Time as Duration in Artistic Communication

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Abstract

The article deals with epistemological, aesthetic and communicative aspects of time. The metalanguage of the study is the system of artistic communication. Understanding time as duration, the author uses A. Bergson's theory of duration which has become relevant in the context of post-non-classical trends in the development of science.

This study is based on a phenomenological analysis of the artistic communication of the twentieth century (avant-garde painting, media art, modern music, photography), and takes into account the concepts of time of G. Deleuze, multiple temporalism of I. Wallerstein and F. Braudel, ideas of E. Husserl, and M. Heidegger.

The study showed that in the conditions of the information society, the duration of social interactions changes, diachrony at the communication maximum is compressed into synchrony. Art objects, in which the reception of culture is carried out, display individual and social time, and also convey qualitative transitions and temporal layers through the procedures of duration compression and stretching.

Keywords

Время как длительность в художественной коммуникации

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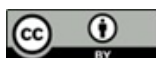Email: elinafil[at]mail.ru

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются эпистемологические, эстетические и коммуникативные аспекты времени. Метаязык исследования – это система художественной коммуникации. Понимая время как длительность, автор использует теорию длительности А. Бергсона, ставшую актуальной в контексте постнеклассических тенденций развития науки.

Данное исследование основано на феноменологическом анализе художественной коммуникации XX века (авангардной живописи, медиаискусства, современной музыки, фотографии) и учитывает концепции времени Ж. Делёза, множественного темпорализма И. Валлерстайна и Ф. Броделя, идеи Э. Гуссерля и М. Хайдеггера.

Выявлено, что в условиях информационного общества длительность социальных взаимодействий изменяется, диахрония в коммуникационном максимуме сворачивается в синхронию. Арт-объекты, в которых осуществляется рецепция культуры, отображают индивидуальное и социальное время, а также передают качественные переходы и темпоральные наслоения через процедуры сжатия и растяжения длительности.

Ключевые слова

время; восприятие; продолжительность; искусство; медиа; синхронность; диахронность; большая длительность; кратковременность; коммуникация

Introduction

The issue in the title links philosophy of mind, semiotics, communication and media theory, psychology, and neuroscience. It leads to studying the phenomena of human intersubjectivity, 'We-existence' in the act of grasping time. The perception of time is a link between sensibility and reason; the perception of duration is carried out as a synthesis of diversity in imagination.

The starting point of the reasoning can be the common definition of time, etymologically associated with the verb *to turn*: time is the actualization of a moving arrow that reflects the cycle of the Earth. According to Aristotle in Physics:

> "Time is not movement, but only movement in so far as it admits of enumeration. An indication of this: we discriminate the more or the less by number, but more or less movement by time. Time then is a kind of number" (Aristotle, 1991, 219b2-219b9)

One's perception of time is guided by the hand clock. Neurobiology claims that there is also an internal clock: reproduction of short time intervals is carried out on the basis of special time patterns associated with the ratio of excitation and inhibition processes in the neural networks of the brain.

> Time perception is processed differently depending on the sensory modality investigated and that time information collected by several different internal clocks are sub-sequentially merged in a global time perception awareness, composed by different elements according to their contextual salience. (Lernia et al., 2018)

In general, this is the perception of time as a sequence of now-points. In Hegel's "the negation of negation as a point", the negative unity of being-out-of-itself is revealed. In this perspective space is time, since pure point thinking, i.e. space, each time it thinks now and outside-itself-the being of different now.

Our understanding of temporality is based on the understanding of time as duration; time does not transform into space. It is this kind of time that we consider in artistic communication. Astronomical time cannot always be used to determine the duration of social processes. From the substantial understanding of time as one-dimensional and linear, scientific thought has made a turn towards the interpretation of temporality as a multidimensional and non-linear. Social time always has a trace in history; it is semantically filled with events. This was pointed out by Sorokin and Merton:

> If we seek the operations which enable us to determine the time at which social events occur, it becomes manifest that even today all such time determinations are by no means referred astronomical or even calendrical frameworks. (Sorokin & Merton, 1937, p. 618)

Studying time in artistic communication is a reflection on human existence: irreversible life is perceived (taken) as a moment, but is recognized and interpreted as duration. A significant transformation in the understanding of *duration* took place after the publication of Henri Bergson's works. The French thinker, objecting

to representatives of positivism, believed that knowledge should not go from immobile to moving, but vice versa, since the essential characteristic of the universe is duration (Bergson, 2011, p. 88). Scientific rationality is unable to understand duration, since scientific rationality reduces time to a sequence of instantaneous states connected by a deterministic law. In the positivist paradigm, time is an event history, a series of facts. In Braudel's terminology (Braudel, 1958) a fact is a short duration (*courte durée*). The positivist starts from the fact and comes to a presentation of the event history. Bergson moves away from the consideration of space as subject to movement and concentrates exclusively on the movement itself, on pure duration. Even the spectrum of a thousand gradually changing hues with a line of feeling running through them is inaccurate and incomplete.

