

## THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SUBJECT IN A VIRTUALIZED SPACE

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the study is to reveal the features of the formation of a new social and informational space of our time and the work of consciousness under the influence of information and communication technologies. The author tried to present the work of thinking in the context of the virtualization of modern society. The scientific novelty lies in the interdisciplinary consideration of the issue of virtualization of thinking with the involvement of the works of modern philosophers, sociologists, psychologists.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Virtual Reality, Consciousness, Cyberspace, Information And Communication Technologies, Internet, Virtualization*

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### INTRODUCTION

The problem of consciousness has always attracted the close attention of philosophers, for the determination of the place and role of man in the world, the specifics of his relationship with the surrounding reality presupposes an elucidation of the nature of human consciousness. For philosophy, this problem is also important because certain approaches to the question of the essence of consciousness, the nature of its relationship to being, affect the initial worldview and methodological guidelines of any philosophical trend. Naturally, these approaches are different, but they all in essence always deal with a single problem: the analysis of consciousness as a specifically human form of regulation and control of human interaction with reality. This form is characterized primarily by the allocation of a person as a kind of reality, as a bearer of special ways of interacting with the surrounding world, including managing it. Numerous problems associated with the study of the subject's consciousness are so little studied or not studied at all that the more we penetrate into them, the more clearly the awareness of our ignorance and understanding of the depth and scope of this issue appears.

This understanding of the nature of consciousness presupposes a very wide range of issues, which becomes the subject of research not only in philosophy, but also in special humanities and natural sciences: sociology, psychology, linguistics, pedagogy, physiology of higher nervous activity, and now also semiotics, cybernetics, informatics. The development of special scientific research stimulates the development and deepening of the actual philosophical problems of consciousness. So, for example, the development of modern informatics, the creation of artificial intelligence, the associated process of computerization of human activity, forced to consider in a new way the issue of the essence of consciousness, specifically human capabilities in the work of consciousness, the optimal ways of interaction of a person and his consciousness with modern computer technology and generated by virtual reality.

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It is consciousness that distinguishes the created world from reality. The process of creating realities is endless. We believe that any educated reality can be called virtual, and such virtual reality, under certain conditions, becomes generative for another. Consciousness is the basis of this process. The processes and phenomena of reality are inconceivable without projection into the virtual world. Consequently, a person is always a person who assimilates virtuality and reality, living his life “here and there”, in the world of reality, in which his body is located and in the world created by his consciousness - the virtual world.

Human thinking in the usual sense of its understanding is the thinking of a person, therefore it is personified, subjective and individual. And although a person's thinking is based on universal principles and laws of evidence, correctness, consistency and semantic meaningfulness, nevertheless it is colored by the peculiarities of a personal worldview, psychotype, character and other personal characteristics. Internet thinking and, if I may say so, network logic have a different specificity. When the physical world of matter fades into the background, the perception of the world changes in a fundamental way. By controlling the degree of connection of consciousness with the surrounding world, a person can significantly expand his perception and even create new objects of reality that did not exist before. The subject of such perception and thinking is no longer just a person, but, according to the philosopher V. Kurbatov, “an actor or agent of global information and communication interaction, which is carried out in an information network through this network and a way of connecting to this network. Moreover, this actor or agent, whose thinking is specific, which is called, by definition, exists only in this information network. Outside this information environment and apart from it, such an agent or actor cannot exist” [1].

## MAIN BODY

Today virtual reality is not only a new technology that has no spatial boundaries and time frames. It is also a new information space, and for many it is even a genuine environment of their daily life. Humanity has isolated its existence from the factors of reality, and virtual reality has become one of the most important tools for this isolation. It overcame physical space and time, which means it crossed out the inviolability of nature. It can be argued that virtuality manifests itself not only as a technical means, but appears to us as a socially new phenomenon, where the emergence of new forms of being becomes the center. This plurality appears before a person in various settings of consciousness and forms of activity. Any attempt to find one single space, a reality accepted by all, is doomed to failure. Plurality of realities are the motto of modern society. The answer to the challenge of society is the emergence of the concept of virtual reality, which is thought of as a reality that exists outside of the personally existing. Thus, a modern person can be defined as a virtual network person, a person of the global information network. Information exchange, receipt, assimilation and processing of information - virtual thinking is constantly replenished with new meanings, meanings, feelings. Accordingly, a new type of communication is being formed - virtual communication, a new type of person - virtual person, possessing a specific way of thinking - virtual thinking, and using specific lexical means for this - virtual language.

