

Phenomenon of virtual reality in the structure of everyday life

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Abstract. The paper presents the results of a socio-philosophical analysis of virtual reality. The authors explore the concept of virtual reality in the context of human existence, everyday life. Having created a virtual environment in the image and likeness of a real society, a person turned it into a new sphere of socio-cultural activity. There have been changes in the structure of human consciousness related to the need to adapt to the conditions of virtuality. A person of the new information age is homo virtualis, a subject of virtual reality – a new socio-cultural environment, the cognition of which is carried out through virtual consciousness characterized by clip thinking. The study of the stated problem is carried out by methods of dialectical cognition, literature analysis, synthesis and modeling of socio-cultural phenomena. The presented review reflects the multidimensionality and ambiguity of the studied phenomenon. According to the authors, in the foreseeable future, virtual reality will become an independent cultural phenomenon (cyberculture), or it will completely absorb the human mind, building its world according to its own laws. One thing we can say for sure: virtuality is more indeterminate than objective reality, and its main properties will remain unpredictability and uncertainty. It is concluded that by creating a virtual environment in the image and likeness of a real society, a person has turned it into a new sphere of socio-cultural activity. There have been changes in the structure of human consciousness related to the need to adapt to the conditions of virtuality.

Keywords: virtuality, reality, everyday life, information technology, man, society, clip thinking

1 Introduction

The scale of modern social transformations has adopted a truly global format, the digital revolution has rapidly turned all spheres of human existence almost “under way” forming new mechanisms and principles of socio-cultural interactions. The dynamics of changes taking place in society are so rapid today that before the eyes of one generation we are witnessing a change in a number of technological cycles following each other at incredible speed. Having crossed the line of the fourth industrial revolution, humankind entered the era of the formation of a completely new habitat, a new type of society – information society, which integrated two types of social reality: post-industrial and globalizing. It has only been a few decades since the humankind entered an information age that, from a project of the distant future, has become the reality of the present, where the dominant role is assigned to high technology, network communications and virtual reality [1].

The humankind, having created a “second nature” – a world of things transformed for its needs – went further and, complicating the latter, creates a “third nature”: artificial, digital, informational. This is a new space – there is a synthetic product of close interaction

of material production, which has become the apogee of scientific and technological progress, automation and digital technologies that have rapidly burst into our lives.

Information technologies today have penetrated so deeply into human existence and consciousness that they have changed not only the nature, but the very essence of social processes. One of the markers of this transformation is the phenomenon of virtual reality. Virtual reality is an alternative sphere of existence, a real-world map created using a computer [2]. A person could have gotten into virtuality before while watching a movie, reading a book or looking at a picture, but at the same time they remained a passive viewer (reader). The Internet, as the main virtual environment of our time, allows users to be active participants in the action (from the point of view of perception), giving a person access to an endless stream of information and unlimited opportunities for self-realization.

The rapid spread of information technologies and the popularization of virtual reality predetermined the interest in the study of this phenomenon from the standpoint of various sciences. What is the essence of virtuality? How does it affect human existence? What processes does it affect and how is it manifested? Understanding these questions determines the relevance

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of considering virtual reality in the context of the present study.

The concept of virtual reality theoretically developed in the late 1970s. According to F. Hemith, the term “virtual reality” was invented at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to refer to the projection of the real world created by computers [3]. However, most authors consider an American scientist and programmer J. Lanier the “father of virtual reality”. He proposed 35 definitions of virtual reality at once in 1989, which finally fixed this term in the scientific community [4].



Fig. 1. Virtual reality.

2 Materials and Methods

The purpose of the work is to study the phenomenon of virtual reality in the structure of everyday life.

The study of the topic is based on current sources in the field of theory and history of culture, social psychology, philosophy, cultural studies.

The study was based on generally accepted approaches in science: dialectical, philosophical and cultural, structural and functional.

The conceptual foundations for the study of the virtual reality phenomenon in post-classical philosophy were developed by V.V. Afanasyev, J. Baudrillard, D.V. Ivanov, A. Kroker, N.A. Nosov, E.E. Taratuta, P. Tillich, S.S. Khoruzhy and others [5, p. 6]. In the context of this work, the approach of D.V. Ivanov, who developed the ideas of J. Baudrillard about simulacra, presents the greatest interest. According to D.V. Ivanov, virtual reality as a simulation of real things and actions has the following features:

- intangibility (virtual creates the effect of presence typical of material);
- convention (virtual environment is created by a person, and its parameters are non-constant and modifiable);
- ephemerality (a person can leave and return to virtual reality at any time, and thereby interrupt (continue) interaction) [6].

In our opinion, it is these attributes that form the basis for the study of virtual reality in social philosophy and the sociology of culture. I.I. Bulychev notes another important sign of virtuality – its secondary nature,

mediation from the physical world: those spheres of life that are initially constitutively virtual become virtual – for example, the sphere of social communications [7, p. 33]. Through virtualization, communication becomes global and interactive, involving an unlimited number of people from around the world [8].

