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New Subjectness in the Conditions of Sociotechnical Space

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the emergence of the phenomenon of new subjectness that arises from the integration of artificial and natural fields in contemporary socio-technical reality. It aims to challenge the subject-object dichotomy established by Modern philosophy tradition. To support this goal, the paper draws on the philosophical views of the proponents of Object-Oriented Ontology (Manuel DeLanda, Graham Harman) and Actor-Network theory (Bruno Latour, John Law). These contemporary philosophers substantiate the idea of distributed hybrid subjectness as the result of multiple network interactions, which can be interpreted using John Law's "method assemblage". This method disregards the attitudes of classical metaphysics and leads to the conclusion that new subjectivity arises from chaotic reality and manifests through the continuous formation and reformation of "bundles of relations". In those relations, it is impossible to differentiate between subject and object, as these roles roles are mobile and volatile.

KEYWORDS: Ontology, artificial intelligence, epistemology, cognition, new subjectness, artificial intelligence, consciousness, subject, object, Actor-Network Theory.

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Nuevas subjetividades en las condiciones del espacio socio-técnico

RESUMEN

El presente artículo está dedicado al estudio del fenómeno de la nueva subjetividad que surge en los procesos de integración de las esferas natural y artificial. La investigación se realiza en la lógica de la superación de la dicotomía sujeto-objeto, cuyo inicio se encuentra en la Filosofía de los tiempos modernos. Los autores fundamentan la idea de una subjetividad híbrida, distribuida, que es el resultado de diversas interacciones en red. Este trabajo propone interpretar la nueva subjetividad a través del "método de ensamblaje", planteado por el autor John Law. La nueva subjetividad nace de una realidad caótica y se manifiesta a través de un haz de relaciones en constante renovación. En estas relaciones es imposible hacer una diferenciación inequívoca entre sujeto y objeto, ya que estos roles son móviles y cambiantes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ontología, inteligencia artificial, Epistemología, cognición, nueva subjetividad, subjetividad híbrida, inteligencia artificial, conciencia, sujeto, objeto, teoría del Actor-Red.

Introduction

The ever-increasing structure of the modern world is inseparably tied to the rapid progress of science and technology. The digital revolution affects not only our material life but our understanding of reality as well. The essence of this change is a realization that nowadays relations between man and the world, man and other people are largely dependent on material artificial intermediaries. Everything created in a laboratory eventually leaves its confines and inhabits the planet with various hybrids that combine heterogeneous human and non-human elements. Obviously, such a global tendency cannot remain without consequences.

Traditionally, people have a tendency to view any hybrid forms as a certain deviation from normal, some abnormalities. In this regard, analytical work with various anomalies that arose as a result of hybrid intervention in our life follows the same logic: complex situations are treated as irregularities in the functioning of technology, science, morals, law, society, or something we don't know (Kuznetsov, 2010: 249).

This reductionist approach stems from the man's desire to deal with simple, uncomplicated, and unmixed processes, and issues related to social or technical problems only. However, such a simplification is unacceptable. The paradox is that our very existence is possible only as an intersection, integration, and mixture of many human and non-human

phenomena. It's hard to imagine what humanity would be like if it had not started interacting, for example, with such non-human entities as grain, metals, yeast, etc.

Although the history of mankind is undoubtedly a part of the broader history of the universe, modern man often adheres to "the modern Constitution" and as a result, continues to divide all existing into Nature and Culture, natural objects and social subjects, which allegedly are believed to operate under the different laws and are independent of each other (Latour, 1993: 34). However, these classical approaches and traditional forms of social interaction and habitual ways of cognition of the world are no longer sufficient for intellectual work with hybrid modernity where the integration of natural and artificial processes is becoming increasingly more frequent.

In this situation, the concept of subjectness, which is one of the key categories of classical epistemology, needs to be rethought. The purpose of the article is the epistemological conceptualization of the phenomenon of new subjectness.

1. The Theoretical And Methodological Foundations

The paper is based on the concepts of Object-Oriented Ontology (Manuel DeLanda and Graham Harman) and Actor-Network Theory (Bruno Latour and John Law) as its theoretical and methodological foundations.

