

# *Categories of Abstract and Concrete in Analysis of Modernity*

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**Abstract**—The conception of the information society, in which information is given the status of this society essence, testifies the modern crisis of rationalism as a philosophical paradigm. The dialectics of such categories as the abstract and the concrete allows us to understand that the essence of the information society as a social reality is not information but abstraction as a separation of all spheres of society and all social institutions from senses and actual content. But it is important to realize that thus the information society itself becomes a poor abstraction and exists exactly as long as we see our own essence and the only guarantee of the progress in information.

**Keywords**—*information society; information; rationalism; science; concrete; abstract; abstraction*

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Today, the position of the subject has become barely substantial. No one today is able to take responsibility as a subject of power, a subject of knowledge, a subject of history. And no one, however, even tries ... the issues of alienation collapsed” [1]. After these words of the French philosopher, uttered in 1983, one could just state the end of postmodernity as the apotheosis of subjectivity. And if we really believe Baudrillard, then in this situation “... the only possible strategy is the strategy of the object” [1], implying the complete disappearance of the subject. That is the complete disappearance of a person. Let us recollect the film “the Matrix”, which was denied by Baudrillard, but in which the director intentionally shows us the cover of the philosopher’s book “Simulacra and simulation” held by the hero.

However, another intellectual claims and gives a well-grounded proof in the volume of his book that Western mind, including Baudrillard’s, is quite subjective and throughout its history has been practicing political “ideology...which is just the “interested” distortion of senses, the abuse of plasticity of the natural language, which is... philosophy called to resist” [2].

What is the fate of the subject in the modern information society: has it disappeared or not? The disappearance of the subject means that today a person is only a part of the information field, a certain matrix, the laws of which are basically incomprehensible, because they, these laws, simply do not exist. And then, as Baudrillard would say, we can state not only the end of the history after Fukuyama, but the end of that end. But if we see that someone is engaged in” distortion

of senses” and manipulation, we can claim that not only the subject has not disappeared, but also the senses are alive. For it is impossible to distort what does not exist. However, the search for the senses should not be done in the information field, but in the subject.

In our opinion, to sort out this ambiguity is possible via the categories of abstract and concrete, with the help of which we will try to answer the question why the information society does not contribute to the solution of the problem of senses and values, of subject and object, but, on the contrary, only aggravates it.

## II. REASONING

The generally accepted approach to the category of abstract and concrete is formally logical, i.e. positivist. In this tradition, the abstract as “one-sided, simple, not developed; side, part of the whole; opposes the concrete” is defined as the result of the abstraction operation as the process of notion forming, “mental distraction” from the concrete, i.e. visual, empirical. Abstract is purely mental in relation to directly experienced, concrete.

Such putting of the abstract and concrete on different sides of being, which is seen everywhere in the philosophical literature [3-5] leads to the conclusions that in the information society, which has lost methodological and ideological guidelines, can be very dangerous. Here thinking is possible in two ways. If our mind is called abstract, and the empirical world of things is considered concrete and rich in content, then the rich spiritual content of culture is sacrificed to the ordinary, everyday, opportunistic interests. And then the philosophy of everyday life and subjectivity is born, for which the top is the problem of success and personal happiness. Obviously, this is a deliberate ideological distortion of senses. Alternatively, on the contrary, the empirical world of things is called insignificant, abstract and from it, they say, we transit to the notions as something concrete, that is to the essence, to the conception, to understanding. Thus, the empirical world as a “poor abstraction” is sacrificed to certain ideologies, mental constructions, principles that are supposedly richer in content. And the philosophy is born infinitely combining “essences”, the philosophy of “non-classical” constructivism.

It seems to be productive to consider the information society through the interpretation of the abstract and concrete

categories given by E.V. Ilyenkov in the tradition of G.W.F. Hegel [6] and K. Marx [7]. In Russia E.V. Ilyenkov, to no purpose in our mind, was accused of idealism and Hegelianism on the grounds that the philosopher presumably gave the ontological status to thinking. But this is far from the true. E.V. Ilyenkov in his interpretation of thinking, and hence of the abstract and concrete categories, has avoided the narrow psychological, i.e. natural-scientific, and all in all positivist and scientist's position. According to this narrow interpretation, the subject of thinking cannot be but a separate individual, and thinking is a product of this individual brain "activity".

In E.V. Ilyenkov's approach [8], thinking is not just a mental function of an individual and forms of thinking are not only notion, judgment and conclusion perfectly studied by formal logic since Aristotle, but they not in the least explain thinking as a phenomenon of culture. Thinking initially and genetically is a function and attribute of society, which is nothing but a thinking subject. And the forms of thinking basically are the forms of activity of a human as a social being, that is, society. In such forms, the culture as a whole appears before us, both material and spiritual.

In this logic, it is easy to understand the essence and specifics of such cultural phenomenon as science and scientific cognition, which was developed by V. G. Ivanov and M. L. Lesgina in their conception of science as a scientific research process in its evolution as "science in flux", the objective process of "entrance of things into the idea" [9]. Collective mind in the form of science in its complex ways, sometimes confusing and not direct, is gradually moving towards absolute truth.

In the same tradition, we introduce the following definition: *culture is a process of specifically human, i.e. the subject-symbolic interaction of society and nature in material and ideal forms and products of which the universal sense and single-group (ethnic, national, class, etc.) meanings of the historical process are disclosed* [10].

