

## Article

# Digital High: The Art of Visual Seduction?

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**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the structure of an advertising image for a 2010s computer company in the neo-capitalist Moscow, Russia. The analysis looks back to the pioneering studies of advertising as a commercial “applied art” by Sergei Eisenstein, Leo Spitzer and Roland Barthes. The picture’s plot and composition are shown to be a consistent and sophisticated near-artistic design that uses textual puns, poetic topoi and visual stereotypes (in particular, sex appeal) for the promotion of the advertised merchandise (a smartphone). The psychological naturalization of the design is clarified with references to the insights of Sigmund Freud, Heinz Kohut and Gerard Genette into the dynamics of narcissism. In a widening circle, the contextualization of the design involves: the literary topos of using birds in love poetry (made famous by its treatment in the lyrics of the Roman poet Catullus) and in painterly variations on the theme; the narcissist discourse of a modern Russian poet (Eduard Limonov); and the grand pictorial tradition of portraying a nude (Venus) before the mirror (relevant classical canvases are considered briefly).

**Keywords:** advertising; semiotics; design; visual; sex; narcissism; poetry; painting; mirror; classical; Russian; self-portrait; selfie



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## 1. The Project: Analyzing a Commercial Image<sup>1</sup>

In the window of the computer company *Belyi Veter digital.ru* (White Wind Digital.ru)’s store on the ground level of my 16-floor apartment building, at the corner of Sadovaya-Triumfalnaya boulevard and Vorotnikovskiy lane (in Moscow, Russia), was a gorgeous and unusually sophisticated poster.<sup>2</sup> I asked the staff inside for a copy, but they could only give me a pamphlet with a slightly different version of the image (see Figure 1). In what follows, I will offer a thematic and structural analysis of that visual text.

Before proceeding to specifics, let me entertain a question that begs to be asked: Why would I analyze an ad?!

Well, for the very general and venerable reason that semiotics is interested in all signs—just like linguistics is interested in all languages. And, in my case, for a somewhat personal one—because ever since I read Roland Barthes’s analysis of an advertisement for “Pasta Panzani” (Barthes 1964) I always wanted to emulate it.<sup>3</sup>

One of Barthes’s most interesting insights was that the color scheme of the ad (red, green, whitish) implicitly brings in the colors of the Italian national flag, while “l’italianité” itself connotes, for the French consumer, “freshness and abundance” (Barthes 1964, pp. 41, 49).

In fact, Roland Barthes was not the first to zero in on ads.

As a typically capitalistic genre, advertising has flourished in the West, especially in the U.S., and it has attracted the scholarly attention of psychologists, sociologists, and semioticians. Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (Packard 1957, itself a best-seller) focused on the rhetoric of advertisements which sell you the product by selling you on the idea that underlies it.

Leo Spitzer, in a sympathetic outsider’s view of Americana and a *tour de force* of “an *explication de text* of a good sample of modern advertising” (Spitzer 1962, p. 249), analyzed an ad for *Sunkist* oranges as an instance of *Gebrauchskunst*, a notion which, curiously, he had

at the time to paraphrase in English as “‘applied practical art’: that art which has become a part of the daily routine and which adorns the practical and the utilitarian with beauty” (Spitzer 1962, p. 248).



Figure 1. The “SNAP QUICK!” poster/image.

One of Spitzer’s major points was about the “disinterestedness” of that art, or to translate this into the Slavic dialect of Structuralese, its “set towards expression” (the Jakobsonian *ustanovka na vyrazhenie*). I, for one, remember and admire many advertisements and commercials, but hardly ever what they are supposed to sell me.

In my pre-capitalist past (= prior to my emigration from the Soviet Union to the United States), as I studied the theoretical works of Sergei Eisenstein, a great artist but also an inspiring student of art, I found a telling reference to—what else?—the art of advertising. In his 1945 article, devoted to the art of Charlie Chaplin (and titled, even in its Russian version, “Charlie the Kid”), Eisenstein discusses the compositional device known in English as foreshadowing by citing five pages from an American handbook of advertising, Professor H.A. Overstreet’s *Influencing Human Behavior* (Overstreet 1925)!

