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Original research paper

"THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST" IN THE CONTEXT OF *ZOOM*ED-IN IMAGES IN THE MULTIMODAL INTERPERSONAL VIDEO COMMUNICATION

Sunčana Tuksar
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula
stuksar@unipu.hr

Mauro Dujmović
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula
mdujmov@unipu.hr

Abstract: The aim of this paper is the analysis of interpersonal practice regarding the functions of a) semiotic and cultural connotations stemming from the prepandemic travel perceptions; b) global media interactions; c) cognition of (post)pandemic context of visual representations of social actors online. Our contemporary society is significantly marked by transcultural encounters, even more so on the notable hypothesis that the 20th century travel and tourism triggered global sociocultural exchange. Paradoxically, recently prescribed social distance and radical lockdowns have brought human interaction closer together due to unprecedented domination of close-ups or "Zoomed"-in video conferencing. Further challenges in technologically mediated world induced new types of literacy. Thus, the outlook of the 21century regime of images emphasizes multimodal production of meaning potentials for social actors in the image. Prevalence of visual representations of universal human interactions reflects cultural and biological traits, which contribute to participatory communicative apparatus. We "travel" (the world) less but "visit" (platforms) more; Metaphorically, the tourist experience has dramatically commuted online. Here, the term "accidental tourist" describes the unexpected practice of the individual, who still manages social encounters online, yet requires offline competences. The expected outcome includes the image-related dialogue on a broader scale of thel exposure in a sociosemiotic landscape, therefore a proposed concept provides for the applicable acquisition model for such practices.

Key words: *multimodality, transculturality, tourism, social distance, images, video conferencing, interpersonal visual competences*.

1. Introduction

The background argument of this paper is that the notions of the travel and tourism social and cultural encounters and interactions as-we-know-it have recently been impacted by lockdowns. The foregrounded thesis is that intercultural

perspectives of the offline and pre-pandemic times nonetheless play an important role in our interpersonal online communication, especially due to our close-ups and zoomed-in images in video conferencing. Deprived of temporal and special localities due to lockdowns, the effective transcultural communication intertwines with the intepresonal adaptive changes which take place in both preserving or revitalising social encountars online. Social semiotics provides for the adaptive interpretation in the light of multimodal interactive communication.

Travel and tourism has nowadays blended in with our intepersonal relationships established in video communicatons on various platforms. What used to be called the intercultural competence of prepandemic times should now be treated as multimodal interpersonal (post)pandemic literacy. Movements in travel and social interactions have by far marked the 20th century (Cohen,1972, 2004). However, the first couple of decades of the 21st century our lives have been determined by multiplatform online participation (L'Pree Corsbie-Massay, 2021). Multimodal online environment enables the shift from transcultural experience of globe-trotting travelling to interpersonal skills required by the regime of images that surround us in digitally networked societies (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

Metaphorically speaking, due to radical social distances our travel experience has almost entirely moved online: the individual has concstantly become "Zoomed"-in, "Teamed"-up, "Google"-met, etc. Paradoxically, the *offline* social distance imposed by lockdowns has brought human interaction up close and personal *online*. Not only are we facing the challenges of intercultural but also highly interpersonal social interaction. Respectfully, the scope of social ineraction requires a) the knowledge of interpersonal competences and b) the knowledge of the image. The functions of both induce the multimodal visual literacy, which includes the cultural and behaviural participation within the sociosemiotic framework (Machin, 2007). In the interdisciplinary terms, this paper a) encompasses the sociocultural communication studies in the scope of multimodal semiotics and b) connects the general aspects of transculturality and travel to the particular image-related social actors in the media representations. There are four aspects of this paper:

First, **Travel as Sociocultural Interaction of 20th century,** revises the importance of social interaction and transcultural communication in travelas a given notion of the past several decades. The 20th century tourism as social phenomenon may be defined as a form of contact between two societies. It may be said that the primary focus of tourism is the communication between tourists and the host destination. As a result, the sociocultural interaction of people who travel establishes the contact and brings about the encounter in everyday life (Wearing et. al., 2010). Second, **Transculturality and the Media Turn,** proposes the global communication as a matter-of-fact participatory practice. From what used to be called "the new media" to all-encompassing online communication, a new light has been shed on our *reality*. The shift from general offline competences to more specific online interpersonal and visual literacy is examined. Third, **Multimodality**

and Interpersonal Communication and of 21st century, brings into the limelight a social distance shaped by the COVID-19 rule of thumb. Proxemics (being far apart yet so close) underlines the continuous processes of social encounters in the multimedia environment. Fourth, "**The Accidental Tourist" of 21st Century: Images are Us,** metaphorically names the transgression of tourist habitus towards the virutal reality: his/her "visits" are online and due to the current situation are occuring by chance, unexpectedly and even unintentionally, so here the term bears the symbolic significance. The idea of a multiplatform "accidental tourist"[1] is brought into a connection with the image-based cognition in order to investigate the interaction of social actors.

New practices in the realm of our "new normal" are determined by the offline social interaction. Thus, the role of visual representations and online interaction is determined by verbal and non-verbal communication contex. Regarding proximity and different distances, when said "images are us" what is meant is that we are unprecedently exposed to the close-up and rather personal social encounters (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Respectfully, represenations of social actors are dealt with in terms of universal cultural and biological traits of humans (Machin, 2007). In multimodal communication the appreciation of the rhetorics of images is a given. However, as it moves beyond images, social semiotics examines various cultural interpersonal impacts deliverd by our visual representations. The critical view of cultural attributions in online participation carries certain properties, practices and possibilities, which may refer to different interpersonal representations as well as contribute to their production. In the regime of images, multimodality is thus seen as a performative action of meaning making. Our participation in media is a-matter-of-fact. Lastly, claims and examples are brought together into a unique scope with two aims. One is, to fully address the role of our visual representations for the pragmatic purposes of interpersonal skills and multimodal (visual and verbal) competences acquisition. The other is, to encourage visual literacy in theory and practice.

2. Travel as Sociocultural Interaction of 20th century

Travel and tourism are generally acknowledged as the temporary movement of people to places and destinations outside their everyday work and environments. The study of tourism is often defined as the study of people away from their home, along with establishments set up in response to the needs of the sociocultural impacts that they have. Globalization is a key factor in the overall 20th century shifts of locations, improvements in transportation, the proliferation and development of travel for pleasure (Hartley, 2002, p. 136–137). Also, globalization is induced by media as the mass communication becomes both „the practice and the product

[1] For the purpose of the argument in this paper, the tem „the accidenal tourist" was metaphorically establish accoriding to preceded coined terms in tourism, such as "drifters" and „explorers" (Cohen, 1972). Further, the term is inspired by Lawrence Kasdan's film „The Accidental Tourist" (1988), adopted from the novel of the same name by Anne Taylor.The plot evolves around a writer of travel guides on how best to avoid unpleasantness and difficulty.

of providing leisure entertainment and information to an unknown audience by means of corporately financed, industrially produced, state-regulated, high tech, privately consumed commodities in the modern print, screen, audio and broadcast media" (p. 138).

In the realm of global travel forces of the 20th century, many authors reflected on the phenomenon of cultural exchange through social interaction and travel. Cohen (1972) is looking into the sociological aspects of the question 'Who is a tourist?' Also, a conceptual clarification follows the trail of social development (De Kadt, 1979) and inevitably puts into perspective a cross-cultural communication (Evans, 1976). The overall assumptions of those times are today's norm: people's choices of travel depend on various forces, such as their standard of living, work environment, income, education and culture.

More or less, we have all been tourists at some point in our lives as travel has became an accepted daily life norm. In addition, a world growth rate in international travel has become one of the fastest growing export industry and earner of foreign cultural and economic exchange in many countries all over the world. For a long period of time travel was associated with the production of symbolic or cultural capital rather than material goods, with tourism being of central importance to social and cultural changes, thus considered one of the most exciting and relevant phenomena of our times. So today's discussions about social encounters and cultural transformations are stemming from such increased mobility.

