

Humanitarian-anthropological Aspects of Contemporary Education (Philosophical Analysis)*

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Abstract—The author presents the philosophical conceptual foundations of an individual of a modern era in the context of his involvement in humanitarian and educational processes. The essence of an individual is introduced as a reflective center of a modern culture. The author analyzes the main features of the cultures of modernity and postmodernity in their conjunction with the corresponding changes in human life and the possibilities for the socio-cultural identification. The author notes the radically transformed nature of the real social relations in the era of modernity era, now gravitating towards simulative relations of the postmodernity, as reflected in education and culture.

Keywords—contemporary education; mass media; posthuman; human of modernity; simulacrum; sociality; mediatization; humanitarization of education; informational knowledge; autopoiesis

I. INTRODUCTION

A holistic consideration of a person is possible only in his representation in the epoch, in the depth of temporal space, in which a personal history is inscribed. Moreover, an individual reflects with own life the state of society, the conditions of culture and education. Keeping with the position that the history of social development is undergoing currently the stages of "modernity" and "postmodernity" with the relevant qualitative changes in all the spheres (economic, political, educational, social, cultural), let us note, that an individual of modernity is an immanent "product" of his *own time* with the emerging conceptual justifications and narratives, while an individual of postmodernity has *his own* imprint of the radically altered state of society. The dynamics of transformation from modernity to postmodernity is a transition to society, having qualitatively *different* grounds and characteristics in comparison to the preceding era. Profound and accelerated transformation of the aforementioned transition left its mark on the changed nature of an individual: a postmodern person differs radically from the one of modernity by the mere fact of belonging to the

other culture and by estimating in another way the social changes, emergence of new institutions, among them a significant place is occupied by education.

Speaking of a postmodern individual we mean the one, "brought up" by this era, as it is possible to live in the era of postmodernity being the representative of modernity or even the traditional society. We will talk further about the traits of a person, carrying the imprint of postmodern time; exactly those socio-cultural and educational processes and contradictions that involve and concern him, even if an individual is not a cause and has no chance to resolve certain conflicts.

It doesn't matter how we define the era - "postmodernity", "second modernity", or "radical modernity". What matters to us are the qualitative foundations, identifying the ontological certainty of a person and the social life, inherent to him. Obviously, the modern days significantly change the state of a person, his way of living and perception of the world around, educational reflective forms and technological means of obtaining knowledge.

II. THE IMAGES OF MODERN AND POSTMODERN INDIVIDUALS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN EDUCATION

The philosophical discourse of modernity and postmodernity contains anthropological issues, examines the problems of human existence, culture, education, and identification in the world of increasing complexity. In the theoretical consideration of the transformation from modernity to postmodernity, we conceptually outline *an image of a person*, closely associated with his own era and the changes, occurring during this transformation. In this article, we are talking about the era of "late" or "radical" modernity (under the notion of Z. Bauman), covering the last decade of the 20th century and gradually transforming into the postmodernity in the early 21st century.

Modernity as the object of the thinkers' reflections shows how the occurring processes destroy and "smelt" previously sustainable communicative links and institutional structures. For example, the J. Habermas' consideration of contemporaneity as an "incomplete project", supposes the

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completion of the modernization processes of a society. Habermas believes that it is necessary to rationalize the modern "life-world", to restore communicative understanding in the space system of the changed reality. In his "Modernity - An Incomplete Project" he substantiates historically the definition of "modernity": it has always expressed the "consciousness of an era" in the transition from the old to the new". It is possible to be aware of oneself as a modern person, i.e., relevant to the "Zeitgeist", in any given historical period, from antiquity to the present day. According to Habermas, modernity is immanently connected to the Zeitgeist and is far from leaving the historical stage. The project of modernity is still not exhausted, so we rather need "to draw a lesson, than to admit defeat of modernity and its project" [1; P. 15].

Postmodernism as a special form of philosophy of the late 20th – early 21st century, draws the dividing border with the Enlightenment in its description of an individual as a "holistically centered being, unified individual with the unity of mind, consciousness, and activity" [2; P. 97]. A human being and his uniqueness were concentrated in the definition of "personality" in modernity. In postmodernity the subjectivity dissolves in sociality, which also disappears, being transformed into new forms, giving rise to something essentially different.

A postmodern individual is radically different, moreover, he is a phenomenon of the entirely new model of life, even comparing to an individual of a preceding era of late modernity. In the works of postmodernists, a subject is "divided" into multiple functions, planes, social and personal roles, which is probably connected with the division of social life into different spheres (political, economical, cultural), that weaken, dissolve, and transform into other types, are "ephemeral", hyperreal (J. Baudrillard) [3], media-mythological.

A society in the postmodernity becomes discrete, fragmented, a logic of unified communications is broken. Human life also becomes fragmented: short life spans surface, presenting the immediacy of the short-term life goals. The erosion of social institutions, deregulation, and disintegration of their structures lead to the fact, that an individual is constantly in search of a new identity, new ways of life, forced to design new images and meanings of existence, attain new identities. This happens so fast and often, that the mere existence turns into a chain of multidirectional movements, where only an extraordinary willpower may help to reach the goal. The unstable, precarious state of society with radically transformed institutional characteristics led to the fact that the *social* in postmodernity should be reviewed in a *qualitatively* different perspective.