The world of electronic communication, virtual reality and their influence on consciousness, as a specific object of special scientific research, has a short history. The names of N. Luhmann, M. Castells, M. McLuhan, J. Sempsey, A. Touraine, J. Habermas, W. Eco and many other modern researchers can be named as representatives of this direction. In their works, new information

media are becoming one of the most important tools for orienting a person in the world and for people to interact with each other.

One of the most popular typologies of civilizations among various specialists belongs to the Canadian sociologist M. McLuhan [2]. The basis for it is the leading type of semiosis - the process of the generation and functioning of signs. M. McLuhan identifies four types of civilizations:

- 1) The era of preliterate barbarism;
- 2) Millennia of phonetic writing;
- 3) Half a thousand years of book printing;
- 4) Modern electronic civilization.

In his opinion, it was the phonetic alphabet that acted as a means of creating a "civilized man". But, since "any technology is a continuation of a person outside ... external projection, or self-amputation, of our physical bodies" [2], then, being "an intensification and expansion of visual function, the phonetic alphabet reduces the role of other senses in any written culture: hearing, touch and taste" [2]. Regarding the new stage in the development of culture, M. McLuhan is quite optimistic: "The electric era is literally the era of illumination. As light is both energy and information, so electrical automation unites production, consumption and training into a single and indissoluble process" [2]. However, continuing his idea of technology as a kind of psychophysical limitation, it should be noted that electronic technologies are also, first of all, "the expansion of the visual function", and hence the ongoing reduction of other parameters of the psychophysical organization of a person.

Virtual reality as a vivid manifestation of the fourth type of semiosis leads to the transformation of consciousness. We can hardly agree with this thesis unconditionally at the present time. The fact is that now virtual reality is only a product of human consciousness, and therefore it acts not so much as a determining consciousness, but as a phenomenon determined by consciousness. However, it acts as a "developer" of some deep transformations of consciousness or as an "expresser" of those features of consciousness that were previously present, but were hardly noticeable or were undeveloped and occupied a subordinate position. The relation "consciousness - virtual reality" is characterized not by causality, but by the relation of correspondence: virtual reality is a model of consciousness, a means that allows one to explore the features of consciousness specific for a given era.

Virtual reality, in contrast to the constant and stable nature of ordinary reality is variable in nature. For example, it is the parameter of short duration that underlies the distinction between ordinary and virtual particles in modern physics: virtuality here means a relative short duration, instability. But the conceptual content of variability is broader, since here, in addition to the moment of short duration, there is also a moment of dynamism: the variable is not only short-lived, but also more dynamic, rapidly changing (although these two moments are related, since a decrease in the time scale, as usually leads to an increase in the speed of processes). From this point of view, a virtual world can be called a world that is changing rapidly and has existed for a short time. For example, this is the "world" of a computer game or an Internet session, but not only, since, as mentioned earlier, it is necessary to include any short-term actions, for example, a dream, a game, a performance, etc.

Another important aspect of virtuality is not only its short-lived, but also surreal character. The conceptual basis here is the categorical pair “real - possible”. The virtual world is just one of the possible worlds, which differs from the real one in one way or another. In this world, there may be other laws that differ from the laws we are accustomed to (and which requires certain intellectual efforts from us, since we are not adapted to it and our instinctive behavior, which is as a result of adaptation to the ordinary world, no longer helps here). As one of the possible worlds, the real world loses its exclusive status.

Thus, virtual reality, on the one hand, is a direct product of consciousness, and, on the other hand, can have a significant-direct impact on the psyche of an individual and consciousness as a whole. Then virtual consciousness is a reflection of virtual reality, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, is the result of the very properties of human consciousness. That is, virtual consciousness is a part of consciousness that is a reflection of virtual reality, a form of adaptation to it.