As Franklin and Crang (2003) argue, in the context of a fast-changing world and forces of globalisation and international migration, tourism undoubtedly acquires new dimensions, properties and directions: "Tourism has broken away from its beginnings as a relatively minor and ephemeral ritual of modern national life to become a significant modality through which transnational modern life is organised" (p. 3). Looking back, writers such as Lash and Urry (1994) claim that a significant change has taken place, involving a shift from organised to disorganised capitalism, which is actually a shift from mass consumption to more individuated patterns of consumption. Esentially, these changes have also been characterised by Poon (1993) as involving the shift from old tourism, which involved packaging and standardisation, to new tourism, which is segmented, flexible and customized rather than highly regulated. However, 1990s marked yet another shift from towards the fragmented pattern of mobility. As Cohen explains (2004), we are much less rooted in time and space than were people in previous times. Tourism and more importantly travel should therefore be seen as a process that has become integral to social life. Moreover, globalazied world seemed to be in increasing movement, while technological and media advances impacted the global travel industry. However, the conditions of globalization clearly started to involve the transient mobility of tourism, allowing a much greater degree of mixing and cultural interchange than in the past. In addition, virtual travels through the internet are introduced, huge numbers of people are caught up by flow

of people and different communications and images. Regardless of the complex intersections between different modes of travel, there was no evidence yet that *virtual travel* is replacing *corporeal travel* as it has expanded and intensified over the last decades.

Cohen (2004) points to countless mobilities, physical, imaginative and virtual, voluntary and coerced, while everyday sites of activity are redesigned in tourist mode. Reisinger (2009) defines social interaction as the everyday interaction between people, with its main purpose in specific contexts and by engaging in conversation, exchanging views and experiences, learning about each other, developing relationships, and so forth. Successful social interaction may contribute to the removal of social and national prejudices and the promotion of better understanding and positive social change. Moreover, as flows of people have been mediating almost all societies across the globe, the mobility and globalization are held responsible for the ways in which people experience the contemporary world and appreciate other cultures and societies across the world. As Lury indicates, "both objects and people are increasingly mobile and such mobilities are culturally encoded" (2000, p. 79). Furthermore**,** Pratt (1992) argues that mobility takes the traveller into a contact zone or a social space where disparate cultures meet (p. 4). What this means is that travel, tourism and culture now plainly overlap and there is no clear frontier between the two and they cannot be kept apart. This is because culture has come to occupy a more central position in the organisation of the present-day societies: the role of culture in this process is multi-faceted as it is in the same time a resource, a product, an experience and an outcome.

The clash of cultures had soon become the central theming of a contemporary society leaving both sides changed, the "host" and the "stranger"; In order to capture this two-way process Pratt (1992) uses the term "transculturation", rather than "hybridisation", that is, the production of something that is both made up of the elements that meet, yet different from them too. As a result of different cultures coming into contact, understanding or misunderstanding is fostered in the sociocultural process on a larger scale. Within the context of globally connected world, intercultural encounters are often and intense and is staged within a wider context in the network of globalization. Consequently, encounters result in relationships developed according to different attitudes and behaviour toward each other: "Under such condition, the relationship is transitory in nature, it suffers from temporal and spatial constraints, it lacks spontaneity and it is unequal and unbalanced" (UNESCO, 1976, p. 82). In everyday life, however, establishment of contacts with people from different countries and cultures presents the contrast to the anonymity and alienation. As said by De Kadt (1979), tourist-host encounters occur in different intercultural social contexts regardless of being strictly induced by travel and/or tourism.

Generally, intercultural competences include tolerance, enthusiasm, interests, generosity, welcoming attitudes and mutual respect (Hamelink, 2015; Hartley,

2002). For Berno (1999) in this process cultural values play a prominent role and considerably influence social interaction because they determine motivations for interactions, participants' interests, the importance of personal goals, activities, willingness to cooperate or compete, personal attractiveness and communication style. In other words, our cultural competences highly depend on understanding and appreciation of different cultural backgounds: interactions in which individuals are culturally very similar to one another are least intercultural, whereas the interactions in which the individuals are culturally very different from one another are most intercultural. Intercultural face-to-face encounters may result in positive and negative outcomes. It also contributes to cultural enrichment and learning about others (UNESCO, 1976). The overall idea of the competences acquisition is to refer to the context in which the encounters may occur and essentially try to avoid or understand a deep interaction which may result in negative outcomes. Otherwise, instead of destroying misconceptions between the different countries, the ignorance perpetuates or creates prejudices, and stereotypes.

