Virtualization of culture as a defining trend development of modern society

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses various aspects of the modern society's development related to the virtualisation of culture: the educational process, the cultural industries, the artistic sphere, the use of artificial intellect (AI) and artificial intellect and commemorative practices. The authors describe the origin of the term "virtuality" and its evolution in a scientific discourse. The emergence and evolution of the phenomenon of virtuality is connected to the development of information and communication technologies (ICT). The concept of "virtuality" is considered as an information and technical space, a technically mediated environment, an information resource of modern society and a media environment of culture. On the basis of the methodological approaches by the world's researchers of the information society M. McLuhan and M. Castells, to the formation of a new type of culture, it is concluded that the intensification of the virtualisation process gradually leads to the replacement of the real subject space by the space of images, symbols and signs in many socially important spheres of human activity. It is shown that virtualisation contributes to the creation of innovative technologies of cultural and interpersonal communication and offers a new form of interaction with artefacts that have a virtual representation. The article highlights the increasing hybridisation of online and offline spaces, the transformation of the Internet into a space of human communication, everyday activities and entertainment. The authors note that modern innovations cannot replace the effect of a "live visit", but thanks to digital progress and widespread digitalisation, the development of 3D technologies, people have the opportunity to react emotionally to world events by being virtually in the centre of them. Virtualisation is seen as a new technology of representation that will largely determine the cultural experience of humanity in the nearest future. The authors show that the Internet now appears to users as an integrator of all spheres of social reproduction, and that various forms of cultural convergence and networking are being recorded in the Global Web. The benefits, threats and risks of the widespread use of modern information products are examined.

Introduction

In today's world, information technologies (IT) play a major role, they are also extremely important in the development of all spheres of social life without exception: it seems appropriate to mention that AI (artificial intelligence) is the most important word of 2023 according to the Collins dictionary (*'AI' named... , 2023*).

I would like to draw research attention to the cultural potential of information and communication technologies (ICT), intentions to implement and expand onlineization and digitalization, digitization and virtualization, representatives of almost all professions feel an obvious interest in the latter. Modern culture is also expressed in technologies: almost the entire cultural life of a person, everything created by him, goes online. Also, modifications of modern culture in society are expressed mainly in social networks and the blogosphere. The cultural life of a modern person is gradually moving to the Internet, online and offline realities relevantly being compared and intersecting. Due to the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, the cultural life of Ukrainians has largely moved online: if we recall music, performing arts, show business, we can state that many artists left Ukraine and their art became available only on the Internet. If culture signifies and includes all kinds of social relations, it is axiomatic that culture is present in nature, man and society, technological innovations create a new state of fine art. Painting as an image in its immediate interpretation is maximally virtual.

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The concept of "virtual culture" first began to be developed in the works of famous foreign philosophers M. Castells, M. McLuhan, and J. Baudrillard. S. Žižek explores the virtual not as an ideal model, but as a ceaseless creativity of the actual. Ukrainian researchers are also investigating the issue of culture virtualization. V. Volynets interprets virtuality as a sign of modern cultural development, and also analyzes the influence of artificial intellect on modern art. V. Buryak traced the dynamics of culture in the era of globalization. Therefore, a consistent and systematic philosophical and cultural analysis of the phenomenon of virtuality is an urgent task.

The purpose of the article is to consider the phenomenon of culture virtualization as a defining trend in the development of modern society. To reveal it, it is necessary to solve the *following tasks*: to define the concept of "virtuality", to analyze various aspects of the modern society development related to the virtualization of culture: the educational process, cultural industries, the artistic sphere, the use of artificial intellect (AI), commemorative practices.

Research methods

The analytical method was used to understand the phenomena of virtuality and virtualization of culture in the modern philosophical and cultural discourse. The systematic method is applied in considering modern culture as a whole totality of elements in a set of relationships and connections between them.

Results end Discussion

The idea of the virtual goes a long way in its formation and develops in the subject field of modern science. However, the first ideas about the virtual were formed in antique culture. Thus, when interpreting the concept of the "virtual", ancient Greek thinkers relied on the leading power of the mind, and the concept of "virtual" itself comes from the Latin word "virtus", which meant "virtue", "victory", "courage" (*Volynets, 2014: 152*). The concept of "electronic" virtuality arose in 1965, when the developer of the Internet network and the father of computer graphics A. Sutherland predicted the creation of an "unsurpassed display" that would provide users with the feeling of a full-fledged space that does not differ from the real one. A. Sutherland called such a space "virtual world". The first simulators of aviation flights appeared, using computers, means of controlling graphic objects with the help of mechanical manipulators.