Contemporary philosophers and sociologists, when analyzing the postmodern society through the prism of radically different social relations, notice the emergence of a "posthuman" or "digital human", being an attribute of postmodernity. Technology increases its power over humans to such an extent, that the latter can no longer be regarded as the solely empowered subject of a society. A person gets

pushed away to the background of the rapid technological development of the mediatized world that also affects the acquisition of knowledge in the educational process. The society and identity are losing their former characteristics [4]. Digital Human is now a symbol of the postmodern era, being just an individual, a lonely atom, not able to absorb and analyze huge bulk of information on the Internet.

We find significant the reflective images of a postmodern person, presented by the British philosopher Z. Bauman and regarding the social and personal dynamics in the society's transition from the "modernity" to the "radical modernity" or postmodernity. According to Bauman, the radical transformation of modernity starts in the middle of the 20th century and leads to a social order with the qualitatively new principles and forms of existence. Comparing the phases of "modernity" and "postmodernity", the philosopher analyzes this transition from the perspective of its social consequences and impacts on an individual and his cultural identity, adaptation to a dynamically changing environment. His approach seems to us to be a kind of a new methodology that allows considering postmodernity as the "individualized society". While doing so, the interconnection between the changing human nature and profound social processes plays the most significant role [5].

The human practice in the age of modernity was so fixed and restricted, that in most cases people sought not to maintain certainty and stability but to overcome them. Hence, apparently, is the source of Bauman's findings of the "heavy modernity", determining and cementing the human life. The status of individuals of the "liquid modernity", i.e. the late modernity, the jobs to which they can have access, opportunities and perspectives transform quickly and can no longer serve as a reliable life goal. "Blurring", "fragility" of those goals, the loss of stability, the uncertainty of the future are the traits of the late modernity, indicating a transition to postmodernity. Bauman highlights in-depth changes, particularly, in the information and media sectors, which have radically changed the socio-cultural background of the modern world.

Modernity was an institutional historical era, "institution, establishing the rules" (Z. Bauman). Modernity's established structural organization was imperfect, but still the *social* was represented in institutionalized and legal forms. Postmodernity, in our opinion, loses much of its institutional features, as it is devoid of many traditional stable structures of modernity – the state, public, political, economic ones. Postmodernity is *not institutional*. That is why the postmodernists note in their works such features of the period as the erosion of the institutional forms, the "disappearance" of the social, and its emergence in new, previously non-existing forms [6, 7].

The institutions of education and economy serve as a good example. They are being transformed into such types and structures, which were absent in educational and economic spheres even in the late modernity. The forms of social life in postmodernity, even more, remind the simulacra of the earlier ties, and the usual principles of existence have lost universal meaning, value and moral grounds.

III. INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY AND EDUCATION

It should be emphasized that the "offense" of postmodernity is not connected solely with the individualization of an individual, but also with the deepening processes of his identification. The problem of identity is acute in the contemporary times, changing its appearance and content, and depending largely on an education of a person, his reflective abilities and, particularly, the ability to analyze the current changes. Nowadays the identity basis of an individual is the result of the destruction of the former forms of social life. The erosion of the social institutions leads to a greater uncertainty in human lives, bringing the concentrated *episodic* nature to the personal histories. Social time is now experienced in a new way. The most important trait of postmodernity is the compression of time and the subsequent reduction of the infinitely expanding time to the current moment only. A sense of transience and the infinite succession of moments/episodes of life leads to the fact that the person ceases to feel himself the master and the creator of the external condition for his own existence. The conditions in which a person is included – including the cultural, educational, and financial ones – loom over him and hinder his quest for identity.

Dissonance with the inherited feeling of stability, inner confidence in self, is getting more and more obvious in the postmodern era. Instead of traditionally-defined affiliations in the world (depending on a choice of profession, education obtained, moral and religious self-evaluation etc.) comes fragility, chaotic distribution of social roles, the atomization, and disintegration of social space. An individual is found in a society, where the old relations, behavioral patterns have been destroyed, and where the notion of value is tentative, because the criteria of value and axiological evaluation disappear because of the infinite scattering, crushing, and the artificial reproduction of the artifacts. According to the famous remark of J. Baudrillard, culture, media, advertising in such a society reach the status of "Xerox" [8].

A subject is forced to perform daily lots of social roles, more reminiscent curious "games" with the constant quick and subtle changes in the rules and formats of the said "games". J-F. Lyotard called them "language-games". Individual's stability and success now depend on how quickly he is able to break own behavioral patterns in order to enter (or adapt to) the new rules of the game, the changes of which are not announced.

