



Humanities Knowledge in the Twilight of Culture

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to relevant issues of humanitarian knowledge and cultural transformations. It investigates changes in culture, impacted by technological progress and standardization of culture, which, first of all, decreased interest in the humanities fields of culture. The focus is made on total commercialization, which has influenced a lot of cultural areas. The authors analyze the causes of those changes, including in the cinema, which, in their opinion, is more and more tends to become an industry dressed in the clothes of art, rather than art itself. The article concludes that the rapid massovization of culture transforms the cinema, turning it into a global market and thus devaluating the very concept of "creativity". This study also touches on the issue of the interaction between language and culture, which serve as a barometer of what is taking place. The main problems of modern verbal culture are distinguished. The article focuses on the emergence of a "newspeak", which transforms ideals, including the culture of speech, into "simulacra", sign fetishes (according to Jean Baudrillard). The authors concluded that the discursive hierarchy disappears and the status of normative vocabulary changes in the modern language. Everyone more or less speaks the same language, which mixes together slang, jargon, computer slang, and anglicisms, desacralizes obscenity, deprives words of their meaning, makes visual imagery dominant. In the context of general transformations of culture, the authors are trying to determine the place of knowledge produced by humanities, which has become more of a description, a depiction of contemporaneity. It is established that the search for new cultural values is the only right direction for humanities knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century will be the century of the humanities, or it will not be *Claude Lévi-Strauss*. C. Lévi-Strauss was not the first who believed that the separation of culture and the humanities will be disastrous for culture, he also was not the first who, thinking about the fate of civilization, saw the culture mainly as a world of meanings, signs, symbols, values (for example, E. Cassirer with his "Philosophy of Symbolic Forms"). For decades, philosophers and cultural scientists have been sounding the alarm, pointing that technological progress and following standardization, among many of their negative

consequences, have reduced interest in the humanities fields of culture, as it was predicted by F. Nietzsche. Another thinker, O. Spengler, speaking of the "decline of Europe", linked this with the inevitable degeneration of European culture into civilization.

However, the intelligentsia of the post-Soviet states was taken by surprise by the sudden invasion of commerce and the market into the artistic space and scientific research, as well as into the media, schools,

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and universities. Sure, we ourselves are co-authors of this transformation, whether we want it or not. The countries of young capitalism threw themselves to catch up with the West, though not in the ideas of humanities but in mass culture, patterns of sexual relations, educational standards. And these standards often turn out to be primitive, dependent on the laws of advertising, shows, and the television pressure of countless series - just to ensure commercial success. The same situation is with book publishing, in which detectives and so-called "female" novels break all records. Glamorous magazines containing addresses and phone numbers of prostitutes, shooting and violence on television, game TV-shows copied from foreign originals - these are the most noticeable signs of contemporary cultural space.

The situation in the film industry is not much better. We should stress - now it is industry, dressed in the clothes of art, rather than the art itself. But whether everything that is good for the industry is good for the art too? Take for example the most popularized Russian films (blockbusters, as they called in Hollywood): "Night Watch", "Day Watch", "The State Counsellor", "The 9th Company", "Admiral", etc. These are films aimed for box offices, that is, for high ratings; they have entertaining simplicity in the narration of complex historical and psychological events, showiness, action. A teacher for them is American mass culture, which focuses on the ideology of consumerism and gains a stable position throughout the world. But the prominent Polish film director Andrzej Wajda said: "You will never defeat the Americans because they are making stories, and you are - problems".

It may seem that historical cinemas (e.g., "Bogdan Khmelnytsky") exist too, but they also are created according to the pattern of the action movies and the dramatic social and moral issues recede into the background. But why, in general, we strive to overcome American cinema? You need to play professionally in your field. It is known that each culture is comprised of two cultures - high and mass, national and global market. Indeed, there is much more in the West than commercial art. There are about 500 theaters in Paris (for comparison, Odessa, the city of a million, has only five theaters). The fifth channel of state television in France is high-quality cultural content. But in Ukraine, there is no similar television channel at all. The Russian channel "Culture", which for several years was available at the cable television, was disconnected for the Ukrainian audience by a decision from above - either for commercial reasons or in order to "protect the information space" (from whom and what is protected?). The transformation of culture into a

product of mass consumption (according to José Ortega y Gasset - as a consequence of the notorious "uprising of the masses") provoked another natural result - the triumph of mediocrity, which is aggressive towards the remaining islands of high culture. A consumer society is a society of successful mediocrity that seeks easy understanding and guarantees of success in practical (i.e., economic) use. The choice is very simple: "We are small but successful people, and if you (this is addressed towards highbrow intellectuals) are so cultural and creative, why are you so poor?".