Ilya Prigogine also pointed out the importance of the concept of duration: time associated with movement does not exhaust the meaning of time in physics (Prigogin, Stengers, 2020). Thus, the limitations against which Bergson's criticism was directed start to be overcome not by abandoning the scientific approach or abstract thinking, but by realizing the limitations of the concepts of classical dynamics and discovering new formulations that remain valid in more general situations (Prigogin, 1980, p. 136).

No less important methodological significance for understanding temporality is the concept of Deleuze. In the work *The Logic of Sense*, returning to the idea of the infinite divisibility of the time of the Eleatics, he speaks of two readings of time (Deleuze, 1969, p. 95): an infinitely cyclic present, the time of Chronos, in which there is only a moment of the present, and an infinitely divisible, empty temporality of the past and future: a pure event is both a short story and a history, but never actuality (Deleuze, 1969, p. 95), not the actual moment, but the abstract ideal time, Aiôn, in which there is a past and a future, but no present. The first relates to a concrete reality, but is meaningless, and the second, on the contrary, makes sense, but is not connected with reality. Deleuze considers the coexistence of Chronos and Aiôn as having a logical and linguistic nature. The present is correlated with reality, but outside the narrative it has no meaning. The construction of history as a line from the past to the future (Aiôn) is a process of abstraction, that is, time as history is meaningful, but abstracted from reality.

It is worth noting that the Aiôn which is not related to matter still cannot be understood as Newtonian mathematical time, since this is the time of incorporeal, pre-individual event-verbs. The first is the legacy of a traditional society, and the second is a product of the Modern era. Deleuze believes that these strategies intersect, while Aiôn is not a fate, but a game, primarily a speech game; an event in it is simultaneously a word (Deleuze, 1969, p. 99).

Thereby, the event synthesis has a communicative and intersubjective character. The connection between the temporal and the social is that the perception of time is the result of the interaction of the external and internal worlds. Structuralists applying the synchronous approach to culture consideration paid attention

to the moment of history, and art in this aspect represents a series of states. In post-structuralism, the principle of distinction and rupture was carried to the extreme.

Another approach to understanding the temporality of artistic communication is linearity, when the laws or principles are extrapolated to all cultural systems, then a longer duration is the canvas of events (*très longue durée* in the terms of Braudel's philosophy). These traditions do not consider time as duration. They remain on the positions of classical mechanics, that is, Newtonian Science.

In the paper, studying non-linear changes in artistic communication combine synchronous and diachronic methods in the aspect of compression and stretching of time.

Temporality of social events

In the information society, the temporal characteristics of communicative relations are transforming, the speed of interactions increases, which causes changes in social time (Minnullina, 2018). Temporal synthesis of social phenomena takes place in communication. If in the pre-digital era the instrument of dialogue were memory and paper, today a conversation can be recorded in the form of media data using various means. The irreversibility of live speech is replaced by technical reversibility: "what is written with a pen" can now be deleted or edited. Anonymity, impersonality of communication, generation of large volumes of texts due to multiple repetitions, proliferation of myths – all this in general makes us look at our era as a digital archaic, which, with all the technological progress, has the features of an early written culture. It is not surprising that modern products of mass culture retain mythological features, as shown in *The motive of initiation as a structural element of the mythological in the comics* (Aliyev, 201, p. 184).