In addition, verbal and non-verbal communication is a vehicle which may attribute to cultural understanding and promot positiveness of the interacting groups. Morris (2002) depicts non-verbal meta-signals as capabilities of both encountered parties and the degree of dispersal of the understanding and willingness to demonstrate interpersonal competences that include not only language skills but exist for the matters of body language and nonverbal transactions. Machin (2007) shows how visual representation of the group or the individual may carry certain biological and cultural refletion of a power relationship that will depend on the level of race, gender, income, education, etc.

Last but not least, the internet and the media are great promotors of globally *and* virtually connected world. The beginning of the 21st century was marked by global communication definitely gone online, which constantly challenges us in a way of exponent global cultural interaction. Generally speaking, the trend toward digitalization means that technologies for processing and transmission of information began to use the same language – the computer language of the binary code. For the study of global communication, twenty years ago Hartley (2002) raised a question "whether the new possibilitis of the Internet, such as weblogging, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, You Tube, Pinterest, ebay, Yahoo, Flickr etc., expand human communication capacity to communicate trans-locally" (p. 216.). However, what was then called the "new media" (Castells, 2000) today is a norm, and what used to be called "the challenge of of the social quality of online networks in the global public sphere" (Harley, 2002, p. 227.) it is not only our reality but also a necessity.

3. **Transculturality and the Media Turn**

Cultural interchange is as an understandable response to globally networked and travel-oreinted world. Harly (2002) says, that the 20th century model of mass society[2] used to be shaped by industrial/capitalist societies and characterised as

[2] "Mass society theory was an understandable response to the economics and politics of the 1930s,

atomised and isolated workforce individuals "who were alienated from their labour by its repetitive, unskilled tendencies and by their subjection to the vagaries of the wage relationship (the cash nexus) and the fluctuations of the market" (p. 139).

In the cross-cultural context, social interactions fall into a category of either/or intercultural communication (social behaviour) and interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal). Difficulties in verbal communication are often ascribed to language barrier, whereas those in non-verbal communication belong to our visual representation, which combines non-verbal skills such as body language, facial expressions, eye gaze, spatial behaviour, posture, gesture, etc. (Morris, 2002, p. 1–22). Moreover, Morris explains how difficulties may occur on the account of the differences in rules and patterns of social behavior because each culture has its specific rules (p. 71–88). All in all, cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication influence tourists' and hosts' perceptions of each other even more so due to a globally connected world, where individuals may be confronted with culture differences and many unfamiliar situations in various contexts. Therefore, the terms *tourist* and *host* are used here in a broader sense to illustrate the general tendency of cultural differences as important factors that determine the interaction and mutual understanding. In our multicultural world both encountered parties are exposed to new people and new behaviours.

Indeed, travel is a promotor of various transcultural adoptions and transformations. In the words of Chen and Starosta (2008), as we become aware of the global interdependence of people and cultures we confront ever shifting realities that shrink the world of the twenty-first century, thus; "we must learn how to see things through the eyes of others and add their knowledge to our personal repertories" (p. 215). These guidelines specify that communication competences require appropriateness as the fundamental criteria in order not to violate the interaction and the content of the encounter regarding different cultural norms. Such orientation emphasizes the communicative competence as a context-specific behavior. Our social encounters have recently been moved almost entirely *online* so our identities further expanded into the vast field of numerous participatory practices. In other words, our contemporary society faces new types of *literacy*. The term is often associated with *language*, however, *visual* literacy assumes production and understanding of multimodal (multimedia) audiovisual text which further generates cultural interpretation (Tuksar, 2021). When referring to our relationship with the media, Charisse L'Pree Corsbie-Massay (2021) calls it "a strange love"as the author's approach engages "with the impact of more than a century of changing media on the ways we think, remember the past, interact with others, and construct our identities" (p. 5).

and was neatly summed up in Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936). But it has hung on in a commonsense version which is associated largely with cultural and literary critics for whom industrialisation and modern society in general remain a regrettable aberration from values and habits which these writers fondly imagine used to prevail before the invention of machines, democracy and the like" (Hartley, 2002, p. 139).