The virtual world modifies, first of all, individual consciousness. Interesting changes in the stylistic characteristics of individual consciousness are taking place. Based on the analysis of numerous scattered sources, the following effects of the transformation of consciousness can be distinguished:

1) the effect of polyphonic consciousness. Objective reality is a complex system, each component of which is a process, which means that it develops simultaneously with other processes and is at the same time in an explicitly or implicitly expressed relationship with other components of the system. These characteristics fully correspond to the definition of both a complex dynamic system and polyphony and allow us to recognize that the reality around us is polyphonic. However, at the present stage of the development, can a person cognize it, does he have this opportunity, ability? The establishment of interconnections between the components of one system, as well as communication with other systems (higher and lower) occurs in time and is a process. This means that a person's knowledge of the system should be based on the ability to comprehend two or more simultaneously occurring, different, but interconnected processes. This type of thinking does not fit into the framework of any of the known types of thinking (visual-effective, figurative, logical, etc.). We are talking about the ability of a person to identify connections between two different, simultaneously occurring processes, in some way "split" his consciousness.

In the article “Transformation of ideas about consciousness in the Internet era” Ponomarev A. I. , referring to the concept of splitting consciousness by D. Parfit, writes about the preservation of the integrity of consciousness: “It is obvious that it is difficult to imagine how you can actually be in several places at the same time. Intuitively, it seems obvious that consciousness should be localized in one place. However, according to a fairly widespread concept of D. Parfit, the integrity of consciousness is not necessary to preserve the identity of the individual. You can remain yourself, while being in different places at the same time, if the "psychic connection" is maintained. The Internet is just such a space that can demonstrate the position of D. Parfit. On the Internet, you can be in different places, present in different capacities and different roles. By connecting to the World Wide Web, each person creates a certain character (the hero of pages on social networks, an account on the forum, etc.). Can you say that my character is me? Yes, you can, despite the fact that we are in different places. However, since we demonstrate similar behavior, there is a psychic connection, then both of these objects - a profile on the Internet and a

physical body - are two incarnations of me. The freedom of the Internet is manifested in the fact that there you can create an infinite number of different selves, but in the physical world a person has only one body, and this can be called non-freedom” [3].

Let us disagree with the position of A.I. Ponomarev. In the virtual space, it is not always with the “splitting of the personality” that the “psychic connection” is preserved, which the author of the article speaks about, referring to D. Parfit. When creating an avatar, a “character,” a person very often endows him with qualities that are not inherent in himself, and sometimes even the opposite. Such ambivalent behavior often leads to the rupture of the very “psychic connection” and the effect of depersonalization arises, which will be discussed below.

At the present time of nanotechnology and the emergence of nanotechnological reality, human activity should increasingly be subject to his awareness. The tool of this awareness, in our opinion, is polyphonic thinking, the development of which is a condition for a person's existence in this reality. For instance, an example of the polyphonic nature of consciousness in virtual reality can be a certain detachment of participants in Internet discussions and the possibility of a delayed reaction, which allows you to react not so much to a particular message, but immediately to a group of messages, creating a complex response that incorporates various “motives”. Polyphony as a new phenomenon of the consciousness of a virtual personality is associated with the multiplicity of interpretations of information content and with the interactivity of the communicative process in the information space.

Doctor of Philosophy V.M. Rozin, contrasting classical and modern thinking, the latter characterizes in “postulates” of generation, context and polyphony. He defines polyphony as a set of “many different thoughts, which are among themselves in different relationships (addition, opposition, independence, kinship, etc.)” [4]. At the same time, V.M. Rozin interprets polyphony not as a special type of thinking that a certain subject can possess, but as a characteristic (postulate) of modern thinking as a whole. At the same time, this view characterizes not only the peculiarity of the modern stage of development of society, scientific thought, but also, in a certain sense, indicates the polyphony of the reality around us.

2) the effect of the distribution of consciousness of a virtual personality is inextricably linked with the effect of polyphonicity. Consciousness in the concept of distributed consciousness is understood as a mosaic composed of separate specialized neurons of consciousness and functions in accordance with a vector spherical model. It is described as a stream of subjective states that includes perceptual, emotional, and thought processes in the human brain.