The significance of time for the individual is expressed in the interpretation of the relationship between the "I" and the outside world (Karimov, Minnullina, Gurianov, 2021). A long month of monotonous activity, not filled with experiences and emotions, seems shorter in memories than a week of bright events. As M. Heidegger accurately noted,

> By reason of this covering up, the time which Dasein allows itself has gaps in it, as it were. Often we do not bring a day together again when we come back to the time which we have used. But the time which has gaps in it does not go to pieces in this lack-of-togetherness. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 462)

These stretches and breaks are communicative in nature. Based on existential analytics, it can be concluded that intuitively grasped personal time is not a successive change of "now" moments, but a non-uniform, discontinuous layering of the past, present and future. There are gaps in everyday life when a person does not remember (or does not know) what they were filled with. One may feel lack of time — or being constantly late; or running ahead; or feel something happening in one's present — s/he didn't have a time to blink — or, on the contrary, s/he might not

know how to 'kill' time, and put off things for later. Individual, internal time is subjective, but it is influenced by the interpretation of social events. A wonderful metaphor of the contradictory relations between a human being and society is given in the article by E. Tajsin: "An attempt to set aside communication, leaving it, will only lead to the fact that the social force will soon throw the new-born hermit back into the maelstrom of involvement" (Tajsin, 2021, p. 210).

The personal sense of time is commensurate with the generally accepted rhythm of human life. In Proust's series of novels *In Search of Lost Time*, time flows differently for the hero depending on the register: the narrator, the writer, and the hero, – these are the temporal states of "I", "you" and "he". The long journey of the hero in search of time shows that the length of the days of our lives is not the same, as if a person changes the speed of life. The structure of the novel corresponds to this multi-layered time, and the temporal scale of the narrative changes: one party is described on almost two hundred pages of the book, while two years before the trip to Balbec are dissolved in one phrase.

Thus, after the 1917 revolution, for emigrants, "the present has become an actualized past" (Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2017, p. 276). A person preoccupied with the generally accepted rhythms of life uses the time that is available, which people reckon with. The publicity of "time" is again all the more forced, the more the actual presence is specially preoccupied with time, keeping a special account for it" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 463–464). Relations "early", "late" or "on time" are formed in comparison with the temporal line determined by social rituals and cycles. At the level of collective practices, time spans also arise. It is no coincidence that I. Wallerstein (following F. Braudel) argued that "there are many types of social time intertwined with each other, the importance of which is due to a kind of dialectic of durations" (Wallerstein, 1998, p. 189). Modern American sociologist D. Black, in his book *Moral Time*, states that "every shift in social time that causes conflict suggests an approach or a distance" (Black, 2011, p. 6), while the parameters of interpersonal distance are relative and determined by social space. Paying considerable attention to the topic of conflict, the author concludes that the shift in social time can give rise to negative phenomena (for example, crime, suicide, or punishment). At the same time, he rightly notes the importance of maintaining the necessary distance for harmonious relations. Communication provides an institutionally determined social distance. Today, traditional and innovative societies coexist, and it is no coincidence that in postmodern philosophy there is a rejection of a linear understanding of time, which implies an unambiguous determinism of events.

Previous to the era of Gutenberg (McLuhan, 1962), the individual did not perceive social events synchronously: before the advent of printing, the simultaneity of social actions was realized only in the immediate boundaries of visibility, – for example, the battlefield. Time had a cyclical return to traditional activities. The synchronicity gradually took shape after the invention of printing, when the way information was exchanged had transformed and the society became

visible. Thus, in the information society, historical diachrony turns into communicative synchrony.

Duration in art objects

The language of art is taken here as the metalanguage of temporality. It is worth noting again that there is a difference between rationalized duration as a fixed and full range of changes and duration as incomplete and ever-growing blends and overlays (this is what I consider further in the objects of art).

I make use of the three pairs of concepts: short duration and long duration, stretching and compression, mobility and immobility. Art is considered as an irreversible and at the same time technically reversible dialogical process, in which the moment of perception is interpreted as duration. Analysis of works of avant-garde painting, photography, music, and cinema demonstrates the dependence of the perception of time on the means of communication. Thus, cinema is temporal; it is close to music, while photography is static. The text novel is linear, and the graphic novel is non-linear. Time constituting includes both synthesis-grasping and temporal extension. In a sense, these are very close things. If consciousness itself is interpreted as temporary, then its main activity lies in the synthesis of various temporal phases, in grasping certain intervals and the contents that fill these intervals.

Synchronicity is time as a state, the order of coexistence. Diachrony is the order of sequences – time as a line. The two models of representation of temporality coexist in artistic communication. The first model does not depict movement; synchrony is a representation of the features of space, it is anti-temporal, while the Present is equal to eternity. Medieval icon painting was created according to the principle of discontinuity: the icon does not depict a moment or duration; it conveys the whole story relatively (the hallmarks framing the centerpiece retell the life of saints, for example, Seraphim of Sarov, Fig. 1).