In this logic, the transition from sensually contemplated concreteness to the concept is a movement from the concrete to the abstract or from the abstract to the concrete. This is a form of movement from the phenomenon to the essence, from the consequence – to its foundation, which is possible only if our analysis goes beyond the individual psyche and beyond psychology – into the social sphere. This dialectical interpretation was presented by E. V. Ilyenkov already in his thesis (1954): "Only this point of view coincides in its perspective with the consideration of the object from the point of view of the subject itself. Only from this position objectively significant definitions of the object become visible – "what the object is what it is", in other words, an abstraction of the concept" [11]. E. V. Ilyenkov here deals with criteria of essential, objective. It is impossible "to distinguish between the essential for the object (for his desires, aspirations, goals, etc.) and the essential for the objective definition of the nature of the object, completely independent of subjective aspirations" [11], relying on the positivist interpretation of consciousness contrary to the positivism declaration of one's

own independence and objectivity. "Reproduction of the concrete in thinking is the goal that determines the relative weight and value of each separate act of generalization" [11] - the philosopher writes. In other words, we are talking about the fact that in our individual thinking the concepts should not be empty, but specific and reflecting the reality in its essential characteristics. That is, they should not be simulacra, fantasy phantoms of individual consciousness. "This means that all really scientific, and not absurd, non-empty abstract definitions arise in the human head not as a result of a thoughtless, random process of turning the specific into the abstract, but only as a result of systematic promotion of knowledge in line with the general logical process of science development in the course of concretization of existing knowledge through its critical transformation" [11].

The categories of abstract and concrete are the characteristics of both sensory perception and conceptual thinking. The abstract by E. V. Ilyenkov is not only a form of thought, and concrete is not only sensual-visual image. "In the form of a visual image only poor, one-sided knowledge can be learned. Logic in this case will have to qualify it as "abstract" knowledge, despite all its visibility. Conversely, in verbal and abstract form, in the language of formulas, knowledge can be expressed as rich, vibrant, deep and comprehensive, that is concrete" [11].

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the categories of abstract and concrete, through their dialectics, we understand the society, which today is called information one. The essence of the information society is abstraction as a distraction from the wealth of content, abstraction as a new form of alienation, abstraction as a modern form of degradation of culture as a continuum of meanings.

The information society turns everything it touches into an abstraction. Ideology is becoming an abstraction in the information society. It is one thing to call ideology a "false consciousness" and to consider it as a modern form of political mythology. "False consciousness" and political myths still have their own nature and their roots, which in the analysis can be found and revealed in the society itself. But it is quite another matter to design ideologies and entire ideological concepts according to the order, with the help of which to raise entire nations to mass movements. Public psychology becomes abstracted in the information society. From a certain historical-organic system-cultural matter with its structure and content, social psychology in the information society is transformed into mass consciousness. Even the mass consciousness itself is abstracted, since the very routine and everyday life is not formed by the objective reality, and not even by the subjective reality (the illusion of many young people obsessed with individual freedom), but by the virtual reality, which is formatted through the "information field" by the same adherents of the information society. The type of the inhabitant with virtual consciousness becomes more and more widespread and is reproduced on a large scale. Modern art is abstract not only with respect to artistic realism, but even to

the art of abstract art and the avant-garde of the twentieth century. No proletcult (cultural and educational organisations formed in 1917 in the Soviet Russia) even in its most daring experiments did not reach today's performances and installations. Public consciousness as a whole is abstracted, losing its integrity and consistency.

In the information society not only objectively ideal, but also the social reality itself with its objective social relations turns into an abstraction. It is virtualized. The essence of this process is the replacement of objective social relations with constructed, virtual ones. Virtual reality is not a computer that exists in the network or in the digital "cloud". The term came from physics, then migrated to psychology and means something both existing and non-existing or rather existing only in a certain situation of interaction, and in another situation suddenly disappearing. And this virtual reality becomes a characteristic of our consciousness. They called it "ever-changing society" and abandoned the very opportunity to know and govern this society. People become an abstraction, becoming a population, a mass of consumers of goods, services, entertainment and pleasures. K. Marx wrote about "abstract labour" as a scientific abstraction reflecting the essence of capitalism. But today, the labour itself is abstracted so much that it ceases to be the basis of culture, and its place is occupied by self-realization and self-actualization (the term, by the way, taken from Maslow, but distorted beyond recognition, that is also turned into abstraction). Money in the information society, as everyone knows, ceased to be the equivalent of labor long ago and turned into an abstraction of derivatives, the volume of which exceeds the volume of world GDP at least ten times. The whole media sphere is abstract, which becomes a social field of our present existence, because the media not only lose touch with reality, but also deliberately tear this connection not considering it something significant for themselves. There is even the expression "fake media".

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The list of signs of a spiritual crisis and a global humanitarian catastrophe is far from being exhausted. However, as always in times of crisis, the tragedy is optimistic. And optimism is as follows. As long as the concept of the information society does not work for a person, it is an abstraction itself, that is, something bad, not adequately reflecting the actual state of affairs. Consequently, the information society as a virtual reality exists exactly as long as we consider information as our own essence and essence of

modern society, linking it (and only it) with our communication strategies and horizons of development. Until we understand that information is only an attribute of matter, and not a substrate, and especially not a substance that replaces it, we will have neither full-fledged communication, nor real development. It is likely that, on the contrary, this close relationship with information, imposed on us as an essential characteristic of modernity, will lead us away from the wealth of specific content and concepts of culture in the world of abstractions, empty forms, simulacra.

In particular, in our view, the analysis of the information society as an empirical reality through the categories of concrete and abstract, rather than through the category of information, would be more productive for the emergence of new knowledge about the society in which we live. Maybe there would be another name that reflects the essence of modernity better, for example, the abstract society, a society of simulacra, the mythological society, virtual society, or something like that. And after the "end of history" and "making senseless the very process of making senseless", history will have to begin again by finding meanings.

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