Modern man has a “distributed” consciousness. This can be easily explained by the example of using any electronic device that has access to the network - in most cases, interaction with the real world does not take place in a single information flow. Most gadget users have several windows or dialog lines open at once when they go online. An interesting fact is that in the process of using the network, consciousness adapts in a specific way to filter out streams of unnecessary information. Also, thanks to anonymity, it becomes possible to simultaneously occupy different virtually personal positions (the extreme expression of this effect is the “splitting” of the virtual personality, since the Internet makes it possible to simultaneously participate in the discussion under different names). “Consciousness and all mental procedures are distributed between me as a person and different devices to which I transfer part of my cognitive functions. Here an interesting question arises: where, in fact, do I end up as a person?” [5]. Of course, such a distribution may be extremely similar to “schizophrenia with split

personality - splitting", but the ability to quickly switch or perform multiple functions at once is undoubtedly a useful skill.

3) the effect of depersonalization or modification of self-awareness. This effect is a logical consequence of the effect of the distribution of consciousness. Depersonalization in psychiatry is usually defined as a disorder of self-awareness, a feeling of change, loss, alienation, or a split in oneself. Usually accompanied by signs of derealization, manifested by a change in the perception of the surrounding world. Depersonalization can be manifested by the alienation of feelings, thoughts, actions, i.e. alienation of one's own "I". The main sign of depersonalization is the feeling that a person is losing physical connection with the world around him and his own body. Virtual corporeality appears before us as a self-sufficient formation that develops according to its own laws, not subject to the general definitions of understanding the phenomenon of corporeality, which are characteristic of the real living space of modern society. In the Internet space, as P. Virilio writes: "[...] there is no need to burden yourself with your physical body. "Interchangeable bodies" make attachment to the only and unchanging body unnecessary"[6]. Indeed, in difficult modern conditions, matter becomes a conditional object, information replaces meaning, and the category of time is determined in many respects by the speed of information transmission. The use of virtual reality technologies creates risks associated with the loss of existence, alienation and depersonalization of the inner world of a person. The feeling of the timelessness of communication or action within a social network or virtual reality gives rise to a disregard for the real temporality of existence in real life, which gives rise to a problem in the self-identification of a person who is simultaneously in two different spaces: virtual and real. The newest form of realization of one's own "I" arises. The "I" is experienced by the virtual reality actor as a result of dual education. Initially, the formation of the body as an empirical object, as the origin of coordinates that exists in constant reality, then there is a perception of a certain virtual personality, a network image of a real person, an avatar of a personality, which can differ significantly from the image of a real person. The main characteristic of such an ambivalent behavior of a modern personality, protrusion of oneself in virtual space and the absence of the will and desire to change oneself in reality, is a permanent quality of the society of everyday life and comfort. The effect of modification of self-awareness or depersonalization is that from the moment of "entering" into an avatar or identification with it, a person begins to realize himself not as a physical body, but as this avatar. "Gradually, you, as a real person, will be less and less interested in the world, and the value of your digital avatar, on the contrary, will steadily increase, since he will be able to say a lot about you. Everyone will be interested in your digital copy, which is stored on the clouds, not you. At the same time, it is important to understand that we will all be absolutely transparent for the digital world" [7].

Note that the modification of the user's self-consciousness in virtual reality is far from a harmless effect that requires the most careful study.

4) the effect of modification of consciousness (and, on our own behalf, subconsciousness). The psyche in general and consciousness in particular, as its highest manifestation, constitute a single continuum that does not have quantitative gradations that could be distinguished as separate blocks. A change in the state of a specific system belonging to one of the spheres (physiological or mental) inevitably entails certain shifts in another. Until recently, the main method of such a change was recognized as the method of influencing human consciousness. At the same time, it was postulated that "tangible effects" can be perceived by our consciousness if and only when they can be critically interpreted by our consciousness, pass through the filter of our operative