To make that story very short here, here is an example of what Eisenstein quotes from Overstreet:

The canvasser rings the doorbell. The door is opened by a suspicious lady-of-the-house. The canvasser lifts his hat. “Would you like to buy an illustrated History of the World ?” he asks. “No!” And the door slams < . . . >

Hence <...> we [must] start a person in the affirmative direction. A wiser canvasser rings the doorbell. An equally suspicious lady-of-the-house opens < . . . > “This is Mrs. Armstrong?”

Scowlingly – “Yes.”

“I understand, Mrs. Armstrong, that you have several children in school.”

Suspiciously – “Yes.”

“And, of course, they have much home work to do?”

Almost with a sigh – ““Yes” < . . . >

We do not guarantee the sale. But that second agent is destined to go far! He has captured the secret of getting, at the outset, a number of “yes-responses”.

(Overstreet 1925, pp. 16–17; Eisenstein 1982, pp. 116–17)

Foreshadowings in prose and poetry as kindred to the “yes-response-techniques” in advertising! I used this insight of Eisenstein time and again since, including in an analysis of a Boris Pasternak masterpiece (see Zholkovsky 1994, p. 230).

## 2. A Close Reading of the Post-Soviet Ad

The inscription in block yellow can be translated literally as: “Snap quick!”; lower down, in smaller yellow letters, it says, “Digital technology for your vacation! Swoop in!” And depicted against the white-blue background of the sea below a lightly clouded sky is a sultry brunette (modeled perhaps, after a Latin American TV star?)<sup>4</sup> with flowers in her long wind-swept hair, wearing a short open white dress that exposes tanned legs above the knees (her skin tone matches the color of the inscription, which is, of course, the computer company’s main color). With a smartphone (as an example of the digital products to be consumed during summer holidays)<sup>5</sup> in her left hand, she takes a snapshot of herself, or rather, of a white seagull spreading its wings as it lunges with its open beak for an ice cream cone in her right hand.

Thus, we are presented with a unique dramatic moment (a wild seagull eating practically out of your hands!) that calls for prompt *carpe diem* action and, as is clearly shown, can indeed be captured—as advertised—thanks to new digital technology. The Faustian motif of stopping a beautiful but fleeting moment is conveyed by the seagull’s hovering, by the dancery half-turn of the female figure juggling cell phone and ice cream cone, and by the hem of her dress fluttering from the wind and from her own motion. The theme of ‘a fleeting moment’ is expressed by the girl’s facial expression: her oblique gaze at the cell phone while biting her lower lip either in response to her photo-journalist’s acrobatic tension or from sheer momentary pleasure. Also observed is the principle of auto-meta-creativity, so cherished by artists: the photograph portrays the making of a photograph.

As deliberately ostentatious and somewhat overloaded with images as the poster is, the composition does not fall apart, thanks to the skillful organization of the visual route along it. Our attention is immediately attracted to the flirtatious beauty, but she does not look at us, but rather at her cellphone screen; as we follow her gaze, we figure out it is directed at the seagull, which, in turn, is focused on the ice cream.

A counterpoint to this visual plot is provided by the picture’s color pattern. Against the background of the dominant white, black, and blue colors is a dotted line in red tones, formed by the top scoop of the ice cream, the bracelet on the brunette’s arm, one of the flowers in her hair,<sup>6</sup> and the swimsuit visible beneath her dress. This sensuous red pattern is organically grounded in the calmer yellow-brown color of the girl’s swarthy body, while at the other end of the spectrum, it is akin to the scorching blackness of her hair.