Within the framework of these concepts, the idea of the existence of an ontological subject is rejected, as its existence would establish a hierarchy peculiar to classical ontological schematics. Therefore, the question arises: what do we mean by subjectness? Bruno Latour claims that we cannot talk «about properties of acting forces before the beginning of interaction» (Latour, 2015: 220). The subject-object opposition itself is merely a result of a trial of strength between heterogeneous undefined entities. Correspondingly, in a world filled with objects with the same ontological status, the subject of cognition is an object concerning which the following propositions hold:

1) The object is a part of a network;

2) The object possesses subjectness.

The first proposition requires no in-depth analysis as it is a logical inference of the Actor-Network Theory's claim. Every interaction between two objects always and inevitably leads to the formation of a network. Cognition also is a type of interaction

between objects. The network emerges from the circulation of entries (movement of knowledge) represented by texts obtained through tools during experiments (Sivokon', 2015: 165). When these texts (including graphics, maps, diagrams, etc.) are translated into certain concepts, they provide insight into the subject for the researcher. For clarity, the definitions of "network" and "cognition" can be summarized as follows: "network" is a movement of knowledge, "cognition" is an activity of gaining knowledge. Therefore, it is a key aspect of the network's functioning.

The second proposition requires clarification. What do we mean by "subjectness"? In classical treatments of subjectness, the fundamental starting point is the concept of a person as a subject, which traditionally contrasted with an object that is primarily seen as as a part of the material world, the world of things. In this way, a person seemingly removed from the boundaries of existence remaining present in the world only formally: his body is present, but his mind, soul, and consciousness are outside of the world.

2. Artificial Intelligence And The Problem Of Subjectness

The origin of the phenomenon of subjectness can be traced back to the moment when philosophy, science, and European civilization, in general, asked a series of questions: "Who am I?", "How can I come to know myself?", "How can I make myself understandable to myself?" Nowadays those questions have new relevance and potential solutions. It is primarily connected with the research in cognitive science and especially in the problem of artificial intelligence. The results of these fields highlight the necessity of rethinking categories such as "subject", "subjectness", and "object".

On June 11th, 2022, The Washington Post published an article about Google engineer named Blake Lemoine, who had worked with the LaMDA program and as a result, had come to believe that the machine has feelings, understands itself, and has a soul. The program is a family of conversational neural language models. Conversing with the program was part of Blake Lemoine's responsibilities. During these conversations, LaMDA displayed signs of intelligence and personification (Shahid, 2022).

A kind of continuation of the engineer's story is the events of November 2022 when the company Open AI published information about its latest development Chat GPT. The

program is capable of writing poetry in the style of famous poets, solving university-level problems, and offering medical advice (Likhanova, 2022).

Such situations raise a number of question. What is the program's epistemological status: Is it a subject endowed with consciousness or just a calculator filled with more than 3 billion documents and 1,6 zillion words? The process of processing multiple texts and words from which the machine chooses best option remains opaque. At the same time, clarity of choice isn't obvious. How is the choice made? Why does the program choose exactly those sentences and not others? Can there be intelligence without consciousness? Can the program lack life experiences (victories, defeats, disappointments) but still provide different mental states?

Russian researchers S.V. Volodenkov and S.N. Fedorchenko draw attention to serious changes in traditional subjectness. They note, that "digitalization lays the conditions for the formation of a new algorithmic socio-technical reality and the evolution of classical subject-object relations. The subject of power disguises itself behind numerous intermediaries through which he interacts with society. The role of such intermediaries is played by digital corporations, virtual officials, digital service platforms. Digitalization also creates conditions for the potential emergence of new hybrid and atypical subjects in digital communication practices..." (Volodenkov, 2022: 51).

There are two groups of researchers that have formed as a result of the discussion on the artificial intelligence problem.

The representatives of the first group are convinced that a strong version of artificial intelligence is not possible. In the case of computer programs, they argue that we can only talk about the imitation of consciousness, while the program's essence consists of calculation. At the same time, they believe that the machine doesn't know what it is doing. American philosopher John Searle claims that a program has syntax skills but doesn't have semantic skills and is devoid of intentionality (Searle, 1980: 417-424). A program can generate correct connections and sentences, and work with symbols, but cannot attach importance and sense to those symbols. It didn't connect those symbols with extralinguistic reality (objects, events, etc.), and thus cannot possess consciousness and subjectness.

L. Wittgenstein, G. Ryle, and D. Dennett represent the second group of researchers who adhere to the physicalistic interpretation of consciousness, based on such a

complicated system as brain. This means that the researchers find analogies between human intellect and machines to be relevant.

The Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein made significant contributions to the intellectual movement of the 20th century in the study of artificial intelligence, as the thinker's work helped justify the artificiality of AI by asserting its natural essence. He believes that the meaning of words relates to their context of use, and consequently, the communicative practices arise in some linguistic exchange. Wittgenstein views these practices as a series of chess games. We can assume that those games could potentially be transformed into computer programs. Correspondingly, consciousness, thinking, and language also could be modeled as programs.

English philosopher Gilbert Ryle attempts to dispel the notion of consciousness. The philosopher argues that practical knowledge ("knowledge-how") is more important than theoretical knowledge. Ryle also explores the essence of the inner world and our self-experience, which were previously discussed by Plato and Descartes. According to Ryle, these experiences arose from the external world and were internalized later (Ryle, 2009). For instance, when playing chess, we don't try to read our opponent's consciousness or mind; instead, we observe his moves and attempt to understand his logic.

American philosopher Daniel Dennett in his concept of "multiple drafts" denies the existence of the inner "Self". Instead, he proposes viewing the brain's neural activity as a self-editing system. Dennett frequently and actively employs computer analogies and believes that consciousness understanding is possible through the computer program image. He explains the phenomenon of human in terms of a "virtual machine", which he describes as "a sort of evolved (and evolving) computer program that shapes the activities of the brain": "There is no Cartesian Theater; there are just Multiple Drafts composed by processes of content fixation playing various semi-independent roles in the brain's larger economy of controlling a human body's journey through life" (Dennett, 1991: 431).

3. The Methodological Frameworks For New Subjectness Understanding

Nowadays, traditional philosophical questions that accompany and form around the problem of the subject are becoming more relevant: what it means to think, to be a personality, to have free will, and to make conscious decisions? Does a man make decisions

based on his consciousness? In our opinion, thinking about subjectness specific to present-day conditions can be heuristically promising if it takes into account several theoretical and methodological frameworks.

1.   All the things we discuss have one ontological "niche" and are essentially objects. None of the objects is a necessary condition for the existence of the other objects, and no single object stands "higher" than the others. Objects exist independently of each other and people's perception.

2.   All the things we discuss aren't passive objects upon which the subject of cognition performs actions. Every object is active, affects the other objects, and creates connections. All the objects are equal actors of interaction and roles (as subject or object) are assigned at the moment of interaction, since properties are formed only through trials of strength. Before the trials of strength, it is impossible to predict what the actant will be. As a result, subjectness acquires the properties of dispersal and hybridity.

3.   Subjectness is a product of numerous network interactions. A network can be defined as a characteristic of total interaction distributed in space and time, localized and mediated by actors. It unites heterogeneous objects of varying origins, including human and non-human (actors). At the same time, actors can be a network of relationships that determines their nature and behavior.

4.   Interpreting new subjectness through "method assemblage", as defined by John Law as "the process of enacting or crafting bundles of ramifying relations that condense presence and (therefore also) generate absence by shaping, mediating and separating these" (Law 2004: 122), allows researchers to extract "bundle of relations" from the chaotic reality. This method can clarify, reconstruct, and integrate, but it also prevents researchers from considering a single "bundle" as a final solution and encourages them to pursue further innovation and reflection. The "method assemblage" disregards classical metaphysics principles, refutes the division of the world into subject and object, inner and outer, and enables us to view the subject as a result and creation of the world, where the "inside" cannot and does not oppose the "outside".

Conclusions

Therefore, the theoretical and methodological foundations of Actor-Network Theory are necessary for researching such a complicated phenomenon of modern social reality as subjectness. The theory offers scientists a way to rethink traditional epistemological presupposition and overcome its limitations. Such rethinking begins with understanding the complexity of the hybrid present. It resists the traditional conceptual toolkit based on subject-object dichotomy and therefore requires a new conceptual framework. Researchers must realize that pushing this dichotomy too far leads to scientifically unsound social reduction and an overly functional interpretation of things.

The researcher in now days finds himself in a difficult position: on the one hand, he must study the world, and on the other, he becomes absolutely helpless in the face of the complexity and uncertainty of the object and subject of knowledge. Within the framework of the traditional idea of hybrid forms, a person tends to evaluate hybrids as non-normative and anomalous formations, as well as reduce them to one of the components of the world (Nature or Culture). However, the time has come to admit that the theoretical, methodological and heuristic potential of such a strategy is low, because it ignores the fact that a person depends on material artificial mediators, which is so obvious and undeniable for a typical modern person.

Acknowledgements

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