Our technoculture in the COVID-19 pandemic era faces the *real time* that has become interactive to the point of no return: what previously might have been considered as the interactivity merely for entertainment has now become the ultimate communicative model. Metaphorically speaking, virtual reality has become the only realty we might presently have. To begin with, a standard definition of virtual reality by Hartley (2002) says that it is "interactive graphic simulations" (p. 232), i.e. virutality is "the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns" (p. 69). In both cases interactivity signifies the development of the relationship between person and computer, and with others via the computer (Castells, 2000). However, due to lockdowns we have actually became more attached to our technological devices as the frequent and reliable means of social interaction. So what Marshall McLuhan in 1964 feared to be an extension of the mechanical principles of fragmentation and separation has rather invasively and instantly become the consumers' (only) technologically embraced *social activity* for "fusing" the instantaneous character of interaction, information and learning (Castells, 2000).

Further, Corsbie-Massay (2021) says that all media communicates, but not all communication is mediated. In turn, the author indirectly talks about visual literacy when actually defining media literacy as "he skills that help users analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a wide variety of media modes, genres, and formats. For us to understand the context within which a message was produced (e.g., time period, technological capabilities, and gender relations) and its deeper meaning, we must be able to read patterns in media technology that constitute the current media environment" (p. 6). Come what may, media are the tools that aid in or mediate communication, including but not limited to technologies and content. Therefore, we should still bear in mind that we are "end users" or "surfers". In this sense communication further reflects any conveyance of verbal and non-verbal messages within an individual (i.e., intrapersonal communication), between individuals (i.e., interpersonal communication), and to many individuals (i.e., mass communication). Drawing from such contextual background, it is precisely the context and the ability to understand the production and visualisation of our multimodal digital world that leads the way back towards our interpersonal relationship as a reflection of our relationship with media.

By comparison, in our recent times it has been acknowledged that the user's fundamental psychosocial and interpersonal needs and encounters are just as influenial as have been the opportunities earlier afforded by a) offline travel and tourism and b) the technology itself. All things considered, the current approach may equally confirm and redefine the common saying that the media environment is like nothing we have ever seen before.

4. **Multimodality and Interpersonal Communication of the 21st Century**

Digitally mediated communication has been widely embraced as the functioning way of a "new normal". What used to be an online practice of leasure

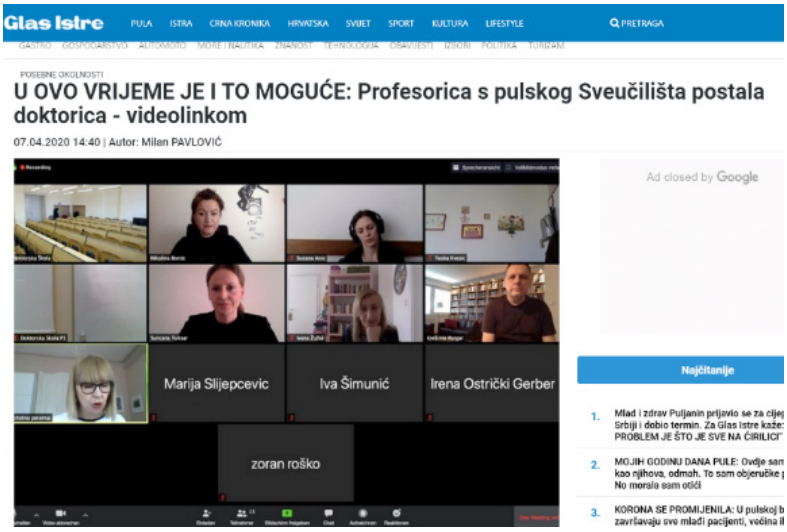
and entertainment has become the necessary routine in the pandemic era. The term "mass communication" is truly "a common ground category of an early twentieth-century mass society" (Hartley, 2002, p. 138). Instead, *interpersonal participation* is put forward as our communication more shifts toward contemporary multimodal centricity.

Diachronically, conditions for image-centricity were initially set through the advances of the 20th century but captured throught the 19th century when the shift towards image has taken place (Stöckl et. al., 2020, p. 2–3). In the semiotic landscape the image has enchored in the long and descriptive argument directly engaging with designed, graphic, illustrated or visual image elements, which may produce rhetorically complex multimodal, pictorial argumentation. From history of art and paintings to photography and snapshots, technoculture has become more image-related. Synchronically, we are emerged in a visually-dominated digital era, where the individual takes centre stage, e.g. in video conferencing. When *virtuality* is not merely a cyborg phenomenon or the interaction with technology but also our *reality* as an extention to our identity representation, in the realm of image-centric practices our own visual representation offers furtile ground for further exploration of this new communication and visuality. Hartley rightly (2002) points out that media studies have long been aware of the the key concepts in relation to the image as the objectification of self-knowledge for communicative purposes, as "one's 'image' is made up of the cues by means of which others make sense of the performance of the self. These include visual attributes (one's looks and clothes) and intentionally communicative acts (speech, interaction with others), but also behavioural characteristics that project an image beyond the control of the self (a 'tearaway', 'self-confident' image, etc.). At a cultural level, image is the alienation of personal attributes for semiotic purposes" (p. 107).

