NEWSLETTER ON

THE

RESULTS

OF SCHOLARLY WORK

IN SOCIOLOGY, CRIMINOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

RESULTS OF SCHOLARLY WORK ✓
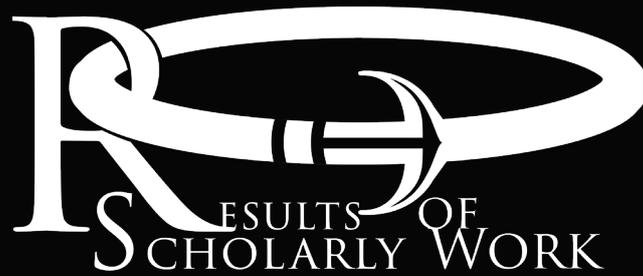
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RESULTS OF SCHOLARLY WORK

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INTRO

As editor-in-chief of an academic journal, I am ultimately tasked with the responsibility of deciding whether or not a submitted manuscript will be published. The criteria used to judge academic acceptability will often produce an issue replete with articles destined for scholarly oblivion. Such is the nature of publications cherished by many in the academic community. This issue, as all issues of this journal, cuts the Gordian Knot of impenetrable obscurity with its relevant presentations.

Not in the order of their appearance or importance within this issue, we call your attention to the work of Oleg Maltsev, *Phenomena of the Mind: Related to Human Perceptions and Representations*, a fresh and fascinating journey into the workings of the human mind. Vadym Palahuta continues the voyage by exploring the concept subjectivity in his *The Identity of the Modern Human Problem of Social and Humanitarian Knowledge*.

As we wander away from delving into the human mind, we turn our attention to the human condition. The latter is addressed by both Dwight Wilson in *Mass Shooting and Events*. This article tackles problems all too common in today's society, i.e., violence and lawlessness. Valentyna Voronkova et al., and Steve Gennaro address the digital world impact on the human condition in *Formation and Development of Society 5.0* and *Reclaiming the Right to Play in the Googleburg Galaxy*, respectively. And Douglas Keller in *Media Culture, Politics, and Society* addresses the media's role in framing

the conditions that impact the human condition in today's digital society that is often plagued by violence and lawlessness.

For those interested in keeping abreast with a specific region of the world, Frédéric Conrod and Vladimir Skvorets do not disappoint. In *Hombre, Claro…: A Reflection on Narcissism in Spanish Culture*, Conrod addresses the impact narcissism had and has on Spain and its cultural output. Skvorets in *Theory of Social Change in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Society* helps clarify the importance of the contributions of Ukrainian scholars in a post-Soviet world. Our readers in want of esoteric, albeit fascinating, topics will find Marco Andreacchio and Mark Horvath and Adam Lovasz of much interest. In *Thomas Pangle's Neo-Epicurean Reading of Aristotle's Biology*, Andreacchio takes on Pangle's central contentions in his 2020 reading of Aristotle's work. Horvath and Lovasz present for our esoteric appetite their research, *An Absentological Analysis of the Trace: Pre-Cambrian Arche-writing, and Jacques Derrida's Realism.* A work sure to please the informed and edify the neophyte.

Hoping you enjoy our presentations in this issue of *Results of Scholarly Works.* We are committed to bringing you cutting-edge research and dynamic opinion that illuminates and educates our readers. Until our next issue, we remain academically yours.

Sincerely,
Harvey W. Kushner
Long Island University, Brookville, New York
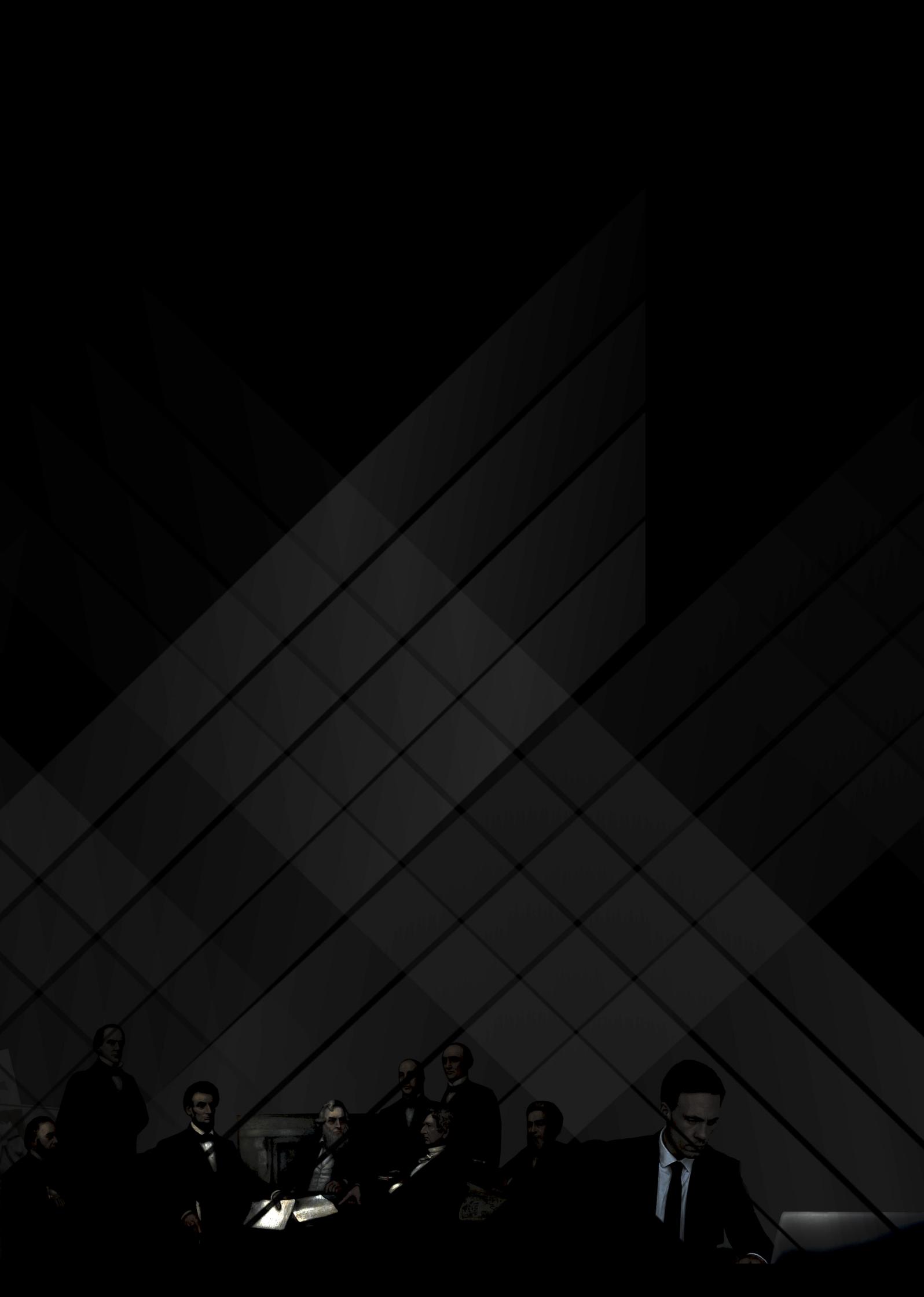
PHENOMENA OF THE MIND
RELATED TO HUMAN PERCEPTION AND REPRESENTATIONS

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Oleg Maltsev is an author, scientist, criminologist, psychologist, photographer, and investigative journalist. He is the head of the Memory Institute, named after Grigory Semenovich Popov, and the author of groundbreaking scholarly works in criminology, psychology, and philosophy. He is a presidium member and academic member at the European Academy of Sciences in Ukraine (EUASU). He has been engaged in scholarly work for nearly 30 years and has conducted field research with the Expeditionary Corps of the Memory Institute, for a decade. This comparative international research explores the reasons why different nations and rulers attained power throughout history, with an emphasis on culture, military and scientific technique, and mentality. His recent work in English language is Jean Baudrillard, Maestro: The Last Prophet of Europe co-authored together with Dr. Lucien-Samir Oulahbib. Dr. Oleg Maltsev is currently working with Dr. Harvey W. Kushner on a forthcoming book addressing the subject of war crimes.

ABSTRACT

Current scientific intelligence represents a compilation of research findings and the outcomes of practical experiments conducted by Academician Maltsev between 2022 and 2023. The primary objective is to delve into the underlying causes and essence of phenomena of the mind that play a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of one's efforts towards achieving meaningful outcomes and professional development.

Within the research framework, the sport discipline under scrutiny is skeet shooting, selected for its capacity to serve as a high-quality arena for practical experimental models. This article is dedicated to exploring various facets of the human mind, particularly in relation to perception and its interpretation of phenomena, objects, subjects, events, and incidents. These processes directly influence the sequencing of result attainment and the overall quality of an individual's social realization. In the subsequent discussion, we will delve into the paramount role and significance of these mind phenomena in decision-making, training, and the practical application of existing skills and knowledge.

Keywords

INTRODUCTION OR "OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL"

Have you ever encountered an individual who, in their right and rational state of mind, would willingly offer their body for a lifetime to be controlled by other minds, all in exchange for a carefree and well-provided life? It is quite probable that such individuals exist, although they may not openly admit to it.

When people assume their social roles and strive for societal approval, the vast majority will assert their unwillingness to become slaves, and they will do so emphatically. However, to break free from the mental captivity of slave-like thinking, one must first learn to master their own mind. As soon as the challenge of management arises, the responsibility expands to include the need to organize other minds: subordinates, clients, business partners — essentially, everyone

who has a stake in the final outcome or a share of the rewards. Numerous scientific works currently focus on the field of management (Jachimowicz & Weisman, 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Noda, 2020; Redmond & Sharafizad, 2020; Trzeciak & Banasik, 2022). Therefore, if a person has no intentions of creating masterpieces, becoming a champion, nurturing a garden city, or managing a successful business company in the manner of a business ship, then they do not require the way of life of a manager or even a "master." Such individuals would not necessitate subordinates or "slaves" either.

Nonetheless, in the 21st century, it has become customary for people to act in precisely the opposite manner. The image of the contemporary "supercompany director" is both comical and lamentable, as they often lose sight of why they embarked on their business quest in the first place. Moments of stark enlightenment often occur on the day when employee salaries are disbursed. As an experiment, one might try to envision what would transpire if, in a "slave-like" fashion, they were to outstretch their arms and say, "…I am sorry, I did not manage to earn enough for your wages; please return next month." It is reasonable to assume that the fate of such a director would be less than enviable.

So, what course should those who are unwilling to follow either the path of slaves or the path of "masters" pursue? The answer is rather straightforward: *they should undergo a transformation in their thinking.* But how does one go about doing this? Desire alone or the stark necessity, as evidenced by the challenges of the 21st century, unfortunately, do not suffice. Rational observations and conclusions, as it turns out, do not fall within the category of triggers capable of magically altering a person's way of life through mere mental command. Is it possible that our minds, the very embodiment of "ratio" in Latin, are fundamentally irrational?

In the context of this article, we propose an exploration of the concept of "known irrationality" within the realm of human nature's mind functions, considered from a purely practical perspective.

Understanding the phenomena of the mind, pinpointing their origins and essence, and charting a course for meaningful outcomes and professional growth have become increasingly imperative in today's dynamically changing world. To accomplish this, it is crucial to identify the root causes and fundamental nature of mind phenomena. Delving into the mind involves examining cognitive processes, psychological dimensions, and neurobiological factors that shape our thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. It encompasses an analysis of both internal and external influences such as personal beliefs, educational background, cultural factors, and social dynamics. Additionally, it requires defining the ultimate goals and expected results one seeks to achieve through their efforts.

Recognizing the underlying causes and essence of mind phenomena is crucial for shaping the trajectory of your efforts towards meaningful results and professional development. This is especially pertinent to achieving your career objectives and discerning the competencies and skills essential for success in your chosen field. Strategic planning is imperative for goal attainment, necessitating constant evaluation and adjustment of your approach. A comprehensive perspective involves integrating psychological, cognitive, educational, and vocational approaches to harness your mind's full potential. Additionally, developing skills to manage your own emotions and those of others contributes to enhanced interpersonal dynamics. Coping with stress is equally vital, given its direct impact on decision-making quality and overall effectiveness. In essence, cultivating a clear understanding of the importance of adapting skills and knowledge to a changing environment is fundamental to professional resilience and success.

The integration of teamwork skills development — encompassing effective communication, conflict management, and collaborative goal achievement — with regular self-reflection and a commitment to continuous adaptation in the professional realm forms a comprehensive approach to mindfulness and professional growth. This approach ultimately leads to meaningful outcomes in one's chosen field. The mind serves to be aware of and analyze information from the environment. Reason, fulfilling the purpose of making informed decisions based on available data and experience, empowers us to take actionable steps towards our goals. By employing mind, we can analyze problems, discover optimal solutions, and overcome challenges. Ongoing learning and knowledge enhancement are essential for mind development, aiding adaptation to new situations, acquisition of new skills, and improvement of existing ones. Thus, the mind is instrumental in shaping thinking abilities to comprehend the world, achieve results, and continuously enhance skills.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of studying mind phenomena, crucial for enhancing the quality of efforts towards meaningful results and professional development, requires effective implementation and the integration of methodological, theoretical, and technological concepts. The exploration of mind phenomena, aimed at optimizing professional growth, involves formulating a hypothesis to explain the causes and essence influencing professional development. We propose that a potential hypothesis could center around the relationship between emotional intelligence and success in the professional sphere. To validate this hypothesis, we specify data collection methods, such as analyzing samples of broken/unbroken skeet on the shooting range within the practice of the shooting discipline of skeet. These methods ensure the reliability and validity of the collected information, thus establishing trustworthy results.

The synthesis of various philosophical methods and the Agile methodology in exploring the causes and essence of mind phenomena plays a pivotal role in shaping the quality of efforts for meaningful results and professional development. This holistic approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding and effective implementation of educational strategies. Leveraging philosophical tools such as analysis and synthesis, interrelationship, abstraction, transition from the concrete to the abstract, and from the abstract to the concrete, along with historical and logical analysis, enabled the development of a coherent and holistic concept. This method allowed for the harmonization of diverse empirical data into a unified framework, providing a nuanced comprehension of the dynamic landscape in the contemporary understanding of the mind phenomena.

In the ever-changing landscape of education in the digital era, these philosophical methods serve as essential guides, steering our understanding and decision-making. Additionally, the Agile methodology has significantly enriched our endeavors to unravel the intricate phenomenon of the mind in the digital age. This methodology has proven invaluable in navigating the intricate domain of big data, a realm with the potential to predict and influence the course of distance education as a multifaceted social and cultural phenomenon. The application of the Agile methodology has facilitated a thorough examination of challenges related to big data, data mining, and the innovative possibilities presented by modern technologies.

The theoretical framework of exploring the fundamentals of the mind establishes the groundwork for enhancing individual professional training, theoretically justifying possibilities for ongoing human development and improvement. It provides a philosophical underpinning for educational foundations, encompassing general concepts of educational philosophy, philosophical laws, and the organizational structure of specialist training. This includes the structure of professional competence and readiness to apply professional competence in the practical activities of future specialists. The study reveals that the cognitive model of mind phenomena, specifically related to human perception and understanding, underscores the significance of profound learning, a deep understanding of educational concepts, and the cultivation of values and culture.

A heuristic model of the mind and its perception is formulated to foster critical and reflexive thinking. Employing these steps in the research methodology establishes a comprehensive approach to uncovering the causes and essence of mind phenomena, along with identifying practical measures to enhance the quality of effort in professional activities. This research approach ensures the systematic organization of the process, validates the scientific integrity of the results, and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of mind phenomena within a professional context. Systematizing problem-solving approaches aids in pinpointing specific techniques and strategies for addressing identified issues, optimizing professional development through an understanding of mind phenomena. Essential components for successfully applying research findings in practice include self-development and continuous learning.

RESULTS

Games of the Mind and Games of Perception

Due to the mind's inherently nonlinear comprehension of the "must" category and its tendency to prioritize the "want" or "interest" categories, individuals, even when motivated and enthusiastic about pursuing new victories and achievements, often find themselves ensnared by a barrage of informational inputs. They become distracted by both trivial and potentially significant data.

It is also widely acknowledged that merely understanding how to do something is insufficient. The second crucial facet is the act itself —

the execution. To illustrate, comprehending the theory behind breaking clays in skeet shooting is insufficient; one must possess the practical skill to actually aim and shoot, hitting the target. However, a significant obstacle presents itself here: an untrained body can be entirely uncooperative due to a lack of practice. Consider another example, executing a backflip. While one can theoretically grasp the mechanics of backflip the somersault and seek validation from experienced individuals, this does not guarantee a successful attempt. In practice, the body must still perform the backflip, and it is improbable that an untrained body will execute the mind's command to backflip flawlessly on the first try. Therefore, to conquer a challenging new task, it is imperative to actively engage one's body to condition it to function effectively in the required manner. Equally vital is the need to adapt when undertaking new activities, be it sport shooting, motorcycle riding, hunting, or business endeavors. The question naturally arises: "Adapt to what?" Different tasks necessitate distinct combinations of motor skills, and this adaptability within the human structure is facilitated by the **core component**.

Take, for instance, a scenario where an individual has resided in Los Angeles for numerous years, becoming accustomed to specific traffic rules and regulations for riding a motorcycle. Unforeseen circumstances may require a relocation to countries such as Ireland or Japan, both of which adhere to left-hand traffic regulations. Initially, the rider will likely experience confusion and perhaps a lack of orientation. They will need to readjust to the rules and nuances of riding a bike or driving a car, recalibrate their instincts for the opposite side of the road, and find their rhythm in the new environment.

Similarly, the habits and skills acquired by a journalist can present challenges when engaging in tasks from different domains. By force of habit, upon noticing an unusual event, a journalist may instinctively redirect their attention to it, momentarily neglecting their primary task. Indeed, a former journalist turned businessman tends to gravitate towards what intrigues the journalist's curiosity and may unintentionally neglect aspects critical to the business endeavor. Consequently, prior to commencing any task, it is imperative to pre-emptively shift into a mindset that aligns with the specific context — a mental state characterized by the appropriate background, heightened sensory awareness coupled with focused attention, and a

role suited to the task at hand, etc.

Nonetheless, there exists a group of individuals who resist the notion of transitioning between roles, refining their perceptual abilities, or approaching their own training methodically, despite their awareness of their own inefficacy. This category of people finds it more convenient to rationalize their setbacks and losses by claiming that they were overly ambitious (compared to others who set more modest goals), and that they were impeded by an array of extraordinary circumstances, inevitably leading to unproductive outcomes. **Human ingenuity is indeed proficient in conjuring numerous explanations for "why things did not work out."**

As a counterpoint, envision an individual possessed of an unyielding and limitless determination, aiming to break all 100 clay targets without exception. In their world, everything revolves around clay; their thoughts are consumed by it, and the entire universe is comprised of clay that must be hit and broken. They remain undeterred by obstacles and external circumstances; it is as though they are afflicted with an obsession. This state of mind is termed temporary "professional deformation." The compulsion to break each and every clay (or master any other skill, such as closing contracts) does not wane within a few

days. Such an individual will go to great lengths to achieve the desired outcome.

Typically, when someone asserts that they desired a specific result but fell short, it implies that their desire did not evolve into a fervent state, or as it is colloquially expressed, a certain "schizoid" condition — a state where an individual cannot cease their practice; they continue relentlessly until they achieve proficiency in something previously unknown to them. For instance, when one endeavors to learn motorcycle riding, fencing, or entrepreneurship, *they must immerse themselves wholeheartedly and temporarily adopt a "zealous pursuit of victory."*

It is as if these individuals possess an inner void that demands filling — teaching themselves to perform what was previously beyond their grasp. Consequently, they voraciously assimilate information, with the speed of acquiring new skills and processing data accelerating significantly. This state of **temporary professional deformation** fosters a high-quality learning experience. The person approaches their endeavors with enthusiasm and diligence, striving to comprehend the inner workings of the business, system, or pursuit that captivates them. Time elapses unnoticed as they immerse themselves in the process.

Consequently, achieving qualitative learning necessitates a commitment of a substantial amount of time. Furthermore, without entering a state of professional deformation, genuine learning remains elusive. When in such a state, a person possesses a clear, unambiguous understanding (requiring no explanation) of precisely what they need to train. It proves valuable, at the very least, to engage in self-examination and understand what personal adjustments are required to transition into this state of professional deformation. The more one comprehends the prerequisites, the more pronounced the "schizoid" state becomes.

In the age of a consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998) and abundance, the focus is on a person's qualitative indicators rather than quantitative ones. Therefore, during the training process aimed at acquiring new skills, and to subsequently distinguish oneself with a high level of proficiency and quality, one must not only engage in training but also effectively interact with peers and senior colleagues. This entails learning how to approach trainers, experts, and consultants and the critical skill of objectively evaluating received information. It is not uncommon for the authority of an expert to overshadow common sense, leading trainees to blindly mimic the

expert without questioning the accuracy of the information. As empirical evidence indicates, individuals who have achieved success may not always provide correct principles. This discrepancy arises from their reliance on their own past experiences and psychophysiological characteristics, which may differ significantly from those of another person who may be better suited to a completely different technique, perhaps due to differences in physiological attributes.

When is the guidance of a counselor most relevant? It proves invaluable at the outset when one is attempting to grasp how to achieve desired results, especially when habitual motor reactions lead to mistakes and failures instead of the desired outcomes. Seeking guidance from an experienced individual at this stage can help overcome learning and training obstacles more swiftly, make necessary corrections, and access more advanced knowledge. It is far more efficient to consult with an expert, discuss missing information, pose questions, and then return to the gym or training ground in a day or two with renewed vigor and a clear understanding of how to attain the desired outcome. It is markedly more efficient to meet with an expert, engage in discussions to address gaps in information, pose questions, and subsequently, within a mere 1–2 days, approach the gym or another training facility armed with newfound vigor and comprehension of how to attain the desired outcomes. This approach proves superior to the protracted process of spending weeks or even years analyzing past mistakes and persistently repeating them. Furthermore, the identity of the individual providing professional guidance and the manner in which this advice is conveyed are equally consequential. Thus, the psychological compatibility between the consultant and the trainee stands as a crucial element, with the pace of skill acquisition directly contingent upon it (Örtenblad et al., 2017; see also Bayona & Castañeda, 2017)

The process of acquiring new complex motor skills, whether in business, skeet shooting, or developing a training program, typically unfolds through three fundamental stages:

1. Acquiring the skill.
2. Acquiring the skill to perform under diverse conditions, encompassing mental and physical challenges. (For instance, achieving proficiency in shooting at a stable scope versus mastering it on a swaying ship's deck amidst waves represents distinct levels of training).

3. Striving to surpass and achieve a level of mastery beyond emulation, rather than merely replicating the accomplishments of mentors or role models.

Certainly, continuous improvement is praiseworthy and yields rewards. However, the unrelenting fervor for acquiring new complex motor skills often subsides after a significant victory, such as becoming an Olympic champion. Many individuals, once they attain the status of a winner, tend to halt their pursuit of improvement and progress, ultimately resulting in inferiority. It is crucial to note that these principles extend beyond sports and apply equally to domains like business and various other spheres of activity (Lee & Lee, 2018).

Nonetheless, as the number of tasks, even if they are procedural and known in advance, increases, an individual can lose their equilibrium. These simple observations lead us closer to grasping the first significant phenomenon of the mind. Thus, we come to the question: "Why and how does a person 'stumble' when they know everything?" Everything is within the grasp of the mind beforehand, the body is well-prepared, and each task for the multitasker is neither novel nor challenging. None-

theless, it is as if the person is moving toward a state similar to a creature suddenly trapped in live electrical wires. The escalating tension disrupts their balance until they ultimately give in.

