Virtual Reality: Pro et Contra

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the dual nature of virtuality as a sociocultural phenomenon, which enables the outlining of recommendations for ensuring the integrity of a holistic personality and its stability in a world subject to transformation. The study is based on the methodology of systemic and structural research; comparative induction method; principle of complementarity; method of participant observation. The effectiveness of the study is determined by the following conclusions: The dual nature of virtuality correlates with the dual nature of a human, who is both an actual biological organism functioning at the level of the information system and a potential social organism functioning at the level of the conceptual system; if the information system forms an orientation to the priority of the individual over the collective (egoism), then the conceptual system forms an orientation to the priority of the collective over the individual (altruism); in contrast to the information system, which restricts the entire diversity of the individual's life to a reaction to the natural reflex, the conceptual system frees the individual from the dictate of the biological program through reflection; interaction with virtual reality can either fix the status of a passive consumer to an individual, whose consciousness as a correlate of an information system represents an ideal object for all kinds of manipulations, or initiate the birth of a creative person with a spiritual identity, which is acquired in the unity of information and conceptual systems; virtual reality as an integral component of the Global Internet, the actualization of which is determined solely by external actions from the side of the user (pressing a processor button, paying for the Internet, maintaining the equipment in working condition, etc.) acts as the simulacrum of an individual conceptual system, the updating of which is possible only through the inside of the conducted organization of the information system; the universal "simulator" providing the desired unity of information and conceptual systems is the art, which is due to the isomorphism of a human and the text of culture; if the true unity of the information and conceptual systems is the guarantor of the positive deviation of the individual, then the simulation of the desired unity through the external interaction of the individual and virtual reality generated by the Global Network inevitably becomes a source of negative deviation due to the fact that such virtual reality does not change anything in the biological substrate, saturating information system with additional information.

Key words: virtual reality, emotivity, meaning formation, individual information system, meaning, value.

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Introduction

In descriptions of the nature of virtual reality, as a rule, attention is paid to the dichotomy of true/untrue, real/unreal (illusory), and genuine/not genuine (Ivanov, 2000; Luginina, 2016; Robbins et al., 2019; Romanov, 2003; Saenko et al., 2020; Watson, 2020). Moreover, defined as a simulation, virtual reality often generates a negative connotation. In this case, it is viewed as a space artificially created by computer technology that can absorb the Internet user so much that the latter sometimes loses the feeling of reality, experiencing more comfort while being in the social network than in the surrounding society. In another case, the concept of virtuality is positioned as a potential reality, which requires its actualization from the individual. At the same time, outside of the desired actualization, such virtuality does not lose its real status, while remaining only potentially possible (Borodina et al., 2019; Gabidullina et al., 2020; Ritter, 2020; Savina, 2015). It is hypothesized that one of the universal systems that contribute to 1) recognition of the true nature of virtual reality as opposed to its simulation, and 2) minimization of simulacra, increasingly filling the living space of an individual, is the art system.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to reveal the polyconceptuality of understanding the process of virtualization in the existence of a modern person. On the one hand, virtuality is positioned as something illusory, unreal, but relevant at the same time, and, on the other hand, as something real but at the same time extremely potential, requiring actualization. The search for the reasons for seeing in virtual existence not another, completely new phenomenon but the next mode of "going beyond one's own boundaries," outgrowing one's nature, and reaching one's spirit through the art functioning at the level of the text of culture is the main line of research.

Literature Review

Despite the fact that the problem of virtual reality is relatively new, in recent decades there have been studies in which the terminology of virtualistics determines the vector of scientific research of their authors (see, e.g., Afanasyeva, 2005; Becker & Paetau, 1997; Bühl, 1997; Castells, 2004; Ivanov, 2000; Krasnykh, 1998; Kroker & Weinstein, 1994; McLuhan, 1967; Sterling, 2005; Warner & Witzel, 2004). Shapiro's (2008) analysis of the virtual phenomena of the sociocultural space is carried out taking into account the formation of a new type of society different from the

industrial one. There is a tendency of transition from the materiality of social space to its imagery, which initiates the formation of a new reality based on symbolism. This process is irreversible and asserts itself more and more.