The paradgmatic textbook of visual design *Reading Images* (2006) by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen primarily focus on multimodality and the image in the aspect of cultural interpretation: the agenda is to investigate various aspects of multimedia communication through multiple modes, with modes being regarded as ways of representing information, a set of socially and culturally shaped resources in a meaning-making process, whereas media refers to the available technologies for the dissemination of text (e.g. mobile technologies, etc.). What this means for the platform-based discourses is defined by having different context interpreted in different ways, depending on the choice of platforms and modes as well as on the viewer's perception.

The production as the choice of medium is important not only because it enables a certain aesthetics, but also enforces and enables the reshaping and redesigning of the media text. In this way, the new environments, tools and cultures are created within the communicative framework. Finally, the distribution of the text via technology makes such transformation in the sense of design possible for users and audience to participate and communicate. The following picture shows the first PhD defence on the "Zoom" platform in Croatia during the lockdown (1

April, 2020). It reads: "Nowadays, it is possible: a professor from University of Pula defended her PhD thesis over the Internet".



Picture 1. A PhD defense on "Zoom" 2020

Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) image analysis associate with investigations of the way social issues are represented in the mass media, and it has the distinct advantage of being understood and accepted by most people (p. 2). From the semiotic point of view, images are produced to serve as documented evidence of reality, people, places, things and their relatinos, and the method of visual analysis may provide a wide range of defined features which connect them to specific meanings and particular communicative functions or effects regarding cultural interaction. But how do individuals interact across multiple platforms with image-centred identities? Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) propose interpersonal competence, as a part of both fundamental competence (involves the general ability to adapt effectively to a new environment in order to achieve goals) and social competence (involves specific, rather than general, abilities).

Interpersonal competenece is especially related to how individuals peform certain skills in order to achieve goals in particular communication situations. Firstly, the aspects of media, technology and travel are being closely related. Secondly, the influx of tourists induced interations between people and culutres: in some cases, the interaction will be face-to-face, and in other it will be virtual through electronic devices. Regardless, it will require well-developed intercultural communication skills. Such communication is self-reflective as humans have the ability to think about themselves, their messages, and potential results of those messages at the same time (Samovar et. al, 2010, p. 4–19). In this sense the interactive dimension of our images is subjected to not only intercultural interpretative need but also interpersonal; "the 'writing' of what is usually called

'non-verbal communication', a 'language' shared by producers and viewers alike" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2010, p. 116). Multimodal visual literacy offers the concept, which explains how our bahaviour is shaped by multitude of sources with the interplay of modes in the picture producing the meanings beyond description itself.

As our visual representation is mediated through various platforms one should be aware that we also carry the uniqueness as we are more than our culture. Finally, the ability of self-reflectiveness knows the concepts in which behaviour develops and recognizes diffferent patterns of behaviour (Morris, 2002). This is even more so as we have been recently engaged if not determined by online interaction which illuminates the idea of interpersonal competences: we are "Zoom"-ed in during our video conferencing: we are constantly brought to a close-up, which articulates our platform-related activity as a communicative resource for understanding and interacting.

5. **The Accidental Tourist: Images are Us**

The focus of this paper hereby shifts from multimodal arrangement of modes in general to the image and interpersonal communication in particular. The aim is to elaborate the proposed thesis how descriptive practice (of the culturally shaped image) and the close-up communication online (which perceives us in the image-centred process) are brought together in the interpersonal interpretative practice.