Indeed, the mind can manage multiple tasks when they are familiar (that is, what one is accustomed to). The key term here is **"familiar."** *Even the slightest disruption to the familiar framework can shatter the entire mosaic of the mind's perceptions, akin to a colossus with feet of clay crumbling.*

ON THE POWER OF THE FAMILIAR

We shall endeavor to visually illustrate this phenomenon. It is a universally acknowledged fact that individuals necessitate a certain period for adaptation to the new aspects of life. Furthermore, even if an individual is accustomed to a routine, such as commuting via bicycle to a park each morning, a mere interval of time, say a couple of months without engaging in cycling, can result in the loss of that customary practice. The concept of "get accustomed" juxtaposed with "lose the habit" forms an intriguing pair, emblematic of an additional set of facets pertaining to the human mind.

It is imperative to underscore that the mere possession of knowledge and skills does not necessarily translate into assured success. In essence, if an individual has not acquired the proficiency to apply said knowledge and skills — if they have not integrated them into a personally familiar regimen — they may encounter difficulties when confronting environmental challenges. Merely acknowledging the existence of certain knowledge does not automatically cultivate the habit of directing one's mind faculties toward said knowledge. Consequently, even when confronted with a task that is already well-known, it may unexpectedly metamorphose into an unexpectedness (!) owing to the very phenomenon of non-utilization ("lose the habit").

Those who have dedicated time to learning a foreign language are intimately acquainted with the repercussions of this phenomenon: even if you received an "A" in English during school and quoted Jack London, a couple or three years of non-practice can render you unable to speak
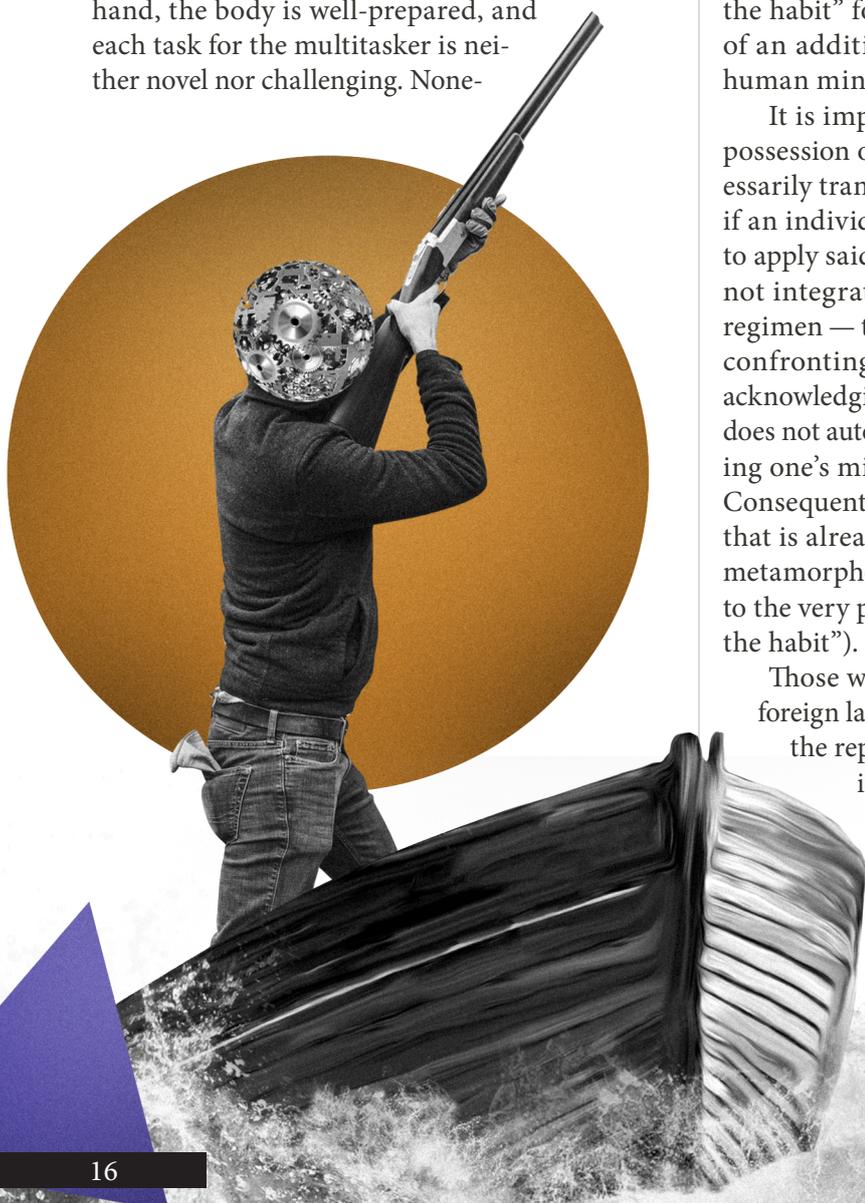
English fluently as you did in your school days, despite the English language's presence in your memory's information blocks. The reason for this is straightforward: lose the habit. This principle is equally applicable to motor skills, revealing that one can lose the habit to execute practiced karate or judo strikes, ride a motorcycle, or even write with a pen on paper.

Individuals often require a substantial period to acclimate themselves or get accustomed to new orders, rules, or organizational structures within a novel environment, such as transitioning to a new company or entering any unfamiliar collective. The issue being examined mirrors the overarching discussion in contemporary research across diverse life and activity domains (Frick et al., 2018; Klehe & Fasbender, 2021; Lovin et al., 2023; Patel et al., 2023; Ward, 2022). While they possess knowledge about various individuals, phenomena, and regulations, the mind frequently signals "I cannot get accustomed!" in contradiction to common sense and factual knowledge, and it simply ceases to function effectively.

THE MIND REFUSES TO WORK WITH THE UNFAMILIAR

Metaphorically, we can depict the "stance of the mind" towards an unfamiliar task or matter in the following manner: "Just yesterday, you, unfamiliar task, did not exist, and neither I nor my master have any need for something like you." Notably, even the introduction of any foreign element, be it new wallpaper, a plasma screen, or a chair, initially prompts the mind to cultivate the habit of acknowledging its existence and accepting it as part of the environment. Over time, the mind adapts, and the foreign object seamlessly integrates into the human perceptual landscape, losing its "foreign" label. Given that everything foreign and unanticipated places a burden on the mind, even the process of acclimatization is often unwelcome to individuals. Human nature tends to resist exertion; we are inherently averse to straining ourselves.

Even if someone possesses foreknowledge of an upcoming business negotiation and the possibility of closing the deal, it can often trigger resistance due to its unexpectedness. Why does this happen? Despite having knowledge at their disposal, their mind has not yet assimilated the idea that a deal should be closed tomorrow for some reason. One can hypothetically imagine an absurd scenario: even if someone is aware of an impending ambush

near their residence the following day, orchestrated by an individual known as 'Mr. X,' the scenario remains unexpected and even unanticipated. Why? Because the mind has not yet internalized the available information.

In such situations, individuals may even question the authenticity of the information received. Unforeseen events are prone to skepticism and doubt, with thoughts like: "Could this all be a hoax or deception?" or "What if the ambush is not tomorrow but a month from now?" or "What if I am fortunate, and Mr. X falls asleep during the ambush and forgets to shoot me?" The potential for absurd contemplation knows no bounds; it defies rationality. The mind operates without considering the consequences, and it does not rely on past experiences, because a person may not have experienced, for instance, being shot and spending three months in rehabilitation within the confines of a hospital. In essence, it is as if the mind resists the notion of having to undertake any action. Beyond the familiar, the mind exhibits a reluctance to engage in activity.

> *The mind requires a certain thing labeled as "X" to become habitual before it begins to engage with this "X."*

This phenomenon functions as a defense mechanism of the mind. Take a moment to contemplate what would transpire if you had to simultaneously keep all events, phenomena, factors, classifications, potential outcomes, and more within your field of perception. No individual could manage such an overwhelming load; it would likely lead to madness. From a safety perspective, the mind eliminates constant values and variable data from active consideration, and it also exhibits resistance toward anything new.

Are there categories that the mind does not resist? Yes, such categories do exist. These notably include substances that impair functioning of the mind, such as alcohol, drugs, and potent substances. The mind "easily" accepts those categories that allow it not to work and, consequently, not to exert itself. Even watching a movie or TV series is not always entertainment and relaxation for the mind, only the type of movie that does not make you think relaxes you. The ideal movie for the mind does not make one to agonize over the twists and turns of the storyline, to look for rea-

sons for the actions of certain characters, somehow otherwise strain in order to find out, "hu iz hu". It is enough just dynamics, linearity of events, the certainty that nothing terrible will happen to the main characters, and non-stressful atmosphere, and therefore it does not matter what is the ending or the outcome of such a movie, what it will end.

> *The mind is pleased to perceive a certain thing that relieves it from effort and strain.*

The multitasker disrupts the mind's accustomed rhythm, forcing it to adapt to a multitude of tasks. It is important to note that mere awareness of the existence of various variables is insufficient; the mind must get accustomed to them (the time required for this adjustment varies in each case). After several days, the mind "comprehends" that the problem persists and must be resolved. It adapts to this reality, generating potential solutions and configurations to address the issue. However, deliberate training to swiftly engage the mind in new tasks can expedite this adaptation process, transforming it into a flexible system responsive to its master's resolute commands.

In addition to acclimating to external changes and demands, the mind becomes accustomed to exertion, a unique aspect of our mind faculties. The impact of physical adaptation to increasing loads is vividly illustrated in strength-focused sports like weightlifting. Similarly, information loads can overwhelm anyone initially exposed to a functioning research institute, including meetings, reports, experiments, and technological sessions, especially in the initial weeks or months. While intellectual labor does not strain the muscles, it presents its own challenges. *The mind requires an extended period to adapt to new systems and directives. The mind not only has to adapt to variable and unexpected tasks, according to its irrational judgment, but it also needs to become accustomed to exertion.*
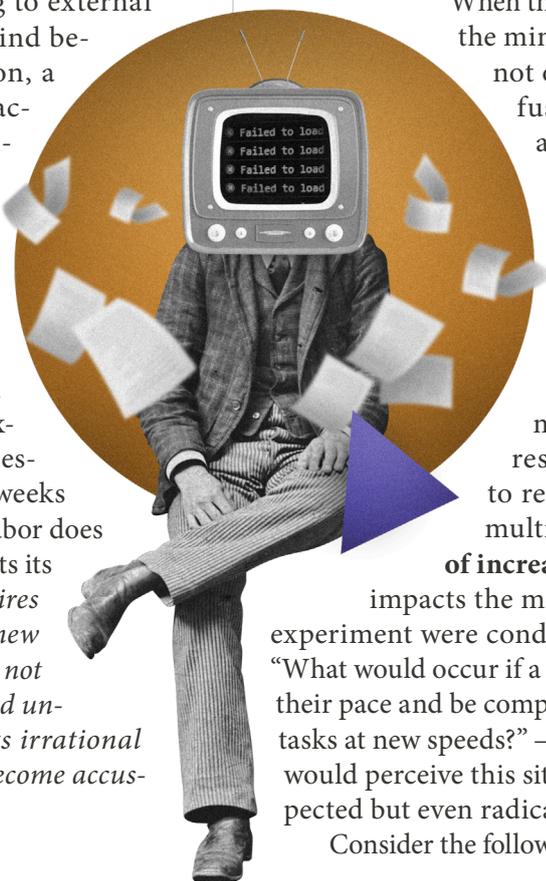
"I Want It All at Once… but Gradually!"

This unwillingness to exert oneself is not the final component of the mind's functionality; there is another critical phenomenon related to perception and representation. From childhood, the mind processes the world gradually, embedding gradualism into its functionality. Simultaneously, it remains open to "rebirth" or complete transformation, but only when these transformations occur gradually. For instance, an unemployed person may aspire to become a wealthy expert or a business owner in the future, but they will not make a sudden leap in their capabilities; they "desire instant changes, but gradually." Despite its paradoxical nature, this irrational mind phenomenon is an essential consideration when designing a training program.

At the same time, the mind does not react in any way to the slow rebirth, re-education, or 're-forging' of the personality. **Mind requires gradual transformations.** On the other hand, if, by standards of the mind, the rebirth of an object is swift, the corresponding reaction will not be delayed, much like workers at a factory who promptly strike when they disagree with the current pace of transformation. *The slower the transformations occur, the less noticeable they are to the mind. Conversely, the faster they happen, the more the mind resists.*

When the demanded pace exceeds the mind's comfort level, it may not only protest but also refuse to engage in the task altogether. Such refusal often leads to emotional reactions and ineffective behaviors, including panic, hysteria, or even psychosis. Therefore, when analyzing factors influencing human perception and representation, it is essential to recognize that, alongside multitasking, the **parameter of increasing speed** significantly impacts the mind. Consequently, if an experiment were conducted with the premise: "What would occur if a human were to accelerate their pace and be compelled to perform familiar tasks at new speeds?" — the mind of this person would perceive this situation as not only unexpected but even radical.

Consider the following situation as an exam-

ple: a manager is confronted with the task of earning 1000 euros within a week, not over a month (at their own comfortable pace). As the distance and time frame shrink, the mind becomes increasingly uneasy. On the fifth day without financial results, the mind does not just raise an alarm but takes radical action. It calculates the distance to the finish line and the speed required to reach it in time. If the calculated results do not meet its satisfaction, the mind simply refuses to tackle the task. Even if there are objectively viable solutions, it is as if the mind chooses not to acknowledge them. The verdict is something along the lines of, "If I have not earned 1000 euros in 5 days, there is no way I can earn them in 2 days!" This verdict triggers a reactive human response caused by a refusal to undertake the task.

> *Once the speed of task completion surpasses the pace deemed acceptable by the mind, it triggers a refusal to carry out the task.*

Even when a person consciously analyzes the situation and understands that their decision to refuse is flawed and that they still have time to accomplish a lot, the mind remains unmoved. The mind does not operate based on categories such as "necessary / not necessary / defective / useful";

these concepts are foreign to it. Attempts to engage the mind in rational dialogue, inspire it with lofty ideals, discuss cause-and-effect relationships, or influence it through other means prove futile. The mind does not recognize these categories because they are fundamentally aspects of consciousness. It is insufficient for the mind to grasp the rationale behind the need to act, implement changes, or make efforts. Even constraining a person within the confines of a seemingly hopeless situation does not rectify the matter. The mind is irrational, and it can only be "conquered" by employing similarly irrational methods. In essence, the existence of deception in the world serves as a means to cope with one's own mind.

> *The nature of the human mind is inherently irrational; meaningful and conscious categories are not within its domain or "language."*

The mind can only be deceived; it does not comprehend any other means of communication. Therefore, when dealing with one's own perceptions and those of others, these aspects of the mind's functioning must be considered. Consequently, through experimental and empirical study of mind phenomena related to the formation of representations and their impact on the process

of task resolution, as well as the development of skills and training, the following logical model emerges in Figure 1 (Maltsev & Lopatiuk, 2023).

TURNING THEORY AND ANALYSIS INTO PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of this analytical workshop is to demonstrate the logical process of integrating received recommendations, thereby establishing a solid foundation and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the scope of development, that is scope of training.

1 The starting point for transitioning from "slave thinking" to independent thought is what we term the **"plateau."** Irrespective of your chosen field of activity, a foundational base is indispensable for effectively addressing the associated tasks. Every system possesses its own foundational plateau, whether it encompasses sport shooting, strategyic consulting, or pole vaulting. The fundamental skills underpinning any system are linked to this plateau. Just as constructing a building without a foundation is unfeasible, our minds necessitate a form of "springboard" or base. Prominent world champion in skeet shooting, Yury Tsuranov (Bystrai, 2015), has emphasized that this base remains consistent across all disciplines. It matters not which shooting school you align with or the discipline you pursue; the base remains invariant. While skill levels may vary during progression, the core actions, such as "raising the firearm, aligning, and pulling the trigger," remain rooted in the

fundamental concepts of the plateau. Essentially, we are dealing with elementary categories. As an alternative example, contemplate the mandatory sequence of actions essential for proficient motorcycle riding. Without the ability to initiate movement from a standstill, navigate, decelerate, shift lanes, and grasp traffic regulations, motorcycle operation becomes unfeasible. A base is imperative, serving as a platform for refining subsequent skills, including such fantastic skills such as mastering front or rear wheel-only riding.

The primary challenge revolves around constructing this base, which, in itself, is not particularly daunting (consider the vast number of motorcycle riders worldwide). Challenges encoun-
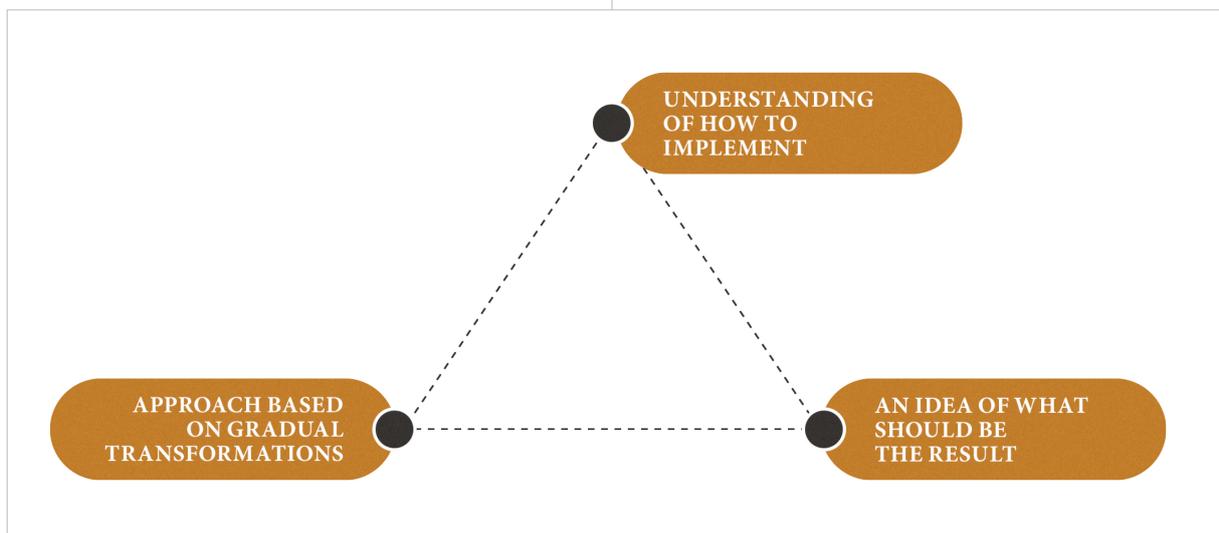

FIGURE 1. LOGICAL MODEL

tered by individuals at the outset predominantly encompass psychological aspects. In essence, there exists a particular intellectual hurdle to surmount, an understanding of the nature of this obstacle. Details on conquering this intellectual obstacle are elaborated upon in the book "How to Learn to Ride a Motorcycle" (Maltsev, 2021) readily available for reference.

Frequently, when confronted with initial barriers and challenges, such as understanding concepts like countersteering, individuals seek guidance from consultants who can help them overcome these obstacles. However, it is crucial, even at this stage, to differentiate between amateurs, enthusiasts, and professionals — those who have genuinely mastered overcoming such barriers themselves and can effectively assist others in learning. At this juncture, it is advisable to place greater trust in demonstrations over mere words. During the initial phases, models, logical explanations, and physical demonstrations hold significant importance for the mind.

Of course, one could choose to follow the mainstream path, subscribing to the common stereotype that "the human mind is an enigmatic subject not meant for scrutiny." In doing so, individuals relinquish the pursuit of various "plateaus," "scopes," or the logical construction of a training program, among other aspects. Why? Because the majority opt not to burden their consciousness and minds with such scientific categories, simply choosing to "live their lives," and there's a reason for this. It is a choice in favor of slave thinking.

The human mind, inherently irrational, harbors a propensity for simplicity, favoring simplification to evade tension. Thus, when faced with the decision between the challenging yet rewarding training regimen of a champion and the tranquil, uncomplicated trajectory of an average individual with minimal resistance, many tend to select the latter. This paradox is dangerous: instead of nurturing their own philosophy and thought processes, which directly impact their well-being, people often choose the path of slaves. Furthermore, in just a few decades, modern civilization has undergone a transformation akin to a quantum leap. Consequently, an inconspicuous collective movement has emerged among the majority, seemingly yearning for slavery. This movement is willing to cede control to external minds, entrusting them with decision-making and accountability in exchange for a semblance of loyalty. At first glance, this may
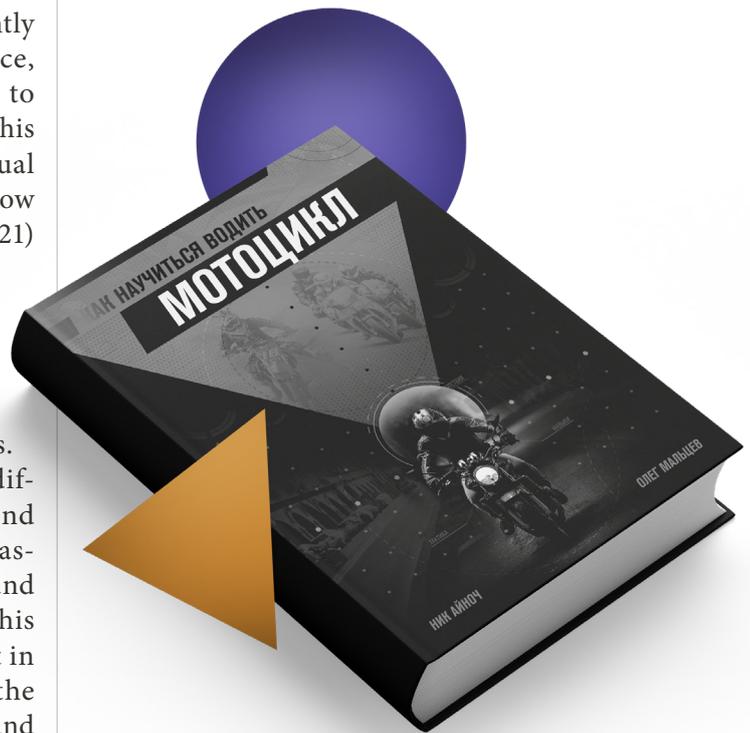
seem like a protracted path with no guaranteed outcomes. Additionally, it enforces the practical, deeply-rooted notion that the fruits of one's labor do not belong to the individual but rather to the organizers and overseers of the endeavor — essentially, external minds.

One might perceive this phenomenon as somewhat unjust, yet it remains a prevalent occurrence that individuals resist altering their life management tactics. This resistance often stems from an automatic inclination towards weakness, laziness, and an aversion to exertion or personal transformation. Why endure hardship and effort when one can opt for the path of least resistance and seek immediate simple results through trial and error? This appears to be the irrational perspective embraced by the automatic system of Homo Sapiens.

2 Delving into the pivotal question, one that perplexes not only novices but also professionals who are just embarking on the journey of teaching: *"How to construct a plateau?"* To address this, we need to revisit certain concepts, and the plateau inherently involves a crucial element known as its "foundation" or basis. The basis of the plateau is the managing mechanism of the core component. *Technical elements require effective management.*

For instance, hypothetically exploring the championship journey of Mike Tyson. Even today, when attempting to dissect his life and training

progression step by step, no analyst can definitively elucidate how Tyson ascended to become the world champion. What's more, "Iron Mike" himself has confessed in interviews that he does not fully comprehend how this remarkable feat transpired. The hint lies in redirecting our attention to the individual who nurtured, educated, and molded Mike Tyson into the youngest heavyweight boxing champion: his coach, Constantine D'Amato (Tyson & Sloman, 2017). Without the intellect of Cus D'Amato, his philosophy, training regimen, and distinctly innovative approach to cultivating world champions, Mike Tyson would have remained a troubled young man who found himself in a Juvenile Penitentiary after attacking a white man with a knife (Weiss, 2013). Yet, when Cus D'Amato departed from Tyson's life and the influence of an entirely different individual began to shape him, the once invincible Mike's star began to wane ignominiously. The comprehensive details of how this occurred and the strategies employed to diminish Tyson's authoritative stature are expounded upon in the book "The Swaying Scene."