The wind blowing up her dress is explicitly inscribed in the poster’s text: in the lower left corner of the picture, as part of the name of the store (“White Wind”), below which is the IT link to the company’s site (**digital.ru**)<sup>7</sup> in black letters, echoing the blackness of the girl’s hair. The simple pun on the seme of “wind” is picked up by an even more obvious pun on the verb *naletai*, “swoop in and snatch,” urging the buyer to follow the example of the seagull aiming for ice cream. A subtler pun, underlying the entire structure, is the *double entendre* inherent in verb of the invitation (*sniat’*, “snap”), which in the current Russian slang means “pick up a hottie.”

Many other details of this seductive picture are ambiguous, too. As usual in advertising, a commodity is promoted through sex appeal: the idea of buying a smartphone materializes as gazing at a gorgeous female. But this is not performed in a primitive slam-dunk way—by simply placing a cell phone in the hands of a hottie who gives the viewer a “come-on” look—but rather by getting us involuntarily involved in her moment of self-admiration under the pretext of taking a picture.

### 3. Archetypes and Intertexts: Narcissistic Venuses

This design relies on a cluster of archetypal constructions of which the viewer’s identification with the viewed character is only the most obvious one.

Self-admiration is a powerful psychological mechanism, the professional study of which was pioneered in 1914 by Sigmund Freud, who pointed out that it was a universal phenomenon, characteristic in particular of the female psyche, and dubbed it narcissism.<sup>8</sup> Hence, choosing a woman for the role of a self-photographing character is quite justified. Other components of the picture’s plot are also archetypal. The targeted consumer, primarily a male,<sup>9</sup> is supposed to enjoy looking at a beautiful woman showing a lot of naked flesh (an elementary erotic interest); he becomes involved in peeping at her movements (voyeurism), which, in turn, are motivated by narcissism and exhibitionism.

In the fine arts, especially in painting, the classic embodiment of the theme of female narcissism is the motif of Venus in front of the mirror. Among the great examples are canvases by Titian (see Figure 2: “Venus with a Mirror,” circa 1555; [http://muzei-mira.com/uploads/posts/2013-01/1359536068\\_venera-pered-zerkalom-tician-vechellio.jpg](http://muzei-mira.com/uploads/posts/2013-01/1359536068_venera-pered-zerkalom-tician-vechellio.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022)): Venus is shown seated almost frontally, with a portion of her face visible in the mirror;



Figure 2. Titian. “Venus with a Mirror” (circa 1555).

Peter Paul Rubens (Figure 3: “Venus at a Mirror,” 1615; <http://rybens.ru/woman/rubens2.php> (accessed on 25 September 2022)): she is portrayed from behind in profile, and in the mirror her face is in full-face;



**Figure 3.** Peter Paul Rubens. “Venus at a Mirror” (1615).

Diego Velázquez (see Figure 4: “The Rokeby Venus,” circa 1648–1651; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c5/Diego\\_Vel%C3%A1zquez\\_064.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c5/Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez_064.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022)): her nude body is seen from behind and her face in the mirror.



**Figure 4.** Diego Velázquez. “The Rokeby Venus” (circa 1648–1651).

Among prominent Russian artists of the 20th century, Aleksandr Deineka has two notable paintings in this genre:

“The Model” (1936 [http://img1.liveinternet.ru/images/attach/c/5/89/220/8922043\\_3\\_large\\_a10.jpg](http://img1.liveinternet.ru/images/attach/c/5/89/220/8922043_3_large_a10.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022); see Figure 5), an obvious variation on Velázquez’ canvas, with the difference that there is a nude figure repeating the original, but no mirror: instead, there is a window with a view of the city in winter;



**Figure 5.** Aleksandr Deineka. "The Model" (1936).

and "The Model in Front of a Mirror" (watercolor, 1928; [http://artinvestment.ru/content/download/news/20091222\\_deineka\\_naturshica.jpg](http://artinvestment.ru/content/download/news/20091222_deineka_naturshica.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 6), portrayed from behind (= a Rubensian *derrière*) in front of a mirror in which, however, there is no reflection.