The infinity of the moment is expressed in a number of works by European artists of recent centuries: even in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism (Fig. 2, 3).

Time considered as a change of present "now"-moments is a short duration (*courte durée*). Music and literature are traditionally acknowledged to be temporal arts, while painting and sculpture are spatial ones. It is assumed that fine art conveys only the image of time and movement. However, by the example of the development of art in the 20th century, we see that a person seeks to know what the world means; moreover, consciousness itself to which the philosophy and art of modernity refers, is also the world. This was determined by phenomenology and existentialism; it is expressed in the decentration of the subject in postmodernism; and contemporary object-oriented ontology is concentrated on this. If impressionism still conveys the perception of movement (short duration), then post-impressionist artists (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne) refused to depict only visible reality (like naturalists) or a momentary impression (like impressionists), but sought

to depict its basic, regular elements, long-term states of the surrounding world, the essential states of life, while sometimes resorting to decorative stylization (*longue durée*). Art critic V. N. Prokofiev believed that in Cezanne's paintings (most clearly in landscapes) there is an amazing concreteness, the reality of this "big time" that captures and shakes the senses (Prokofiev, 1985).

Figure 1. St. Seraphim of Sarov, the Righteous Wonderworker

Figure 2. P. Cézanne. L'Estaque, Melting Snow (1871)

Figure 3. C. Monet. Impression, Sunrise (1872).

The problem is that understanding time as a change of "now"-points is a representation of a fixed, finite line, while time is mobile and infinite. The perception of the moment is, among other things, the capture of what has already passed and what has not yet come. The moments may be the same, while the duration is not uniform. Bergson believed that qualitative multiplicity is inexpressible because it is heterogeneous, and it cannot be adequately represented by a symbol or language. I think that the art of the 20th century is capable of conveying the image of duration. It strives to go beyond the limits of the human: duration is qualitative, unextended, multiple, mobile and continuously interpenetrating.

We have considered two schemes of time representation: short duration stretching and long duration compression.

Short duration stretching

Duration stretching example is found in Salvatore Sciarrino's *Vanitas* (Fig. 4), a remake of Hoagy Carmichael's *Stardust* (Fig. 5). The progression of chords captured the slow evolution of meaning. The listener perceives not just the melodic sequence of sounds that in Carmichael's original were combined in chords, but the temporal changes of reality.
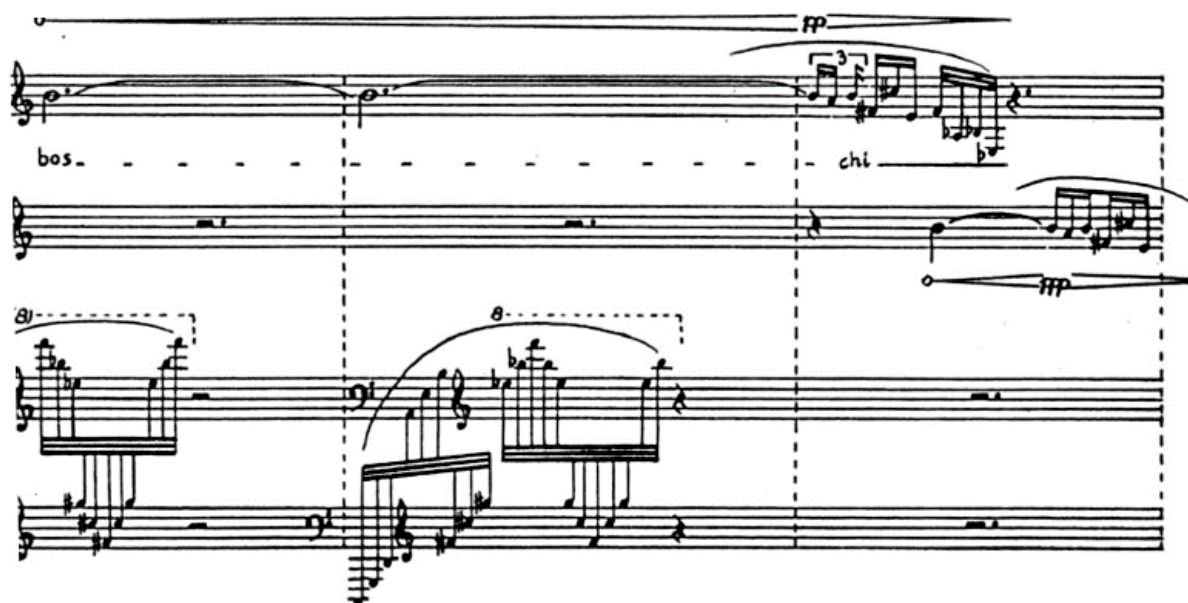

Figure 4. S. Sciarrino. *Vanitas*. Score fragment

Figure 5. H. Carmichael. Stardust. Score fragment

Another example of short duration stretching is a photograph taken with a long exposure (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Michael Wesely. Leipziger Platz, Berlin, 2004–2006.