Firstly, the travel experience of the 20th century emphasized the importance of the individual on a general level of tourism industry. Social distance temporarily subjects us to always travelling virtually. Such tourists' visits have nothing to do with the online travel technology of prepandemic times but metaphorically describe the practice of the individual in the accidental and unexpected situation. For this (post)pandemic "accidental tourist" social encounters online are just as real in a digital close-up as were offline, on a certain level even more so. Precisely, lockdowns have brought people closer together as we frequently "meet" for video conferencing. Consequently, interpersonal competences are required. Secondly, on the basis of variable of visual representation, the close-ups subject us to what Kress and van Leeuwen called "language" of the image (2006). It can be verbal and non-verbal and is equally communicated by the giver and the receiver. Therefore, when saying "images are us", what is meant is that the analytical route moves beyond generalisation of image-making or editing process and embraces the cultural varieties which help to understand and evaluate rich rhetorical texts that we ourselves produce. Thirdly, Machin (2007) links the interpersonal relationships with investigating actions of social actors in the image. When talking about the kinds of participants in images, this includes relevant transferring category. For example, verbal and non-verbal communication as one aspect of interpersonal competnece acquisition has been put forward as it carries important connotations in the culturally shaped interplay of modes.

Due to lockdowns we *travel* less yet *visit* more. Indeed, the excitement of highly mobile times generated new social relations, new ways of living, new ties to space, new places, new forms of consumption and leisure and new aesthetic sensibilities (Cohen, 2004). In consequence, the context of enhanced mobility tourism studies have been moved to the center stage of many people's more mobile lives (Wearing, etl al. 2010). However, push and pull factors in tourism have recently been determined by coronavirus and lockdowns and a virtual reality became a new space for "travel". Hereby the term "visit" reflects a digital context when we "check" the site or "view a page" in the sense of "hits", "visits", "unique visit", "visit by Cookie", etc. Individuals are thus referred to as "visitors" or "users". In addition, what we recognize as *realistic* style of representation actually reflects a culturally shaped code. Over time certain methods of production within a medium become naturalized or accepted as a reflection of reality. Thereby, "the accidental tourist" is a metaphor for involuntary and rahter sudden online pracitice we have accepted as a reflection of our "visits" and "encounters". It recalls the critical reference to interpersonal relationships that stem from video and web conferencing platfroms, such as "Zoom", "Teams", "Big Blue Button", "Google Meets" or any other "places" that require some kind of our "movement".

Given that, an interesting light has been shed regarding social distance and social actors, according to discussion of proxemics (the psychology of people's use of space) by van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001). The authors state how our interaction, social relations determine the distance, literally and figuratively: "At close personal distancewe take in the head and the shoulders. Atfar personal distancewe see the other person from the waist up. At close social distance we see the whole figure. At far social distance we see the whole figure. At far social distance we see the whole figure'with space around it'. And at public distance we can see the torso of at least four or five people" (p. 29-30). The system of size in frames derives from the proxemics of everyday face-to-face interaction and is devided into six values: (a) Intimate. (b) Close personal. (c) Far personal. (d) Close social. (e) Far social. (f) Public. These are defined in terms of how much of the (human) participant's body is represented in the frame of the respective image (p. 29-30).

Further, Machin (2007) responds to the image classification regarding interpresonal and/or intercultural competences in order to investigate actions and deal with representatin of social actors in the image (p. 118-128). In the view of social semiotics, Machin's proximity inventory is metaphorical as it looks into the visual grammar of actions for analysing what people do or may not do in both images and reality. The concept draws from the paradigmatic study *Rhetoric of Image* by Roland Barthes (1964), thus relying on the two main hypotheses: one is, there is no neutral documentation, and the other is, that denotation is only the first level of meaning (of a photograph, for example) and that we need to first know something about what we are looking in order to be able to understand the image. Similar to Kress and van Leeuwen, Machin looks into three aspects:

gaze, or to what extend we are encouraged to engage with the participants; angle of interaction, which can create power relationship and also involvement; and distance, which may or may not create intimacy (p. 110-111). Further, according to cultural and personal (identity) transmission aspects, social actors are *categorized*: visual representation of people is either cultural, biological or both. The cultural categorisation is realised through the standard attributes of dress, hairstyle, body adormnemt, etc., biological categorisation is achieved through stereotyped physical characteristics, whereas both categories may be used to invoke both positive and negative connotations (p. 118-119).

