

Conference Paper

The Crisis of Humanities in Contemporary Society: Causes and Effects

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Abstract

This article analyses the impact of information revolutions on culture, society, and education, as well as the individual. Contemporary technological consumer society presents a pathological model of relations between human beings and being – a situation that results in many social and cultural problematic features. This article explores these features of modern civilization from a philosophical (ontological) viewpoint, demonstrating that the current crises of humanities is rooted in this deeper ontological situation. The described features of modern information and cognitive metabolism in culture and education show the situation of the “ontological impasse”. In the current sociocultural situation, individuals have lost themselves as thinking entities and education has lost itself both as an institution and as a means of realizing the potential of a person’s spiritual and cognitive transformation. Knowledge has lost its value and sacredness, becoming based on pragmatism, usefulness and comfort. To overcome this situation, deep existential and ontological shifts are required.

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1. Introduction

Assessing humanity today as a living and evolving body, we can see a parallel between the increasing civilizational crisis and disturbances in the process of informative and cognitive exchange in the consumer society.

2. Materials and Methods

Contemporary society of technologies and consumption of existence is a pathological version of informative and communicative (mass media) metabolism (in wide sense of this word) which is accompanied by different informative and metabolic diseases. Many of them are well-known: overproduction of signs and texts that will never be read (Jean Baudrillard), content obesity, running away from thinking, degradation of understanding,

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information noise pollution, global hoarding of the intellectual space (A.A. Zinovyev), cognitive deficiency, screen dependency, gamification, addiction to information and images (A.A. Kalmykov), competence crisis, functional illiteracy. And so on...

3. Discussion

The humanity has experience of knowledge, experience of direct interaction with reality, experience of not alienated understanding and awareness of the being in all the human rationality. Since “understanding is an existential state of a personality when it can grasp the essence of human existence” [1, p. 17]. There is another utmost simplified and technological way – a linear broadcasting of ready-made formalized multi-knowledge that is related to acquisition of schooled competences and operational skills. Contemporary crisis of mass-class-school and all educational practice of the written type is a crisis of educational paradigm as well, a model of written interaction.

The deeply rooted stereotype, both in academia and among the public, that “education is a system of education”, which identifies the state of “being educated” with the acquisition of purely operational and functional skills, leads to the de-ontologization of education and de-anthropologization of human beings. According to A.O.Karpov, de-ontologization of education happens when we lose connections to the fundamentals of being. Education “loses itself in two ways: (I) as an institute historically designed by society to promote specific goals and functions – social de-ontologization and (II) as a place of spiritual growth that leads to the culturally authentic, vocationally adjusted and thought-through life – existential de-ontologization. The latter is the result of cultural automatization, when the processes of inner change and transformation are abolished, and the main goal of educational transformation becomes the consumption of external cultural forms as the only influence that normalize human behaviour” [2].

The general civilizing process is tied to the processes of alienation, desacralization, secularization, worldliness, simplification and the rise of simulacra. Human being cannot become a thinking and understanding subject within an “overlearning” system because the model of informational-communicative metabolism does not correspond with the nature of human as a multidimensional, spiritual, thinking and creating denizen of the Universe.

The specifics of national development in the 21st century are largely connected to the fact that education is the key sphere of creative and innovative growth of human capital. The level of professional training and the creative ability are largely tied not to the technology, technique and/or formalized “competences” that cannot replace

“maxims” (M.Polanyi) of personal experience, but, paradoxically, to the artistic and aesthetic education.

The “written” rules, recipes and technologies for teaching creativity do not exist and cannot exist. But there are certain “unwritten rules”, non-formalized field of creative literacy found in any type of activity, which constitute the essence of anthropological transmission of the experience of being. According to M.Polanyi, maxims are rules whose skillful application forms a part of the area of mastery in which they are formed as regulative principles. Good maxims help us to understand the nature of action and activity, but they cannot replace this activity. “He who does not possess a good practical knowledge of art, would not be able to understand its maxims, let alone apply them. We extract them from our understanding of art; but in themselves they are not capable either to replace or to produce this understanding” [3, p.58]. Maxims are the “types” of non-discursive knowledge. They are similar to canon – a system of internal creative rules and norms immanent to art and aesthetic consciousness that determine the main principles of artistic thinking and consolidate basic structural and constructive differences between the art genres [4, p. 378]. We may say that maxims form a certain artistic and aesthetical canon of inner understanding and creativity inevitably inherent in human activity of any type.

Spiritual tradition is not a social institute. S.S.Khoruzhiy states that there are ontologically different ways, types and forms of anthropological and social transmission. Anthropological transmission is possible when the experience possesses transcendent quality, when there is a meta-anthropological attitude and when the experience leads humans to the horizon of their existence.