The very concept of "creativity" has been devalued too. Because now every showman, every voiceless singer who goes on stage and sings only under a phonogram, call themselves "creators" in the "workshop of culture" (interesting that the "workshop" is also a term from the vocabulary of the industrial economy). All this is so far from what A. Goralskiy calls creativity, believing that creativity is not only the creation of something new but socially valuable activity, requiring from the Master and his students to have special qualities and skills, a complementary dialogue with the past, and mastery of heuristic techniques (Goralskiy, 1998, p. 7-10). It is not surprising that scholars, serious writers, and good artists began to feel ashamed of calling themselves representatives of creative professions.

That's how the twilight of culture started in previous centuries: the sun had already set and the starry sky had not yet appeared. At the same time, from year to year, it becomes more difficult to change something. At one of the international conferences that discussed the state of culture, an exact diagnosis was established: a dead end of direct continuation. The process has gained such inertia that it is extremely difficult, almost impossible, to radically change the direction of the movement. It reminds a heavy accelerated car, which is forced to move by inertia and attempts to make a turn may cause a catastrophe.

The condition of the language of culture, mainly of the natural language, is one of the most important barometers of what is happening. Is it possible that a language, which usually sensitively reacts to all the phenomena of social life, does not reflect the ongoing events? Although according to Heidegger, it is not a man speaks a language, it is a language speaks through a man, the language is still very dependent on the state of culture. And what can be found in the post-Soviet space?

There are numerous signs of the transitional period of the post-Soviet states that look completely natural - from the past to the future, from Orthodox customs to Western aspirations. Take, for example, the existence of a well-established form of citizens' address in

conversations with each other, which in everyday life is usually brought to automatism. Modern Ukrainians are often inconsistent in their addresses. Today, to address someone with "man/woman (young man/girl)" is most acceptable. The second most popular form is "Mr./Mrs.", and such forms as "pan / pani" are quite exotic. Such an address as "comrade" is no longer perceived as an acceptable form. It is still preserved in the army, but its existence is limited to the framework of a sublanguage, a professional argot used in a closed social group. The society is more supportive of such addresses as "Mr./Mrs.". Also, Ukrainians are still uncertain about the use of a patronymic. Western trends make patronymic redundant. However, people of middle or old age, if addressed without a patronymic, perceive it as rudeness.

Ukrainians are still unaware not only of how to address each other but also how to communicate with each other in simple situations. For example, when we arrive at a boutique, a shop assistant rushes towards us with the phrase: "Can I help you with something?". The language has no fixed rule of response. The question itself is traced from the English, but the answer to it has not yet been formed, as well as to the question: "Can I be useful to you?". Of course, the answer can be made up on the fly, but the very need to think about it means that the stereotype has not been developed yet. The service sector is one of those areas in which speech etiquette is being currently elaborated.

But this is quite natural for young states. There are much worse things. We've never observed such an aggressive and, we would even say, frivolous and fun substitution of the "great and mighty" natural language with various slangs - from computer to criminal. Swearing and obscene expressions are heard from the theater stages and from movie screens. According to scriptwriters and playwrights, these words, if they do not add artistic expressiveness, then they give the dialogues some "zest", and, most importantly, bring art closer to the mass audience and, accordingly, contribute to the box office success of their products (we do not dare to name them works of art). But it's one thing when Solzhenitsyn described the monologues of Ivan Denisovich, who was in Gulag, where life was unthinkable without a criminal argot, and quite opposite when in the regular TV series quite prosperous and seemingly intelligent heroes use the same argot that is usually used in prisons.

Though not so disgustingly, computer slang also disharmonizes with culture (such words as "emelia", "klava", and so on). It is frequently used not to indicate the professional affiliation of the heroes but

as a way to show their "modernity". These heroes refuse to use the "ancient language" of older generations together with their, presumably, "ancient" culture. It is not a coincidence that postmodern philosophers and cultural scientists were skeptical of the creators of Internet culture. Jacques Derrida and Umberto Eco emphasized that you should not treat the computer and its communication capabilities with excessive reverence as it will bring damage to the development of verbal culture.

At the same time, slangs perfectly fit into the system of simulacra. Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1995, p. 2, 4), have diagnosed Western civilization of the second half of the 20th century as a "consumer society"; he noted that this society has changed the ideals of the production of functionally useful things to "simulacra" - the production of fetishes. The value of these fetishes is measured not by the real material value of the goods, but their symbolic value: far-fetched indications of social status, prestige, an indication of external differences, compliance with predetermined patterns, etc. Simulacra, thus, give the advertisers the possibility to manipulate public opinion, mystify and emulate social progress, because these fetish signs form a languagelike connected system. Due to this, they not only actively influence the natural language itself but also, to a large extent, try to replace it.