In the book's annotation, the author Oleg Maltsev (2020) reveals:

> *"The story, which some people prefer not to discuss, clearly sheds light on how certain "interested individuals," displaying remarkable ingenuity and utilizing specialized training, are able to undertake enterprises aimed at impoverishing the audacious individuals who have conquered Olympus. Specifically, ventures involving the theft of money on a particularly grand scale, such as one billion dollars. Yes, precisely one billion. Curiously, the directors, scriptwriters, and prompters behind this elaborate production remain concealed, as does the conductor of the grand project that led to Mike Tyson's downfall. To this day, these enigmatic figures remain unidentified. The identity of the individual responsible for the theft of Tyson's One Billion Dollars remained shrouded in mystery. Or to be precise, it remained undisclosed until I concluded an extensive investigation. The*

findings of this investigation are presented for the reader's perusal within the pages of this book" (p. 3).

A mind lacking integrity, motivated solely by profit and deception, not only eroded Tyson's standing in all societal aspects but also swindled him of a billion dollars. Subsequently, the once-great Mike descended into obscurity, eventually appearing in a commercial dressed in a bee costume to promote marijuana. Yet, in the annals of sports history, Mike Tyson remains a boxer, a sport discipline far from elementary. Boxing encompasses a specific repertoire of strikes and technical elements. While our hypothetical contemporary athlete may be as physically robust as Tyson, merely possessing a set of technical elements and the ability to execute them will not suffice when facing another boxer in the ring. What is required is the capacity to choose how to act at each moment, which techniques to employ against a given opponent. This demands a mechanism that goes beyond mere retrieval of technical elements from memory. Recall that the mechanism responsible for managing the core component is referred to as tactics. Tactics enable the selection and execution of specific technical combinations. But what shapes this tactic?

3 To aid those seeking an answer to this question, we introduce the next crucial element, one without which the framework for implementing a training program cannot be established. This element is **philosophy**. Philosophy serves as the assembly point, determining the overarching perspective. The resulting configuration of forces and dynamic categories can be outlined as follows:

An individual possesses a fundamental system capable of solving problems at an acceptable level, up to the most challenging situations — this is the base level or plateau level. Using skeet shooting as an example, basic skills might still allow a person to make it into the top ten, although it is far from the most effective approach.

- Nonetheless, a scope system, constructed from a plateau, involves working with a core component.
- This core component must be managed, necessitating tactics.
- Tactics do not arise out of thin air; it is preceded by philosophy.

Furthermore, before embarking on the learning process, it is crucial to grasp the intricacies of this non-trivial philosophy. A clear understanding and mental image must take shape in one's consciousness. It is essential for an individual to grasp the overarching purpose of their actions, how to execute tactical maneuvers effectively, and what resources, strengths, and time are at their disposal. Merely envisioning the task at hand is not sufficient; one must invest effort into the training process and execute it correctly from the start. Learning something haphazardly or through a "somehow" approach may lead to suboptimal results, akin to a jumbled mess. It is worth remembering that learning can lead to both proficiency and ineptitude, and unlearning bad habits can be more challenging than building a functional and robust system right from the outset. Furthermore, the described effective approach is often more time-efficient.

DISCUSSION

In delving into the exploration of the intricate dynamics that influence the mind phenomena and its consequential impact on the trajectory of professional development, several seminal theories have emerged as paramount:

1. Abraham Maslow's Theory of Self-Actualization: Embedded within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, self-actualization stands as the pinnacle, representing the pursuit of unlocking individual potential and the realization of personal aspirations (Maslow, 1954).

2. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory: This theory posits an optimal state of complete immersion in a gratifying activity, commonly referred to as the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The experience of being fully engaged fosters heightened performance and contributes significantly to professional growth.

3. Erik Erikson's Theory Psychosocial Development: Spanning eight distinct stages of personal development, Erikson's theory delineates unique challenges and crises within each stage (Erikson, 1950). Successfully navigating these stages becomes integral to fostering substantive professional development.

4. Lev Vygotsky's Activity Theory: Vygotsky's theoretical framework accentuates the pivotal role of sociocultural context in the formation of the mind (Vygotsky, 1978).). His emphasis on social interaction and cultural influences underscores their profound impact on the landscape of professional development.

5. Exemplary Leadership Theory by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner: This theory introduces a comprehensive leadership model encompassing five key practices: modeling, inspiring, motivating, vision setting, and learning from mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). These practices, as outlined in the model, are directly applicable to fostering professional growth.

6. Multiple Intelligence Theory by Howard Gardner (1983): Gardner's theory proposes the existence of various types of intelligence, including logical-mathematical, verbal-linguistic, musical, visual-spatial, and others. Emphasizing the diversity of intelligence abilities, this theory underscores the importance of cultivating all facets of intelligence.

7. Daniel Goleman's Theory of Social Intelligence: Goleman's theory highlights the concept of emotional intelligence, emphasizing the pivotal role of emotional literacy in achieving professional success (Goleman, 2006). The ability to manage one's own emotions and engage effectively with the emotions of others is considered a critical aspect of intelligence.

8. The Concept of Neuroplasticity by Michael Merzenich (2013), et al.: This concept attests to the brain's remarkable ability to change its structure and function in response to experience and training. Supporting the notion that continuous learning and mental exercise can enhance cognitive abilities throughout one's life.

9. Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development: This theory delineates the stages of cognitive development from childhood to adulthood (Piaget, 1971). An understanding of these stages proves invaluable in identifying the types of thinking and understanding that require enhancement at different life stages.

These concepts offer a broad overview of diverse approaches to enhancing the mind. Numerous pathways exist for advancing in the realms of professional and personal development, with the choice of a specific approach contingent upon goals, individual characteristics, and context. Each concept provides a unique perspective on the phenomena of the mind, motivation, and professional formation. Understanding these theories aids in goal-setting and directing efforts toward success in various facets of life, including professional careers.

For those who diligently follow this logical approach, a significant challenge arises: where can one obtain a suitable philosophy? This philosophy should not only exist but must be guaranteed to work flawlessly. The research direction can shed light on the concept of a prototype. To achieve this, it is recommended to explore the fundamentals of prototypological method and the advantages of drawing inspiration from alternative domains. Investigating prototypes, immersing oneself in their environments, and delving into historical contexts will unlock the secrets of an effective philosophy. Philosophy, in turn, lays the foundation for comprehending tactics, which dictate how to manage mechanisms of the core component and formulate combinations of technical elements based on the situation and its parameters.

The concept of "philosophy," often dismissed as abstract, should, in practice, be constructed from three fundamental categories: **the rooter, beliefs,** and **managing blocks**. The primary objective of this part of the article is to systematize these categories rather than reiterate or reinterpret previous conclusions. Therefore, the primary focus in research on philosophy should be directed towards the **rooter**, which is the core essence of the system one seeks to master. The

rooter ideology must effectively address the life challenges.

Beliefs are of utmost importance, serving as reference points and essentially acting as the software for the mind. Effective beliefs are essential for the mind's optimal functioning, providing a reliable foundation for its operation. However, it is imperative that the belief system associated with the discipline being learned does not contradict beliefs held throughout one's life. Such contradictions can be likened to conflicting software on a computer and can lead to confusion and stupor during critical moments when attempting to execute a task.

Furthermore, it is worth addressing the category of managing blocks or instrumental blocks. When selecting a system to learn, it is crucial to remember a certain warning: **systems that lack tools for task-solving should not be considered as viable training systems.** In other words, if a proposed system lacks the necessary tools for addressing specific challenges, it should be promptly dismissed as a viable option. Additionally, one should guard against naivety. No one will simply provide the necessary tools to one; this is a closely guarded secret that is rarely discussed or written about. Analytical approach is required to address the instrumental issue. It is essential to prepare for the possibility of disappointment, as long-awaited resources or texts that have been sought after for extensive periods may turn out to be mere marketing ploys. Promises of experiencing the greatest achievements in a particular discipline are often empty, even if they bear the name of a world champion on their cover.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude this presentation of the analytical part's findings, highlighting one of the "most irrational conclusions" that may unsettle the conscious part of human nature but undoubtedly resonates with its inherently irrational mind component. How can one attain it all at once, reach extraordinary heights, and outpace others? The answer is "Gradually!"

Do you aspire to achieve something remarkable? Are you confident that you are fully immersed in your aspirations, unafraid of the challenges that come with training? Do you believe you deserve more, and obstacles will not deter you? All of these qualities align with the "I" — a self that is strong, courageous, free from

fears and pain. However, the human mind, as it channels the efforts of the "I," operates based on different categories. Sometimes, even the most ambitious aspirations aimed at providing social utility can be thwarted by a fundamental lack of understanding of how one's own mind functions.

In the 21st century, almost everyone desires to engage not just with winners and professionals but also with individuals capable of explaining complex concepts in simple language. In other words, it is often insufficient for a person to perform a backflip; they must also possess the ability to teach. Teaching is a unique talent not inherent in everyone, but it can be nurtured and developed (preferably starting from the very beginning, without procrastinating this wonderful pursuit). Naturally, one must begin by learning on their own, as offering guidance on something you do not understand yourself reflects an inferiority. Therefore, as a concluding recommendation in this practical understanding, we emphasize the following: when training yourself and learning, it is beneficial to select and gather models, examples, approaches, and methodological techniques that will serve you as a trainee and will prove valuable in the future when you are regarded as an authoritative consultant.

People seek a formula for success in one way or another. Some openly, some covertly — people vary in their approaches, but often they act irrationally. From the author's perspective, making grand claims about the essence of the "successful formula" for self-learning is inappropriate. When analyzing the phenomena of the mind related to a person's perception and ideas, it becomes evident that the true key to triumph in this construct is the rooter. The rooter represents hidden practical knowledge, a guide, and a roadmap that leads an individual toward coveted success and accomplishments. Indeed, it is crucial to gain a clear understanding of the rooter beforehand to definitively respond with a "yes" or "no" to the following question: "Does the suggested approach align with my expectations for the future?" If the answer is "yes," then I will proceed with this system; if it does not align, I will explore alternative options and I will find the school that caters to my individual needs."

Improving the mind encompasses various facets, and the recommendations provided should be tailored to your specific goals and context. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Engage in continuous learning by reading books, participating in courses, and listening to lectures. These activities help expand your knowledge and stimulate mental alertness.
- Work on enhancing your emotional intelligence. Take the time to understand and control your emotions, and develop the ability to recognize and comprehend the emotional states of others.
- Regularly reflect on your actions and decisions. Analyze your experiences, extract key lessons, and contemplate how you can improve your actions in the future. This practice fosters self-awareness and continuous improvement.
- Cultivate systematic and creative thinking. Tackle problems, solve tasks, face new challenges, and explore alternative approaches to problem-solving.
- Engage in physical activity to enhance cognitive brain function, energy levels, and overall well-being.
- Take a structured approach to problem-solving to improve way of thinking.
- Connect with peers, share ideas, and discuss with people from diverse spheres to promote creative thinking.
- Participate in mental games and exercises like puzzles, crossword puzzles, and chess to exercise the mind and enhance cognitive abilities. Improving the mind is an ongoing and purposeful process that benefits from a systematic approach.
- Continually expand your skill set by learning new languages, mastering programming, or exploring new technologies. This stimulates the mind and enhances adaptability to change.
- Interact with a variety of people to broaden horizons and enrich experiences. Networking with colleagues, friends, and experts in different fields can lead to new ideas and perspectives.
- Challenge yourself with new tasks and difficulties. Tackling challenges promotes mental growth and improves problem-solving skills.
- Express your creative side through drawing, music, literature, or any creative process. This promotes intelligence and the ability to innovate.
- Identify areas for self-improvement and develop an action plan. Constantly striving for personal growth is a fundamental aspect of improving the mind.
- Improving the mind is an ongoing process that involves continuous learning, social engagement, challenges, creativity, and a commitment to self-improvement.

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Note

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MEDIA CULTURE,
POLITICS, AND SOCIETY

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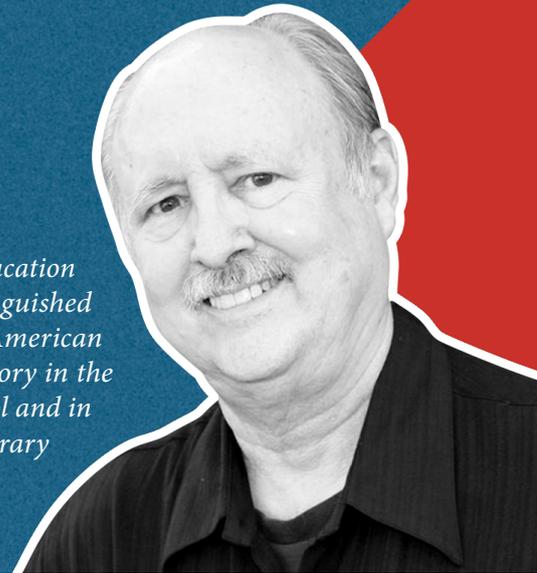
ABSTRACT

From the 1960s to the present, media culture in the United States has been a battleground between competing social groups with some artifacts advancing liberal or radical positions and others conservative ones. Likewise, some artifacts of media culture promote progressive positions and representations of gender, sexual preference, race or ethnicity, while others articulate reactionary forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and rightwing values and beliefs, thus many films articulate a contradictory matrix of liberal, radical, and reactionary representations, discourses, and narratives. In this article, I argue that media culture can provide important insights into the psychological, socio-political, and ideological make-up of U.S. society at a given point in history. Reading culture diagnostically allows one to gain insights into social problems and conflicts, and to appraise the dominant ideologies and emergent oppositional forces. This approach thus involves a dialectic of text and context, using texts to read social realities and context to help situate and interpret key artifacts of media culture in the 21 st century.

Keywords

media culture, diagnostic critique, ideologies, racism, sexism, homophobia, US society and politics

INTRODUCTION

From the 1960s to the present, media culture in the United States has been a battleground between competing social groups with some artifacts ad-

vancing liberal or radical positions and others conservative ones. Likewise, some artifacts of media culture promote progressive positions and representations of gender, sexual preference, race or ethnicity, while others articulate reactionary forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and rightwing values and beliefs, thus many films articulate a contradictory matrix of liberal, radical, and reactionary representations, discourses, and narratives.

From this viewpoint, media culture can be read as a contest of representations and contested terrain that reproduce existing social struggles and transcode the political discourse of the era (Ryan & Kellner, 1988; Kellner, 1995/2020). I am using the term "transcode" to describe how specific political discourses and positions like liberalism or rightwing nationalism or militarism are translated, or encoded, into media texts. For example, films like *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Woodstock* (1970) transcode the discourses of the 1960's counterculture into cinematic texts in image, sound, dialogue, scenes, and narrative, while feminist films like *Thelma & Louise* (1991) and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) transcode feminist and pro-women discourses (Hopper, 1969; Wadleigh, 1970; Scott, 1991; Sciamma, 2019).

From the right, films like *Red Dawn* (1984) and *Missing in Action* (1984) transcode the conservative discourses of Reaganism while the 2017 TV series based on Margaret Atwood's novel The Handmaid's Tale could be read as a protest against the election of Donald Trump in 2016 (Milius, 1984; Zito, 1984; Miller, 2017–2022; Atwood, 1985).Indeed, *The Handmaid's Tale* became a global sensation, as women throughout the world donned the white hat, cloak, and modest uniform of the handmaids as symbols

of resistance to the attack on women's rights in the Trump administration and elsewhere, while debates raged whether Trump's America was coming to embody feature of Atwood's dystopia.[1]

Of course, films, TV series and other forms of media culture are "polysemic" and contain multiple and often contradictory meanings open to numerous and variant interpretations, as I demonstrate in *Cinema Wars* and *Media Culture* (Kellner, 2009, 1995/2020). Yet, there are a number of recurring themes in many of the major and minor Hollywood films and TV series of the past decades, which articulate some of the key events and socio-political and economic relations of the time. Indeed, many of these texts of media culture resonate, and can be reread, within the history of the social struggles and political context of their period. In this way, media culture can help interpret the social and political history of an era, and contexualizing media culture in their matrix of production, distribution, and reception can help interpret the multiple meanings and effects of specific texts, genres or creators of media culture.

METHODS FOR STUDY OF MEDIA CULTURE

This study focuses on U.S. media culture in the 2000s, covering the eras from the Bush-Cheney Gang's militarist and conservative regime (2000–2008) to Trump's hard right and extremely erratic presidency, culminating in the attack on democracy in Trump's insurrection of January 6, 2021, in which his Stormtroopers invaded and tried to occupy the Capitol (Fandos & Cochrane, 2021). This has been a particularly turbulent and contested era of U.S. history and Hollywood films reproduce the passionate polarization, intense political struggle, and often surprising and dramatic events of the contemporary era.

I take the artifacts of media culture as providing illuminating access to events and social realities of this period, and see media interpretation and critique as contributing to knowledge of the present age through contextualization, interpretations and critique. In general, media

texts can display social realities of the time in documentary and realist fashion, directly representing events and phenomena of an epoch. Yet media entertainment can also provide symbolic-allegorical representations that interpret, comment on, and indirectly portray realities of an era. Finally, there is an aesthetic, philosophical, and anticipatory dimension to the texts of media culture, in which they provide artistic visions of the world that might transcend the social context of the moment and articulate future possibilities, positive and negative, and provide insights into the nature of human beings, social relations, institutions, and conflicts of a given era, or the human condition itself.

Realist media texts would include critical documentary and films like Oliver Stone's historical dramas that attempt to provide a representation of events like the Kennedy assassination (J.F.K.), the Vietnam war *(Platoon, or Born on the Fourth of July), Nixon*, or countercultural figures like *The Doors* (Stone, 1991a, 1989, 1991b). Of course, both documentary films, however rigorous, and realist films are constructs, and as the Oliver Stone examples easily suggest are interpretations and specific versions of social and historical reality. It is similar with documentary films by committed filmmakers like Michael Moore whose *Bowling for Columbine, Fahrenheit 9/11*, or *Mr. Hoover and I*, properly interpreted and contextualized, can provide key insights into specific historical persons, events, or eras, as I have demonstrated in my works (Kellner, 2013/2019).

Allegorical films include fantasy and horror genres which require more theoretically-informed interpretations concerning what realities, or fantasies, specific films represent. The series of haunted and collapsing house films of the 1980s such as *The Amityville Horror* and the *Poltergeist* trilogy, for example, can be interpreted as projecting fears of middle class families losing their homes or having their families torn apart during the Reagan era in which the middle class was indeed downwardly mobile, divorce was up, and families were losing homes (as happened again in accelerating fashion during the Covid lockdown in which many people could not keep up their

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1   Adi Robertson, "In Trump's America, *The Handmaid's Tale* matters more than ever. Nolite te bastardes carborundorum," *The Verge*," November 9, 2016 at https://www.theverge.com/2014/12/20/7424951/does-the-handmaids-tale-hold-up-dystopia-feminism-fiction (accessed August 21, 2019), and Tom Engelhardt, "Trump's America Is Worse Than Orwell's '1984.' As global warming intensifies, our world is becoming bleaker than one of the darkest dystopias ever imagined." The Nation, August 12, 2019 at https://www.thenation.com/article/donald-trump-george-orwell-1984/ (accessed August 21, 2019).

home payments (Rosenberg, 1979; Hooper, 1982; Gibson, 1986; Sherman, 1988; Kellner, 1995/2020).

Likewise, a series of political thrillers in the 2000s can be read as allegories articulating liberal fears of rightwing oppression under the Bush-Cheney administration, including *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Syriania*, and *V for Vendetta* (Frankenheimer, 1962; Gaghan, 2005; McTeigue, 2006). The texts of media culture thus provide insight or illumination into the contemporary moment through their images, scenes, or the narratives as a whole. As Walter Benjamin and T. W. Adorno argued, cultural forms can provide "dialectical images" that illuminate their social environments, as Adorno claimed regarding the poetry of Hölderlin, or as Heidegger claimed that Greek tragedy and epic poetry illuminated the world of the Greeks.[2] Media culture is, to be sure, a less sublime mode of culture, although its artifacts have their moments of beauty and transcendence, and modernist moments of style, innovation, contestation or resistance.

More aesthetic and philosophical readings of media culture engage themselves with the aesthetic dimension that ranges from analysis of media form and style to the transcendent visions of another world presented in some media artifacts.[3] By virtue of style and form, innovative and visionary works of media culture can present visions of a better life, as well as provide critical

[2] See Walter Benjamin and T. W. Adorno, and the discussion of their work in Kellner 1989.

[3] The concept of the aesthetic dimension which we are using derives from Herbert Marcuse. See his *The Aesthetic Dimension* and Douglas Kellner, editor, Art and liberation, Volume 4 of *The Collected Writings of Herbert Marcuse (New York and London, Routledge, 2007)*.

insight into the present moment. Media culture has a utopian dimension which enables audiences to transcend the limitations of the present moment to envisage new ways of seeing, living, and being. As Fredric Jameson (1981) has pointed out even popular films like *The Godfather or Jaws* can have utopian moments, as the opening scenes of a communal family life in the *Godfather* wedding scene, the New England community before the shark attack, or the male bonding and heroism of the disparate men seeking to protect the community from the shark attacks (Coppola, 1972; Spielberg, 1975).

In addition, media culture has become a major art form of the past century and has been a productive field for aesthetic and philosophical exploration (Guerrier, 2020; Kujundžić, 2013; McCorkle & Golburt, 2021; Rosmini, 2014; Tobin, 2022). Films and television at their best interrogate the human condition as well as specific social relations and deal with universal aspects of human being-in-the-world as well as specific socio-historical conditions. Thus media culture can be engaged by the disciplines of aesthetics and philosophy, and categories from this realm can

be applied to analyze and interpret its artifacts (Dimitrov et al., 2023; Choi et al., 2014).

Indeed, the texts of media culture can be used to illustrate and discuss a wide range of philosophical, religious, or social-political issues and can be an effective pedagogical tool that engage contemporary audiences in a direct and immediate fashion (Aslan & Baş, 2023; Bonsignori, 2018; Desai et al., 2018; Lee & Lo, 2014; YeşiLdağ & Bostan, 2023). The audio-visual spectacles of cinematic and televisual culture are a crucial part of contemporary cultures and are embedded in fundamental economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of the present age (Alexánder, 2015; Allal-Chérif, 2022; Barreda-Ángeles et al., 2021; Cranmer et al., 2020; Radianti et al., 2020). The artifacts of media culture raise issues and can provoke debates concerning salient issues of the present moment as when Andrew Light (2003) claims in *Reel Arguments* that contemporary films raise important issues concerning surveillance technology, identity politics, or environmentalism, generating arguments and debates that contribute to political enlightenment or philosophical understanding.

In this and other critical studies, I use history and social and political theory to analyze media culture, and deploy its texts to illuminate historical trends, conflicts, possibilities, and anxieties of the era. From this diagnostic perspective, media culture can provide important insights into the psychological, socio-political, and ideological make-up of U.S. society at a given point in history. Reading culture diagnostically allows one to gain insights into social problems and conflicts, and to appraise the dominant ideologies and emergent oppositional forces. Moreover, diagnostic critique enables one to perceive the limitations and pathologies of mainstream conservative and liberal political ideologies, as well as oppositional ones.[4] This approach thus involves a dialectic of text and context, using texts to read social realities and context to help situate and interpret key artifacts of media culture in the 21st century.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Much as Benjamin (1967) used the poetry of Charles Baudelaire to illuminate the scene of Paris in the mid-19th century, as well as other historical and political sources and artifacts, and the ephemera of everyday life, so too can we use media culture to provide critical insight and knowledge into our own historical era. For diagnostic critique,

media culture is an important source of knowledge, used judiciously with the tools of theory and cultural studies, that provides privileged insight into how people behave, look, and act in a particular era, as well as their dreams, nightmares, fantasies and hopes.

In addition, a German exile writer Siegfried Kracauer (1947), once close to Benjamin and Adorno, laid bare the allegorical dimension of film and provided one of the first systematic studies of how films articulate social and psychological content. His book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* argues that German inter-war films reveal a highly authoritarian disposition to submit to social authority and fear of emerging chaos (Kracauer, 1947). For Kracauer, German films reflect and foster anti-democratic and passive attitudes of the sort that paved the way for Nazism. While his assumption that "inner" psychological tendencies and conflicts are projected onto the screen opened up a fruitful area of sociocultural analysis, he frequently ignored the role of mechanisms of representation, such as displacement, inversion, and condensation in the construction of cinematic images and narratives. He posits film-society analogies ("Their silent resignation foreshadows the passivity of many people under totalitarian rule") that deny the autonomous and contradictory character and effects of film form and the multiple ways that audiences process cinematic material (Kracauer, 1947, p. 218).