Human being is a being capable of transcendence. In other words, it is a being that strives to transcend itself, to step beyond the limits of its worldview, knowledge, life and opportunities. The very process of transcending not necessarily implies certain actions (“actions” meaning material, physical production); however, the very attempt to transcend changes consciousness, awareness and world-image providing higher quality of self-awareness and self-manifestation that reveal the authentic human existence based on wonder and creative reshaping of being. M.Heidegger formulated the problem of openness regarding human attitude to the world. According to the philosopher, humans are thinking beings open to Being and “the human alone, being open to Being, allows Being to approach it in its presence. This presence uses the openness of a certain clearing and, thanks to this use, entrusts itself to the human being” [5, p. 74].

All informational and technological revolutions – the invention of literacy, printing, electricity, new means of communication (telegraph, radio, telephone, microprocessor

and personal computer) – led to the development of “information society”. The invention of alphabet determined the development of human beings, their culture and their cultivation. The Text and texts appeared. Alphabet engendered and continues to engender infinite number of linear texts. Book as a product of written culture played a role in the universalization of civilized space, universalization of thinking, development of new ways to master the Culture and cultures. The second informational revolution – the invention of printing press – greatly accelerated the extension of information culture and of human mind horizons. Printing created bases of mass textbooks for schools, first for mass and then for compulsory education. The watershed between the book era and the screen era happened in the mid-20th century. In the second half of past century culture experienced the expansion of visual communication, of “medium as the message” as wrote M.McLuhan. Computer is a tool for (re)production and reworking of images and texts.

The constant “multiplication of texts” (Yu.M.Lotman) creates information overproduction and produces the only *extensive* strategy of the system’s development: the increase in number of educational courses and the search for new technologies to pack information as an educational text. The written culture’s orientation 1) towards the past, 2) towards news and exceptional events, 3) constant production of new texts, create conditions for accelerated obsolescence of information, its depreciation due to its misalignment with the present and future social time. The resulting phenomenon of information overload leads to the loss of awareness. If in contemporary society technology is human master, can a socio-technological individuum with broken information-cognitive metabolism access directly the Knowledge and knowledge?

Orality is usually described as a historically obsolete form of culture that existed under the conditions of low technological progress. However, Orality is a non-formalized type of understanding (preservation, transmission and understanding of meaning) that is gradually being lost with the progression to the uni-vocacy of information culture. Orality differs from literacy not technologically but typologically. Orality is more than folklore, traditional culture or oral folk poetry. Orality is not a way of saying but a way of understanding Being. Altogether, it is a way to create, preserve and actualize the entire field of cultural meaning-production and the depth of world-understanding. Orality can be defined as a sum total of means of creation, functioning, preservation, transmission, education, transfer, understanding, comprehension, awareness. These means are organic and universal for the entire traditional culture; they form an intrinsic part of life-world and syncretically connected to the structures of everyday life. The

main corpus of knowledge about the word and norms of behavior is mastered and experienced organically and informally [1].

Orality is not a way of saying but a way of understanding Being. The persistent existence of oral culture is rooted in the fact that the procedures for meaning-production are organically built in the mode of existence and transmission of culture. Orality is characterized by canonical, nonlinear thinking. Within the space of oral culture thinking through analogies, through “pointing”, through “eidetic mimesis” constantly activates an ability to (co)creatively understand image-meanings, as well as an ability to generate ideas as informational/imagery structures. The activity of creative consciousness is the overcoming of technical formalization through experience and realization of understanding as an art of co-creative interpretation [6, p. 70-71].

Many contemporary theories (that perform “doctrinal ontologization”) of “information society” and “knowledge society” posit that knowledge and information constitute the main resource of postindustrial economy and social development through innovation. Unlike raw resources, knowledge possesses unique characteristics not analyzed in theory: knowledge and understanding differ from goods that have market value; knowledge is selective. Knowledge is available only to those who possess creative abilities, intellectual abilities and level of education high enough to acquire and understand it, that is, to master knowledge and its implementation. Here we have a paradox: “humanity’s entire development has led from the struggle for competitive resources (capital, land, mineral deposits) to the situation when our main resource, knowledge, is freely available, but not everyone can utilize it. This leads to an important conclusion: mass production of new knowledge (and distribution of knowledge through education) *does not automatically produce* social improvement; the key to moving forward is use and application of knowledge” [7].

M. Mamardashvili and A. Pyatigorsky believe that knowledge is based on symbolic relationship that arises in a certain state of consciousness. Being in such state, it becomes possible to think the nature of the world and to intuit the foundations of Being. One can only enter this special state of consciousness freely and voluntarily. Within rational tradition and virtual world-picture teaching such state of consciousness is impossible. This state cannot be predictably reproduced within the system of education that functions as mass media. It is not transmitted.

4. Conclusions

Unlike material things that are obtained, meaning, internal content and essence of truth should be grasped through processes and states of consciousness. The grasping of meanings is a work of awareness (not a skill), it is understanding (not a processing), mapping across pre-existing structures and states of consciousness, immersion into the store of creative memory (that is, remembrance and not signification). Therefore “ontology is a privilege for those who disclose, and not package, the meanings of thinking” [2].

The future of Knowledge depends on creativity and awareness, on projective thinking and not on the next informational and technological revolution, to the “anthropological turn in ontology”, to the shift in paradigms of thinking, to the creation of the new world Image and the new Human World.

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