**Figure 6.** Aleksandr Deineka. "The Model in Front of a Mirror" (watercolor, 1928).

In our poster/image, the “Venus” is presented from the front and almost in full height, but we do not see the “mirror,” rather in this case, the camera screen, and we are invited to guess what’s in it.

The juggling pose, in which both hands are actively involved is a characteristic one—a well-known manifestation of narcissism, whose dynamics have been defined as a “confirmation of the Ego under the guise of the Other” and the corresponding aesthetic, as “a baroque < . . . > Vertigo < . . . > one that is very conscious and < . . . > well-organized” (Genette 1966, p. 28).

Thus, in Eduard Limonov’s poem “I will hold another person in my thoughts,”<sup>10</sup> the following lines become the pinnacle of the poetic plot:

и даже на спину пытаюсь заглянуть

Тянусь тянусь

но зеркало поможет

взаимодействуя двумя

Увижу родинку искомую на коже

Давно уж гладил я ее любя

(and I even try to take a peek at my back / I stretch stretch / but the mirror will help / interacting with the two / I’ll get to see the searched-for mole on my skin / Long have I been stroking it lovingly)

But the protagonist of the poem is consumed exclusively with his own self, and almost seems to have three /hands: two to hold the mirrors and, as it were, a third one to stroke the mole, while the heroine of our poster/image does not limit herself to narcissism/autoeroticism.

#### 4. Archetypes and Intertexts (cont’d): Erotic Bird(s)

If, according to the external plot, the cutting-age technology is supposed to help capture an exceptional moment, the general strategy of advertising suggests a sexual lure, while narcissism implies a focus on something very personal and intimate, so what is needed is a love scene. But that would seem too risky for a computer store ad. The maximum titillation the artist can afford are the girl’s partially exposed breasts and gently wagging pelvis under an impeccably white dress, with some telltale folds clinging to her lap. What in literary scholarship is known as Aesopian writing comes into play: “sex” is only alluded to by subtle innuendo. In particular, it is refracted through yet another archetypal motif boasting a venerable pedigree.

Let us take a closer look at the left edge of the painting: the image of the seagull. The erotic pairing of a woman and a bird is a familiar combination. For instance, the Latin poet Catullus (himself looking back to a more ancient tradition) made a bird, in his case a sparrow, a mediator (if not a tool or perhaps even a symbolic organ) of his amorous passion for his elusive beloved Lesbia. In one of his poems (Catullus, 2), he envies the bird’s right to freely caress her:

Passer, deliciae meae puellae,  
quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,  
cui primum digitum dare appetenti  
et acris solet incitare morsus,  
cum desiderio meo nitenti  
carum nescio quid lubet iocari  
et solacium sui doloris,  
credo ut tum gravis acquiescat ardor:  
tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem  
et tristis animi levare curas!

(Sparrow —my sweetheart’s delight—/ she often plays with you, has you in her lap, / giving her index fingertip to you / teasing you to make sharp nips, / when my shining object of love / is pleased to play by some unknown dear reason / and a small comfort from pain; / I think it’s so her love may then subside. / If only I could play with you as she does, / and relieve my soul’s sad torments!)

In the next poem (Catullus, 3) the poet mourns the death of the pet:

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque < . . . >  
 passer mortuus est meae puellae,  
 passer, deliciae meae puellae,  
 quem plus illa oculis suis amabat <...>.  
 nec sese a gremio illius movebat,  
 sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc  
 ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.  
 qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum  
 illuc, unde negant redire quemquam < . . . >

(Weep, Venus, and you, Pleasures, weep! <...> / Poor chick, my girlfriend’s love died, / Poor chick, my girlfriend’s / love. / He was dearer to her lovely eyes <...> / He never flew off his mistress’s lap, / He chirped sweetly for her alone, / He fluttered here and there, playing. / And now he walks on a misty path... / To a land of horror from which there is no return...)