Hollywood has long been seen as a dream machine that articulates the subconscious yearnings and fears of a culture, as well as an ideology machine that inculcates the dominant ideology — and, as well shall see, projects dreams of liberation, resistance, and a world of freedom, happiness, and justice. Sociological and psychological studies of Hollywood film proliferated in the United States in the post-World War Two era and developed a wide range of critiques of myth, ideology, and meaning in the American cinema. Parker Tyler's studies of *The Hollywood Hallucination* and *Myth and Magic of the Movies* applied Freudian and myth-symbol criticism to show how Walt Disney cartoons, romantic melodramas, and other popular films provided insights into social psychology and context, while providing

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4 On diagnostic critique, see Kellner and Ryan 1988 and Kellner, 1995, pp. 116–117.

myths suitable for contemporary audiences (Tyler, 1944, 1947). In *Movies*: A *Psychological Study*, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites applied psychoanalytical methods to film, decoding fears, dreams, and aspirations beneath the surface of 1940s Hollywood movies, arguing that: "The common day dreams of a culture are in part the sources, in part the products of its popular myths, stories, plays and films" (Turner et al., 1950, p. 13). In her sociological study of *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, Hortense Powdermaker (1950) studied an industry that manufactured dreams and fantasies, while Robert Warshow (1970) in *The Immediate Experience* related classical Hollywood genres like the Western and the gangster film to the social history and ideological problematics of U.S. society.

Building on these traditions, Barbara Deming (1969) demonstrated in *Running Away From Myself* how 1940s Hollywood films provided insights into the social psychology and reality of the period. Deming (1969) argued that: "It is not as mirrors reflect us but, rather, as our dreams do that movies most truly reveal the times" (p. 1). She claimed that 1940s Hollywood films provided a collective dream portrait of its era and proposed deciphering "the dream that all of us have been buying at the box office, to cut through to the real nature of the identification we have experienced there" (Deming, 1969, p. 5–6). Her work anticipates later, more sophisticated and University-based film criticism of the post-1960s era by showing how films both reproduce dominant ideologies and also contain proto-deconstructive elements that cut across the grain of the ideology that the films promote. She

also undertook a gender reading of Hollywood film that would eventually become a key part of film criticism.

The same model of interpretation that critics of an earlier era applied to film can be applied to the texts of television. In addition to laying bare the socio-political fantasies and personal dreams and nightmares of an era, critical analysis of film and television can help dissect and deconstruct dominant ideologies, as well as show key ideological resistance and struggle in a given society at a specific moment. The groundbreaking work of critical media theorists like the Frankfurt School and French structuralism and poststructuralism revealed that media culture is a social construct that reproduces dominant ideology and its contestations, intrinsically linked to the vicissitudes of the social and historically specific milieu in which it is conceived. Film and cultural studies unavoidably had to engage the politics of representation, which drew upon feminist approaches and multicultural theories to fully analyze the functions of gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual preference and so on — social dimensions that are vital to the constitution of cultural texts and their effects, as well as being fundamentally constitutive of audiences who appropriate and use texts (Durham & Kellner, 2006).

Feminist film criticism of the 1970s to the present combined critical theories like psychoanalysis and poststructuralism to interrogate how cinematic and televisual form, production, and reception contributed to the oppression of women and could contribute to their liberation. British cultural studies, for instance, adopted a feminist dimension, paid greater attention to race, ethnicity and nationality, and concentrated on sexuality, as assorted discourses of race, gender, sex, nationality and so on circulated in response to social struggles and movements (Gilroy, 1991; McRobbie, 1994; Ang, 1998). An increasingly complex, culturally hybrid and diasporic world calls for sophisticated understandings of the interplay of ideological representations, politics, and the forms of media (Schlesinger, 2015; see also Borré et al., 2023; Cooper, 2019; Dayán, 2017; Van Oosten, 2023). Our studies drawn on a wide of critical theories.

Poststructuralism stressed the openness and heterogeneity of the text, its embedded in history and desire, its political and ideological dimensions, and its excess of meaning. This led critical theory to more multilevel interpretive methods and more radical political readings and critique, and in this study I shall combine discourses and
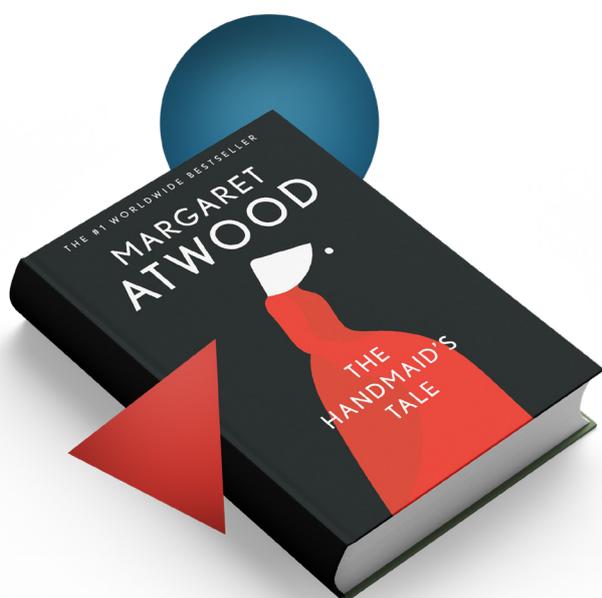
methods from these traditions of critical theory, cultural studies, and film and television criticism.

The global film and television industries are an important part of the culture industries through which megacorporations seek megaprofits through producing blockbuster films, and hit TV shows (that can be cycled in reruns throughout the world), generating commodities that can generate a high return. From the 1980s to the present, media culture was increasing corporatized, commodified, and produced often mediocre works to gain maximum profits. Hence, sequels, familiar "high concept" films that can be "presold" because of recognition of their source material, and ultimately franchises that can sell merchandise and spin off other products like the *Star Wars* films and Disney films, while many popular films became blockbuster TV series like *The Lord of the Rings*. Increasingly, the culture industry has been producing media culture that can be sold through saturation advertising and booking to turn-over large profits in a quick release that brings in mega-audiences before going into DVD, TV, or foreign release.

Nonetheless, media culture in the US in the past decades has managed to turn out a surprising number of critical and oppositional films, television, and popular music in the 21st century. The radical movements of the 1960s spawned movements of independent film and radicalized Hollywood film directors, actors, and many throughout the production community. A generation of "movie brats" emerged from film schools in the 1970s to make ground-breaking and in some cases immensely successful films such as George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola,

Martin Scorsese, and others who were able to make a great variety of projects in the succeeding decades and opened the way for others. Younger independent filmmakers emerged from the indie movement range from male filmmakers like John Sayles, Spike Lee, David Lynch, and Richard Roderiquez to female cineastes like Chantal Ackermann, Martha Coolidge, Cheryl Dunye, Miranda July, and Barbara Kopple. The success of their early low-budget films gave them access to
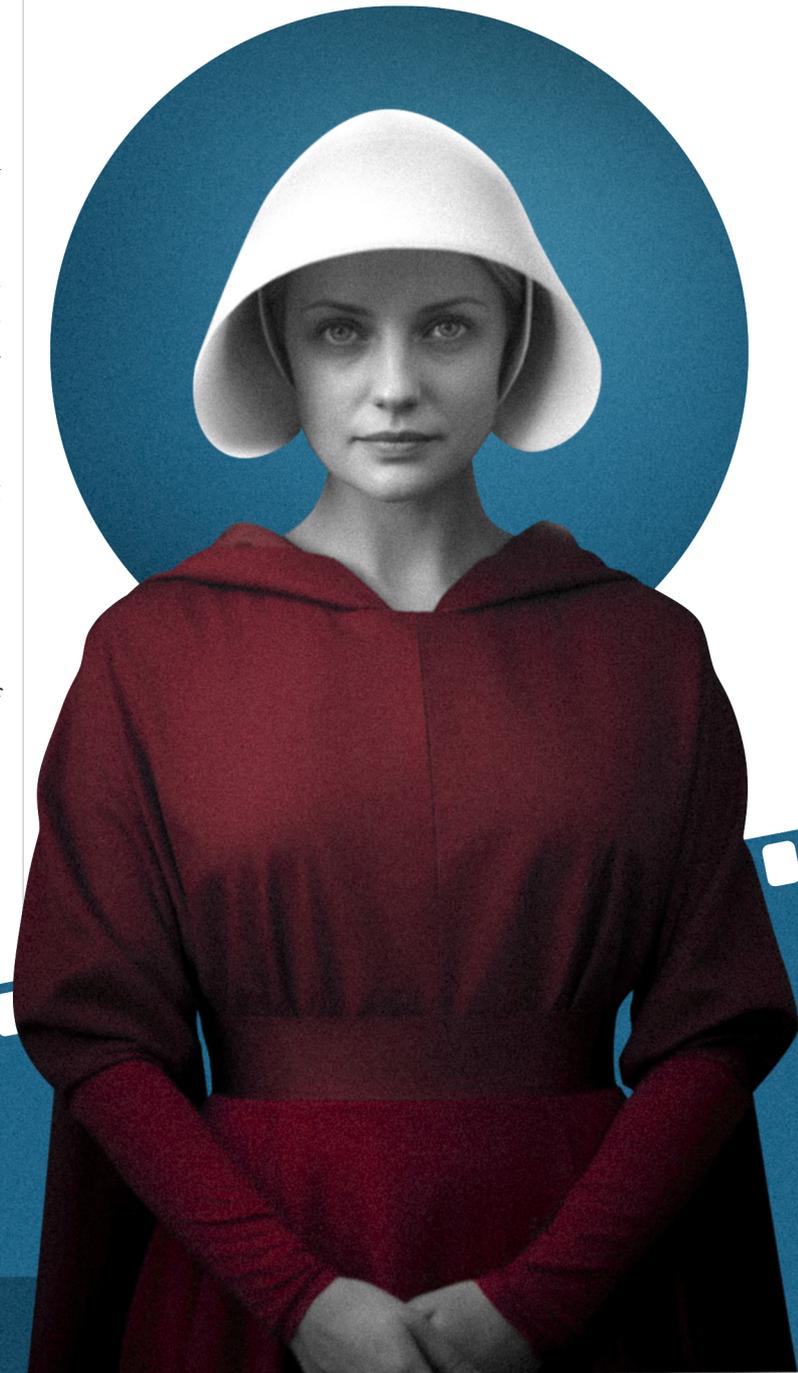
higher budget cinema production in some cases or at least steady financing of their projects.

In the next section, I will carry out a case study of how Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* provided a global feminist intervention against patriarchy from the time of its publication and has continued to articulate with struggles of women against patriarchal oppression such as have been especially visible in the United States in the struggle against the anti-feminist politics of the Donald Trump administration and then the Supreme Court's shocking attack on Roe vs. Wade and women's reproductive rights (Atwood, 1985). I will accordingly interpret in the following section the 2017 TV mini-series version of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* as a dystopic critique of a patriarchal society that intersects in interesting ways with the presidency of Donald Trump (2016–2020) and thus can be used as a social text to illuminate the struggles over gender, class, and sexuality during the Trump era (Miller, 2017-2022). *The Handmaid's Tale* is a global popular that has been received as an iconic feminist critique of patriarchy and the TV mini-series was especially relevant during the Trump era, as I shall demonstrate in the following study.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE AS DYSTOPIA AND ECOLOGICAL/ POLITICAL CRITIQUE

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* was first published in 1985 as a critique of what she saw as disturbing conservative trends in U.S. politics during the Reagan era, embodied in groups like the Moral Majority, rightwing segments of the Republican Party, and evangelical religious groups, and in their attacks on women's freedoms and rights. Having taught at Harvard and lived in Boston and the Cambridge, Massachusetts area during this time, Atwood set her novel in a Northeastern U. S. urban area in a near future time frame.

Atwood's father was an environmentalist and she spent much time in the north of Canada and thus became involved in the ecology movement of the era. It is often overlooked that Atwood's dystopic novel is also an ecological parable showing a U.S. society some few decades further along than our own which has poisoned the environment, caused infertility in most women, and thrown modern industrial-technological societies into crisis.

The Handmaid's Tale envisages a small right-wing U.S. male cabal carrying out a revolution, murdering the previous power elite, and establishing a religious patriarchal theocracy Gilead in which women are reduced to child-bearing and reproduction or, oppressive forms of servitude. In Atwood's dystopic vision of Gilead, women have no rights and are the property of their husbands. Women are either the wives of the dominant male caste, or "Marthas" who serve in household as servants, "Handmaidens" whose sole task is production of children, or "Jezebels" who are condemned to serve in houses of prostitution for the male elite, or are sent to the colonies to engage in slave labor in a nuclear polluted area where their lives are nasty, brutal, and short.

In 2017, shortly after Trump's election, the Hulu channel inaugurated a TV limited series of Atwood's novel and *The Handmaid's Tale* became a global sensation, as women throughout the world donned the white hat, cloak, and modest uniform of the handmaids as symbols of resistance to the attack on women's rights in the Trump
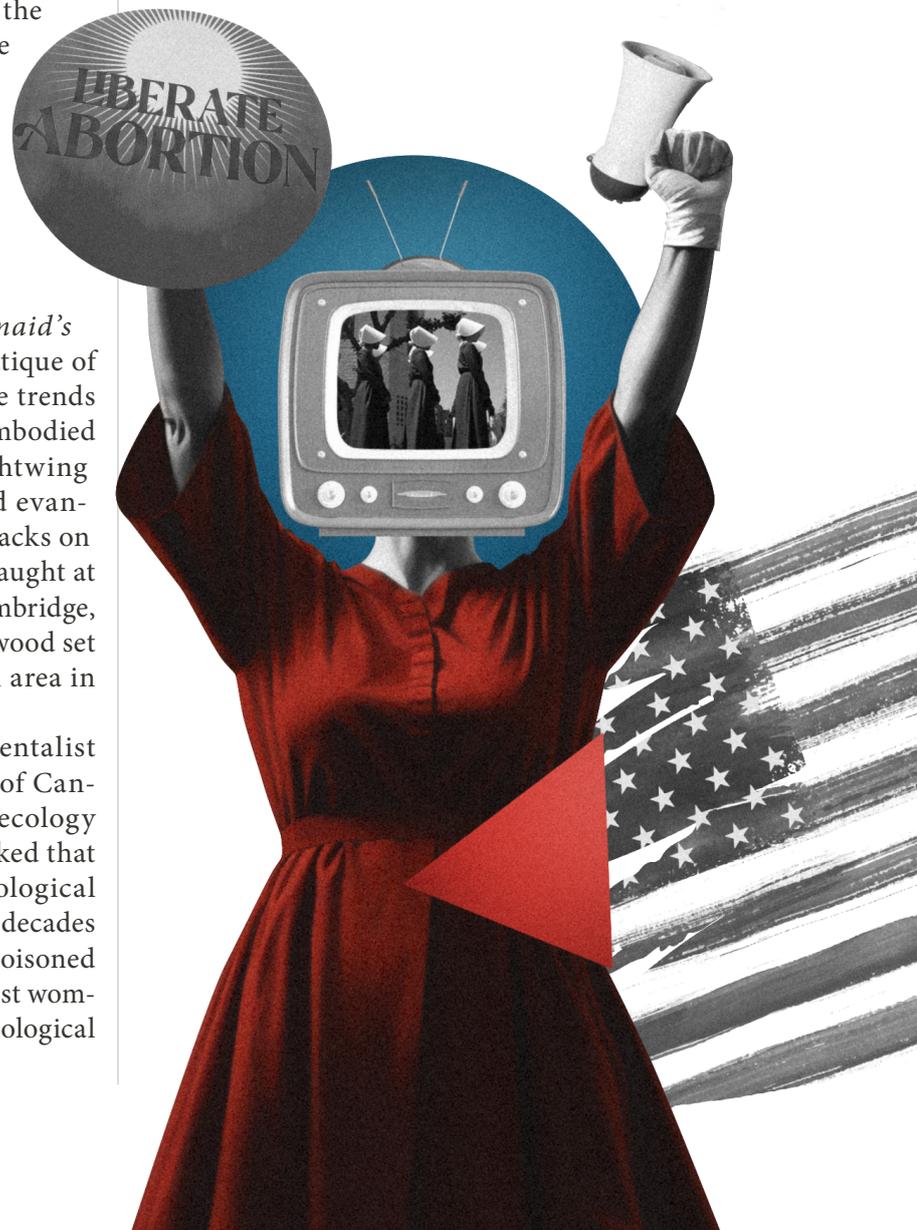
administration and elsewhere, while debates raged whether Trump's America was coming to embody feature of Atwood's dystopia.[5] The first season of the Hulu broadcast focused on the events told in Atwood's novel, whereas the second and third seasons went beyond Atwood's text, envisaging the main character Offred/June (Elizabeth Moss) escaping from bondage, encountering a resistance movement, then returning to her bondage as a Handmaid to try to save her daughter who had been taken away from her, while still attempting to resist and help cultivate a movement to overthrow the fascist theocratic state of Gilead.

The proliferation of cable channels in the 2000s and growth of streaming channels like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, and others has proliferated TV production to previously unimaginable levels, and allowed for the production of more radical series and movies like *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–2019), Joseph Heller's anti-war novel *Catch-22* (2019), Armistead Maupin's gay drama *Tales of the City* (2019), and countless other series or films that embody a diversity or productions by different races, creators, and individuals previously kept out of conservative white male dominated TV production (Miller, 2017-2022; Clooney et al., 2019; Morelli et al., 2019).

The Hulu TV series *The Handmaid's Tale* opens with June Osborne attempting to escape to Canada with her husband, Luke, and daughter, Hannah. June is captured and due to her fertility, she is made a Handmaid to Commander Fred Waterford and his wife, Serena Joy, and is now known as "Offred." The handmaid's names are created by the addition of the prefix Of- to the first name of the man who owns them, so Offred is Of-Fred, the property and reproductive handmaid of Fred and his family. When handmaids are transferred, their names are changed, and at the end of the first episode and throughout the series, Offred keeps reminding herself and the viewers that she is really "June."

The Waterford's are part of the Gilead elite as Fred Waterford is a high-ranking government official and his wife Serena Joy was a former conservative activist, writer, and celebrity. Serena has accepted her new role in Gilead, despite losing her fame and cultural power. Infertile herself, she yearns to have a child and willingly participates in the bizarre sexual "ceremony," whereby Serena folds Offred in her arms as the latter copulates with Fred, attempting to impregnate Offred and have her much desired child.

Aunt Lydia (Ann Dowd) is in charge of the training of the Handmaids and is a major figure in the plot, and in early episodes she indoctrinates the handmaid's with their role as childbearer and their importance to the survival of the society. Aunt Lydia uses a fundamentalist version of Christianity to indoctrinate the handmaid's into performing their roles as bearers of children and submissive underlings. While Lydia appears to be deeply religious, she is capable of great cruelty and embodies an authoritarian personality who serves to discipline and control the young women.

Early episodes depict Offred/June and other Handmaids going shopping and meeting on the street and in various stores where they are doing errands which also affords the opportunity to present the oppressive features of Gilead such as a wall where men are hung for being gay, or not conforming in some way. The handmaid's also observe "Savagings" where rebels are hung to death or executed in public ceremonies. The Handmaids wear long red dresses, heavy boots and white coifs, with a larger white coif to be worn outside, concealing their facial figures from public view and restricting their own vision. Indeed, the women of different castes wear different clothing, with Marthas who are housekeepers and cooks, wearing long, loose-fitting dull green garments and covering their hair with headwraps. The upperclass Wives wear elegant, tailored dresses in blue and turquoise, cut in styles evoking the 1950s, while Jezebels who work in brothels to service the male elite dress in provocative lowcut blouses, tight skirts, and clothing to show off their bodies.

Flashbacks show June and other women losing their jobs, having their bank accounts frozen, and forfeiting all their rights, in cautionary warnings that oppressive patriarchy can return women to second class citizenship and worse. Throughout, there are also flashbacks to June's

5 Adi Robertson, "In Trump's America, *The Handmaid's Tale* matters more than ever. Nolite te bastardes carborundorum," *The Verge*," November 9, 2016 at https://www.theverge.com/2014/12/20/7424951/does-the-handmaids-tale-hold-up-dystopia-feminism-fiction (accessed August 21, 2019), and Tom Engelhardt, "Trump's America Is Worse Than Orwell's '1984,' As global warming intensifies, our world is becoming bleaker than one of the darkest dystopias ever imagined." *The Nation*, August 12, 2019 at https://www.thenation.com/article/donald-trump-george-orwell-1984/ (accessed August 21, 2019).

past pre-Gilead life, her relation to her husband Luke, her child Hannah, her feminist mother, and her friend Moira, creating contrasts between the former human life and the inhuman life of Gilead. In many images in the series, the camera tightly focuses on June's face and depicts the story from her point-of-view, showing the misery etched on her facial expressions and the indignities and oppression forced on her and the other Handmaids — although on occasion June's face expresses flashes of anger and resolute resistance, while the final episodes of Season 3 depict June as relentlessly focused on freeing the oppressed women and children.

The first season that follows the storyline of Atwood's novel and focuses on June's relations with the other Handmaids, depicting their shared oppression and moments of solidarity, and June's increasingly complex relations with the Waterford family. Seeking to humanize the nonhuman relations, the Commander Fred invites June/Offred to his private study where they play Scrabble and eventually talk like normal people; he also takes her to a brothel, meant for the entertainment of the male elite where she meets her friend Moira and begins forging relations of resistance. Serena, jealous of Offred's relation with Fred and afraid he may be infertile, encourages Offred to have sexual relations with Fred's driver Nick, which she does and begins to have a relation with him that will eventually yield Serena's much desired child.

At the end of the first season, Moira escapes to Canada where a Gilead resistance movement is forming, and Offred is arrested and taken away in a black van. In the second season, Offred escapes her imprisonment, but decides to stay in Gilead to unite with her first daughter Hannah. She ultimately hopes to go to Canada with Hannah to join her husband Luke and second daughter who is stolen from Serena near the end of the second season and who Moira spirits to Canada.

The second and third season of *The Handmaid's Tale*, produced during the Trump era, depict the growing resistance to Gilead, parallel to growing resistance to Trump, and *The Hand-*

maid's Tale is widely discussed as a critique of Trump's America, although Trump's defenders attack the interpretation making the series one of the most contested and debated TV series of all time.[6] As states from Georgia and Alabama to Missouri have been banning abortion rights for women, protestors often show up with the Handmaid's uniforms and hats, and Atwood's novel has periodically jumped to the top of the *New York Times'* best seller's list, decades after its initial publication in 1985.

The first three seasons of the Hulu TV-series of *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–2020) were broadcast from 2017–2020, during Trump's presidency and served as a critique of the patriarchal nature of his administration, as well as anticipating the deep roots of an oppressive patriarchy in U.S. institutions. In 1973, the U. S. Supreme Court passed a landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*, in which the Court ruled that the Constitution of the United States conferred the right for women to have an abortion. The decision struck down many federal and state abortion laws, and over almost fifty years this ruling served as law of the land, guaranteeing women the right to abortion (Barnes & Marimow, 2022).

Trump had promised when he was running for President in 2016 that he would overturn Roe. v. Wade, and subsequently nominated three conservative judges who were committed to overturning the law that guaranteed women the right to abortion. Although Trump lost his re-election bid in 2020 to Joe Biden, in 2022, Trump's Supreme Court passed *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, overturning Roe v. Wade and ruling that the court held that the Constitution of the United States does not confer a right to abortion (Mangan, 2016). This decision caused an uproar in the highly divided U.S. political scene and may have be seen as Trump's most consequential and controversial action of his presidency.