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memory, and only then be deposited in our subconscious. In this case, direct access to the subconscious is strictly closed. The subconscious was seen rather as something mythical, ephemeral. However, recent studies by neurophysiologists show that our working memory, which forms our common sense, is only a small part of our total memory that a person possesses. Its main reserve is our subconscious. The subconscious contains 70 to 90 percent of our memory (all knowledge). Hence, there is such a huge interest in the disclosure of "reserve" capabilities of a person by direct impact on his subconscious. " In this regard, the opinion of K. Jaspers about the nature of consciousness is of interest: "Our consciousness is based on the unconscious, it constantly grows out of the unconscious and returns to it. However, we can learn something about the unconscious only through consciousness. In every conscious action of our life, especially in every creative act of our spirit, the unconscious present in us helps us. Pure consciousness is not capable of anything. Consciousness is like a crest of a wave, the tip of an iceberg" [8]. Comprehensive communication of sensory information on visual, auditory and tactile modalities in virtual reality allows you to break into the deep layers of the human psyche, replace individual elements of self-image in the right direction. We consider it necessary to dwell here on the issue of manipulating the consciousness of a virtual user.

Manipulation is the process of ideological and socio-psychological influence on people in order to change their behavior contrary to their interests. Today, in connection with the expansion of the influence of the Internet, the topic of manipulation is becoming more relevant, since this virtual environment provides wider, in comparison with radio and television, opportunities for the dissemination of various kinds of discourses, which, in turn, have an impact on human consciousness and, as a consequence, behavior. As G. Le Bon wrote in his work "The Psychology of Peoples and the Masses": "Thousands of individuals, separated from each other, may at certain moments simultaneously fall under the influence of certain strong emotions or some great national event and thus acquire all the features spiritualized crowd. A whole nation under the influence of certain influences sometimes becomes a crowd, without presenting the assembly in the proper sense of the word" [9]. In terms of communication and information transfer, virtual life is in fact not much different from reality. Since people go headlong into the Internet, thanks to its spread and accessibility, it is easy to control them, and it is precisely the invisible nature of such manipulation that is most often the reason for the permissibility of such manipulation. As a result, it is necessary to constantly monitor the incoming flow of information so that further actions are not what is desirable for another, but an adequate reaction of self-realization. It is necessary to think critically and move away from replacing reality with its surrogate.

5) the phenomenon of automated writing. S.L. Katrechko in his article "The Internet and Consciousness: Towards the Concept of a Virtual Human". But in our opinion, automatic writing is not a correct concept, so we are replacing it with an automated one. "Automatic writing (from the Greek "spontaneous") is a process (or result) of writing, which is supposedly the product of the unconscious activity of the writer. At the same time, the individual can be in a state of hypnotic, mediumistic or meditative trance, or be in full consciousness and control everything except the movement of his hand" [10]. This concept is not suitable in order to reveal the essence spine of the phenomenon we are considering.

The basis for the effect of automated writing is the need for a sufficiently fast response to Internet messages, that is, it is often necessary to respond to a particular message (or a group of messages) immediately, almost simultaneously. The computerization of typing had a huge

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impact on the restructuring of the entire process of perception of the surrounding world. Automated writing implies increasing the "productivity" of creating a written product, and, as a result, affects the speed of response to external stimuli in general. One of the first forms of interpersonal Internet communication back in the 1990s was "chat" - an electronic dialogue or polylogue. Today chat has taken on new forms: it has become possible to illustrate communication, video conferencing and audio recording have become the norm. However, the traditional form of chat remains, where the interlocutors exchange text messages. It would seem that in the age of nanotechnology makes a person turn to an almost epistolary genre? "... Waiting for an occasion, the very one that is ready to elevate a fragmentary, stylistically "low" speech to the rank of high experience. In a word, the expectation of affect".

Of course, there are some users who are only interested in a pragmatic approach - communication in virtuality, which ultimately develops into real communications and relationships in physical reality. However, even more participants in such dialogues do not set such goals, satisfying the momentary need for communication. The words in the chat due to the lack of any other means of expressing feelings for the participants, or due to the stiffness of the everyday language, are accompanied by a standard set of illustrations of emotions - smiley faces, emojis, stickers. These virtual icons are tools for creating a virtual emotional field, which can be radically different from the real mood of the conversation leaders. They, like masks, hide the true motives of the participants.