In the work "Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society", M. Castells examines the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on modern culture, using M. McLuhan's terminology (*Castells, 2001: 237*). M. Castells refers to the modern period of cultural development as the "Internet galaxy", stating that the rapid development of ICT led to the emergence of new types of culture – Internet culture, cyber culture and electronic culture, which symbolize the specifics of the modern society's development. It was the creation and spread of various of virtual reality's functioning forms that became the basis for M. Castells in his conclusions about the emergence of a special culture in which the virtual and the real interact at the same time as the "culture of real virtuality". In their conceptual strategies, both M. Castells and M. McLuhan consider the information specifics of modern culture, and also raise the problem of interaction between the real and the virtual in the minds of modern people.

The concept of "virtuality" in this article will be understood according to V. Buriak as "informational and technical space, technically mediated environment, information resource of modern society and media environment of culture" (*Buriak, 2011:11*). Within the reflections on virtuality, the role of (AI), around which discussions are taking place, is growing – a real threat from AI in the field of cultural education is already being recorded, when AI can write essays for students, become the interlocutor of the user, contributing to the displacement of natural intellect. On the other hand, AI is likely to be a very promising technology, it may look like ChatGPT and Microsoft Bing, Jasper Chat and ChatSonic, Bard AI and YouChat, etc. Especially interesting in the indicated context, the latter is an alternative to GPT chat with some improvements and additions, can communicate in different languages, support different communication modes, balanced, creative and accurate, can even create graphic works of art at the request of the user.

The actualization of the virtuality phenomenon's discourse is connected with the explosion of interest in high-tech, robotics and automation, informatization and computerization. Digitization of all spheres of life has reached a new level, which permits to use AI. Its intensive use began, and at the same time the dangers posed by the use of AI became apparent. For example, the threat of washing out the middle professional level from the labor market, which is connected with the fact that it is their professional qualifications that can be the first to be replaced by the capabilities of AI, and it achieves better results than an employee. This was demonstrated by the strikes in Hollywood of those professionals whose qualifications did not require high originality. There is a fear that in the near future artificial intellect may replace specialists where human creativity is widely used. Careless use of AI is also dangerous.

Oswald Spengler once pointed out the soulless rationality of his contemporary era, noting in a famous aphorism that the brain prevails because the soul has retired. Unreflectively using nuclear energy, space technologies, etc., man has become the author of global cataclysms, putting himself on the verge of a global catastrophe. It is important to record the rapidly growing technical capabilities and learning tools that are modifying our understanding of the educational process and technologies. In the situation of the coronavirus pandemic and the current Russian armed attack, large gatherings of people are obviously dangerous for communications, as a result of which the educational process from face-to-face and offline becomes, respectively, correspondence and online, virtual and remote, remote and digital. Proposals from Ukrainian higher education institutions regarding distance learning were and remain relevant in the context of remote management and differentiated access levels, disciplinary and professional interest groups, communities in messengers and social networks (*Fidas and Sylaiou, 2021*).

The French culturologist and philosopher J. Baudrillard wrote about the modern society of virtual reality, filled with gadgets, simulacra, and avatars. Reflecting on the relationship between modern culture and the culture of previous eras, J. Baudrillard wrote: "The neo-technical environment in which we live is extremely rich in rhetoric and allegory. And it is no coincidence that baroque with its passion for allegory, with its new discursive individualism (excessive forms and fake materials), with its demiurgic formalism – it is the baroque that opens the modern era" (*Baudrillard, 2004: 54*). There are online artists in the Internet, there are works of art created with the help of Internet software in

every sphere of culture – a significant role here belongs to electronic technologies. In the field of architecture, houses are already being built thanks to the use of 3D printers, in the medical and sports, educational and scientific, economic and ecological spheres of human activity – examples of the use of digitization and artificial intellect are everywhere, in particular, in the field of urban planning.

Current means of communication and ICT, as noted by M. McLuhan, are constantly expanding the sphere of social life of an individual, "cancelling" time and space boundaries on a planetary scale, returning a person to the world of holistic perception and involving him in all events. Digitization and AI also have a global character and interact with all spheres of human activity, which in their totality can be interpreted as culture in its expanded sense. Modern art uses more and more new technologies, in particular, with the involvement of AI. "Exhibitions of paintings generated on the basis of artificial intellect are a new phenomenon in the world of modern art. This opens up new opportunities for creativity and research in the field of art. Museum and gallery institutions use artificial intellect technologies to expand their capabilities and attract new audience. This includes the creation of virtual exhibitions, the automation of the process of data processing and analysis on attendance and visitors' behavior, as well as the creation of interactive installations based on machine learning," V. Volynets notes (*2023: 24-25*).

From the point of view of informatics, AI is image recognition, but now it can create samples by itself, and naturally, it sounds particularly expressive in the Ukrainian language –IMAGE-CREATING ART. Taking into account that art in general is the creation of images, then this is an opportunity in the elevation of AI, because it complements the picture of those images that have already formed and are taken into account when creating new ones (*Cecotti, 2022*).