The theoretical and methodological features of considering the problem of virtualization of society are reflected in a number of works by representatives of the Frankfurt School. Noting the presence in social reality of a special sphere of life, filled with images and mirages, scientists pay attention to the fact that the designated sphere has a direct impact on the formation of the ideology of modern society. Within the framework of the phenomenological direction, the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) gives an idea of the process of constructing social reality, taking into account that the formation of realities of a different order, embedded in the reality of everyday life, is considered important. The postmodern perspective of the problem is also presented in the works of Barthes (1994), Derrida (1993), Deleuze (1968), and Baudrillard (1981).

A new understanding of social reality was formed within the framework of post-industrial theory by such thinkers as Bell (1973), Touraine (1969), Toffler (1980), and Brzezinski (1970). Attempts to predict and comprehend the changes emerging under the influence of new information and telecommunication technologies in various spheres of human life were undertaken by representatives of information theory (Castells, 2004; Naisbitt & Eburdin, 1992; Pham, 2018; Porat & Rubin, 1978) and in the research of Forrester (2003), Fukuyama (2006), Huntington (2003), McLuhan (1967), Markov (2000), and others. Analysis of the epistemological and ontological aspects of virtualization and the proof of the methodological effectiveness of the concept of virtual worlds for scientific knowledge are found in the studies of Rozin (2017), Horuzhy (1997), and others.

An excellent perspective on the study of virtuality, taking into account scientific and technical achievements, the increased role of information, changes in the parameters of spatio-temporal attitudes, and the formation of a new worldview through the telecommunication interpretation of reality and the creation of its analogs on the Internet, are demonstrated by the works of Grunbaum (1969), Mikeshina (2007), Openkov (2012), Hamit (1993), and others.

Method

Based on a *systematic* approach that initiated "a movement from a multi-subject idea about an object to an integrated one-object idea" (Shchedrovitsky, 1995, p. 80), it was possible to integrate

the achievements of a number of humanities (language philosophy, linguistic anthropology, socio- and psycholinguistics, personality psychology), which allowed to qualify the work with the texts of culture as compensatory activities to eliminate the negative consequences of collisions with simulative virtuality. The appeal to the principle of complementarity of the ontological and historical aspects of socio-philosophical knowledge, justified by W. Windelband, enabled the use of methods of social ontology, focusing on such methodological principles as self-organization and organization (Grimov, 2019, pp. 42-52). Moreover, philosophical anthropology became the methodological basis of the study, which is based on the polyparadigm nature of the study of humans in all their diversity and multidimensionality (nature, physicality, consciousness, sociality, language, and creativity).

Findings

In order to answer the question of whether there is common ground between the person and the text, it should firstly be understood what a person is. From this point of view, it seems justified to consider an individual from the position of an individual information system as a unity of non-verbal and verbal elements, realized through the principle of interpretation (Pavilenis, 1983). It is about a suitable "mechanism," automatically launched by nature, for processing and storing information, designed to ensure the maximum adaptation of the biological organism to its surrounding reality. It is significant that the success of the adaptation process is directly related to the cognitive activity of the individual's consciousness (Shakhovsky & Volkova, 2017, pp. 138-163), which is realized through the communicative function of the language. In this case, the brain acts as an organ designed for survival.

On the contrary, the brain becomes an organ of thinking only when the natural mechanism acting on the basis of individual organization is subjected to organization by its carrier, as a result of which the cognitive activity of consciousness initiated by nature is supplemented by sense-forming activity (Kazmina et al., 2020; Tarman, 2020; Timberlake, 2020; Voronkova et al., 2020). The latter marks a transition from a linguistic reflex to a reflection highlighted by a special doubling of the world. Such "visual doubling," when "the world first split, went crazy, for it turned around and looked at itself" (Girenok, 2014, p. 41) is rock painting, the clearest evidence that non-verbal elements of an individual information system actually and logically preceded the verbal elements. According to Pavilenis (1983), the latter arose exclusively in the service of the former with the

goal of coding the non-verbal experience and manipulating it through manipulating verbal elements. Accordingly, a linguistic being is not necessarily a thinking person.