Atwood's novel and the Hulu TV mini-series anticipated the extreme measures that a patriarchal male-dominated society would take to control

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[6] The previous note documents some articles that sees parallels between *The Handmaid's Tale* and Trump's American while one feminist critics warns against too fast analogies; see Jessa Crispin, "*The Handmaid's Tale* is just like Trump's America? Not so fast. Many women are comparing their lives with that of the characters in the new Hulu series based on Margaret Atwood's novel. That is problematic," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2017 at https://www.theguardian.com/comment-isfree/2017/may/02/handmaids-tale-donald-trump-america (accessed August 21, 2019). For a pro-Trump conservative who denies the analogies, see Rich Lowry, "Conflating 'Handmaid's Tale' is lunacy," *Lacrosse Tribune* September 20, 2017 at https://lacrossetribune.com/opinion/columnists/rich-lowry-conflating-handmaid-s-tale-is-lunacy/article_5e4bd2b2-a9c0–5503–95a2-e77a41cba684.html (accessed August 21, 2019).

women. The final episode of Season 3 "Mayday" opens with a flashback depicting June, after being captured, witnessing women being rounded up and presumably executed, a scene transcoding the brutality of Gilead that has led June to become a leader of revolt. In this episode, June is organizing a flight from Gilead for the children and the Marthas, creating a network of resistance that will lead the oppressed women and children to a transport plane that will fly them to safety (Miller et al., 2019). The Guardians learn of the escape plan and send out patrols to the woods to apprehend the rebels. A determined June ambushes a Guardian, seizes his gun, and forces him to declare "All Clear," allowing the group to escape to the plane and freedom. In a triumphant scene, the children disembark in Canada, are greeted by the Handmaid's who have escaped and in some cases are reunited with their families. June, however, was left behind, as she and some other handmaids and Marthas threw stones at soldiers in order to allow the children to board the airplane. June is shot in a scuffle with a soldier, but in the closing scene is found alive by some of her fellow handmaids who carry her to an indeterminate future as she closes her eyes and recites scripture.

The popularity of the series and divided reception shows a divided country between those seeking to defend women's rights and democracy and those who deny they are under attack or are happy to oppress women along with Trump, his most rabid defenders, and rightwing media. Perhaps never before has media culture become so politicized and during the same period blockbuster hits like *Wonder Woman and Black Panther* show the resistance of women and people of color to rightwing oppression and how new superheroes have entered the pantheon of major Hollywood icons, exhibiting a desire to diversify media culture and its heroes and ideals (Jenkins, 2017; Coogler, 2018).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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MASS SHOOTING
EVENTS

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ABSTRACT

In 1999 the United States experienced its first mass shooting at a public school and later at a church in Texas. It sparked renewed interest in gun control. Our response and the response of law enforcement has changed to protect the citizens. A new vocabulary including mass shooting and the active shooter. These new events are increasing at an alarming rate in our nation. The response has been slow and the solutions even slower. In this article we look at the problem, the response, and some possible solutions. However, the questions of motivation, and prevention remain.

Keywords

shooter, school, church, police, response, victims

INTRODUCTION

The dates associated with some events define our history. In the United States we talk about terrorism pre 9/11 and post 9/11. For mass shootings and the active shooter those dates are marked by the events of Columbine High School, Colorado, April 1999. Currently the United States of America leads the world in the number of mass shootings. These events are not just an American problem, it has affected several nations worldwide. However, there is no denying the frequency of these events in the United States (Donnelly et al., 2023; Newsome et al., 2022; Showstark, 2019). Certainly, this phenomenon is the focus of diverse interdisciplinary research (Jetter &

Walker, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; O'Brien & Taku, 2022; Oz, 2023; Smith et al., 2023).

In fairness let me disclose to you, the reader, that I carry a firearm for a living. I work in the private security industry in Texas. I work in that gray area between law enforcement and the citizens, working for private companies. I understand I have a clear bias when it comes to the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights of our nation's Constitution. I am sure some might consider me as part of the problem and not part of the solution.

The United States has a long history with firearms from the very beginning of the colonies' fight for independence back in 1775. In the lives of many citizens firearms mean freedom from oppression. It is embedded into the culture. The United States alone has an estimated 400 million privately owned firearms and only 330 million citizens.

The attack carried out by two high school seniors ages 17 and 18, in Columbine, Colorado defined the start of school shootings. This was in April of 1999, followed by a church shooting in December of the same year. It started the tracking of mass shootings in public places, churches, and schools. Law enforcement had to quickly adapt to this new changing threat.

METHODOLOGY

Researching the issue of mass shootings in Texas involving public schools and churches, along with the accompanying renewed emphasis on gun

control, can employ diverse methods and methodologies. Initially, an extensive literature review is conducted, delving into prior research on mass shootings, their causes, trends, and relevant gun control measures.

1. A crucial aspect involves studying and scrutinizing histories of analogous cases to identify commonalities and contributing factors. This entails a quantitative analysis, encompassing the compilation of statistics on school and church mass shootings, encompassing metrics such as victim count, types of weapons employed, age demographics, and other pertinent parameters. The collected data is meticulously analyzed to unveil discernible patterns and trends.

2. Complementary qualitative research is undertaken through interviews with survivors, witnesses, victims' families, law enforcement, and other stakeholders. Additionally, an examination of reports and records from past incidents is conducted to gain insights into the incident dynamics and the response of authorities.

3. Psychological analysis of mass shootings, delving into the motivations of shooters, their psychological states, and factors that may contribute to such tragic events.

4. An integral component of the research involves legislative analysis, scrutinizing the existing gun control laws in Texas and at the national level. A comparative assessment is made, juxtaposing these laws with international standards and those implemented in other states.

5. Conducting a comparative analysis between the situation in Texas and other regions where effective gun control measures have been successfully implemented, along with instances where similar situations have been averted. Expert evaluations in the fields of psychology, criminology, education, and law are sought to obtain a diverse perspective on the issue and explore potential solutions.

6. Employing sociological analysis to delve into public opinion on the gun control matter and understand the viewpoints of various demographic groups. Based on the study results, suggestions are developed to formulate recommendations and proposals aimed at enhancing gun control and preventing mass shootings.

7. Evaluating the efficacy of existing programs involves researching the effectiveness of current initiatives for preventing violence in schools and churches, as well as the effectiveness of established gun control measures. This includes identifying both strengths and weaknesses.

8. Implementing technological solutions encompasses assessing the viability of incorporating video surveillance systems, security sensors, and machine learning algorithms to detect and prevent incidents such as suspicious behavior.

9. Developing a comprehensive training program for school and church staff and students, emphasizing the recognition of potentially dangerous situations, the provision of emotional support, and the assurance of safety.

10. Fostering community engagement to raise awareness about the issue, encouraging active community involvement in crafting solutions, and garnering support for gun control measures.

11. Proposing legislative changes involves advocating for stricter controls on gun purchases, enhanced mental health checks for potential gun owners, and the introduction of additional legislative security measures.

12. Conducting media campaigns entails initiatives designed to raise awareness and shift public opinion on gun control issues, emphasizing the urgent need for preventive measures.

13. Establishing a system for long-term monitoring and analysis is crucial. This involves continuous tracking of changes in statistics and security measures to assess the effectiveness of implemented measures and make necessary adjustments.

14. Drawing upon international experiences involves studying how other countries have addressed similar issues, adapting successful approaches to the local context, publishing results, and raising public awareness.

These steps serve as a foundation for a comprehensive study of the problem, fostering a deeper understanding of its multifaceted nature and proposing targeted measures for resolution. Addressing the issue of mass shootings and gun control necessitates a holistic approach, encompassing data analysis, legislative development, community engagement, technological solutions, and educational initiatives.

RESULTS

Tracking mass shooting events is difficult because the reporting has not been standardized yet for

statistics (Bridges et al., 2023). Some departments and agencies consider 3 or more individuals shot, others require 4 or more shot to be considered a mass shooting. News media consider anytime two or more. Some will count the gunman as among the dead. I personally disagree with that. Mass shootings are considered a single event in which 3 or more individuals are shot and killed excluding the gunman. An active shooter is considered an event where a gunman is actively involved in killing individuals (FBI, n.d.).

The FBI also recognizes the active killer. This is thought of as anyone actively engaging in killing as many individuals as possible in a single event with a weapon other than a firearm. An example of this would be the mass stabbing in Canada in which 10 people were killed and 15 wounded in September of 2022 ("10 Dead, 15 Hospitalized in Canada Mass Stabbing Attacks, Police Say," 2022).

MASS SHOOTINGS

The worst mass shooting in the United States, In October 2017, a gunman opened fire on a crowd attending the Route 91 Harvest festival from his 32nd-floor room at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. The rampage lasted more than 15 minutes as panicked concertgoers tried to take cover, unaware of where the shots were coming from. By the end of it, 58 people were killed, and more than 850 were injured (Abadi et al., 2023). By the time police had located the shooter, breached the door, the gunman had took his own life.

Some mass shooters will publish a manifesto online or leave it behind to be discovered by law enforcement during a search of the shooter's residence or body. "In many cases, there is no pattern or method to the selection of victims by an active shooter, and these situations are by their very nature unpredictable and evolve quickly. Because active shooter situations are often over within 10 to 15 minutes — before law enforcement arrives on the scene — individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter situation" (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, n.d.).

CHANGES TO THE LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

In 1999 it was evident that law enforcement was not prepared to handle the new paradigm that mass shootings created. The current response of
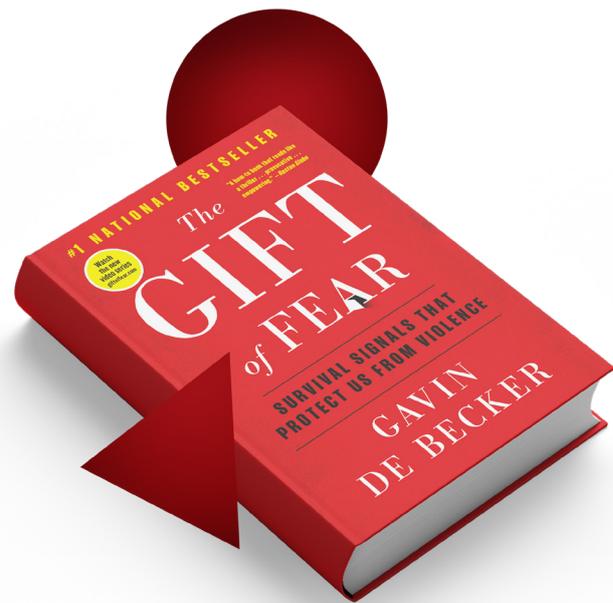
that time was to rely on specialized trained units like SWAT teams. For the patrolman responding to a shots fired call at a school, or private business was to contain the situation as other officers responded and took up containment positions until a SWAT team was assembled and entered the structure to begin searching for the suspects. I remember watching television coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting and watching patrol officers behind cover as you could hear the shots coming from inside the building.

This response was soon changed, and new policies and procedures were developed for dealing with the active shooter. Law Enforcement cadets in the academy received better training to include shooting skills, room clearing and search techniques. Also included was tactics for working in small teams to immediately begin hunting the active shooter to neutralize and stop the threat. Then and only then were people evacuated and medical personnel allowed to enter. Those that were evacuated were isolated to make sure the shooter was not hiding amongst the victims. As other officers responded a perimeter could be established and more teams available for searching. The goal is to reduce casualties by focusing on the threat.

SWAT teams still have a very important role to play in the active shooter response, however shifting some of that responsibility to trained patrol officers has helped to save lives. Patrol officers can immediately team upon arrival and start moving towards the shooter while a specialized team might still be loading up. Time is important in saving lives.

WORKPLACE OR PUBLIC ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

At the facility I work to secure we are required to complete yearly active shooter training and insider threat detection. The following is a short summary of what is commonly taught and is posted on the Federal Bureau of Investigation website (*Active Shooter Safety Resources*, 2023).

Excerpts From an Article I wrote Strategies for Surviving the Active Shooter

Your personal safety and security should always start with you being aware of what is happening around you, knowing where you are, where you are going, and what potential threats you might encounter. Anytime you are going into a building, facility or even a store to go shopping it's important to know where the emergency exits, elevators, stairwells and restrooms that are within the building. I like to even know where the loading docks, storage areas and janitor closets are. Most of the time a building layout can be located in the entry lobby or close to the elevators. I want to know where I'm going, how I'm getting there and how to get out in an emergency.

Remember, if something doesn't feel right, it's probably not. Listen to your intuition. You may never know how your intuition keeps you safe. I think we are wired on an intuitive level that we don't understand. The book by Gavin DeBecker (1998), "The Gift of Fear" is a must read.

"Intuition is always right in at least two important ways; It is always in response to something. it always has your best interest at heart" (p.82).

You hear gunshots in the distance. What do you do? You hear gunshots just outside your office door in the hallway. What should you do? What is your plan? **Run-Hide-Fight.**

Run. If you can escape outside through an emergency exit, doorway, or window. Do it. Get out of there. During the process of getting out make sure it doesn't put you into the line of fire from the attacker. Hallways tend to stack people up and can make you an easy target so use caution. Stay upright but make yourself a small target and move with the flow of people. Avoid the attacker. Use the stairs, elevators box you in.

Hide. Under your desk in a cubical should be the absolute last resort, but it may have to do. Remember this: movement and sound will attract attention. Attention you may not want. If you must hide, move to a more secure location.

Turn off the lights, lock the door, find a safe, out of sight hiding place. For example, better than under a desk is behind a locked office door, locked bathroom, or janitor closet. The next time you are at work take some time to look around. Remember the difference between cover and concealment. Just remember cover will stop bullets, concealment only hides you from a gunman.

Fight. This is the last resort. As a group or even individually you can successfully defend against a gunman. Here's some tips. A fire extinguisher is a great weapon, spray them with the foam and hit them over the head with the can. Make this sicko come to you and surprise him in the doorway. Doorways are transition zones. It is during this time that you can spring into action. Remember it's not enough to control the muzzle of the weapon, injury is the best way to neutralize him. Fight like your life depends on it because it does.

You should contact emergency services to get law enforcement to respond as soon as possible. That being said, don't put yourself at greater risk, by stopping your escape to do so. Get to a safe spot and call for assistance. If possible, stop others from entering the area. Give a description of the attacker if possible. Location of the attacker, building address, building name. The emergency dispatcher will have a lot of questions. Answer them to the best of your ability, if you don't know, tell them that. Someone else may be calling with the information you don't have. Giving false or inaccurate information can delay the response and add to confusion.

Police Response. Police officers responding to the 911 calls of an active shooter are faced with an extremely chaotic situation to sort out. The officers will be very direct and possibly yelling instructions. Follow them. They are working to sort everything out quickly. They may treat you as a potential threat until the scene is under control. During an active shooter their primary job will be to neutralize the shooter. Your primary job is to survive. Follow the instructions given to you by officers on the scene. Officers will be dealing with a lot of confusion and adrenaline. Until the threat is neutralized and the area secured, they will not be rendering first-aid, medical help will wait until the scene is safe.

Recap:

- Know where you are going and how to escape in an emergency.

- Run — get to the exits and out of the building. Call the police. Know the address and name of the building you are at. Stop others from going into the building if possible. If the gunman is too close, then hide.
- Hide — If you cannot run, Hide in a secure place. Lock the door. Turn out the lights. Stay put until the police secure the scene. If you hear the gunman on the other side of the door. Prepare to fight.
- Fight — is usually listed as a last resort. If you must fight, unleash hell and don't stop fighting until the threat is neutralized.
- Understand how the police will respond. Follow their directions.

SCHOOL ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

School's will respond much differently, because of the need to be accountable for the children in their care. This puts a lot of responsibility on the teachers. In several states including Texas which has now made it mandatory to have a School Resource Officer or SRO. That SRO in many cases are certified police officers but in some cases of private schools, they are using specifically training security officers. Valor Force Security owned and operated by Tony Lett. Mr. Lett has a team of armed security officers that participate twice a year in firearms training and annually in active shooter training. The SRO in many cases is the

immediate responder in the situation while first responders are en route.

When an active shooter enters a school. They will immediately go on lockdown. Classroom doors are locked, lights turned off, sometimes windows in the door will be covered to block a gunman's view. Students are accounted for and moved away from doors and windows. The idea is to limit and deny access to the gunman. Once officers arrive on scene they can engage the threat in a lobby, hallway, or common area.

Recap:

- 911 is contacted. SRO en route.
- School goes into lockdown procedures. Doors locked, Lights off. Students accounted for and moved away from doors and windows. Remain quiet and out of sight.
- Police arrive. Threat neutralized. Medical begins.
- Students evacuated. Students

accounted for and reunited with families.
- This is how it should work. A plan properly executed. Prevention is the goal.

Here's a staggering fact from the Washington Post. Since Columbine in 1999 an estimated 365,000 kids have been exposed to an active shooter (Cox et al., 2023). 365, 000!

FAILURE AT UVALDE

Without a doubt the shooting at Robb Elementary School, in Uvalde, Texas will be remembered as a failure on the part of law enforcement ("Uvalde School Shooting," 2023). The police chief, who was relieved of command after the event, declared it a barricaded suspect situation instead of active shooter, citing no key to open an unlocked door that was never checked. It was unlocked. Then it was reported that the officers on scene didn't have the equipment they needed. Once the after actions investigation was complete and the surveillance videos released, it was hard to watch. Over 70 minutes until the shooter was neutralized. 300 officers present from several agencies including local, state, and federal. During this time, you could hear the gunman still shooting. In the end, 19 children and 2 adults lay dead. Failure of leadership. Failure to act. Eventually the door was breached, and the threat stopped. Parents that were outside could hear the shooting and wanted to rescue their kids, they were threatened with arrest. One mother was handcuffed, then released by officers. She immediately found a way into the school and started rescuing children and leading them to safety. The police were not happy with her. The price of failure is high.

CHURCH SHOOTINGS

A few months after Columbine, Ft Worth, Texas experienced its first church shooting. This changed the way churches prepared to protect themselves and different churches have different plans in place. Most immediately encouraged every police officer they had in the congregation to carry concealed to help protect the people. I was working part-time in a gun store and remember selling several pistols and revolvers to ministers, preachers, and pastors. Many of them prepared to carry concealed during services to help "protect the flock".

White Settlement Texas, December 2019, an armed gunman entered a church and killed a deacon but was shot and killed by the church's head of security before he could do more harm. Church security teams have become very common. They are licensed, trained, organized and very professional. Many have their own medical teams. Church security usually hides in plain sight. Other churches will hire a security company, like Valor Force to provide a uniformed security presence.

The worst church shooting was in Texas Sutherland Springs, November 2017. 26 people were killed by the gunman, 22 injured. He was stopped only when a citizen heard the shots, grabbed his rifle, and went towards the church and engaged the shooter (Mooney, 2022). Law enforcement arrived at the scene after the gunman was stopped. In rural areas police and deputies have increased response times, just because of the distance they cover.

According to the Attorney General of Texas, Texas law allows a church, synagogue, or other established place of religious worship to utilize volunteers to provide security services, hire law enforcement officers or licensed security officers to provide security (Attorney General of Texas, n.d.). I personally know of several preachers, pastors, ministers and worship leaders that conceal carry a firearm even during services.

One resource for churches is FEMA, they are awarding grants to nonprofits organizations that can assist in safety and security planning, training, access and entry controls, security cameras, external lights, security fencing and gates, and even contract security guards (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Immediately after every mass shooting that makes the news the politicians are quick to say, "our hearts go out to the victims and their families", "our thoughts and prayers are with the people affected by this tragedy." Then the talk of gun bans, banning the assault rifle, limiting magazine capacity, enhanced background checks. Go down the list it stays the same (Furlow, 2022; see also Luca et al., 2020; Pomeranz & Ochoa, 2021; Stone et al., 2022; Tiderman et al., 2023).

Gun free zones. I have never heard of a criminal changing their behavior because of a sign that marks Gun Free Zone. These signs only restrict law abiding citizens from carrying a firearm to protect themselves and others. I told you I had a bias towards firearms and being armed. Most mass shooters don't attack a police department; however, murders will kill an unsuspecting officer. Never get complacent.

Banning assault rifles. This is a heated topic. The AR is not short for assault rifle, but for the Armalite Rifle platform is a good shooting weapon. It is safe, reliable, accurate, everything you want for home defense. Many politicians that speak ill of firearms have no experience, or knowledge of how they work. Banning firearms will only create more outlaws of law-abiding citizens and embolden the criminal. Criminals by nature don't follow the law. If mass shooters were lawful citizens, they'd understand that murder is against the law.

Limiting magazine capacity. The idea that you would have to take the time to reload. During

that time less people would be shot and could escape. With practice magazine changes can be accomplished in a short amount of time. Many mass shooters have been bringing multiple firearms with them, limiting the need to change magazines.

Red flag laws. This is an idea that simply states an individual can report you because they feel you are a danger to yourself or others (Zeoli et al., 2022). Law enforcement could then come to your house and remove all the firearms from the home. You would then have to go to court in order to gain possession of your firearms. Sounds reasonable, however anyone could make a claim against you, an ex-spouse, a coworker, and disgruntled neighbor (Pear et al., 2022).

Mental Health Resources. While resources for mental health are available there is a stigma still attached to getting professional health especially for first responders, service men and women and even firearms owners. Some law makers are asking for increased funding for mental health screening and treatment. The relevance and significance of mental health issues is reflected in current research (Abdalla et al., 2022; Ali & North, 2016; Bharadwaj et al., 2021; Hylton et al., 2019; Thoresen et al., 2016).

Mandatory use of School Resource Officers. The state of Texas passed legislation to require schools to use either police or security working at schools. In the remote areas of the state this can be a teacher or administrator. Having an active presence with a professional trained officer did make the mass shooter in Tennessee go to a secondary location. The shooter was also being treated for an emotional disorder (New York Times, 2023).

Increased security through building design. The layout of a building or campus should include design modifications to increase safety but also security. I feel that this can be accomplished without turning schools, churches, or public buildings into fortresses resembling prisons. They already include design into retail buildings for loss prevention.

Use of technology. Currently there are several technologies that can be deployed to find concealed weapons, sound detecting alarms that can hear gunshots. Facial recognition. X-ray and metal detectors. Surveillance cameras. Integrating new technology like artificial intelligence software with access and entry controls

security cameras, external lights, security fencing and gates, and using mass notification systems like SaferWatch (https://www.saferwatchapp.com/) along with contract security officers and law enforcement will hopefully yield the best results in the future.

In the article for Campus Security Today, Mike Lahiff the CEO of Zero Eyes states, "When an active shooter is capable of killing dozens before a 9–1–1 call can be made, every second counts. Reactive technologies can't help change the course of events" (Lahiff, 2022). This is true. Cameras will only record the event. Locked doors only work if they are locked. Contracting with armed security companies only works if they are professionally trained, proactive and present. He also warns against "fortressing" schools to feel

more like prisons and becoming counterproductive to fostering a learning environment.

Privacy Concerns. The use of security cameras, body worn cameras, smart cards, biometrics, and artificial intelligence comes down to information gathering and privacy concerns. For security and safety some people are willing to give up a degree of privacy, others are not. We have laws that protect our personal information and our conversations with attorneys, and doctors. Will we be able to find a balance between Big Brother security and safety, and personal freedoms.

Citizen training. Training in Run, Hide, Fight is a must for business and employees, but also for every citizen. Everyone should be able to spot indicators and warning signs of trouble in people around them. If you see something. Say something "If You See Something, Say Something®" the national campaign to raise public awareness of the signs of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, and how to report suspicious activity to state and local law enforcement (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.)

Examples of Red Flags to watch for:

- Making Threats.
- Difficulty controlling emotions and impulses.
- Researching mass shootings and violence.
- Sudden fascination with guns of violence.
- Isolation from friends, family, or co-workers.
- A sign for adults, but especially kids is being bullied (physical, verbal or online).
- Depression, a sense of hopelessness, or signs of self-harm.

GUN CONTROL MEASURES

Implementing effective gun control measures requires a comprehensive approach that considers citizens' rights while prioritizing public safety. Here are some practical recommendations:

1. Enhance background checks for gun purchases by strengthening systems, conducting more detailed criminal and mental health history checks for purchasers.
2. Institute mandatory waiting periods between applying for and receiving a gun purchase to allow for more thorough background checks.
3. Develop and implement educational programs for prospective gun owners, including training on safe gun handling and legal basics.