Now AI not only repeats, but also independently creates images, multiplying them, so we observe a tendency to overshadow and even supplant all the diversity of human experience and human culture. According to the interpretation of the Slovenian philosopher S. Žižek, it is virtual and real (*Žižek, 2004:3*), because it continuously causes the entry into presence, or the actualization of a certain new entity that is potentially contained in the virtual, but has not yet been discovered. The philosopher thinks of the virtual not as an ideal model, but as an incessant creativity of the actual, which exists "through all its lines that diverge in fact" (*Deleuze, 1958*). Any actualization of the virtual is a repetition, but not a repetition of the same, but a repetition that has a difference. J. Deleuze calls it the concept of "eternal return" created by Nietzsche, which denotes the actualization of virtuality as differentiation. The phenomenon of virtuality permits to give meaning to created images of future real objects through the actualization and recognition of the phenomena's meaning already existing in reality through the process of virtualization. The very process of virtualization, immersing a person in a certain space free from physical laws, on the one hand, gives a feeling of social weightlessness, permits to move away from harsh reality into an ideal world of virtuality, and on the other hand, it permits to veil the true meaning of real phenomena and objects, thereby endowing reality with an illusory meaning perceived by the majority as the only true (or desired) one. The strengthening of the virtualization process itself gradually leads to the replacement of the real object space by the space of images, symbols and signs in many socially important spheres of human activity. The realization of how dangerous it is for human creativity has not yet come to an end. We assume that only human creativity can resist the materialization of this idea. The experience of the past millennia shows that so far creativity has been enough for the survival of humanity, although the losses of the achievements of ancient civilizations are known, including the achievements of the ancient Persians and Hittites, Babylonians and Scythians, Chinese and Indians, the vast majority of whose cultural works have not reached us. From our point of view, so far, the capabilities of AI are at the level of creating a work of art of mediocre quality, there are still no examples of genius or even outstanding ones written by AI. Although more and more original generated works are appearing. For example, the canvas "Theatre D'opéra Spatial", which was created by the Midjourney neural network under the leadership of programmer Jason Allen, won the fine art competition in Colorado in August 2022 (*Borisikhina, 2022*).

The development of virtual science leads to changes in the perception of space and time. Time loses its cyclicity and linearity, mixes, divides into parts. A person lives one moment as if several times. M. Castells, emphasizing the essential importance of virtual reality in the creation of a new type of culture and man, explains this by the fact that "the cultural, historical, geographical significance of one or another area is erased, which is reintegrated into figurative collages and into functional networks, the space of places undergoes significant changes under the influence of the information flows' space. In this new type of communication system, time is erased into the past, present and future. From now on it can be programmed to interact in a single message with each other…" (*Castells, 2000: 353*). Transformational changes in time and space are directly related to the emergence of a new type of reality – virtual, in which various phenomena, events and eras are intertwined at the same time. This type of reality is associated with the formation of a new approach to the perception of the surrounding reality, a new type of human consciousness with the coexistence of the real and the virtual.

We will cite the most relevant, in our opinion, examples of the virtualization spread in the field of culture and art, which have become practically the norm, particularly in the museum field. National galleries and art collections of museums have collected millions of world works of different eras, many of which are digitized and available for viewing on official websites, among these exhibits there are many world masterpieces of painting, sculptures, jewelry, manuscripts and tableware, virtual tours are held on museum websites excursions. You can see online now works of famous masters of the world, you can delve into the processes of restoration and conservation of cultural heritage objects, online galleries support the function of virtual tours of pavilions, each tour is accompanied by recorded lectures in audio format. This corresponds to M. McLuhan's idea that the audio-visual era deserves special attention, during which the sensory balance between audio and visual types of culture is restored, and a person gains the opportunity to emotionally react to events in the world, virtually being in the center of these events.

In today's conditions of strengthening the role of ICT, it is possible to preserve the main cultural achievements of humanity from real and potential dangers, so we can observe how AI will evaluate all previous human experience. Whether AI will look for inspiration in it, as we did, or deny it, or simply remain beyond the limits of the possibilities it opens up, of course, with various consequences for human culture, but the option that humanity will lose its monopoly on cultural creation is also not excluded. AI can obviously

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change our views, including those on ourselves, on our nature and culture (*Rothman, 2018*).

We look to the future with hope, despite the fear that a new war may begin, which has not yet been seen in the experience of mankind (related to the use of AI) – a war of robots and smart weapons. The eternal return as an actualization of virtuality is an "emission" of contingency, that is, an actualization from virtuality must always be turned into an assertion of the improbable, and the virtual must always be a certain infinite condition for the manifestation of the unexpected (*Deleuze, 1969: 238*). Deleuzian ontology affirms the improbable and justifies the eternal actualization of the virtual as a continuous realization of a chance that will always differ. Of course, the most desirable option for humanity would be to prepare for the implementation of the AI project – multilaterally try to see and predict at least the most important consequences.