Both poems<sup>11</sup> provided subjects for renowned paintings of the late 19th–early 20th centuries, somewhat reminiscent of our poster’s design.

The vivacious sparrow of Catullus 2 is featured in

“Lesbia and Her Sparrow” by Sir Edward John Poynter (1907; ([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Sir\\_Edward\\_John\\_Poynter\\_lesbia\\_and\\_her\\_sparrow.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Sir_Edward_John_Poynter_lesbia_and_her_sparrow.jpg)) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Sir Edward John Poynter. “Lesbia and Her Sparrow” (1907).

and “Lesbia with a Sparrow” by John William Godward (1916; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/Godward-Lesbia\\_with\\_her\\_Sparrow-1916.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/Godward-Lesbia_with_her_Sparrow-1916.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** John William Godward. “Lesbia with a Sparrow” (1916).

The deceased one can be seen in “Lesbia, Mourning a Dead Sparrow” (lying in the hollow between her thighs) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1866; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Lawrence\\_Alma-Tadema\\_lesbia\\_and\\_sparrow.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Lawrence_Alma-Tadema_lesbia_and_sparrow.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022); see Figure 9):



**Figure 9.** Lawrence Alma-Tadema. “Lesbia, Mourning a Dead Sparrow” (1866).

But an even closer ornithological prototype of our picture, whether intentionally so or not, is the classic motif of Leda being violently seduced by Zeus in the guise of a swan, which has inspired some of the greatest masters.

There is “Leda and the Swan” by Jacopo Pontormo (1513; <http://www.varvar.ru/arhiv/gallery/mannerism/pontormo/images/pontormo1.jpg> (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 10):



**Figure 10.** Jacopo Pontormo. “Leda and the Swan” (1513).

the one by Leonardo (1515), of which only a copy has survived ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leda\\_Melzi\\_Uffizi.jpg?uselang=ru](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leda_Melzi_Uffizi.jpg?uselang=ru) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 11):



**Figure 11.** Leonardo da Vinci. “Leda and the Swan” (1515).

the erotically more daring one by Michelangelo (circa 1530), also lost and known from a copy by Rubens (1600; [http://www.wm-painting.ru/plugins/p19\\_image\\_design/images/3/862.jpg](http://www.wm-painting.ru/plugins/p19_image_design/images/3/862.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 12):



**Figure 12.** Peter Paul Rubens. “Leda with a Swan” (1600) after Michelangelo (circa 1530).

and the anatomically even more explicit one by François Boucher (he had several paintings on this subject, see, for example, the 1740 version: [https://arthive.com/francoisboucher/works/389707~Leda\\_and\\_the\\_Swan](https://arthive.com/francoisboucher/works/389707~Leda_and_the_Swan) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 13):



**Figure 13.** François Boucher. Leda and the Swan (1740).

This remarkable and highly provocative visual setting brings to mind the idea of the “mirror stage” (*stade du miroir*) of psychological development, ensuring a person’s intimate awareness of their own body as actively distinct from others. This concept forms an influential cluster of the “French theory,” starting with Henri Wallon and followed by René Zazzo, Jacques Lacan, Donald Winnicott and Françoise Dolto.<sup>12</sup> Another relevant background for the understanding of our poster is offered by the so-called “pornolatric” visual theory of the French philosopher Georges Batailles,<sup>13</sup> whose “Le gros orteil” provocatively celebrated the ultimate desire to tangibly visualize—*see* and *sense*—the reflected self-image:

Le sens de cet article repose dans une insistance à mettre en cause directement et explicitement ce qui séduit, sans tenir compte de la cuisine poétique, qui n’est en définitive qu’un détournement (la plupart des êtres humains sont naturellement débiles et ne peuvent s’abandonner à leurs instincts que dans la pénombre poétique). Un retour à la réalité n’implique aucune acceptation nouvelle, mais cela veut dire qu’on est séduit basement, sans transposition, et jusqu’à en crier, en écarquillant les yeux: les écarquillant ainsi devant un gros orteil. (Bataille 1929, p. 302)

This peculiar attitude illuminates the complex view of the “discourses of love” as formulated by Roland Barthes (see Barthes 1963; Ioffe 2008).