4. Consider mandating insurance for gun owners to encourage responsible use and storage of weapons.
5. Introduce measures restricting gun access for individuals with a history of domestic violence and limited emotional management resources.
6. Elevate gun storage standards with stricter requirements, including the use of secure storage facilities and locking mechanisms to prevent unauthorized access.
7. Increase penalties for illegal possession of guns as a deterrent.
8. Monitor Internet gun sales by tightening controls and implementing measures to track and prevent illegal transactions.
9. Support mental health detection programs by increasing funding for detection and treatment programs, ensuring the availability of quality mental health services.
10. Consider restrictions on the sale and possession of military-style weapons suitable for mass shootings.
11. Research and develop technological solutions such as smart gun systems that can prevent unauthorized use.
12. Collaborate with educational institutions to foster a culture of safety and provide educational activities in the community.
13. Regulate gun shows by introducing strict controls to prevent illegal operations and sales.
14. Engage in international cooperation by sharing experiences with other countries and participating in international research projects to identify effective arms control methods.

Practical gun control measures should consider various factors and strike a balance between citizens' rights and the responsibility to ensure societal safety. I understand that some gun owners will oppose several of these suggestions, however this is for the lawmakers to debate and argue over, then implement and find out what works and what doesn't.

CONCLUSIONS

When examining the role of gun culture in the United States, it is crucial to consider historical, cultural, and legal dimensions. The constitutional right to own a gun, rooted in principles of individual liberty and self-defense, plays a significant role. The gun industry's substantial economic influence extends to shaping political discussions and sustaining an ongoing discourse on

gun control. The diversity of perspectives within society underscores the necessity of reaching compromises when formulating legislation and practices, always prioritizing the well-being of citizens and public safety. The evolving public attitudes and debates highlight the paramount importance of education and public awareness in fostering responsible attitudes towards gun ownership.

I think a lot of this comes down to where we put our priorities as a society. Protecting children, protecting worshippers, and protecting citizens need to become a priority. Bright minds with common sense ideas need to be put forth. I don't have answers, just questions. I can tell you that it will need to be a multi-layered approach. I also think the solution really starts in the home and how we need to learn to respect life again. Until then, I'll stand my watch.

This is a callout to academia, sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, and problem solvers. The United States is built on a gun culture. This will not change, at least not in my lifetime. Criminals will always be criminals, violence will always be a part of life, and maybe the answers don't lie in policies, laws, and restriction, but in changing the hearts and minds, and treatment of mental illness. How do we instill a respect for life and the possibility of the future to prevent such tragedies?

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL SOCIETY 5.0

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of this research lies in the fact that in the context of the development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, deep and systemic transformations are taking place, which act as the driving forces for changing paradigms (concepts, models, theories), which give rise to new megatrends of the digitized society, called digital. The fourth industrial revolution influenced the rapid development of the digital society, caused by deep transformation, fundamental technological changes and their social impact on culture, economy, politics, man, his consciousness and worldview. The formation and development of digital technologies, as a factor in the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, today include a set of theoretical knowledge and practical skills of sustainable digital development, which requires the development of strategies and the selection of priorities

that embrace large-scale digital technologies as the basis of a breakthrough in the technological industry. The object of research is the paradigm of digital society 5.0 as a complex social, cultural and economic phenomenon. The subject of research is the evolution of the digital paradigm of the economy, society and man in the direction of society 5.0

Keywords

digital paradigm, digital technologies, digital transformations, digital development, society 5.0

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the article is the theoretical and practical aspects of the evolution of the digital paradigm of the economy, society and man from 4.0 to 5.0 Research objectives: (a) to investigate the conditions for the emergence of society 5.0; (b) provide a characteristic of society 5.0; (c) show the differences of society 5.0 from previous types of society; (d) find out the formation of the concept of Industry 5.0; and (e) justify the mechanism of introduction of the new model of society 5.0.

Analysis of Research and Publications

To analyze this problem, we use the works of K. Schwab (2017) "The Fourth Industrial Revolution," P. Mason (2015) "PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future," D. H. Meadows, J. Randers, D. L. Meadows (2004) "Limits to growth the 30-year update.;" T. O'Reilly (2017) "WTF?: What's the Future and Why It's Up to Us," M. Spence (2011) "The Next Convergence: The Future of Economic Growth in a Multispeed World," J. Studwell (2013) "How Asia Works: Success and Failure In the World's Most Dynamic Region," B. Christian & G. Tom (2016) "Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions," M. Goodman (2016) "Future Crimes: Everything Is Connected, Everyone Is Vulnerable and What We Can Do About It," S. Gupta (2018) "Driving Digital Strategy: A Guide to Reimagining Your Business," Kai-Fu Lee (2018) "AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order". In these works, the authors implemented the conditions for the formation of a digital economy, society, and man thanks to advanced technologies, which require the formation of the concept of digital development of all fields of activity. Digital technologies form new trends and patterns of society, digital man, contribute to increasing productivity as a

new deterministic force of long-term increase and improvement of living standards (Robertsone & Lapiņa, 2023; see also Helbing et al., 2023). These technologies represent a catalyst for change. Industry 5.0 originates from the concept of "Industry 4.0", which was proposed in Germany in 2011 as a futuristic project, part of the strategy of which is developing in the field of high technologies that have been accepted by business, science and politicians.

RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH

The relevance of this research lies in the fact that in the context of the development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, deep and systemic transformations are taking place, which act as the driving forces for changing paradigms (concepts, models, theories), which give rise to new megatrends of the digitized society, called digital. Big data, the Internet of Things, smart cities, 3D printing and 3D production, bitcoin, blockchain are developing. Advanced technologies contribute to the achievement of well-being, but this requires at least a geometric progression of the economy, business, society, and a change in work and communication paradigms. There are no doubts about the positive aspects of the digital revolution, although advanced technologies are turning into risks for global security, the emergence of criminal corporations, terrorist organizations, which indicates the reverse side of technological innovation. The history of the development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution began at the moment when digital technologies created revolutionary new ways of connecting products and services, resulting in the formation of a smart hybrid — bit (algorithm) that transformed the world. As a result of the fact that humanity sought universal connection to the Internet (world brain), digitization transformed both the world and the person himself.

The world closely interacting with digital technologies has received many benefits thanks to advanced technologies, which require the formation of the concept of digital economic development (Walton & Nayak, 2021). Thus, many countries, in particular, Indonesia and the Philippines, have a great chance to make a breakthrough in the economy under the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: there are smart leaders, a high population, relatively low external debt, low incomes and low or average expectations of investors. The European Union is considered a stabilizing model and serves as a source for its

members, particularly Poland and the Czech Republic, which have breakthrough potential. One of the members of this unique group — South Korea — is considered an industrial giant in the latest technologies and expands the framework of export-oriented economies. "South Korea has moved into the category of countries that can be considered an economic miracle, and next to it there are countries with real potential (Sri Lanka, Nigeria), as well as countries whose hopes are considered personal (Vietnam)," — notes Ruchiro Sharma (Voronkova & Nikitenko, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To analyze the formation and development of digital technologies, we will use a non-linear methodology of complexity, which represents a set of theoretical and practical knowledge, abilities, skills and competencies of understanding the digital world, which develops new digital management thinking and new approaches to understanding the existence of a person, his consciousness, worldview, perception of this world. Various methods were used in the basis of the research, which allowed to analyze such a complex topic as society 5.0. One of the methods is the Agile method (flexible philosophy method), which tries to explain the evolution of the digital paradigm of the economy, society and man from 4.0 to 5.0, which should become adaptive, stable, efficient, and intelligent. Philosophers of different eras and schools of thought have tried to reveal the essence of mind, but the question of mind remains relevant to this day, stimulating new research and debate. It is no coincidence that Oleg Maltsev and Iryna Lopatiuk (2023) also returned to this topic. After all, the mind is the tool we use to understand the world around us, which can also be our greatest limitation (Ernest Holmes). The mind can be an objective means of knowledge, the main principle of the development of history and the world (Christian & Griffiths, 2016).

Examining the digital society facilitated by 5G technology entails a comprehensive evaluation encompassing technical attributes, as well as social and economic implications. The following are fundamental approaches for analyzing the 5G society:

1. Technical Analysis — Bandwidth and Data Rate: Evaluating the data transmission capacity concerning preceding technologies.
2. Low Latency: Scrutinizing how 5G diminishes data latency, a critical factor for real-time applications such as autonomous vehicles and remote surgery.
3. Connectivity Density (Massive Device Connectivity): Assessing the extent to which 5G can accommodate a large number of devices, a pivotal consideration for the Internet of Things (IoT).
4. Social Analysis — Impact on Education and Healthcare: Examining how 5G can enhance accessibility to education and healthcare through remote consultations and training.
5. Work and Business: Investigating the influence of 5G on work methodologies and business processes, leveraging improved connectivity and remote work capabilities.
6. Economic Analysis — Economic Impact: Exploring how the deployment of 5G can impact economic growth by fostering new business models and increasing productivity.
7. Investments and Costs: Evaluating the expenses associated with 5G deployment and the necessary investments for infrastructure upgrades.

The analysis methods yielded the following characteristics of the 5G society:

1. High Data Rate: The 5G society offers a significantly higher data rate compared to previous network generations.
2. Low Latency: The 5G society reduces data transmission latency, making it suitable for real-time applications like virtual reality and autonomous vehicles.
3. Connectivity Density: Capable of serving a large number of devices, crucial for the Internet of Things where numerous devices need simultaneous network connection.
4. Energy Efficiency: The 5G society aims for increased energy efficiency, vital for network resilience and broader coverage, including remote and sparsely populated areas.
5. Device Variety Support: Designed to support various devices, ranging from smartphones to IoT sensors and industrial equipment.
6. Security: The level of security provided by 5G and its ability to protect data compared to previous technologies should be considered, including potential vulnerabilities and methods to overcome them.
7. Spectrum Efficiency: Determines how efficiently the 5G radio spectrum is utilized, crucial for eliminating conflicts with other technologies.

An integrated approach is required for analyzing a digital society based on 5G, considering technical, social, and economic aspects:

- Environmental Analysis: Evaluating the environmental implications of 5G deployment, encompassing aspects like energy consumption and overall environmental impact. Considering possible measures to mitigate any adverse effects.
- Regulatory Framework Examination: Investigating the regulatory framework associated with 5G deployment, exploring its impact on various facets such as competition, innovation, and data privacy.
- Adaptation of Society: Assessing how society adapts to the new opportunities and challenges presented by 5G. Evaluate the need for training and skills development to effectively utilize the new technologies.
- Sociocultural Influences: Analyzing how 5G is shaping sociocultural trends, considering changes in societal perceptions, relationships, and communication driven by increased connectivity.

- Interoperability Assessment: Evaluating the level of interoperability of 5G with other technologies and standards. This is crucial for creating compatible and efficient systems.

Analyzing 5G and its impact on society involves a comprehensive consideration of factors, including technical, social, environmental, and political aspects. An integrated approach to assessing these factors will aid in understanding both the positive and negative aspects of 5G deployment in the digital society.

RESEARCH RESULTS

On July 14, the 1st All-Ukrainian conference "Industry 5.0" was held in Kyiv (Ukrainian Cluster Alliance, 2023). The organizer of the conference is the Association of "Industrial Automation Enterprises of Ukraine" with the support of the Ukrainian Cluster Alliance. The event took place as part of the Swiss-Ukrainian project "Strengthening MSME Business Associations in Ukraine (Phase II)", implemented by the United Nations Development Program in Ukraine (UNDP) together with the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine and with the support of the Swiss government. As part of the conference, the participants signed the Manifesto on Ukraine's transition to Industry 5.0. It is noted that the Manifesto on Ukraine's transition to Industry 5.0 (signed on July 14, 2023) is a fundamental and guiding document for the further development of Ukrainian manufacturing and hi-tech sectors in Industry, Energy, Infrastructure and Logistics. In certain provisions, such as governance 5.0 and the circular economy, we are talking about all real sectors of the economy. This document replaces the Industry 4.0 Charter of 2016 and significantly complements the Industry4Ukraine Manifesto of 2019. Conference participants call on other business associations, government organizations, scientific and educational institutions, public organizations to join the signing.

The transition to Industry 5.0 in many directions is possible without a gradual, consistent passage through 3.0 (full automation of production) and 4.0 (digital transformation as a change in business models through the use of modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things). It is about changing the industrial paradigm of industrialists and policy-makers at various levels, where the principles of sustainable development, stress resistance of

value-added chains and ecosystems, orientation to the needs of society, circular economy, and fair distribution of profits begin to dominate the basis of decisions. According to such approaches, technology is simply a tool for achieving the goals of sustainable development, and this is a fundamental difference from the approaches of Industry 4.0, where the predominant focus was on improving the competitiveness and profitability of enterprises due to the use of new technologies. Conference participants agreed that Ukraine has great potential for the transition to Industry 5.0, primarily due to factors such as a passionate and creative society, scientific, technical and educational potential, developed startup communities, thousands of qualified developers and integrators. That is why we chose for analysis the topic of the evolution of the digital paradigm of the development of the economy, society and man from 4.0 to 5.0 (Ukrainian Cluster Alliance, 2023).

1. Conditions for the Emergence of Society 5.0

The digital worldview is formed in the context of the development of digital processes, which change as a reaction to the trends of globalization 4.0, technological development 4.0, Enlightenment 2.0, and influence the emergence of new directions of digital management, digital economy, Internet economy, sustainable development economy, future economy, emergence of the post-world and posthumans. "The development of digital technologies is developing so rapidly that in the near future we will see the development of remote identification, biometric technologies, transactional products and services" (Volkov et al., 2017).

Looking at current political priorities at the European level, their impact on industry cannot be underestimated. The Green Deal will call for a transition to a circular economy and greater reliance on sustainable resources, including energy. Europe offers enormous potential for innovation. A revitalized European Research Area (ERA) will connect and drive research and innovation in Europe, while a new European Industrial Strategy and Skills Agenda aim to address skills shortages. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need to rethink existing methods and approaches to work. This exacerbates our industry's vulnerabilities, such as fragile strategic value chains, and dramatically increases the need to search for flexible and robust innovations to address these vulnerabilities (Voronkova et al., 2021).

It should be emphasized that Industry 5.0 should not be understood as a chronological continuation or replacement of the existing Industry 4.0 paradigm. It is the result of visionary work, a way of structuring how European industry and new social trends and needs will coexist. Industry 5.0 complements and expands the excellent capabilities of Industry 4.0. It highlights some aspects of the determining factors determining the place of industry in the European societies of the future; these factors are not only economic or technological in nature, but also have important environmental and social aspects. The concept of "Industry 5.0" contributes to increasing the economic efficiency of the industry while respecting the needs and interests of employees and ensuring environmental sustainability. This makes it attractive not only to entrepreneurs, but also to potential investors and consumers who could benefit from a more competitive offering in a broader sense.

Participants from research and technology organizations and funding agencies from across Europe discussed the concept of the 5G Industry in two virtual workshops organized by DG Research and Innovation Prosperity on 2 and 9 July 2020. The focus is on implementing 5G technologies to support industry. The participants agreed on the need for more effective integration of Europe's social and environmental priorities into technological innovations and the removal of emphasis from individual technologies to a systemic approach. Six categories were identified, each of which is considered to use its potential in combination with others as part of the technological structure: 1) personalized human-computer interaction; 2) biotechnology and intellectual materials; 3) digital duplicates and simulations; 4) data transmission, storage and analysis technologies; 5) artificial intelligence; 6) energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, storage and autonomous technologies (Voronkova & Nikitenko, 2022).

Industry 5.0 originates from the concept of "Industry 5.0", which was proposed in Germany in 2011 as a futuristic project and part of the country's high-tech strategy, which should be widely accepted by business, science and politicians. Initially, it was concerned with how and to what extent the country succeeded in the first decade of the 21st century and how to more effectively maintain largely stable manufacturing employment in the coming decades. Professor Klaus Schwab has published two books in which he describes how Industry 4.0 fundamentally differs from previous industrial concepts characterized by technological progress (Voronkova et al., 2023).

The term has international influence and is used in various ways by think tanks, business leaders, international organizations and politicians. In its decade-long history, Industry 4.0 has moved away from the original principles of social justice and sustainability and focused more on digitization and artificial intelligence-based technologies to increase production efficiency and flexibility. The concept of Industry 5.0 offers a different focus and emphasizes the importance of research and innovation to support industry in providing long-term services to humanity on a global scale (Barata & Kayser, 2023; see also Agrawal et al., 2023; Leng et al., 2023; Mourtzis et al., 2022; Tóth et al., 2023).

The concepts of "Society 5.0" and "Industry 5.0" are related, as both concepts belong to a fundamental shift in our society and economy to a new paradigm (Huang et al., 2022). The concept of "Society 5.0" was proposed by Japan's most important business association, Keidanren, in 2016. He was later supported by the Japanese government. Japan basically incorporates levels of digitization and transformation (mainly at the level of individual organizations and parts of society) into a full national transformation strategy, policy and even philosophy ("Japan Pushing Ahead With Society 5.0 to Overcome Chronic Social Challenges," 2023).

Simply put, it is a new type of society compared to the hunting society (Society 1.0), the farming society (Society 2.0), the industrial society (Society 3.0) and the information society (Society 4.0). The basic plan of science and technology in 2016 — as a social goal that Japanese society should achieve in the future. In particular, it is defined as the introduction of the latest technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), robots, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data into all industries and social life, promoting innovation and maintaining standards. The form that people need to solve social problems is this new type of society, society 5.0. Undoubtedly, there are many academic papers and studies devoted to this topic (Bartoloni et al., 2022; Calp & Bütüner, 2022; Del Giudice et al., 2023; Fukuda, 2020; Nagy et al., 2020).

This concept was first proposed by the Japanese government in the Fifth Science and Technology Basic Plan in January 2016. The goal is to understand that Japanese society will lead the world and reach a new level of society. Its main concept is to develop the economy and solve social problems in parallel through a highly integrated system of imaginary and real spaces to achieve a new type of people-oriented society.

In the information society (Society 4.0), which existed before, knowledge and information cannot be completely separated, and vertical cooperation between different areas is insufficient. Due to the limited capabilities of a person, it is difficult for a person to find and analyze the necessary information from various information sources, or due to age and physical disabilities, some types of work and actions are limited. At the same time, there are many social problems that are difficult to solve due to the problems of declining birth rates and problems of aging in Japanese society

and the sparse population of the area ("Japan Pushing Ahead With Society 5.0 to Overcome Chronic Social Challenges," 2023)

2. Characteristics of Society 5.0

In this regard, Society 5.0, which will be implemented in the future, should connect all people and objects through the Internet of Things (IoT), achieve the exchange of various knowledge and information intelligence, and also create unprecedented new values, to overcome and solve the abovementioned problems (Valette et al., 2023; see also Kassab & Darabkh, 2020; Rezaee et al., 2023). The Internet of Things is a rapidly developing field, which reflects the current scientific research (Gao et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2018; Tabaa et al., 2020; Voulgaridis et al., 2022; Yang, 2023). In addition, artificial intelligence (AI) will provide people with the information they need when they need it, and technologies such as robots and self-driving cars will also help solve problems through innovation, society will overcome previous barriers and become a society in which people can hope and respect each other regardless of gender, age or age, and a society in which everyone can develop their abilities without hindrance.

Society has passed the following stages in the direction of a super-intelligent society (Society 5.0): a hunting society (Society 1.0), an agricultural society (Society 2.0), an industrial society (Society 3.0) and an information society (Society 4.0). A people-centered society that balances economic development and solving social problems through a system that closely integrates cyberspace and physical space. In the information society (Society 4.0), cross-industry exchange of knowledge and information is not enough, and cooperation is difficult. Since human capacity is limited, the task of ascertaining and analyzing the necessary information from excessive information sources is burdensome, and the work and scope of action are limited by differences in age and ability. In addition, it is difficult to adequately cope with various limitations from such problems as declining birth rates and aging of the population, decline of the local population (Government of Japan, 2022).

Social reform (innovation) in Society 5.0 will enable the implementation of a progressive society that destroys the existing sense of stagnation, a society in which members respect each other and transcend generational boundaries, and a society in which everyone can lead an active and enjoyable life. Society 5.0 has achieved a high degree

of integration of cyberspace (virtual space) and physical space (real space).

In the past information society (Society 4.0), people accessed cloud services (databases) in cyberspace via the Internet to search, retrieve and analyze information or data. In Society 5.0, a large amount of information from sensors in physical space accumulates in cyberspace. In cyberspace, this big data is analyzed by artificial intelligence (AI), and the results of the analysis are communicated to people in physical space in various forms. In the past, it was a common practice in the information society to collect information over the network and analyze it by humans. However, in Society 5.0, people, things and systems are interconnected in cyberspace, and the best results achieved by artificial intelligence beyond human capabilities return back to physical space. This process brings new value to industry and society in an unprecedented way.

Society 5.0 balances economic development and solves social problems. It is safe to say that the environment in Japan and in the world is experiencing an era of rapid change. With the development of the economy, prosperity and convenience of life, the need for energy and food products increases, life expectancy increases, and an aging society moves forward. In addition, the process of economic globalization continues to develop, international competition is becoming increasingly fierce, and problems such as the concentration of wealth and regional inequality are becoming more and more visible. The social problems that must be solved (as a trade-off) for this economic development are becoming increasingly complex. Various measures are needed here, such as reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, increasing production and reducing food losses, and reducing costs associated with an aging society. In the face of such great changes in the world, new technologies that can affect social processes, such as the Internet of Things, robots, artificial intelligence and big data, continue to develop. Japan aims to implement Society 5.0, a new society that incorporates these new technologies into all industries and social activities, while ensuring economic development and solving social problems (Government of Japan, 2022).

Over the past few years, thanks to the rapid development of technology, countries have formulated new national concepts of development. The United States calls for "recovery", Germany promotes "Industry 4.0", and China unveils "Made in China 2025" (Digital Transformation Monitor, 2017; United States Chamber of Commerce, 2017).

Only Japan offers a human-centered development concept, with an emphasis on economic and technological development that must simultaneously solve human social problems. In line with human-centered thinking, Japan proposes Society 5.0 in 2030. This is the fifth transformation of human society after hunting, agriculture, industry and the information society. It is a super smart society based on artificial intelligence, robots, IoT and quantum technologies. According to the Society 5.0 plan, people will live in a world where online virtual and physical reality are integrated; people and robots will coexist in symbiosis; life, be it study, work or leisure, will no longer be linear. For example, human mobility will increase efficiency, reduce accidents and solve the mobility problems of the elderly through autonomous driving and instant messaging technology ("Japan Pushing Ahead With Society 5.0 to Overcome Chronic Social Challenges," 2023).

3. Differences of Society 5.0 From Previous Types of Society

In the concept of "society", the way people make a living is directly related to the way they build their society. The number "5" originated on a completely different timeline than the Industrial Revolution, and on a much longer timeline. The first two "societies" correspond to the pre-industrial period (until the end of the 18th century) and are associated with hunting and gathering and agriculture, respectively. The 3G society is an industrial society that more or less corresponds to the periods of the first, second and third industrial revolutions.

The 4G society is characterized by the dominance of "information", it can be said that it has evolved from the highly digital version of the third industrial revolution to the present. Society 5.0 tries to balance economic development with solving social and environmental problems. It is not limited to the manufacturing sector, but solves larger social problems based on the integration of physical and virtual spaces. Society 5.0 is a society in which advanced IT technologies, IoT, robotics, artificial intelligence and augmented reality are actively used in everyday life, industry, health care and other fields of activity not for economic gain, but for the common good and convenience of citizens. Despite claims that digital technologies are de-

veloping at an exponential rate and are becoming increasingly disruptive in nature, the adoption of digital technologies in European industry appears to be more gradual (Goodman, 2016).

