuum cleaner that sucks the feeling viewer into meaning (Alexander 2010: 11). Due to their aesthetically constructed surfaces some objects become "invested with social meaning", that is, they become "archetypical", or, as he puts it in a different way, "wield depth" (Alexander 2008: 3). The ability of some material aesthetic surfaces to generate and transmit meaning is that what makes these surfaces iconic. But these "aesthetic objects become iconic by drawing us into the heart of the world" (Alexander 2008: 6). This process he describes also as an "immersion in the materiality of social life" (Alexander 2008: 6). Thus, like Gadamer, Alexander insists on

the idea of an image, or icon, as a spatial condition of everyday world, on its agency, not just bare facticity. In other words, for Alexander, as for Gadamer, icons are not objects, but configurations of experience, which are socially and anthropologically inescapable. But unlike Gadamer, Alexander contents himself with a description of different forms of what he calls social icons, without raising a claim to theoretically more differentiated explanation of how the iconization mechanisms work.

But what Gadamer's conception of image is lacking is the systematic analysis of pictorial surfaces, the grammar of combination of their components, which makes them into transmitters and distributors of social meaning. Elements of such systematic analysis we can find in contemporary analytic philosophy (Hayman 2006; Hopkins 1998; Lopes 1996). But what we have learned from philosophical hermeneutics is, first of all, a fascinating notion that seeing some images can be equated to the primary modes of being in the world.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we would like to recapitulate the main theses of the article and outline some consequences and some further perspectives.

The conceptual horizon of our reflexions has been determined by the notion of the life-world understood as inescapable ground of human theoretical and practical self-consciousness, which we consider as a watershed between reflexive (Husserlian) and hermeneutic (Heideggerian) versions of phenomenological project. Perhaps the term "facticity" coined by the young Heidegger

expresses the specificity of this notion more properly. Facticity of human being means in the first instance that human consciousness is rather a permanent practical task than theoretically identifiable “source of constitution”. We are aware of the holistic facticity of our being in the mode of non-theoretical understanding (hermeneutical interpreting), which in turn is an integral part of human being. This hermeneutical way of phenomenological philosophy led it, as a result, to the unreserved acknowledgment of the priority of everyday experiences, rooted in the non-transparent historical tradition, over any theoretical stance including phenomenological one. In other words, the source of “constituting activities” was relocated from transcendental subjectivity to some kinds of everyday events, among others to art experiences as well. The main feature of these experiences is what we might call “transcendence in immanence”: being an integral part of everyday life, these events and experiences are, nevertheless, able to transcend it, while articulating it as a meaningful whole. In this regard, they have a function of world disclosure as of world establishing.

Hans-Georg Gadamer has taken this notion several steps further. He explicitly considers art experience as a new paradigm for Humanities, which is able to account for the specificity and status of the knowledge of the truth in historical sciences. Even more importantly, art experience connected through phenomenon of play to the wide range of non-artistic aspects of reality becomes a point of reference for the whole phenomenological project at a recent stage of its development. The different kinds

of artistic experience are considered by Gadamer to be the various forms of the spontaneous (self-)revealing of the human being-in-the-world, which presents a strong interconnection between thinking, seeing, and acting.

Unlike Heidegger, Gadamer refuses the elitist understanding of art, having foregrounded the ordinary forms of not so much artistic as iconic experience. And if we take into account, on the one hand, the meaning-making (or world disclosing) potential of iconic perception as a form of artistic experience, and, on the other hand, the proliferation of images as one of the key factors of contemporary social life, we will come to the conclusion about the productivity of phenomenological-hermeneutical account of the image perception for recent social theoretical debates.

From our viewpoint, phenomenological hermeneutics can contribute to fulfilling the following theoretical tasks arising from the proliferation of visual images in contemporary culture: the explanation of how some pictorial representations gain their suggestive power; the systematic analyses of meaning-making potentials of image perception as compared with ones of the language; the introduction of problematics of visual image perception into social anthropological contexts; the further elaboration of structural intersection of visibility, spatiality, and agency, which allows for the ocular-centrism typical for some theoretical positions in contemporary visual culture studies; last but not least, the elaboration of the notion of artistic experience beyond the conceptual apparatus of classical aesthetics.

No doubt, phenomenological-hermeneutical approach to the visual image perception, augmented by advantages of another research strategies, such as semiotics and analytic philosophy, could

make a substantial contribution to the conversion of phenomenology from the respectable philosophical tradition into the strong partner in recent sociocultural discussions.

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## MATYTI PAVEIKSLĄ – BŪTI PASAULYJE: VIZUALUMO, ERDVĪŠKUMO IR VEIKUMO SĄRYŠIAI FILOSOFINĖJE HERMENEUTIKOJE

Ilya Inishev, Yuliya Biedash

**Santrauka.** Straipsnis skirtas atskleisti hermeneutinės paveikslo sąvokos euristinių potencialą šiuolakinėje vizualinėje kultūroje. H. G. Gadameris analizavo paveikslą kaip vizualinį, erdvinį ir socialinį reiškinį, išplėsdamas ir sykiu transformuodamas įprastą ikoninio patyrimo sampratą. Paveikslas pirmiausia yra ne estetikos ar meno kritikos tyrinėjimo objektas, o socialinis reiškinys, kuris turi būti vertinamas su jo realiais ir įsivaizduojamais požymiais bei sąryšiais su gyvenamojo pasaulio struktūromis. Savo paveikslo teorijoje suliedamas meno ir gyvenimo ribas, Gadameris atveria aibę galimybių analizuoti pačias įvairiausias vaizdines praktikas – nuo mokslo iki teatro.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** Gadamer, paveikslas, filosofinė hermeneutika, erdvė, veikumas, socialinės ikonos

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