As if in order to prove the relevance of the association between the “Venus before the mirror” and the “Leda and the Bird” motifs (so important for the commercial poster under consideration), there exists a painting that combines both topoi: “Lascivia” (c. 1618) by Abraham Janssens (see Figure 14 or the less successful image at <https://www.adam-williams.com/object/789585/0/lascivia> (accessed on 25 September 2022)).



Figure 14. Abrahams Janssens. Lascivia (c. 1618) Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.<sup>14</sup>

Back to our poster/image: the “Swan” is represented not in immediate contact with the “Leda,” but interacting with her indirectly—through the ice cream cone. Nevertheless, the erotic drive is clearly outlined by the red-color sequence identified above: the ice cream ball; the bracelet on the girl’s forearm; the pink flower in her hair; the top of the bathing suit. This colorful dotted line then breaks off, but its erotic connotations are picked up by the suggestive folds of the white dress that simultaneously hide and accentuate (thanks to the

caressing breeze and the torso's dancing curves) the desired female groin, the *locus amoenus*, to which they definitely point. Incidentally, the white does not appear all that innocent here, as it is also the color of the seagull, who embodies passionate desire (gastronomic and sexual), and whose phallic left wing, the one closest to the girl and suggestive of erection, plays with the transition from white to black (the pitch-black at the top of the wing forming a pattern with the black of the girl's hair and of the cell phone).

In fact, the interplay of the two white-and-black figures is more ambiguous than it may seem at first glance. The "Swan," represented by a seagull (*chaika*), a bird, in Russian, of the feminine grammatical gender, plays—with respect to the distinctly phallic outline of the ice cream cone—an admittedly female oral sexual role: licking the penis (*fellatio*). The corresponding connotations of consuming ice cream are well-known and a popular topic of discussion.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the seagull turns out to be not only the seductive girl's symbolic male partner, but also her *alter ego*/*Doppelgaenger*. This enriches her erotic repertoire and expands the poster's potential sex appeal.

To be sure, there is more to the "White Wind" poster than its subliminal eroticism. The image of a bird coming down from the sky at the call of a human being, not necessarily of a woman and not necessarily for amorous purposes, carries a more general theme of power over the world, as, for instance, in Boris Pasternak's poem "A Dream" (1913, 1928):

Мне снилась осень в полусвете стекол,  
Друзья и ты в их шутовской гурьбе,  
И, как с небес добывший крови сокол,  
Спускалось сердце на руку к тебе.

(*I dreamed of autumn in the half-light of window panes, / My friends and you in their jesting crowd, / And like a falcon who has extracted blood from heaven, / My heart descended onto your hand*).

Our seagull is, of course, no falcon, nor does it bring its prey from the sky so much as it expects to benefit from ice cream on the ground, but a nod towards falconry is felt here as a sort of archetypal design. Cf. The image of a hunter of the 18th century (the times of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich) with a falcon on his hand: (<https://kulturologia.ru/files/u22291/222911144.jpg> (accessed on 25 September 2022); see Figure 15):



Figure 15. A Falcon Hunter.

But falconry was not so much a woman's as a man's pastime. In Valentin Serov's 1902 painting "Catherine II Setting out to Hunt with Falcons" (<http://www.bibliotekar.ru/kSerov/19.files/image001.jpg> (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 16) falcons are held by male rangers rather than by the Empress herself.