While specific new technologies may enable new, disruptive approaches, they are fragmented into many smaller players (without digital skills or investment capabilities). This can be achieved through the large infrastructure investments required in some types of industries, so the current adoption of digital technologies in European industry is linear rather than exponential, incremental rather than disruptive. In general, the technological landscape of European industry is diverse: from modern high-tech production lines to small enterprises that still keep records of customers in paper directories. A growing number of projects focus on the human and social aspects of the digitization of our (industrial) workplaces, thus promoting a human-centered view of Industry

5.0. A number of projects explore the interaction of humans with robots and cobots in production, explore ways to benefit from their strengths, and ways to assess human capital. Another set of projects examines the impact of digitization on the future of work and the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. The skills needed by workers are an important aspect in analyzing the prerequisites for a successful transition to the 5G Industry and are addressed in several Horizon 2020 and Erasmus projects aimed at closing skills gaps and adaptive learning. Finally, and more importantly, these projects investigate the impact of digital work environments on worker safety, working conditions, job satisfaction, and physical and mental health (eg, human production, symbiosis). It should not be considered exhaustive, as several other Horizon 2020 projects touch on Industry 5.0, innovative technologies (artificial intelligence, photonics, smart materials), green economy and sustainable or experience and skills development (Gupta, 2018).

Although Industry 5.0 is a relatively new concept, some early scientific papers describe its main features. An analysis of the literature on Industry 5.0 shows that there is a lot of uncertainty about what it will bring, how it will interfere with business in detail, and what is its ability to break down the barriers between the real world and the virtual world. Based on the literature review and our perspective analysis, we argue that Industry

5.0 is defined as the rediscovery and expansion of purpose beyond the production of goods and services for profit.

This society of the future "5.0" consists of super-intelligent systems in six main areas. The first is drone delivery. The Japanese government believes that one of the main problems facing a society with a low birth rate is that lonely and widowed elderly people in remote areas remain abandoned by society. To solve this problem, drone delivery can not only ensure the speed of logistics, but more importantly, it can provide the most convenient delivery service for people who live in remote areas with inconvenient transportation (Lee, 2018).

Secondly, the popularization of home appliances with artificial intelligence. Not only can air conditioners, hot water in the bathroom, rice cookers, microwave ovens and other household appliances be controlled remotely, you can use your smartphone to give instructions. At the same time, refrigerators will be completely intelligent, what is missing?

Third, intelligent medical care and patient care. With the help of the artificial intelligence system, remote diagnosis and treatment can be carried out. At the same time, highly intelligent robot nurses were produced, allowing paralyzed patients to take care of themselves. Create a highly intelligent robot companion to ease the loneliness of the elderly or patients. According

to the Japanese government's goals, this remote monitoring system can not only detect people's blood pressure, but also detect data such as blood sugar and uric acid levels using smart toilets, as well as check for cancer in feces and urine.

Fourth, intelligent and automated industries. For example, with the help of a GPS positioning system, it is possible to implement fully automated operation of agricultural machinery, as well as to implement unmanned operations for transplanting, harvesting and transportation. The technology of planting vegetables and the experience of agricultural experts or veteran farmers are introduced into the intelligent system, and then the inorganic cultivation of fruits and vegetables is happening indoors, and the safest and most nutritious fruits and vegetables that are completely close to growth are grown naturally.

Fifth, intelligent management. Electronic payments will become the mainstream of social payments. With the help of an electronic payment system, a huge database can be created, which can organize the supply of goods in a more targeted manner, expand production and link with intelligent logistics for automatic distribution and replenishment. Hotels and resorts can use facial recognition technology to provide more convenient services for residents and at the same time significantly save on personnel management costs, making travel more comfortable.

Sixth, fully automatic driving. By implementing fully automatic driving and reducing traffic accidents to zero, we will create a "car sharing" society through an online car ordering system. Fully automated buses can provide travel services to people 24 hours a day. Even in remote villages or when returning home late at night, driverless buses can provide the most convenient and uninterrupted service. Children go to school, elderly people go out, driverless buses will become people's life companions.

The logistics of the super-intelligent society will be more developed, and the volume of goods delivery will also increase, while the logistics industry will also experience a serious labor shortage. Delivery trucks with a fully automatic driving function will use high-speed information transmission and communication between trucks. If there are 10 delivery trucks, while the first truck is driven by someone, the next 9 trucks form a team.

Thus, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, artificial intelligence and robotics will become the basis of the implementation of "Society 5.0". To implement Society 5.0, the Japanese government's

Institute of Advanced Industrial Technology has proposed six key technologies that must be fully overcome:

1. Human intelligence augmentation technology capable of controlling perception in the CPS system.
2. Innovative artificial intelligence technology and applied artificial intelligence system.
3. Self-Evolving Security Technology for Artificial Intelligence Applications
4. Information input and output equipment and effective network technologies.
5. A new generation of technologies of intelligent production systems supporting mass customization.
6. Completely new measurement technology for the production of intelligent products. Therefore, the concept of a system of free flow of data based on trust (Data Free Flow with Trust), which is "society 5.0", should be developed.

The trend of the Japanese government building "Society 5.0" deserves our long-term attention.

DISCUSSION

Formation of the Concept of Industry 5.0

The concept of Industry 5.0 is moving forward at an incredible speed due to digitalization combined with the growing possibility of microprocessor computing power, telecommunication networks and the addition of new nodes to networks, which will contribute to the improvement of electronic services with the presence of basic digital infrastructures. The concept of Industry 5.0 in the context of exponential development is particularly focused on the breakthrough technologies presented by Martin Stutchi. At its core is the great benefit of big data for the energy transition to a circular economy and for the recovery of valuable resources. However, as the sources note, the potential of disruptive (breakthrough, digital) technologies in the interests of sustainable digital development has not yet been fully implemented, because Agile management has not been implemented as a factor of flexible breakthrough technological development (Mason, 2015).

At the heart of the Concept of Industry 5.0 are the philosophical principles of digital information and computer technologies that develop on the border of various sciences: philosophy, computer

science, software, high (breakthrough, digital, convergent, innovative, socio-humanitarian) technologies that affect sustainable development in in the context of the formation of the following developments: (a) artificial intelligence; (b) robotics; (c) control systems of industrial equipment via the Internet; (d) unmanned vehicles; (e) 3D printing; (f) nanotechnology; (g) biotechnology; (h) materials science; and (i) quantum computers.

Philosophers need to prove exactly how digital technologies will change life and the lives of future generations and what changes will take place in the economic, social, spiritual, and cultural spheres. "The concept of digital sustainable development, which is changing in the conditions of digitization and exponential growth, is especially focused on breakthrough technologies" (Meadows et al., 2004). It is presented by Martin Stutchi, and it is based on the analysis of big data for the energy transition to a circular economy and especially for the recovery of valuable resources.

The concept of Industry 5.0 as a global trend of informatization, digitization and technological production will lead to changes that will be able to contribute to endless digital transformations in the interweaving of the physical, digital and biological worlds. Digital technologies themselves are changing management processes, as innovative products (cryptocurrencies, blockchain, fintech), megatrends of the digital era are emerging, which are creating conditions for a sustainable economy at an incredible speed. In contrast to the old management processes, automation, robotics, new possibilities of business processes appear, the human potential is revealed. Everyone must adapt to the speed of change and achieve sustainability: enterprises, companies and organizations, statesmen, citizens. The speed of changes leads to the fact that digital production begins to depend not on material assets, but on digital technologies, which are based on "the intellectual component, organizational and human capital, the synergistic essence of digital spheres that contribute to the globalization of the world" (Nikitenko et al., 2021).

The formation of the concept of Industry 5.0 in the context of the challenges and threats of the digital world, as a global trend of the digital society, will contribute to drastic, large-scale changes that will lead to quantum computing. Nanotechnology replaces established production methods and radically changes the market, as it is a breakthrough product that creates a new industry aimed at creating conditions for a sustainable society. A breakthrough in many areas has already taken place. Thus, thanks to quantum computers,

we are solving tasks that we cannot even approach yet, and this includes a whole class of operations that would take hundreds of years for the fastest computers. The computing power of ordinary computers continues to blossom every 30 years and doubles roughly every year and a half. "This regularity is called Moore's Law," notes O'Reilly Tim in "Who Knows What Our Future Will Be" (Gupta, 2018). Digital progress is achieved due to the miniaturization of the transistors that make up the processor. The picture seems encouraging, but individual operations are so complex that even the best computers at the moment will calculate the correct answer for a long time. What are these tasks? Forecasting the weather, calculating the most useful stock investments, the fastest route for a courier with several deliveries. A quantum computer will be able to give an answer immediately, it opens up new possibilities for humanity (Nikitenko et al., 2019).

The formation of the concept of Industry 5.0 in the context of challenges and threats of the modern world, as a global trend of the digital society, is connected with the fact that we live in the era of big data. Research shows that millions cannot imagine their lives without mobile technology and are much more interested in distributed energy technology like solar panels than previous generations, and therefore welcome advanced energy technologies. "The formation of the concept of sustainable digital development is already taking place in many areas and represents a significant factor of progress," notes Michael Spence (2011).

In the future, artificial intelligence will be everywhere: in courtrooms, offices, homes for the elderly, and marriage agencies. For the development of the concept of the economy of sustainable digital development, which is non-state-creative, the state should be the main source of funding for the development of scientific, technical and innovative activities, an important factor for increasing innovation. It is obvious that the economy of Industry 5.0 cannot take place without the help of the state. Today, such an economy permeates all spheres of life in society: from demography, the biosphere and climate change to the future of medicine, genomics and genetic engineering, synthetic biology and transhumanism; from cloud technologies and the Internet of Things to artificial intelligence, quantum computing (Nikitenko et al., 2022).

The concept of Industry 5.0 means reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, preventing depletion and degradation of natural resources, and meeting the needs of the

present and future generations without harming future generations. Technologies such as artificial intelligence and additive manufacturing can play an important role in optimizing resource efficiency and minimizing waste.

From a technology perspective, Industry 5.0 tries to utilize the prospects of advanced digitization, big data and artificial intelligence, while highlighting the role these technologies can play in meeting new and urgent needs in the industrial, social and environmental landscapes.

Mechanism of Implementation of the New Model of Society 5.0

Society 5.0 will be implemented through a highly integrated system of imaginary space and real space. The previous information society 4.0 was created by people who use the Internet to access cloud services (databases) that existed in virtual space to obtain information or data and analyze them (Oleksenko & Harbar, 2022).

In "Society 5.0", sensors in real space accumulate a large amount of information in virtual space. Artificial intelligence (AI) analyzes the big data generated in this way in the virtual space, and the results of the analysis are brought back to life in the real space in various forms. In the previous information and intelligence society, people analyzed information to create value, but in the future society 5.0, artificial intelligence (AI), surpassing human capabilities, will analyze huge big data, and the results will be transmitted to robots and returned to people, thereby bringing new value to industry and a society that did not exist before.

Currently, Japan and the entire world are experiencing a period of great environmental change. With the development of the economy, people's lives become convenient and saturated, the demand for energy and food products increases, and life expectancy increases, which leads to the development of aging in society. At the same time, due to the globalization of economic development, international competition is intensifying, which leads to such problems as excessive concentration of wealth and uneven development between regions. These social problems, which are incompatible with economic development and require urgent solutions, are becoming increasingly complex, such as reducing the amount of exhaust gases (GHG) that cause global warming, increasing food production and reducing waste, and controlling social costs. Due

to the problems of aging population, promotion of sustainable industrialization, redistribution of wealth and regional disparities, all these need to be solved. However, the former social system could not simultaneously develop the economy and solve social problems and found itself in a very difficult situation (Oleksenko, 2017).

While the entire world is undergoing such tremendous changes, new technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), robots, artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are constantly evolving, which have a huge impact on society as a whole. As an innovator country, it is necessary to implement these advanced technologies in all industries and social life to realize the new 5.0 society, in which economic development and social problems are solved in parallel.

The implementation mechanism of the new 5G model includes a number of technical and organizational steps, which include the following areas of digitalization development:

1. Standardization: various standardization organizations, such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP), develop technical requirements and specifications for 5.0.
2. Infrastructure: The implementation of 5.0 requires the deployment of new infrastructure, which includes the installation of new base stations that support 5.0 technology, as well as the upgrade of network equipment and data transmitters.
3. Planning: This stage involves the analysis of needs and opportunities, the development of a 5.0 implementation strategy and the determination of the necessary resources. Factors such as coverage, capacity, security, budget, etc. are considered in this process.
4. Network deployment: Telecom operators are installing new equipment and infrastructure to deploy the 5.0 network. This may include installing new base stations, laying fiber optic cables and configuring network elements.
5. Testing and Optimization: After the network is deployed, testing is done to verify functionality and performance. Telecommunications operators perform network optimization to ensure quality of service and optimal performance.
6. Implementation of services: the implementation of management 5.0 includes a number of processes and mechanisms that help

ensure the effective use and management of this technology.

7. Deployment: This process includes the installation of base stations, equipment configuration, testing and implementation of network infrastructure solutions.

8. Configuration: After the physical deployment comes the network configuration phase. It covers setting up network parameters including frequencies, channels, bandwidth. Configuration depends on user needs and network requirements.

9. Monitoring and management: This mechanism includes supervision and management of the operation of the 5.0 network. This can be done using a Network Management System (NMS) or other software that provides service level monitoring, problem detection, service recovery, and network optimization.

10. Spectrum resources: Adequate spectrum resources are required for the implementation of 5.0. Governments and regulatory bodies conduct frequency spectrum auctions or set aside certain bands for use by 5.0 operators.

11. Optimization: This process involves implementing strategies and methods to improve performance and service quality (Oleksenko, 2013).

The 1st All-Ukrainian Conference "Industry 5.0" (Kyiv, 2023) came to the following recommendations:

- "Leap through 3.0 and 4.0" — paradigms about "transformations and revolutions" need to be changed. The potential in the transition to 5.0 exists, but is quickly exhausting.

- Governance 5.0 — the 1st step to this is the creation of the State Agency of Smart Industries (Oleksenko, 2015a).

- The problem of the double transition (digital and green) of Ukrainian SMEs does not depend only on the weakness or absence of state institutions. The outdated paradigms of the industrial structure (3.0) of most industrialists are also obvious and it is time to change.

At the same time, we welcome the strong consolidation of industrialists, government structures, parliament and business associations regarding the priority of the processing industry as the engine of Ukraine's economy during the Recovery period. Now we need to include the future tools and mechanisms that can really make our sectors smart (Oleksenko, 2015b).
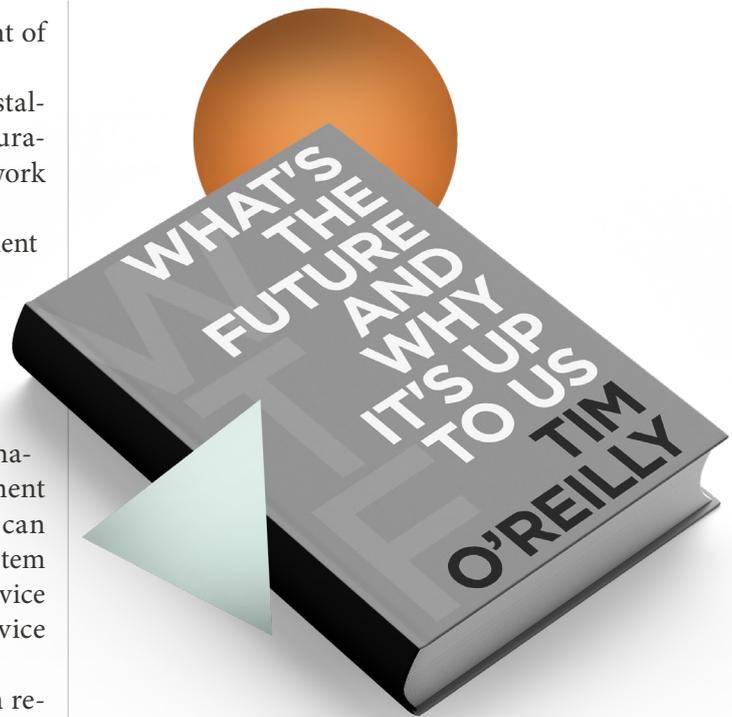
The resolution offers a list of 8-top double transition tools for manufacturing SMEs, which are practically absent in Ukraine today. Rapid consolidation with the help of donors and the international community is needed for their creation and launch.

The lack of these tools and strong state institutions is direct. There is a direct reason for the weak contribution of innovative industrial ecosystems to the strengthening of the defense industry and complete dependence on Western arms supplies. The resolution draws the attention of all state structures to their direct responsibility for this state of affairs.

CONCLUSIONS

Society 5.0 cannot simply be a science and technology policy that will affect the entire Japanese society and should be considered as a national strategy. Using new values to achieve economic development and solve social problems through technological innovation will eliminate differences in regions, age, gender, language, etc., which will allow flexible response to current and potential needs (O'Reilly, 2017).

Products and services will be provided to the people who need them, in the right amount, when they are needed, and the social system will also be optimized to become a society in which economic development and social problems can be solved in parallel. Of course, the implementation of such a

society is accompanied by various difficulties, but the Japanese government is determined to bravely overcome and challenge the difficulties, lead the world as a pioneering country, and show the world a model of the future society (Spence, 2011).

Areas of application of new values — transport, medical care, production, agriculture, food, prevention of natural disasters, energy. Society 5.0 is a people-oriented society. The previous society was a society that prioritized economic and organizational systems.

The future society (Society 5.0) will replace and support operations and adjustments previously performed by humans based on big data with the help of AI and robots, so that humans will be freed from daily complex and inconvenient labor operations, and everyone will lead a comfortable, energetic and high-quality life. It will be a human-centered society with every member of society at its center, not a future society dominated and controlled by AI and robots.

At the same time, this kind of society will lead to the solution of various problems in the world, which lead to the solution of the goals of sustainable development (Sustainable Development

Goals: SDG), proposed by the League of Nations. An example is Japan, which implements advanced technologies in all fields and aspects of social life, creates new values through technological innovation, and leads the world towards implementing a human-centered society (Society 5.0), where everyone can live comfortably, energetically, and with high standards (Studwell, 2013).

The concept of industry 5.0 refers to the need to increase the degree of reliability of industrial production, making it more resistant to failures and ensuring its ability to provide and maintain critical infrastructure during a crisis. Political changes and natural crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the fragility of current globalized production methods. This process must be balanced by developing strategic value chains with sufficient resilience, adaptable production capabilities and flexible business processes, especially where the value chain serves basic human needs such as health or safety (Schwab, 2017).

The concept of Industry 5.0 is an open and evolving concept that provides a basis for the further development of the concept of cooperation and co-creation for the industrial future of Europe. Digital technologies will play a special role. While digital interconnectivity will enable a range of sustainable technologies (including data collection, automated risk analysis and automated remediation), the growing reliance on digital technology exposes the industry to technical challenges caused by disruptions and cyber-attacks. Research and innovation will play a key role in developing the cybersecurity required for future sustainable industries. The concept of Industry 5.0 is: human orientation.

The introduction of 5G technology presents significant opportunities for enhancing various aspects of society. Here are practical recommendations for the optimal utilization of 5G technology:

1. Infrastructure Development: Investing in the development of high-speed wireless infrastructure to ensure widespread 5G coverage. Fostering collaboration among government agencies, telecom companies, and other stakeholders to facilitate efficient network deployment.
2. Data Security: Developing and implementing stringent data security standards to safeguard sensitive information transmitted over 5G. Encouraging cybersecurity research to proactively address threats and potential attacks on the 5G network.
3. Internet of Things (IoT) Industries: Supporting and fostering innovation in the IoT sector by leveraging 5G to provide reliable connectivity between devices. Exploring applications of IoT in various sectors such as healthcare, transportation, agriculture, and smart cities.
4. Education and Training: Integrating 5G technology into educational programs to equip students with new digital skills. Promoting research and innovation on 5G technology at universities and research centers.
5. Transportation and Safety: Utilizing 5G technology to establish intelligent transportation systems, enhancing traffic safety and efficiency. Implementing autonomous and unmanned vehicle systems, relying on 5G capabilities for fast data transfer.
6. Energy Saving: Applying 5G technology to optimize energy consumption in smart cities and buildings.
7. Partnerships: Fostering collaborations between government agencies, private companies, and public organizations to jointly develop and implement projects using 5G technology.

These recommendations can serve as a foundation for the effective implementation and utilization of 5G technology in society, contributing to innovation, improvement of quality of life, and the development of various industries.

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AN ABSENTOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TRACE:

PRE-CAMBRIAN ARCHE-WRITING, AND JACQUES DERRIDA'S REALISM

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ABSTRACT

The first trace-fossil in the history of terrestrial life dates to the pre-Cambrian era. Left by an unknown species around 542 million years ago, *Treptichnus* are fossilized mud burrows, remaining as a geological testament to the early stages of complex life on Earth. Because of the impossibility of any empirical knowledge relating to these unfossilizable creatures, which presumably lacked a skeletal structure, any philosophical treatment of this paleobiological matter of fact must necessarily engage in speculation. Absentology as a speculative epistemontological register allows us to conceptualize these strange burrows as a key event. Following Jacques Derrida's concept of "arche-writing", our essay presents an absentological reading of the forever unknowable unfossilized animal species. Arche-writing for Derrida is an abstract mode of writing that precedes speech and actual written language, hence this constitutes a concept that can be used for prelinguistic modes of expression. The trace fossils left by these unknown creatures constitute a type of prewriting, as well as the dawn of work, representing a crucial step in the evolution of complex life on this planet. A fossil that is not the animal itself, but rather a trace referring to an unknown organic singularity, this is the absent scene of arche-writing. A more realist Derrida emerges from this encounter, for whom extra-textual elements are even more relevant than explicit language.

Keywords

absentology, Jacques Derrida, philosophy of language, posthumanism

INTRODUCTION

The writings of post-modernist philosopher Jacques Derrida continue to be debated by scholars (Farahani, 2014; Guía & Jamal, 2023; Johnsen, 2015; Kennedy, 2023; Lee et al., 2023). One of his most famous expressions was the following: "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1967/1997). This became a veritable catch-phrase of the whole postmodern movement. Widely quoted (and mis-quoted), the expression has spread far and wide. Graham Harman, founder of Object-Oriented-Ontology (OOO) takes Derrida and Derrideans to task, for advocating an "anti-realism" that makes it impossible for us to even speak of anything outside language (Harman, 2017). But what if we have been misunderstanding Derrida's intentions all along? In this essay, we propose to put aside conventional readings of this notorious sentence, and explicate a weird realism from Derrida's work. Specifically, the concept of "arche-writing" presents itself as a compelling example of the latent realism present in Derrida, the indubitable anti-realist connotations notwithstanding. By deepening our understanding of what the French thinker was trying to say by introducing the idea of arche-writing, we can meliorate the standard interpretation of Derrida as being a hopelessly language-centric thinker. We believe that we have found an example from paleobiology. Through a refractive reading, deconstructionism can be made realist again.

METHODS

During the course of this research, we employed qualitative methods, based upon close readings of philosophical works, as well as a selection of paleobiology studies. A qualitative framework was used to reinterpret ontological conclusions stemming from results in the field of paleobiology, through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy. Specifically, what we were interested in is whether Derrida's work can be read in a realist key.It is commonly supposed that Derrida is an anti-realist who denies the reality of anything apart from human language. Through an analysis of nonhuman prelinguistic forms of signification, however, we show that such a reading fails to do justice to Derrida's work. By incorporating nonhuman forms of „writing", we show that Derrida does have important things to say about reality in itself, outside of human language. The case of *Treptichnus* (fossilized mud burrows created by an unknown creature, presumably a worm) shows that arche-writing is already present long before the advent of either human beings or complex organisms. Such a discovery deconstructs the supposed primacy and unavoidability of human language *vis-a-vis* writing. The method of absentology – the study of present absences – is also of crucial importance, as we will never know exactly which species left the *Treptichnus* trace fossils behind. We are confronted with an unknowledge that nevertheless informs knowledge production in the present.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

We found that a novel, realist interpretation of Jacques Derrida's work is possible. Our reading focused primarily upon Derrida's concept of arche-writing, as elaborated within *Of Grammatology*. By reading the work together with results in the area of paleobiological traces left by unknown prehistorical animal species, we can shed new, transdisciplinary light upon deconstructionism and its relationship with nonhuman regions of being. Far from being an anti-realist, Derrida can be interpreted as a realist, who has something important to say about prehuman modes of being too. Human language is not everything: a type of proto-writing, etched into the landscape by the slithering bodies of worms, is present before anything like human presence came on the scene. We are optimistic that by combining a novel reading of Derrida with a realist ontology, further avenues of research into the complex relationship between deconstruction as method and materiality as reality can be unearthed. Our research is of special relevance to researchers working at the intersection of New Materialism, New Realism and Speculative Realism/Object-Oriented-Ontology (OOO). In our view, we have contributed to a more complex and less language-centric reinterpretation of Derridean deconstructionism.

