Virtualization of Consciousness and Issue of External Control over "Human Technogenic"

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ABSTRACT
The study subject of the paper is philosophical analysis of virtualization of consciousness and the issue of external control over the "human technogenic". Comprehension of the new sociocultural type is presented with regard to continuing information streaming and the presence of virtual consciousness with a widely differing basis — ontological, gnoseological, technological, virtual, psychological, social, etc. Considering social representations and mechanisms of influence (at individual and group levels) is an important aspect of the study. The sociocultural approach, allowing determining specificity of consciousness virtualization, serves as a methodological basis of the study. The issue of formation of the new sociocultural type — the human technogenic, is studied on the basis of the anthropological approach. [1] The issue of "external control" over the human technogenic through the lens of the modern culture uniqueness is studied on the basis of analysis of the main factors of social dynamics with technological innovations. Scientific novelty of the study consists in 1) grounding the idea that the main trend in "external control" over social representations of the human technogenic is divorcement from reality and virtualization of individual's inner world, 2) justifying that a significant part of interpersonal relationships in the technological society, under conditions of modern reality, in the situation of continuing global information streaming is formed under the lens of technical devices, resulting in a changing structure of consciousness — it is being virtualized, and 3) grounding the idea that the process of consciousness virtualization itself is conditioned to the need of the modern individual for construction of subjective reality in the real-life space by means of simulacra, copies and virtual images-symbols.

Keywords: virtualization, virtual consciousness, social representations, human technogenic

I. INTRODUCTION

Studying social representations and mechanisms of influence (at individual and group levels) is an essential aspect of studies on consciousness virtualization and the issue of "external control" over the human technogenic.

The origins of the concept on social representations are traced in ideas of E. Durkheim and L. Lévy-Bruhl, who originally used the notion "collective representations". According to E. Durkheim, [2] social life is composed of social representations which form social consciousness – a phenomenon that is completely opposite to personal consciousness. In other words,

social representations are a complex cognitive formation of human, connected with a lot of psychic phenomena like memory, beliefs, ideologies and faiths. Most of these cognitive formations have not been fully studied yet, and basically they are unlikely to be studied, which certainly complicates mental processes. [3]

II. THEORY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

E. Durkheim explained the diametric difference between social and personal consciousness with the idea that their structural elements are formed by different grounds. He considered that social consciousness was based on collective representations, mainly expressed in group members' self-consciousness and their affiliation with the world. They express how group members comprehend themselves and their

connection to the world. At the same time, collective representations exist in individual's consciousness, controlling and dominating from the inside. E. Durkheim insisted that appearance of collective representations was not inherent to individual consciousness.

Any social representations contain, along with conceptual knowledge, specific virtual images-symbols. For example, when recalling an event, the individual remembers not only the representation of this event itself but also a virtual reference image, consisting of symbols. This very virtual image-symbol allows the individual to admit a new reality reflexively. Studying individual's virtual sphere of images as a channel of "external control" refers to vivid existential experiences. As a rule, it contains an irrational component that refers to peculiarities of the modern technological landscape of the world. The worldview of modern reality is reflected through the lens of social representations which bring to light people's ideals and their needs. At the same time, the irrational component serves a crucial regulator of social life, influencing the images of social reality at individual and group levels.

Virtual images-symbols are a "multilayer structure, conceptual perspective, the explanation and understanding of which makes the interpreter work with different-level codes", [4] i.e. each layer of the symbol contains its own different-level code, requiring individual interpretation. Three large groups of code levels can be singled out: physical (appearing as a result of lapping of one information over another), psychological (appearing due to the existence of differences in individuals' perception of the world around them), semantic (appearing because of individuals' ability to interpret different notions (signs, symbols, etc.) loosely). "In this context, interpretation is an activity of thinking, consisting in decoding of the meaning that is behind the obvious meaning, in uncovering the levels of the meaning, enclosed in the literal meaning, or, in other words, interpretation takes place where there is a complicated meaning, and this very interpretation allows to identify multiplicity of meanings". [4] In other words, virtual images-symbols are always polysemic and have a serious meaning; at the same time, they are not illusions or fiction but serve a specific form of expressing reality because they reflect authentic and specific reality.