6) the effect of expanding consciousness outside the body. Being in a real living space, a person senses and touches his body. But the simulation of reality forces the individual to transform, which is expressed in his desire for self-identification, the proper experience for which is not real life situations, but the experience gained in the virtual space. It is he who dictates the rejection of corporeality, creating a certain "virtual corporeality" of modernity. Overcoming spatial limitations, the modern individual overcomes his physical nature and goes beyond its boundaries. M. McLuhan argues that any technology is actually an extension of our bodies and consciousness [2].

In the well-known article "Expanded Consciousness", the English-speaking philosophers E. Clarke and D. Chalmers proposed the hypothesis of expanded consciousness, according to which the cognitive functions of a person can be transferred outside his body. Researchers believe that objects of the surrounding world can constitute a person's mental life on a par with neurophysiological processes in his body. In particular, people can memorize something, plan future actions, count, etc. with the help of technical artifacts external to their body (telephone, computer) and, often, with greater efficiency than without such artifacts. If the attraction of an external artifact occurs regularly and its use has a high degree of reliability, then, according to the hypothesis of expanded consciousness, such an artifact can be considered a part of the human cognitive system.

Let us emphasize that the hypothesis of expanded consciousness does not simply speak about the use of some artifacts by a person to solve cognitive tasks, the hypothesis insists on considering some of these artifacts as constituent elements of the cognitive system of a person as a whole.

The use of information technologies also leads to more radical shifts in consciousness, which allows us to speak not only about its transformation, but also about the overcoming of individual consciousness by new supra-individual structures. This is evidenced by the following phenomena, which cannot be ignored in connection with the research topic:

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7) the phenomenon of semantic resonance. The main idea of this phenomenon is the special connections that allow large-scale consciousness to arise - the result of the general resonance of many small components. It denotes a fundamentally new way of obtaining ultimate knowledge - multipolar work with electronic dialogue. That is, in the process of virtual communication, the final answer or result does not depend on the opinion of a particular person, but is born by the collective mind or as a result of the perception by one particular person of the entire arsenal of opinions and arguments. This leads us to understand such a phenomenon as the phenomenon of virtual collective consciousness.

8) the phenomenon of virtual collective consciousness. It is defined as "inner knowledge catalyzed by social media platforms and shared by many people, driven by the spontaneity, homogeneity and synchronicity of their online activities. The phenomenon occurs when a large group of people connected by a social media platform think and act in a unified way and share collective emotions. Thus, they can effectively coordinate their efforts and quickly disseminate information to a global audience". Since the virtual collective consciousness is the result of the actions of the network, these actions must be timely, sharp, rapid, subject to the subject area and purposeful in order to successfully achieve their goal. Thus, the virtual collective consciousness is an emerging global model of these individual actions. The term "virtual collective consciousness" first appeared in 2011 in connection with the wave of protests and uprisings in the Arab world, named as the "Arab Spring", when there was widespread use of social media for organizing, communicating and informing in attempts at state repression and Internet censorship.

## CONCLUSION

Today the phenomenon of collective virtual consciousness acquires an ontological and epistemological status. Throughout history, we have communicated with each other through speech, writing, images on a screen, which is analogous to a dial up connection - an Internet connection that uses telephone lines and is established with minimal infrastructure, including a computer and a modem. However, a fairly advanced neural interface can give our communication the properties of a high-speed network, which will turn "we" into a new "I" that did not exist before. "

Thus, summing up, it should be noted that we tried to investigate the problem of the formation of the consciousness of an individual who thinks in terms of the virtual world - a product of the rapid spread of information networks and technologies. This problem, which has become especially relevant at the beginning of the 21st century, goes beyond the scope of special sciences and becomes a topic that requires philosophical reflection. The virtualization of consciousness requires the study of modern technologies and principles of influence, not alien to the individual's worldview, but based on the specifics of virtual reality as a new socio-cultural civilization that forms a person as a person, contributing to his adaptation in a complex global world.

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