Obviously, three years, as compared to one musical bar, is a long time. It would seem that it is necessary here to consider a long duration. However, for the life of a modern city, – this is one moment. We do not follow its gradual changes which are just presented on the picture, as if we have slowed down the video and the overlays would become noticeable. In the late Cézanne, the smallest transformations of Mont Sainte-Victoire are similarly shown (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. P. Cézanne. Mont Sainte-Victoire. 1902–1904.

Long duration compression

Painting by Russian artist Nicolai Fechin *Pouring* (Fig. 8) shows a scene of folk life. The artist's technique achieves a demonstration of mobility by using deliberate incompleteness which compresses a large duration. It conveys concentration on the moment, but behind this moment there is a tradition, a rule. It looks like a video.

Figure 8. N. Fechin. Pouring (1914).

Guernica by Picasso (Fig. 9) is painted in black and white. The picture presents scenes of death and violence, suffering and helplessness, without indicating their immediate causes. The choice of a black and white palette, on the one hand, conveys the chronological proximity to newspaper photographs of that time, and on the other hand, it reflects the lifeless nature of the war.

Figure 9. Picasso. Guernica (1937).

Duration of action can be expressed in terms of mechanical immobility: as in Pimenov's Waiting (Fig. 10), where the motionless tube becomes the indicator of events.

**Figure 10. Y. Pimenov. Waiting (1959).**

The idea of compression of long duration is most vividly realized in avant-garde painting. The avant-gardists put forward the idea of a fundamentally new aesthetics of the world they created. This required a new perception, different tastes, categories, and descriptive language. Kandinsky's paintings (Fig. 11) are free from objectivity; the artist sought to immerse his viewer in the "music of light". It is enough to abstract from specific outlines and convey the very mood, to give it a musical sound.

Photography is one of the most important types of sign communication of a visual culture person living in social networks: "The way we represent ourselves using pictures speaks about the way we interpret our personalities and want to be seen by the other" (Vavilova, 2015, p. 184–185).

Figure 11. V. Kandinsky. Succession (1935).