**Figure 16.** Valentin Serov. "Catherine II Setting out to Hunt with Falcons" (1902).

### 5. A Long-Awaited Point: Selfies

Taking pictures of herself with her smartphone, our heroine is indulging in an activity that is now practically universal: taking "selfies," i.e., literally speaking, "off-hand" self-portraits.<sup>16</sup> This suggests adding to the visual tradition (discussed above) the genre of self-portrait (usually in front of a mirror), which was practiced mainly by male artists and less frequently by women; as far as selfies are concerned, the opposite has been noted.

The most influential female self-portrait in the history of Russian painting appears to be Zinaida Serebryakova's "At the Dressing-Table. A self-portrait" (1909; [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Serebryakova\\_SefPortrait.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Serebryakova_SefPortrait.jpg) (accessed on 25 September 2022); Figure 17):



**Figure 17.** Zinaida Serebryakova. "At the Dressing-Table. A self-portrait" (1909).

a selfie is featured in a picture authored by an unknown third-party photographer (= the creator of the ad).

\* \* \*

I hope to have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the post-Soviet commercial image promoting a computer company's merchandise is well-rooted in the complex historical cultural tradition, especially visual, but also verbal, and in the archetypes that underpin it. This modern variation on the age-old themes both relies on the tradition in many subtle ways and creatively diverges from it by replacing

- a "Venus" before a mirror with a lightly clad selfie-taking modern beauty,
- Leda's sexually aggressive swan with an ice-cream hungry seagull
- and the genre of self-portrait with an apparently innocent but elaborately suggestive beach scene, a classical fleeting moment capturable nowadays by the advertised electronic device.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A revised and expanded version of (Zholkovsky 2013). My sincere thanks go to Dr. Christopher Gilman for editing the translation—A.Z.
- <sup>2</sup> It was there at the time of this essay's writing, in 2013, but, alas, not anymore.
- <sup>3</sup> My first attempt was (Zholkovsky 1983).
- <sup>4</sup> A slim, young and thus pointedly positive female model.
- <sup>5</sup> No specific smartphone model is being promoted; evidently, the company wants to advertise its summer offer in general.
- <sup>6</sup> There are two flowers there, the color of the other one, white, matching that of the beach and of the vanilla ice cream flavor.
- <sup>7</sup> The website is no longer accessible after the company was dissolved in 2015 (cf. the Wikipedia article: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Белый\\_ветер\\_\(компания\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Белый_ветер_(компания)) (accessed on 25 September 2022).
- <sup>8</sup> See (Freud [1914] 1964) and a redefinition of that classic study in (Kohut 1978).
- <sup>9</sup> Primarily but perhaps not exclusively: the ad is not only for men, but also for (young) women because the eroticism is rather veiled (and of course women often adopt these stereotypes) and combined with nice beach scenery and pastime. One could argue that the ad is neither completely gender neutral nor strictly for male customers, and this ambiguity raises its quality.
- <sup>10</sup> On that poem see (Zholkovsky 1994, pp. 148–63).
- <sup>11</sup> For my detailed analysis of Catullus' sparrow poems see (Zholkovsky 2017a, 2017b).
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. (Wallon 1983); (Lacan 1949); (Thévoz 1996); (Dolto and Nasio 2002); (Guillerault 2003); (Roussillon 2008a, 2008b).
- <sup>13</sup> See his magisterial literary work (Bataille 1928); cf. (Didi-Huberman 1995); (Mayné 2001, 2003).
- <sup>14</sup> The remarkable combination was observed, and the photograph kindly provided by Prof. Dennis Ioffe.
- <sup>15</sup> See for example: <http://lady.pravda.ru/articles/psycho/15-03-2013/9905-icecream/> (accessed on 25 September 2022). On icecream as an important iconography in pop art see (Sooke 2015).
- <sup>16</sup> On selfies see: (Qiu et al. 2015); (Sorokowski et al. 2015); (Stavans 2015); (Halpern et al. 2016); (Eler 2017); (Mills et al. 2018); (Storr 2018); (Veldhuis et al. 2020); (Raymond 2021).

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