It is clear that in this context, the act of speaking cannot be regarded as the basic difference between a person and an animal, to which Girenok (2014) draws attention in his work "Beyond Language and Instinct": Despite the fact that "going beyond the limits of the existent, a person ceases to be a natural being" (p. 26), such a transformation in no way provides this non-natural being with the status of a "cultural being"; indeed, "the transgression of the boundaries of biology does not mean a quick entry into the world of the society" (p. 26). In other words, even having mastered the language, a person, in essence, remains a two-legged talking animal, fulfilling a natural program that is the same for all living things: to survive at all costs. Therefore, Chomsky (2002) is unconditionally right, claiming that "inside the species (human species. – P.V., A.L., N.S.), it seems that there is no variability... It is a uniform system, and therefore there has been no significant evolution since the time of its appearance... In the case of the language, it is known that something appeared in the process of evolution and, since it appeared, there have been no indications of any evolutionary changes" (p. 218).

In this context, it becomes obvious that a person who has mastered his or her natural mechanism through the organization of an individual information system is a supernatural being, i.e., an artificial one. The argument for the presented position is the fact that without any protective mechanisms inherent in natural beings—hooves, horns, fangs, claws, powerful jaws, etc.—a person has the ability to negotiate with similar people in such a way as to remove the contradictions, inevitable while interacting with others, although this inherently human ability is rarely needed. Otherwise, substitutes for natural protective mechanisms, such as brass knuckles, knives, and any other types of knives or firearms up to nuclear weapons, would not be so in demand. Nevertheless, despite the fact that such devices really increase the natural forces of a human, thanks to which they are able to win the battle with any beast, their essential—i.e., actually human—forces remain only in potency.

How can a two-legged talking animal become a human? Presumably, natural activity, consciously organized by the activity of a social subject, is removed through the following modes: 1) decoding of a verbal sign as a return to the initial point from which the formation of the individual system began, i.e., return to non-verbalism; and 2) coding of the verbal element of the non-verbal experience obtained as a result of decoding. It is emphasized that such an experience helps to

eliminate the formal, that is, automatically realized connection between the verbal (rational) and the non-verbal (irrational/emotional) in favor of their real interaction. Accordingly, if in the first case the individual carries out the subjectivization of objective experience, then in the second case, the individual carries out the objectification of subjective experience, which lays the foundation for their intersubjectivity as a correlate of internal sociality.

The essence of the latter was formulated by Bakhtin (1994a) as follows: "I am the only one who proceeds from myself, and I find all the others – this is the ontological and eventual equivalence" (p. 66). The importance of gaining inner sociality is due to the fact that, outside of it, all the laws acting within the framework of society that enshrine the inviolability of the values of human society turn into external coercion for an individual, which inevitably provokes a protest. This state of affairs is a consequence of the dominance of an impersonal mechanism, under the sign of which the individual information system functions as an expedient process, automatically launched by nature. This is a situation where "... our mind is controlled by information alien to us, an implant that cares only about supporting its own existence" (Sommer, 2014, p. 23). In this case, the so-called double morality arises when people say one thing and think another, acting in accordance with the so-called "self-serving" interest, guided in their actions by self-interest, which ultimately gives rise to a shadow economy, shadow communication, etc.

From this point of view, Sartre's thoughts that a person is not a given, but a task, and the words of Mamardashvili and Pyatigorsky (1997), according to whom a person is a constant reincarnation, become clear. Here, it is also appropriate to recall the dictum by Augustinus Sanctus: "each... first, due to the need, according to Adam, is evil and carnal, and then, when he or she is reborn, he or she grows in Christ, and becomes good and spiritual ..." and "although not every evil person will be good, no one however, will be good who was not evil" (Augustine the Blessed, 2000, p. 156). In relation to an individual information system, Augustinus's thought can be commented on as follows:

The givenness of the self-organizing natural mechanism that dominates the individual limits one's life to purely material problems, the solution of which is aimed at achieving personal comfort and well-being. Since there are many hostages to such an impersonal system, the struggle for a place under the sun is becoming tougher for its carriers, embittering those who want to get everything at once. However, if an individual is able to realize that life, organized in this way, is just the implementation of a natural program, one may try to get out of the oppression of an impersonal

mechanism, which inevitably will make one more than oneself, i.e., more than the boundaries of one's nature. The effort made in this direction inevitably make a person more than their self, i.e., more than the boundaries that nature imposes. At the same time, despite the fact that many representatives of the society live without even suspecting that their true human selves remain only potentially possible, none of those who managed to give up the power of nature could succeed as an authentic person without reliance on individual information system in the depths of which a social mechanism is formed.

In other words, if a spiritual person as a potency, as a virtual reality, appears marked by the unity of the natural and supernatural origins, then the carnal person is only nature. Since access to the space of the spirit as an actualized virtual potency requires the individual to have a special culture of thinking—a kind of opposition to the automatism of the mechanism that is expediently triggered by nature—each individual is confronted with the need to remain in constant spiritual wakefulness. It is in this context that virtual reality appears "as a co-existent being, and not as something completed and which happened once and for all" (Mamardashvili & Pyatigorsky, 1997, p. 150). On the contrary, passive adherence to nature, within which the individual uses the language as an object given by nature, is fraught with verbal or otherwise rational thinking of the status of a stable structure.

The catastrophic nature of this state of affairs is due to the following point. The "fact that the individual remains in this state of linguistic thinking" signals their exit from consciousness (Mamardashvili & Pyatigorsky, 1997, pp. 39-40). It is obvious that, using language as a natural object, beyond setting it to transcode the verbal into the non-verbal and vice versa, an individual inevitably loses the realization that verbality itself is secondary in relation to non-verbality, as a result of which the whole is replaced by a part. It is assumed that one of the effective ways to restore the desired integrity, which corresponds to the integrity of nature, but at the same time is distinguished by a supernatural character, is the work with cultural texts.

Since any literary text is isomorphic to the individual, representing both the present reality (musical text, canvas, film footage, book) and the idea potentially installed into the bosom of objectivity (love, life, death, hatred, etc.) in its projection onto the universally human or otherwise, intersubjective values/disvalues, exactly the work with a piece of art, regardless of whether it is a painting, music, literature, etc., can become a precedent for the moment of truth (Nalimov, 1989; Volkova, 2019, pp. 258-264). What is the work with a text of culture?

By building a dialogue with a work of art, the individual realizes the co-existence of the text (the given) and the context (created) as a continuing unity of the verbal and the non-verbal, the rational and the irrational, the external and the internal, which in the terminology by Bakhtin (1994b) is called the dialogue of consciousness (pp. 257-321). As an example, it is suggested to turn to contemporary fine art, which, on the one hand, demonstrates the apparent primitivization of forms, and on the other, a complex space, pulsating with senses, recognizable in the paintings by Richter, Polke, Baselitz, Twombly, and others. If realism based on the idea of rationalism seems unconditionally understandable to a layman, who bases their self on habitual forms of the being, then abstract painting is designed to liberate the individual, removing them from the automatism of perception, stimulating the search for their own Richter, Polke, Baselitz, and Twombly. How can such a search—access to the continuing unity of verbal and non-verbal elements of an individual information system, as a dialogue opposing their mechanical connection is meant—lead to the desired result? Or: What are the necessary conditions for the successful organization of such a dialogue?