Photography is indicative as a means of communicative and social conditioning of individual time. Roland Barthes describes an interesting episode in *Camera lucida* (Barthes, 2000). One of the 19th-century photographs shows a young man on death row for attempted murder ("He is dead and he is going to die"). Then we see a series of personal photographs of Barthes's mother and her friends, a photograph of a road relating to historical events in Bethlehem – all these are some kind of injections ("Punctum") of memory, flattening time in the human mind.
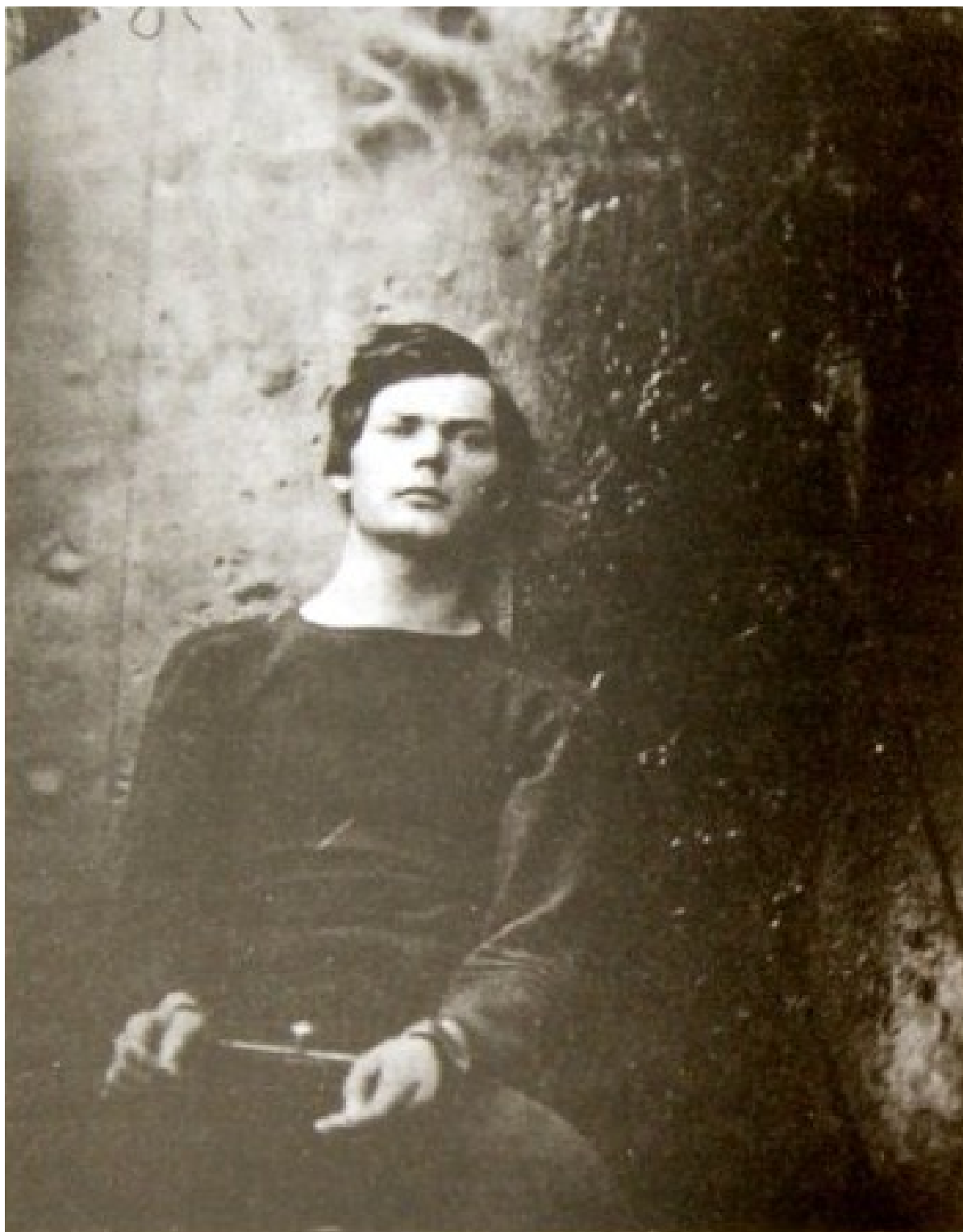
**Figure 12. R. Barthes: Camera lucida. Reflections on Photography
(From Ad Marginem Ed., 2011).**

While watching TV, one's perception of oral speech is synchronous, when it is necessary "not only to keep all the elements in memory, but to fit them into a simul-

taneously perceived semantic scheme". (Luriya, 2013, p. 299). Mike Figgis' film *The Time Code* showed the story of the tragic love quadrangle from four perspectives. The frame condenses reality, makes it more voluminous, demonstrating transitions. Through the technical folding of different timelines into one event, the director achieves the correspondence of the visual sign to the temporal rhythm.

Another example is Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark*: walking through the halls of the Winter Palace, the director makes a metaphorical and fabulous journey through the waves of Russian history in one shot. There is a temporary layering of the past on the future, when retrospective experiences suddenly refer to the future, make us perceive what has already happened as coming. Various means of communication generally influence the perception and interpretation of time in an art object.

Conclusions

The artistic communication reflects the asymmetric duration of existence. The information space allows us to present the sequence of events as the content of the moment, and technical means and tools of modern society are of particular importance. They determine the temporal synthesis of social events, in which, at the communicative maximum, diachrony turns into synchrony and forms duration.

Art object expresses existence through temporal extension in the present, realized and coming. As the metalanguage of temporality, artistic communication expresses a plan-narrative and a plan-present. The past and the future are always interpreted, defining the face of the present. Duration is constituted by the understanding, the interpretation of time, to the same extent that human temporality is the experience of birth and awareness of the finiteness of life.

The language of art objects conveys what eludes consciousness in everyday interactions in which the perception of moments or linear history is available to a person, but the duration and fluidity of the world remain hidden. In media communication, the sequence of events becomes the content of a moment, or vice versa, a moment of the present turns into a multi-colored train of transitions, as in the paintings of the late Cézanne.

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