Signals of any physical nature that are available to the sense organs are symbol bearers. "Information of the symbol is a meaning that already exists in recipient's mind or is attributed to it immediately (it's concerning the question whether a symbol can have an impact if a person does not know the meaning of the symbol). Volume of the symbol information is not linked with the symbol significance for a specific person. That's why the symbol significance is a

semantic measure of the symbol information volume when it is perceived and later processed in one's mind. The symbol significance can be described as a meaning". [5] Therefore, studying "external control" over the human technogenic implies interpretation of content of the influencing symbols. A modern person is controlled, to a greater or lesser degree, by virtual images-symbols as they have an effect on individual's inner world, using the widest range of forms, methods and means of efficient influence. One of the most striking and universal means of such control is involvement of different semiotic systems, built in individual's personal consciousness. Different semiotic categories, historically built in individual's personal consciousness, are used depending on inventiveness and goals of creators in virtual images-symbols. Herewith, they overlay modern reality, thus identifying the properties of different well-known symbols with the properties of the ones that are still unknown. In other words, the symbol meaning is laid in the archetypical memory, and when the information contained in it is being decoded, it will have an effect at the level of unconscious spheres of mind. Besides, science knows a phenomenon of "subtle experiences" of the individual from the contact with specific symbols, when he/she feels the specificity of "radiation", i.e. energy and information influence. For example, this identification results in "symbolic" intentionality of consciousness, caused by an irrational component of a known symbol, or the attention focus on a recognizable symbol that can substitute reality images in consciousness. These representations, reflecting peculiarities of the world landscape of the modern era, are a component of social representations that are dominating at the moment.

All the cultural and historical practice of humanity is unthinkable without signs and symbols. They run through everyday life, rites and rituals of people, mythology and religion, politics and philosophy, ethics and aesthetics, heraldry and astrology, visual arts and literature, theatre and music and all forms of human vital activity. However, symbols are used most of all in the process of "external control" over human. For instance, symbols are meant for giving a meaning to phenomena of human life. Symbols allow a person to order his/her ideas about the world, to make this world more understandable, structured and definite. For examples, the Gilyak, an ethnic group that inhabits the northern half of Sakhalin, showed particular deference to the bear. They believed that the bear was a sacred animal and symbolized strength, courage and longevity. This faith gave a meaning to their lives, going far beyond their rational knowledge.

Therefore, the main trend in "external control" over social representations of the human technogenic is divorcement from reality and virtualization of individual's inner world. Control over virtualized

consciousness systematizes information sources and gives the right direction for its perception.

III. MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE (AT INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP LEVELS)

Advertising and ideology are one of the mechanisms of "external control" over the human technogenic at individual and group levels. For example, advertising artificially makes an individual feel that someone always takes care of him/her, gives some tips, helps, replenishes the deficiency in commodities, the value of which is doubtful, as he/she understands. For example, an anti-plaque spray with only two calories, cigarettes for "real men", a sugar-free Orbit or a detergent that differs from similar products only by its package, and so on. However, a person, understanding all the uselessness of the offered products, buys them anyway driven by advertisements, but at the same time, he/she does not buy the clothes, stocks, beverages, food or cars but the created image of these goods.

The nature of advertising has changed and evolved in terms of its quality. Advertising has come a long way from provision of information to suggestion, from suggestion to development of a consumer's reflex, then — to control over consciousness at individual and group levels. Therefore, it can be said that advertising changes over time, gradually developing from a means of simple informatization of society into one of the most important factors of forming mass consciousness — "a peculiar, specific type of social consciousness, inherent to significant unstructured great numbers of people ("masses"), [6] i.e. a set of the most important components of most people's consciousness. Therefore, advertising today is "not a logic of thesis or evidence, but a logic of legend and involvement into it. We don't believe in it, but it is dear to us." An individual may not believe in the real product, but he/she believes the advertisement and the image, created with virtual images-symbols. It is a case of a "Santa Claus phenomenon". Children do not really think about real existence of Santa Claus and about a connection between this fairy-tale character and the presents they get from him. As children grow up, they slowly stop believing in Santa Claus himself but keep believing the magic of getting presents. Therefore, faith is more a link between fantasy (Santa Claus) and reality (getting presents). Using different symbols, advertising communication works on the same principle — it doesn't try proving anything to an individual but only lures him/her into a "trap of his/her own desire". Like children, individuals do not really wonder if the content of the advertised product (reality) coincides with the content of the created image (pseudo-reality). Just like a "falcon always flies to a red leather rag that looks like a bird", an individual follows it, follows the illusion that,

being repeated several times, imparts "absolute reality to the objects that captivates us. It's not about faith or delusion, the bait is a sort of recognition of the infinite power of temptation". [7]