Due to the fact that "from a historical point of view, it is doubtful whether there are unmotivated links in a language between the meaning and the form; the apparent lack of motivation should be explained by the fact that this connection has been erased, demotivated, and it is necessary to find the initial motivated state" (Kibrik, 1992, p. 130), one should be aware of the following: Both the cognitive process initiated by nature and the process of sense formation are under the sign of emotional breadth (it is recalled that it is about a language phenomenon as opposed to emotionality as a psychological phenomenon (Shakhovsky, 2008)). Notably, if the actual emotives present in the language determine the cognitive process, then virtual emotives show their involvement in the process of sense formation (Shakhovsky & Volkova, 2017, pp. 138-163). The argumentation of the presented position is based on the fact that meaning as a unit of consciousness also appears at the level of virtual reality, which is fundamentally different from its actualized state. Moreover, preceding any actuality, being present in any of them exclusively at the level of potency, virtuality finds its existence "only in action, in dynamics, as a source of newer and newer urgencies..., being a condition for the creation of every act..." (Kudryashova, 2005, p. 293).

Since the conditional existence of virtual emotives, the emotional valency inherent in any linguistic sign a priori allows to see a symbol in such a sign, one cannot but admit the correctness of Mead, who insisted that it is symbols that play a decisive role in the formation of an individual's ability

to act exclusively humanly, i.e., consciously (Ritzer, 2007). Accordingly, nothing more than virtual emotives leads the individual away, on the one hand, from the automatism of perception, on the other hand, from the spontaneity of the language, providing the individual with the opportunity "not to passively respond to reality, which imposes itself, but to actively create and recreate the world in which he or she acts" (Kudryashova, 2005, p. 262). Moreover, it is the emotiveness, actualized in the process of working with literary texts, that can be considered as a cultural dominant in the space of "post-symbolic communication," with which Lanier (2018), the author of the term "virtual reality," connected the future of the globalizing world (p. 415). Paying special attention to linguistic and symbolic forms in his works, pointing to their place and role in the communication process, Lanier predicts their departure to the forefront of the society of the Performance.

Returning to the virtual reality constructed by means of computer technologies, it is noted that, because of its simulative nature, it is dangerous simply because it creates the illusion of thought activity without any volitional effort on the part of the Internet user. Substituting a genuine space of the spirit, this virtual reality eliminates the need for an individual to create meaning in view of its accessibility. However, in reality, such enviable ease turns into a total defeat of the individual. According to Lanier (2018), "the more technologically advanced we are in the future, the more chances we will have to put an end to the history of the mankind" (p. 421).

Conclusion

The processes of the extreme degree of simulation and virtualization bring culture to a stage in which its true (pure) existence appears open or transparent. Concluding the study, one cannot but admit that the processes of extreme degree of simulation and virtualization bring the art and general culture to the stage in which their true (pure) existence appears open or transparent. Therefore, the current situation of total enthusiasm for virtual and global simulation of reality has a positive, productive aspect: A clear vision of the structure of the being of the culture, consciousness, and a human is formed.

On the other hand, the virtualization of the being and the existing modern person is the process of crowding out the mode "here" with the mode "now"; that is, the chronotope of culture becomes pure chronos. This, in the authors' opinion, is a painful point of the paradox: People today are aimed at success, comfort, and material well-being, but at the same time, they are more and more

rapidly and more drawn into virtuality, where all of the desired material goods are instantly replaced by simulacra. Thus, a person is again torn between the aggressive procedure of material consumption and the accelerating stream of virtualization, which becomes a new mode of unity of nature and spirit in a person.

Within the framework of the latter, it seems essential to be aware of the following:

• Interaction with virtual reality can either fix the status of a passive consumer to the individual, whose consciousness represents an ideal object for all kinds of manipulations, or initiate the birth of a creative person with a spiritual identity;

• In the second case, the optimal condition for the awakening of reflection is art as a space for the dialogues of the verbal and the nonverbal, the rational and irrational, the external and the internal, the discrete and the continuum;

• Coordination of contradictions between information and conceptual systems determines the integrity of a human personality, whose subjective values correlate with universal values, being marked by an intersubjective nature;

• If the true unity of the information and conceptual systems is the guarantor of the positive deviation of the individual, then the simulation of the desired unity through the external interaction of the individual and the virtual reality generated by the Global Network inevitably becomes a source of negative deviation;

• Such an experiment is possible insofar as such a virtual reality does not change anything in the biological substrate, only increasing the amount of information in the individual information system.

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