3 Results and Discussion

In the modern world, the problem of self-determination and self-realization is key in human life [1]. Virtuality also leaves its imprint on these processes, primarily the World Wide Web. On the one hand, the Internet weakens the mechanisms of reflection, limiting a person's ability to think critically, thereby standardizing behavior models, worldview, identity [9]. The more virtualization a person's consciousness is subjected to, the more his spirituality is replaced by virtual, synthetic spirituality. On the other hand, information today is a key factor that determines the development of society as a whole and an individual in particular. The development of information technologies contributes to the acceleration of globalization, the unification of humankind within the framework of a single sociocultural reality based on the recognition of human life, personal self-development and “cosmopolitan solidarity” (according to J. Habermas [10, p. 21].

In general, the impact of the Internet on the virtualization of everyday life can be expressed as follows:

- the Internet contributes to the development of horizontal ties, the formation of egalitarian social relations;
- the access to the Internet is open to everyone, and information is not imposed, but offered for free use;
- the World Wide Web promotes the unification of people, the creation of local communities that are perceived as alternatives to traditional social layers (groups);
- the Internet contributes to the virtualization of social relations, the emergence of new types of interaction [11, p. 88].

According to O.A. Polyushkevich, with the further immersion of humankind in cyberspace, the definition of the boundaries of permissible freedom will become a big problem: impunity for actions on the Internet leads to the formation of destructive behavior associated with the absence of fear for committing an action due to the lack of punishment for this [12, p. 171]. However, a much greater threat is Internet addiction, which is still not included in the ICD as a separate type of mental disorder, while possessing a number of characteristics [13, p. 89]. The fundamental difference between the Internet user and the Internet addict is that for the first the World Wide Web is a means of establishing social contacts, and for the second – a means of avoiding reality, similar to the “escape from freedom” by Erich Fromm – i.e., ignoring personal and public problems, avoiding responsibility, etc. [14–16].



Fig. 2. Collage of consciousness.

“Escape from freedom of reality”, writes G.I. Tronin, “is due to the boundlessness of freedom itself on the Web. A person, increasingly immersing in cyberspace, imperceptibly finds himself in the “shackles of virtuality”, limiting its real freedom and establishing zero responsibility for something...” [12, p. 42]. On the one hand, a person on the Internet gains new abilities, whether it is anonymity or a variety of ways to express and self-present. However, on the other hand, all these qualities are conditional and ephemeral and in no way affect the development of the user’s real identity.

Having created a virtual environment in the image and likeness of a real society, a person turned it into a new sphere of sociocultural activity [17]. The structure of human consciousness has undergone changes related to the need to adapt to the conditions of virtuality. So, one of the features of the personality of the Internet era is “distributed consciousness”: almost every user of the Web during the session simultaneously interacts with several information channels, be it various social networks, instant messengers or tabs in the browser [18, p. 58].

It is also interesting that over time the brain learns to distinguish between useful and useless information. Thus, one of the key skills of the modern user is formed – the ability and readiness to independently search for information (solutions). This thesis completely contradicts the belief that the computer and the Network are the same manipulators by public consciousness as the TV and the media [19, p. 1187]. In some cases, distribution, according to V. I. Ignatiev, “can border on schizophrenia”, however, in general, the ability to work in multitasking mode is not only useful, but also a skill necessary for most modern professions [18, p. 59].

The distribution of consciousness determines another feature of virtual consciousness – polyphonicity: communication on the Web is perceived not as a

dialogue, but as a polylogue – a product of interaction of all users. The World Wide Web is built on the principle of hypertextuality, in which each new text placed in virtual reality is the continuation of the other through a system of hyperlinks or intertextual associations [13, p. 90]. Therefore, any object placed in virtual reality automatically becomes a participant in a polylogue, a product of collective mind – and, according to the definition of R. Barthes, this leads to the “death of the author” [2].

This algorithm (principle), according to which interaction and communication in virtual reality is built, is called semantic resonance: being in virtual reality, the final result or response does not depend on a specific user but is a product of one user’s perception of all meanings and opinions that exist in this virtuality [18, p. 60].

Another characteristic feature of virtual consciousness is collage. This concept in a certain context is a synonym for the term “clip thinking” and means information in the form of the simplest forms – collages (“clips”), which are simple in perception and convenient for transmission [7, p. 38].

The formation of perception collage was the result of an oversupply of information on the Web. On the one hand, such a mechanism allows simplifying the process of cognition, makes it fast and pleasant. On the other hand, the stronger the division, the less value the clip carries as a source of information, which ultimately leads to a loss of perception integrity.

Collage, or clipping, became a lifestyle and an attribute of consciousness even before the advent of the Internet, which only accelerated the tendency to “one-dimensional consciousness” (according to H. Marcuse) [20]. Pragmatism and primitivism of the 21st century led a person, on the one hand, to the need to single out only the most important from the general information flow,

on the other hand, to simplify, flatten the ways of presenting information and, at the same time, to its rapid depreciation.

4 Conclusion

Thus, we come to the conclusion that a person of the new information era is homo virtualis, the subject of virtual reality, primarily the Internet, a new sociocultural environment, which is understood through virtual consciousness being a product of media culture and Internet communication.

The key features of virtual consciousness are: hypertextuality (presentation of information as cross-reference systems), collage (fragmented perception of information), polyphonism (absence of the author), distribution (multitasking).

It is possible that in the foreseeable future virtual reality will become an independent cultural phenomenon (cyber culture), or completely absorb the human mind, building its world according to its own laws. One thing we can say for sure: virtuality is more indeterminate than objective reality, and its main properties will remain unpredictability and uncertainty.

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