The modern language of the post-Soviet states is in approximately the same condition as it was in the 1920s and 1930s when special newspeak was being developed. And in the present language, the discursive hierarchy disappears, everyone speaks almost the same language, which mixes together slang, criminal jargon, computer slang, anglicisms, and elements of the Old Soviet language. All this is also noticeable in the language of modern politicians. The Soviet government used its bureaucratic Volapük, and at some point, a lacuna, which destroyed that power, appeared. The Communists lost not only economically and politically, but also linguistically. But then the language accepted under socialism intertwined with the language that had long been rooted in the western hemisphere and resulted in another freak of nature. It has the features of the criminal language and the business language, which in turn is a mixture of the "Old Komsomol" language and criminal argot. The language of power is so bizarre also because it does not rely on any ideology. Old constructs, although seem to be absolutely burlesque, are still preserved in the modern language. For example, such widely used phrases as "someone can't settle down," "it's beneficial for certain forces", "the question is under control", "the question needs to

be pointed and raised to the full height”, “the problem should be deepened”, “the people will not understand this”, “the will of the people”, “certain circles in the West (or in the East”) - these all are just slogans or empty formulas. Meanwhile, a new generation has grown up, for which this old language is the same desired exotic as Soviet life. Now young people often lose the caution previously dictated by ideological considerations. Students, for example, naming prominent speakers, can put Cicero, Hitler, Stalin, and one of the modern politicians in one row.

The obscene lexicon has also had changes in status. The entire post-Soviet space has experienced the desacralization of the swearwords. It is known that the power of the Russian swearwords is connected with their sacredness, this distinguishes them from the swearwords in European languages, which are desacralized. Therefore, when in foreign movies the phrase “fuck you” is translated in Russian with the phrase “damn it”, in a sense this is correct - by the power of meaning it really is. In Soviet times, swearwords were taboo, it was not common to swear from the stage or from the screen, in a company of women or in public places. Conversations in swear language were typical for plumbers, drivers, builders, and soldiers. Now this language is used by young people in schools and university corridors, husbands with their wives, mothers with their children, etc. Swearwords make their way into a normal language and their forbidden side is weakened; now the policeman will never come up to make an observation and ask someone not to swear in a public place. The police speak this language as well. This is a sign of wildness, the first sign that catches your eye in the twilight of culture.

In general, the paraphrase of the biblical expression “the Word was at the beginning of culture” (the word as the Logos), which has served Western civilization for thousands of years, now certainly loses its sense. The word is replaced by a visual row. Currently, not words but brands became important. And the main linguistic know-how of today is the almost complete exclusion of such a fundamental Christian concept as “conscience” from the rhetoric. The level of shame in society has markedly declined, the voice of conscience is less heard. A content analysis of the numerous political speeches of modern politicians shows that the word “conscience” is almost never used. Shamelessness became not only visual but even demonstrative. The concept of conscience is replaced by the advertising concept of success. In one of the study guides, we saw the phrase: “Stalin, despite all his shortcomings, was a very successful leader”. The Communists, with their slogan “The party is the mind, honor, and conscience of the era,” were shameless,

but they pretended that conscience was important for them; modern leaders don't even pretend. This is a new reality. Ten years ago, the expression “successful person” did not exist; we could hear about “successful negotiations or successful work”. Success (read, individual economic success) was not a key cultural value. Now, there are many books and TV shows that tell you how to become successful. The words “ambitious”, “aggressive” changed their meaning.

At the conference “Russian Language as a Mirror of the Modern Socio-Cultural Situation” (Levontina, 2009) I. Levontina noted that “there is a systemic shift, and this is not about mere reception of one or another word, this is a transformation of the worldview”. Insensibly, the technology of success has replaced any ideology. We do not criticize the lawyer for defending the killer because that is his\her job. Now everyone knows: a crowd is lead not by the one who is more literate, well-read, skilled or who is able to formulate the idea better, but by the one who better solves the short-term problem - whether due to money, whether there are connections or the ability to bypass the mind and affect only the senses. But logic becomes unnecessary if someone bypasses the mind. Evidence is no longer needed; the logic of modern conversation: Why? - Just because! You can simply loudly declare that genuine liberals (or patriots, Europeans, professionals, depending on the situation) are not those who call themselves such, but we are. Ideological slogans were replaced by chanting slogans. The borderline between political demonstrators and fans at the stadium has disappeared: “There are a lot of us, and we cannot be overcome!” (Hrynzholly Band).

Many people are looking for a way out of the crisis by turning to serious art and high culture that “needs to be” in demand. But how to do that? Will this happen on its own? We may observe some signs of a spontaneous revival of interest in high culture. It rises in price for the same reason that bread not chewing gum is valued during hunger. However, doesn't this doom us to blind faith that “beauty will save the world” on its own, by virtue of the unknown laws of the cultural evolution? After all, art has a flip side. It constructs an illusory reality in which you can escape. Tragedy, for example, is able to show how beautiful and unbending a person is among the horrors of the world. Thus, there is an illusion that a person is already protected from unhappiness, boredom, and social humiliation. So maybe art is a drug old like the world, isn't it? Or maybe it is aimed only to balance reality and not eliminate the need for real social action, isn't it? Art itself cannot and must not answer all these questions, as there are social sciences and humanities for this.