What is more, nonverbal communication is brought into perspective as it is "universal human interaction which reflects personal traits and countless of times in a day sends messages and signals (Samovar et. al., 2010, p. 223). It is omnipresent in intercultural communication and is an essential ingredient in human participatory interaction: "Nonverbal communication is important because people use this message system to express attitudes, feelings, and emotions. Consciously and unconsciously, intentionally and unintentionally, people make important judgments and decisions concerning the internal states of others — states they often express without words" (p. 244). We are aware of the importance of non-verbal communication because it creates impressions. For example, we prepare for a (video) meeting, which shows awareness that other people will draw a mental picture of us based on our appearance and *vice versa*: "Your personal experiences will also show you how often you make judgments about other people based on such things as the color of their skin, age, gender, facial expression, manner of dress, accent, and even the type of handshake they manage to administer (Samovar etl. al 2010, p. 245). The interaction is managed in this way as our nonverbal actions, whether intentional or unintentional, offer some clues.

On the note about cultural and biological behaviour of social actors in the image, Morris (2002) defines the meta-signal - a signal about signals. For example: "If two men are fighting we can tell at a glance wheter they are serious or playful. We do this by reading two meta-signals. First we check if they are smiling or laughing. If they are, we can be sure that the fight is really a mock-tussle" (p. 411). Culturally, an entirely different kind of meta-signal is gaze direction: "Meta-signal of gaze direction says: All my actions from now on are for you and for you only; others can ignore these signals" (p. 412). Biologically, human feature is a general posture or "bearing", which is according to Morris one of the most wide-spread and common of all human meta-signals: "The way a man holds himself while going through a long sequence of interactions with companion will provide a basic reading for the whole set of other signals that he transmits" (p. 413).

Indeed, images are us wherefore our meta-signals make us persuasive and "reading-friendly". Our repeated exposure to media/video supported communication would eventually expect of us an increased visual fluency in order to qualify interaction due to the process of elaborated semantics of meaning,

which is carried by virtual-yet-real social interaction and followed by patterns of response. Anyone who has ever attempted to communicate with people in online close-up participation will be familiar with the limitations of simply not being aware of visual influence tactics and modality of representations. Respectfully, Hamelink's evolutionary perspective on global online communication, which had ones raised questions about our cognitive functioning in the digital galaxy (2015, p. 228–229), has now moved into the online media shaped reality that not only no longer questions the necessity of convergence technology but is virtually in a permanent codependant relationship with it.

6. Conclusion

Online encounters are the result of a multimodal media reality, which enforces the need for media appreciation, visual understanding and the overall improvement of different social interactions between individuals. Wee metaphorically become accidental tourists as we travel from platform to platform in our daily communication. Thereupon we face a potential communication minefield, which may occur in the interpersonal interaction. In respect to our visual representatinos online, multimodality as a relevant theory combines the social actors and visual modality as interdependable variables. They are defined according the participant's body representation in the image: we are "up close and personal" although "far apart socially". Ironically enough, at we are at the same time "private" (in our homes) but also "public" (as many participants can see us and we can see them).

First of all, the speed and proportion of tourism development and changes emanating from intercultural contact are not exclusive to contemporary times as almost all communities had been exposed to outside contact before the recent upsurge in tourism. Second of all, the increases in technologically interconnected world contributed to the breakdown of cultural barriers. The major factors determining social interaction are temporal and spatial; The nature of the tourist-host contact is itself a paradigm for the general social character of the situation in which the contact occurs, whereas cultural and biological values, attitudes, perceptions and differences and similarities contribute to overall communication effectiveness. Nevertheless, the current conditions reframed the concept of social interaction in reference to personal associations taking place in the online context.

In conclusion, several aspects are connected:

a) Intercultural and travel theories of the 20th century (what is given) have shaped our social interaction so that we can examine the prospects of the accidental tourist (what is new) in the "new normal" of the 21st century;
b) Social encounters have moved online almost entirely as a reflection of a current social distance situation;
c) The individual visit platforms in order to obtain social encounters online, which makes him/her the accidental tourist;

d) Transmition through video conferencing is a necessity which sets us apart and brings us together as visual representations and/or images.
e) Interpersonal relations occur on the level of images due to the mode affordance, i.e., interpretative possibilities rather than passive transmission carriers.

At long last, we remain verbal and non-verbal communicators, however, visual representations offer a rich ground for further exploration of image-centric multimodal practices of the times we live in.

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