Like the faith in Santa Claus gives a feeling of fairy-tale, endless childhood, magic, etc. to children, advertising, using virtual images-symbols, creates a specific atmosphere the product is placed in, it gives illusion to the individual, endowing the goods sold with qualities that initially were not inherent to them. As a result, the latter stops being just an object, offered to the customer; it turns into a kind of a symbol, image, with which one or another feeling, behaviour or desire are associated. That's how trademarks and brands that become more important than the goods itself (the form outweighs the content) are created. [7] An individual becomes controllable, "adjusted" [5] to the common standard, to the general tendency of social representations. Deviation from the standard causes a feeling of cognitive dissonance. As a result, the individual reflexively becomes a part of a common spontaneous flow of information and starts behaving accordingly. Of course, the processes of "external control" take place with different efficiency indices, depending on various factors, in particular the individual's ability to perceive information, personal peculiarities and so on. Herewith, virtual images-symbols, existing in society, become an immanent part of individual's inner world.

Virtual consciousness with a widely differing basis — ontological, gnoseological, technological, virtual, psychological, social, etc., is present under conditions of modern reality, in the situation of continuing information streaming. This very information and virtual basis with its connections and interactions is a basic platform that determines and integrates virtual consciousness, which is an information field, within which communication with a subjective image of the objective world, capable of reflecting and creating the being, takes place. In other words, virtual consciousness is a part of consciousness that is a sort of reflection of virtual reality or a form of adaptation to it, because "creation is directly connected with reality, and that's where structures of this reality are reflected; virtual reality is reproduction of some images of objective reality in consciousness which are perceived as independent reality but actually are not this reality. [5]

If looking through the lens of epistemological grounding, virtual consciousness is self-reflection, i.e. a subjective image of virtual reality. In terms of ontology, it is a type of individual and social consciousness, having such properties as interactivity, obviousness, autonomy, urgency, generation, etc. According to the physiological grounding, it is an ability of brain to construct simulation worlds and to navigate them. According to the psychological grounding, virtual

consciousness relies on senses, perceptions, representations, feelings, caused by virtual reality itself. From the viewpoint of the social grounding, these are feelings, formed due to immersion in various virtualized spheres of social being. [8]

IV. CONCLUSION

Therefore, transformation of individual's consciousness in modern reality and individual's becoming a human technogenic is conditional to an objective image of reality, which includes specific historical events, peculiarities of the era, the level of technological development, conditions of the being, etc. [9] At the same time, developing the issue of "external control" over the human technogenic, we come to a conclusion that the process of consciousness virtualization itself is conditional to modern individual's needs in constructing subjective reality in the space of real life using simulacra, copies and virtual images-symbols. [10]. The objective basis of "external control" is the influence with individual's social perception through different person-centered techniques in order to make a virtual and techno-information effect both on the certain individual's mind and on social communities of people. Information influence techniques allow the individual to subjectively transform his/her own existential and value orientations and, at the same time, not to realize the presence of a preliminary set vector in interpretation of real facts. Such transformations are caused by an invisible external influence on the cultural core of the human technogenic, ideas about good and evil, peace and war and so on. So, finding him-/herself in the virtual space of modern reality, an individual accepts the rules of the game, builds virtual worlds and sets specific rules him-/herself. A significant – in terms of meanings – trait of consciousness virtualization is perception of social being as a kind of a game, which is perceived by the individual through the lens of the psychology of a "playing human". For most people, the set simulation images, mixed with projections of individual fantasies and social illusions become a reality. In the total game world, everything becomes a game, and the player becomes gaming addicted. Modern information technologies, in their turn, meet increasing gaming needs of individuals. A person finds it increasingly difficult to notice substitutions, because the game blurs the lines between imagination and reality, fantasy and real life. However, at the same time the "game world" can set free a "world of breakup" in certain circumstances. [11] Virtual images-symbols, circulating in society, get immanent qualities of person's inner world. All the information perceived is accumulated in individual's subconsciousness, and a good part of it contains a negative charge, destroying the spiritual equilibrium. For example, destructive images blur the spiritual and moral foundations. In other worlds, this process carries both constructive and destructive potential. Therefore, one of the main tasks for the human technogenic is not to lose their individuality in the illusory environment, which is becoming increasingly important for them but, at the same time, which develops a risk of appearance of new addictions.

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