Let us note, that this way of existence is presented (primarily by the media) as a natural way of existence. Contemporary society becomes a "risk society" but not only on the economic but also on mental educational, cultural levels. The result of this society is the ultimate subjective individualization, in which an individual is aimed in his thoughts and thinking of himself only, while other people are mere parts of the hostile world with that one should somehow co-exist while not letting it inside, avoiding it becoming an inherent part of self.

Sure enough, the objective social processes transform radically the mentality of people, but also provide at the same time a new face for a contemporary society, a new

model of interpersonal relations, requiring human activity even to a greater extent than before. It is vital nowadays to have control over the situation, social events, resources, informational sphere. A person should have back more or less sustainable version of the future to make the life more secure and predictable. The key to the solution of the problems must be sought in the elimination of the causes of managerial helplessness of the existing social and political institutions, in removing the feeling of inanity and futility of human actions. Education may play a major role since the personal level of education largely affects the possibility of a potential self-identification. In our opinion, the major humanitarian issue of a modern education is a discrete attitude to the every member of the society.

IV. SOCIETY'S MEDIATIZATION AND EDUCATION

Considering the culture and education of our contemporary era, it is necessary to examine closely the society's susceptibility to the influence of media products, the growing impact of digital information technology, facilitating instant distribution of media messages. The new digital media, that emerged at the end of the 20th century, thanks to the networking, powerful stratification and structuring of the media, the expanding audience of the consumers, constantly circulating information at the beginning of the 21st century, formed a special institution and started to determine the life and operation of both an individual and a society as a whole. Such mediatization of society has naturally entitled the mediatization of the social institution of education.

The functioning self-sufficient (*autopoietic* in terms of N. Luhmann) information system creates and shapes public opinion, at the same time covertly manipulating it within the framework of an entire country. By constantly broadcasting media myths, the aforementioned system constructs a "second", unreal reality [9]. The nature of communications between media and a person is thus specific and largely simulative, as the real interpersonal relationship is replaced by the communication of an individual with the technological devices, a human and a screen. People get gradually used to this kind of relations, being brought up with the *likeness* of the forms of *social interaction*, and feeling a deep need for the real interaction in their lives.

The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek describes the state of the contemporary people as both "interpassive and interactive" in their relation to media. The growing mediatization of society led to the situation when media sort of "endure" or "replace" the feelings, experience, thoughts of people involved in the process of mutual communication [10; P. 200]. Television, e.g., creates a situation when the participants of the shows, discussions suffer, worry, love, resent *instead of those watching* the show. Media is the "scapegoat" or the "surrogate victim", replacing the real human relations and transferring them into the category of virtual media [11; P. 1196].

All these processes gradually penetrate into the education, demonstrating vividly the superficiality, lack of depth of knowledge and development of creativity. IT, developing in

the direction of perfecting the simulative functions, replace many of the students' actions, including the productive imagination, memory and logical thinking.

Consumption of the continuously incoming information almost eliminates critical analysis, a reflection of everything presented by the media. Created and unceasingly broadcasted models of the world are perceived as "own", immanently inherent to a specific subject, gated through a personal experience, and therefore objective and true. The dominance of media significantly changes the sense of self, the critical ways of perceiving the world, the reflection on the received information [12]. The society becomes subservient to the all-pervasive media information, appearing as self-sufficient and self-fulfilling institutional power. In fact, the media presents the studying human not only the actual content of knowledge but also provide a subjective context, the latent evaluation of the facts. Thus, the "real reality" (N. Luhmann) is replaced in the mind of an individual with an illusory one, artificially constructed by the media with the dominance of signs, simulacra, media myths, simulation of real interactions of the communicating subjects.

As a result, people, even those highly educated, are almost unable to distinct *objectivity* from *simulation*, imitation, fine substitution. There is a problem of obtaining the true knowledge, since the gap between truth and falsehood, objectivity and illusion is almost eliminated in the information society [13].

It is next to impossible to recognize the truth in the constant flow of information and the media products. This largely depends on the level-structured meanings, messages, and interpretations, and the diversity of understanding, decryption of transmitted messages, images, and meanings. As a matter of fact, media information, whatever forms it takes, leads to infinity of subjective interpretations, uncertainty, and speculations in the discussion of the transmitted content.

Hence, the main task of forming the reflective abilities, in our opinion, is assigned to education. Only effective education may help an individual in his opposition to the huge never-ending flows of information, resisting to perception and analysis [14]. Educational practices should be aimed at the formation of the analytical abilities of the subjects of the educational process.

V. CONCLUSION

Summing up, let us note that the world of postmodernity is far more complex to a human being than the previous world of modernity. Philosophical-anthropological questions are being gradually replaced by the technological ones; they seem to be *confiscated* by the machines and the latest technological innovations. Cyberspace, virtualization blur the boundaries between the real life and technical simulation, objective reality and its illusory image. The individualized society has set the instability of human life. The discordant path of an individual is filled with unnecessary risks, loss of certainty and self-identity in the eternal struggle for making the right decision.

We are convinced that only the dialogue of culture and education can help a person to self-identify in this world and to choose the own life path.

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