In J. Deleuze's work "Image - Time", the term "virtual" means a certain universal Memory, which "is not the ability to have memories, it is a membrane that falls into various modes: continuity, but also discreteness, envelopment, etc." (*Deleuze, 1958: 526*). Investigating war themes and commemorative practices as value orientations of today and factors in the formation of national identity in view of their potential for interactivity, we see how the culture of historical memory is manifested, how much Ukrainian culture is losing through the destruction of cultural monuments, how and to what extent we ourselves want to leave a memory of all this. Back in April 2022, the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation created an interactive "Map of Cultural Losses", analyzing which particular is lost, cultural experts reflect on what we are losing or what we can recreate in the future as a result of the struggle of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion (*Krechetova, 2022*). An example can be Iraq, which uses virtual reality technologies to restore monuments that were lost (*How virtual ..., 2022*).

M. Castells in the well-known work "Galaxy Internet: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society" reflects on the problem of the impact of virtual reality technologies on social communication and human consciousness, the emergence of online communities, the issue of preserving cultural identity, etc. (*Castells, 2001*). Under such conditions, virtualism contributes to the creation of innovative technologies of cultural and interpersonal communication, the interactive basis of which offers recipients a new form of interaction with artifacts that have a virtual representation. Currently, many interesting creative projects have appeared in the World Wide Web: 3D tours of art museums and Internet broadcasts from world exhibitions, personal sites of artists with their works, online art galleries. All of the above innovations, of course, will not replace the effect of a "live visit", but thanks to digital progress and widespread digitization, as a result of constantly developing 3D technologies, the content consumer has the opportunity to see world masterpieces of art without leaving home.

Conclusion

Thus, the process of virtualization appears as a defining trend in the development of modern society. Virtualization can be considered as a new technology of representation, which in the nearest future will largely determine the cultural experience of humanity. The phenomenon of virtuality not only applies to all spheres of human social life, but also acquires more and more importance in the development and formation of modern cultural space. Since a person spends an increasingly large part of his life in the conditions of virtual reality, it is its specificity that causes most of the changes in the system of cultural values.

Today, the Internet appears to consumers, including, as an integrator of all spheres of social reproduction forms and, from our point of view, it is possible to record various forms of convergence and interconnection of culture in the World Wide Web. Further research can develop towards the analysis of social networks and the blogosphere, which represent the most widespread and defining cultural phenomena of our time.

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Віртуалізація культури як визначальна тенденція розвитку сучасного суспільства

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У статті аналізуються різноманітні аспекти розвитку сучасного суспільства, пов'язані з віртуалізацією культури: освітній процес, культурні індустрії, мистецька сфера, використання штучного інтелекту (ШІ), комеморативні практики. Автори наводять походження терміну «віртуальність» та його подальший розвиток у науковому дискурсі. Виникнення та еволюція феномену віртуальності пов'язується з розвитком інформаційно-комунікативних технологій (ІКТ). Поняття «віртуальність» розглядається як інформаційно-технічний простір, технічно опосередковане середовище, інформаційний ресурс сучасного суспільства і медійне середовище культури. Базуючись на методологічних підходах світових дослідників інформаційного суспільства М. Маклюена, М. Кастельса щодо формування нового типу культури, робляться висновки про те, що посилення процесу віртуалізації поступово призводить до заміщення реального предметного простору простором образів, символів і знаків у багатьох суспільно важливих сферах життєдіяльності людини. Показано, що віртуалістика сприяє створенню інноваційних технологій культурної та міжособистісної комунікації, пропонує нову форму взаємодії з артефактами, що мають віртуальну репрезентацію. У статті висвітлюється посилення гібридизації онлайнового та офлайнового просторів, перетворення Інтернет-мережі на простір людської комунікації, повсякденної діяльності та розваги. Автори зазначають, що сучасні інновації не в змозі замінити ефекту «живого візиту», але завдяки цифровому прогресу і повсюдній цифровизації, розвитку 3D-технологій у людини є можливість емоційно реагувати на світові події, віртуально перебуваючи у центрі цих подій. Віртуалізація розглядається як нова технологія репрезентації, яка в найближчому майбутньому багато в чому визначатиме культурний досвід людства. Автори показують, що сьогодні Інтернет постає перед користувачами, в тому числі, і як інтегратор усіх сфер форм суспільного відтворення, фіксуються різні форми конвергенції та взаємозв'язку культури в Глобальному павутинні. Досліджуються переваги, загрози та ризики у широкому використанні сучасних інформаційних продуктів.

Ключові слова: культура віртуальної реальності, інформаційно-комунікаційні технології, дигіталізація, сучасна культура, штучний інтелект.