In this context, are the hopes placed by Levi-Strauss on the humanities justified? Hasn't he overestimated the possibilities of the humanities?

A general view of the evolution of modern humanities knowledge is not very encouraging. The humanities scholars have largely put up with the understanding of man as a consumer, and at the same time, they only describe and record the occurring changes. As if the ultimate goal of the humanities is to make a diagnosis for culture. The idea of the uncontrollability of the technical conquest of the environment (and even human - genetic engineering, for example) was hardly discussed by humanities. The justification of the price for comfort was not discussed as well. Now we are not making significant physical efforts, which were necessary until very recently, but to what extent does this refusal necessary? Meanwhile, our hearing (not even mentioning decibels impacting thousands of rock concert visitors), our eyesight, perception as a whole, is undergoing aggression recently unknown. Naturally, this cannot but affect the formation of a modern person. And this is when everyone is well aware that a meaningful life requires subtle feelings and developed perception. We can say that civilization easily sacrifices the psyche for the sake of human physics. Unilateral development associated with the evolution of technology threatens man as a species and threatens all nature.

But what do humanities propose in contrast to all these trends? Only descriptions, depictions of what is happening, like a chronicle of our age. But who and when listened to the chroniclers in order to change their lives? Are there any hopes that the humanities in the current condition will be able to change the lives of people of the 21st century?

There are two sides to the question about the prospects of humanities knowledge. First of all, there is the question of how many purely humanities issues, relating to humans as homo sapiens now remain in the humanities themselves? They describe the matter of their subjects (linguist - the "material body" of the language, musicologist - music, etc.), without raising the question of their meaningfulness and purpose. So, in current conditions, the humanities are unlikely to radically change anything. Some scholars even believe that only sociology, structural linguistics, and experimental psychology are left from the humanities as sciences. Let's say you read the work of a literary critic about Shakespeare, and there is another sociological research or attempt to make a Freudian analysis of Shakespeare complexes. This, in fact, is not much different from how in the Soviet period everything was interpreted in terms of the class struggle, under which the supposedly scientific basis of historical materialism was brought. But is it much

more productive to consider the evolution of culture and its very purpose through the prism of only Keynesian economic relations? For the analysis of culture, the language of economics is not richer and not preferable than the language of sociology. If the development of culture has its own laws, then they are formulated differently than the laws of sociology and political economy.

Secondly, it is a question of whether there are a lot of scientific-based matters in the humanities. If, according to A. Einstein, science is the construction of relatively simple models that can explain reality (and, therefore, able to make predictions) using existing laws, and not just description and record of occurring events, then in this respect the humanities are noticeably inferior to the natural sciences. Is anyone able to name any unquestionable laws of the development of Culture on the basis of which we can predict its future? Probably, such laws exist, but in order to establish them, new means are needed, possibly borrowed from other areas of knowledge.

W. Dilthey, who wanted to separate the methodology of the humanities and the natural sciences, had some reasons for this. Indeed, humanities knowledge is based not only (and not so much) on the search for general laws, but also on the so-called "teleological" explanation, relying on "practical syllogism" (Nikiforov, 1998, p. 173-179) when, in order to understand a social phenomenon, it is required to determine the goal and means of human activity adequate to that goal. Thus, axiology, whose subject is the goals of culture and its values becomes the main discipline in humanities. In previous eras, culture was supported by the idea that a person needs to love something more than his\her own existence, to serve something, otherwise, a person goes mad because of the meaninglessness of life. And thus, today there is no task more important for the intelligentsia than the search for new cultural values. Otherwise, the current twilight may never end, and the Kantian "starry sky above your head" will never appear.

SUMMARY

Under the influence of transformational processes in culture, caused by technical progress, humanitarian knowledge undergoes a change. Standardization, comprehensive commercialization and massization of culture diminish interest in humanitarian knowledge. There is a process of turning culture into a global market, and as a result, many of its spheres (from language to artistic activity) are being transformed, from language to artistic activity.

CONCLUSION

Humanitarians in the new reality have come to terms with the understanding of human as a consumer. In humanitarian knowledge there are only descriptions of what is happening. But the statement of transformations is not the ultimate goal of the humanities. Staying in the current state, the humanities are unlikely to dramatically change anything. However, understanding what is happening, identifying the prospects and threats of human civilization can help raise the status of humanitarian knowledge. The search for new cultural goals, its values can become the basis for the evolution of humanitarian knowledge in the future.

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