DISCUSSION

The Reality of Arche-writing

Before proceeding, it is worth fleshing out the broader textual context of Derrida's notorious pronouncement. The phrase occurs within *Of Grammatology*, a book dedicated to the methodical demolition of Plato's idea that writing is somehow inferior to speech. The very gist of Derrida's entire
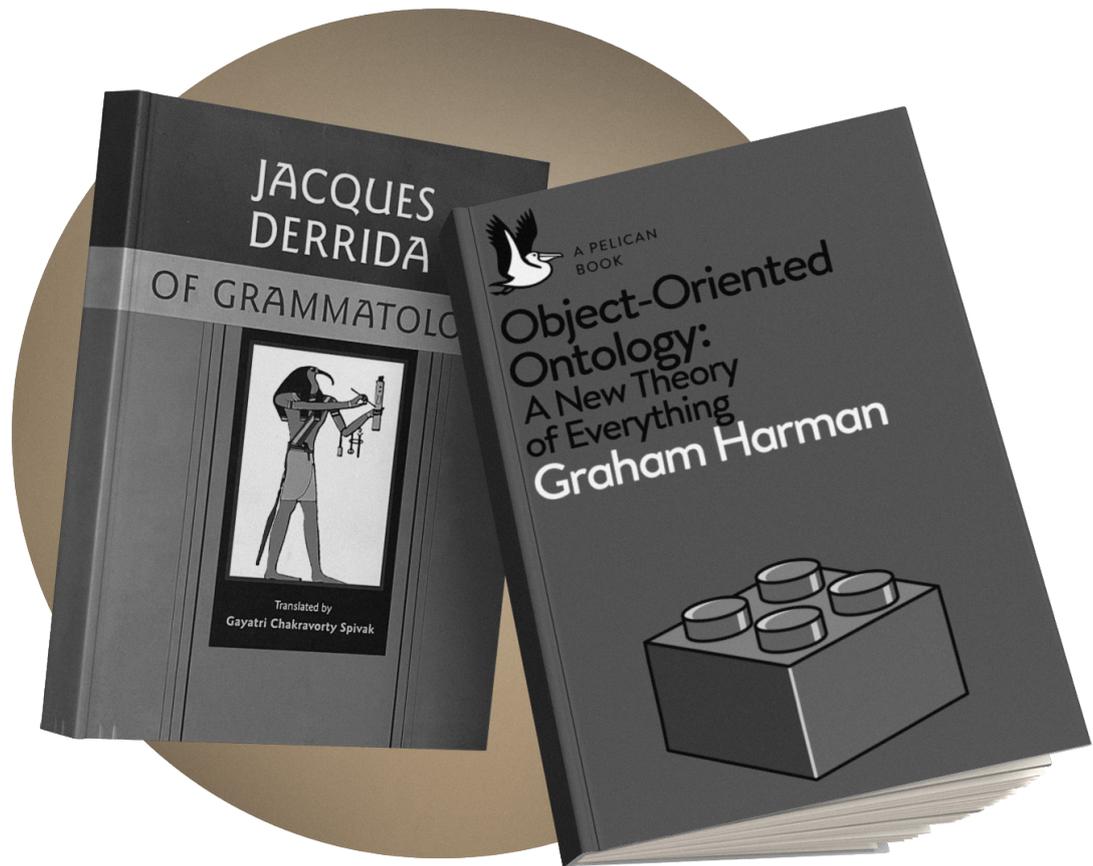
deconstructive project here is predicated upon a denial of language-centrism. There is always more in play in reality than what any discourse can integrate. Differently put, Derrida is actually a realist when it comes to the infinite complexity of the world. Far from claiming that reality is a construct of language, we read the very opposite in the first introduction of arche-writing: "Difference cannot be thought without the trace. This arche-writing, although its concept is invoked by the themes of "the arbitrariness of the sign" and of difference, cannot and can never be recognized as the object of a science. It is that very thing which cannot let itself be reduced to the form of presence. The latter orders all objectivity of the object and all relation of knowledge" (Derrida, 1967/1997). In essence, what Derrida is saying is that *difference precedes language*. Difference is always already there, at work, upon multiple levels of reality. Language, through its conventions, certainly tries to order reality, but the underlying chaos, inscrutability and uncontrollability of the real remains nonetheless stubbornly present, resistant to our categories.

However powerful they may appear, discourses are never free to construct conventions as they please. Beneath writing, there is a pre-writing in play. Forms of expression, Derrida explains, are

"dependent and very derivative" with regard to arche-writing, the latter constituting a surplus of material self-expressivity inaccessible to linguistics: "this arche-writing would be at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression *but also in those of nongraphic expression*. It would constitute not only the pattern uniting form to all substance, graphic or otherwise, but the movement of the sign-function linking a content to an expression, whether it be graphic or not" (Derrida, 1967/1997, p. 60). There is no question here of reducing everything to language. Quite the opposite: language for Derrida is characterized by a fundamental lack, an inherent inability to account of all forms of becoming. Simply put, there are significant, albeit nongraphic forms of self-expression which matter, without becoming anything like a human language. "Arche-writing", Derrida continues, "movement of differance, irreducible archesynthesis, opening in one and the same possibility, temporalization as well as relationship with the other and language, cannot, as the condition of all linguistic systems, form a part of the linguistic system itself and be situated as an object in its field" (Derrida, 1967/1997). This form of self-expression would be a pre-writing that forms the precondition of any and all human language. Though separated from language proper by gulfs

of time, arche-writing is nonetheless operant, in the form of a primordial inaccessibility. Despite this separation, arche-writing is the evolutionary bedrock of language proper. Indeed, it is not a question of hierarchy: pre-writing/arche-writing is in no way inferior to writing as such. Rather, it forms the primordial precondition of explicit language.

According to Derrida (1967/1997), we may speak of a "presence-absence of the trace", the latter being "the opening of the first exteriority in general", the birthplace of what later became linguistic expression, in the context of "difference as temporalization" (p. 70). As a practitioner of deconstructionism, Derrida was particularly fond of borrowing, reshaping and distorting texts. While breaking away from the letter of Derrideanism, we propose an absentological reading of arche-writing as a concept, one that highlights its status as present-absence. Absentology denotes an epistemology of nonknowledge, a foregrounding of the unknowable.[1] What if we used the Derridean concept of arche-writing in a manifestly *realist* manner? Let us quote Derrida more fully this time, to elucidate its meaning and conceptual import: arche-writing is "the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, 'spatial' and 'objective' exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the gramme, without differance as temporalization, without the nonpresense of the other inscribed within the sense of the present, without the relationship with death as the concrete structure of the living present" (Derri-

da, 1967/1997). Exteriority is only intelligible in comparison with an interiority. A body must emerge which maintains an active relationship to its environment.

Derridean Paleobiology

The above extract takes us back, perhaps far further than even Derrida himself could ever have anticipated: we are squarely on the terrain of

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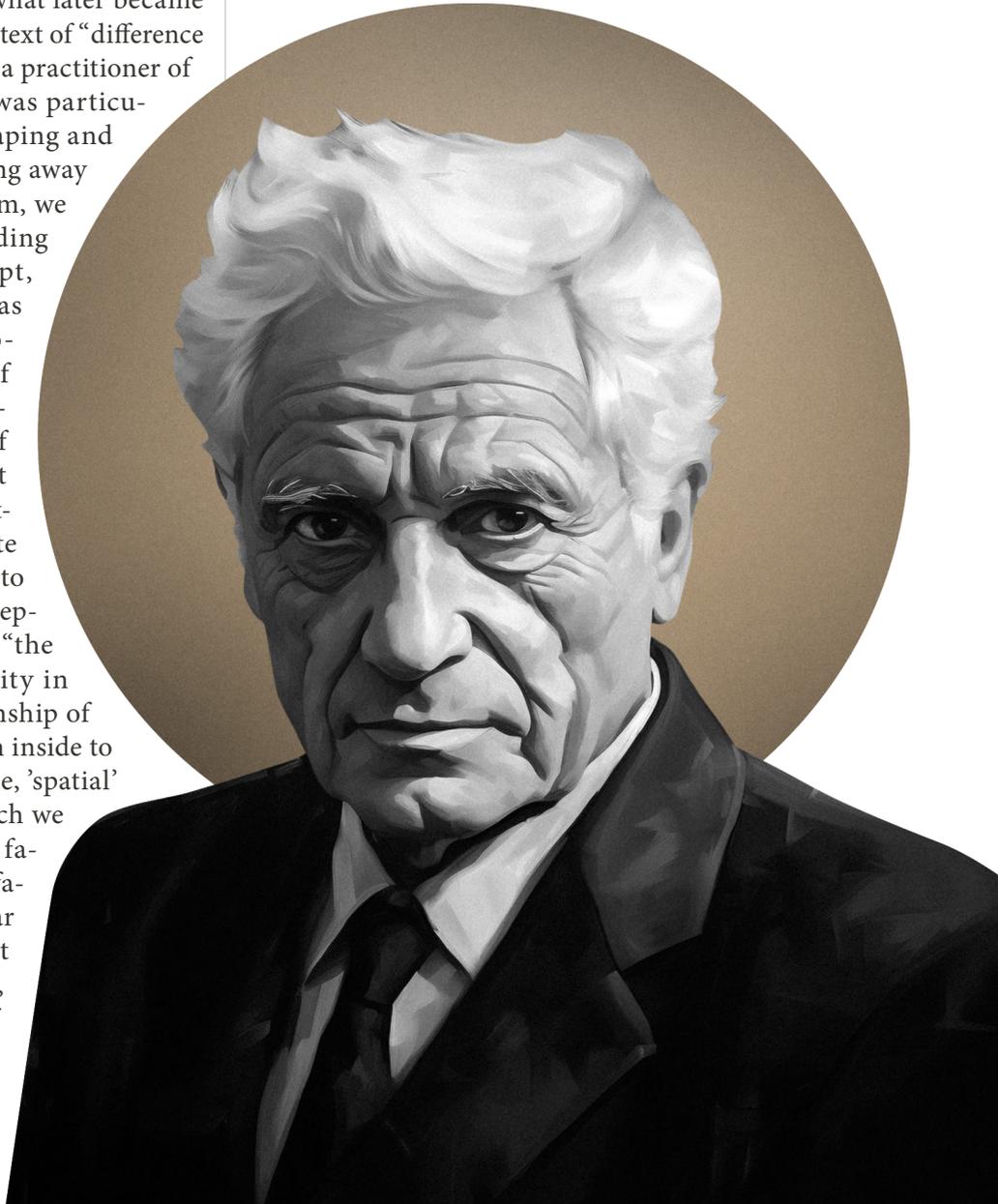
1 First proposed in a 2014 article by Jennifer Croissant, absentology is broadly speaking the "sociology of things which aren't there," be they absent objects, missing knowledges, destroyed cultures and haunted landscapes. The Absentology Work Group has taken this neologism and uses it for the analysis of a wide range of phenomena. See Croissant (2014), Horvath & Lovasz (2016), Lovasz (2016), Horvath & Lovasz (2019).

paleobiology. On such a speculative realist reading, the "first" exteriority would correlate with the emergence of the first complex lifeforms on Earth. Does this hybridization of postmodernist philosophy not risk sliding into a misuse or abuse of science? This depends above all upon the view we take regarding the relationship between philosophy and science. In this field, scientific discourse is quite diverse (Bolinska & Martin, 2021; Hendry & Kidd, 2016; Rosen, 2015; Webmoor, 2015). Alfred North Whitehead, for one, vehemently denied that philosophy should subordinate itself to the natural sciences. Quite the reverse: to make scientific discoveries intelligible, a philosophical explication is required. Whitehead goes so far as to claim that philosophy is the only way we can understand "the nature of things" (Whitehead, 1938). Of course, adherents of scientism could easily brush aside Whitehead's fundamental insight, dismissing the British philosopher as an eccentric or dissident. Unfortunately, this emphasis upon the vital importance of philosophy in knowledge remains the exception rather than the rule, and understandably finds little support among the natural sciences. Still, as a thought experiment, we can use philosophy to illuminate certain matters-of-fact which have proven resistant to scientific knowledge.[2] One such example is *Treptichnus*.[3]

This trace fossil caught our attention completely by accident. It is rare that a single type of fossil denotes a geological boundary. Yet in the case of the Treptichnus trace fossils, this is precisely the case. The dividing line between the Ediacaran and Cambrian periods, around about 541 million years ago, is characterized by the emergence of curious burrows, dug in presumably wet, muddy ground. In this case, the "species" name refers to the burrows themselves, for the animals that made these excavations are long gone, and never fossilized. First named by paleobiologist Jerzy Dzik in 2005, *Treptichnus* represents the earliest known transformation of geological strate by multicellular lifeforms. Dzik (2005) went so far as to claim that these humble creatures, most probably worms, contributed to what has become known as the Cambrian Explosion. Since

then, the burrows have been discovered across many continents. Because worms lack a skeletal structure, they may only be known through the traces they leave. The trace fossil is a prime example of a "present absence", a matter-of-fact which cannot ever become wholly an object of knowledge. In this sense, *Treptichnus* underlines not only the inaccessibility of real objects rightly emphasized by Harman, but also the primordial inaccessibility of arche-writing highlighted in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. As Derrida notes, "writing appears well before writing in the narrow sense" (Derrida, 1967/1997, p. 128). The worms, through their squirming movements, using the power of their bodies, "wrote" their traces into the geological record. Their presence is what separates two geological eras, a truly remarkable feat for any creature.

The most a relatively recent article claims is that "the burrow-producing animal lived under the thin layer of sand and occasionally protruded out of the sediment," a description that, refreshingly, leaves much to the reader's imagination (Sharma et. al., 2018). Barring the invention of time-travel, we shall never know exactly what kind of organism created these magnificent and perplexing burrows. In this case, it is the very lack of accessibility that underlines the real status of *Treptichnus*. Nothing can access the intimate reality of these ancient worms any longer: the burrows ceased around 99 million years ago, disappearing without explanation. Never can anybody know exactly what manner of life lived, played and squirmed its way through the mud of the pre-Cambrian. The first geologically embedded self-expression of life on Earth, written forever into fossilized mud deposits, these burrows form the arche-writing that made possible not only the Cambrian Explosion, but all subsequent language. If there is an origin of language, then *Treptichnus* surely qualifies as a fantastic example, in the double sense of awakening our awe, while also mobilizing our intellectual-speculative faculties. An absentological matter-of-fact would be a circumstance unamenable to any mode of explication. The best we can do is illuminate and

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2 A widely cited example is the mystery surrounding the status of consciousness. Most recently, philosopher David Chalmers won a bet with cognitive scientist Christoph Koch, regarding the possibility of a reductionist account of consciousness. Chalmers denied that such an account is possible, whereas Koch was optimistic regarding this development. To date, reductionist materialism has proven incapable of explaining consciousness. See Horgan (2023).

3 In using an animal example, we follow the footsteps of posthumanist scholar Rodolfo Piskorski, who has argued for an Animal Studies-based "zoogrammatological" reading of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, emphasizing the multiple ways animals "write" themselves. See Piskorski (2020).

speculate upon present absence, a fact here yet not here, tantalizingly exposed yet evasively distant.

CONCLUSION

In this short essay, we have elucidated Derrida's concept of arche-writing. Against anti-realist readings of Derrida, we introduced an innovative, realist interpretation of Derrida's work. Applying the arche-writing idea to *Treptichnus*, mysterious burrows left in the geological record by pre-Cambrian worms, we have shown that arche-writing can refer to a non-mythic, empirically proven, albeit absentological fact, a presence unavailable to direct access. These trace fossils constitute the clearest example of arche-writing, the latter denoting that specific mode of primordial self-ex-pression which makes language possible. The *Treptichnus* trace fossils are replete with meanings, and of these only some can be decoded by science. Where empirical proofs end, speculative philosophy begins. Speculation is the sole mode of coming to terms with the sheer excessiveness of reality.

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THEORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN POST-SOVIET UKRAINIAN SOCIETY
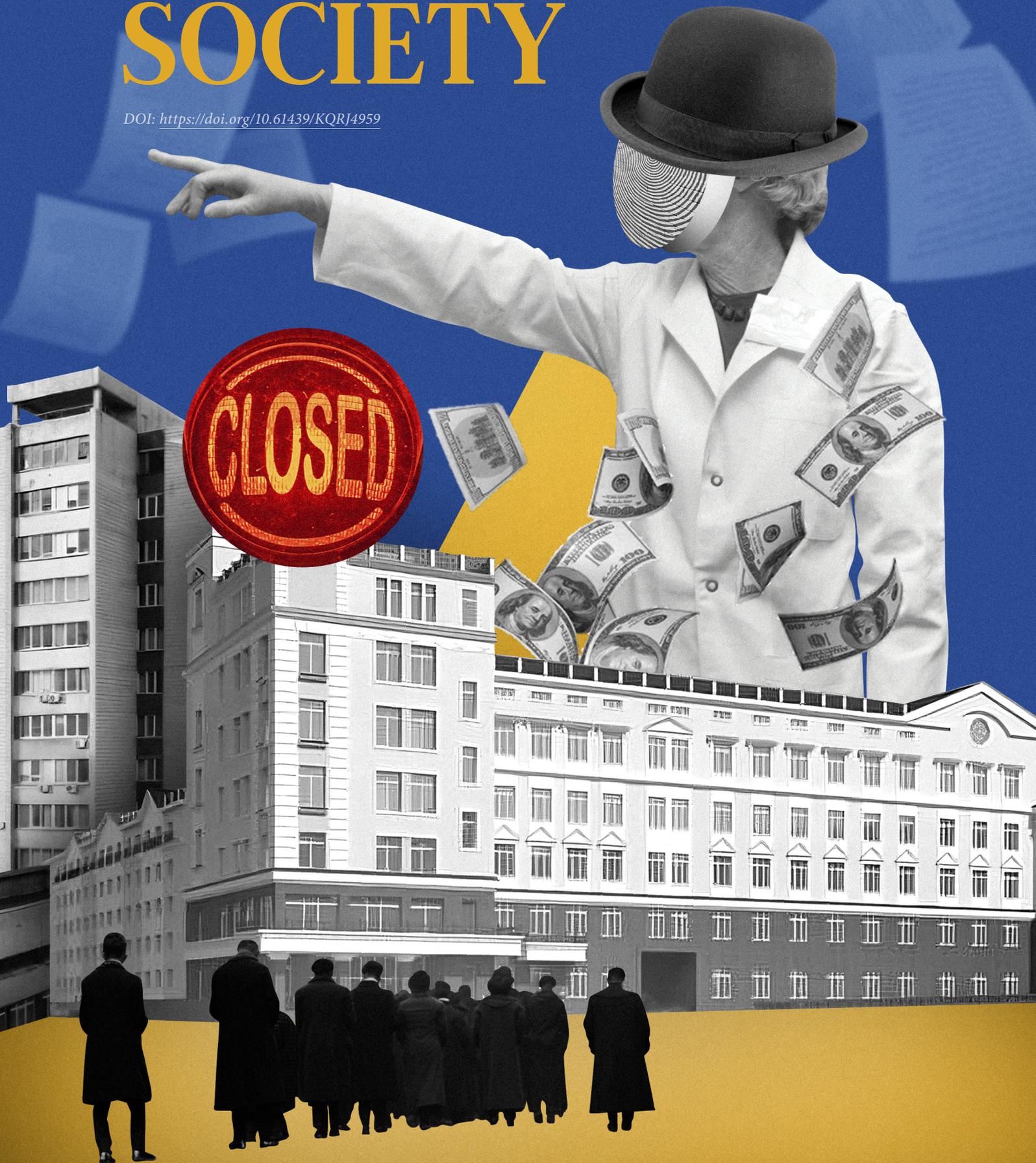
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ABSTRACT

The significance of the issue lies in the observation that the experience of implementing neoliberal market reforms during the 1990s in Ukraine reveals that disregarding the contributions of Ukrainian scholars led to detrimental consequences for socio-economic transformations. This study focuses on the theories of social change developed by Ukrainian scholars. The aim of this article is to consolidate and structure the concepts put forth by Ukrainian scholars that contribute to the theory of social change within post-Soviet Ukrainian society.

The methodology employed to examine the theory of social change in the context of post-Soviet Ukrainian society encompasses systematic, logical, historical, dialectical, and civilizational approaches and techniques. The findings of the research indicate that the theory of social change necessitates an interdisciplinary methodology. The primary criterion for evaluating the nature of social change is its orientation toward upholding societal cohesion. The emergence of crisis phenomena that present challenges to society serves as an indicator of social change. An essential element in understanding social change is an awareness of the socio-cultural distinctiveness of a given society. Effective management of social processes relies on the integration of theoretical principles with practical applications.

Several domains have emerged in the evolution of the theory of social change within post-Soviet Ukrainian society, including economic, demo-graphic, civilizational, political, and security-oriented aspects. An analysis of indigenous concepts of social change within post-Soviet Ukrainian society highlights certain characteristics. Ukrainian social researchers consistently grapple with the task of constructing a comprehensive perspective on Ukrainian society. Amidst the multitude of social changes, a central issue pertaining to various concepts of social change has gradually arisen — the examination of the trajectory that society follows. Notably, a significant portion of scholars, predominantly economists, have regarded the economy as the primary determinant shaping the nature of social change.

The practical significance of these findings resides in the synthesis and organization of the concepts formulated by Ukrainian scholars, which contribute to the framework of the theory of social change in the context of post-Soviet Ukrainian society.

Keywords

theory, concept, social change, social processes, post-Soviet Ukrainian society

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of 32 years, the post-Soviet Ukrainian society has traversed a path that does not warrant recognition of its system of social governance as adequate for the development and preservation of the integrity of Ukraine's socio-historical organism. During this period,

the population has experienced a catastrophic decline, the structure and productivity of the economy have deteriorated, and a significant portion has entered the "shadow sector." The state apparatus and law enforcement agencies have been influenced by criminal elements, leading to widespread corruption.The emergence of new ruling strata has coincided with the criminalization of society, and deindustrialization has marginalized a substantial portion of the population, encompassing millions of Ukrainian citizens. Socially, Ukraine has transformed into a country marked by mass poverty, characterized by a myriad of "social diseases" such as poverty, crime, corruption, official arbitrariness, disenfranchisement, mass unemployment, drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, and the spread of infectious diseases like tuberculosis. The trajectory guided by the ruling circles of post-Soviet Ukraine has not yielded the desired outcomes envisioned by the majority of its citizens.

In 2014, Ukraine experienced a profound loss of territorial integrity with the annexation of Crimea through Russian aggression. Additionally, the military confrontation in Donbas, involving separatists supported by the Russian leadership, resulted in the loss of control over a significant part of the Donbas region. The Russian-Ukrainian war had a severe impact on the state of Ukrainian society, significantly compromising the prospects for restoring unity, integrity, and recovery.

Reflecting on social changes in post-Soviet Ukraine prompts contemplation about the existential challenges facing Ukrainian society. It raises questions about alternative directions, the nature of these changes, and the potential outcomes that could have unfolded during this period. Insight gained from social and humanitarian research conducted by scientific institutions and individual scholars indicates that Ukrainian scientists have generated substantial scientific-theoretical knowledge. This body of knowledge focuses on ways, methods, and means to enhance the system of social governance, ultimately contributing to the development and preservation of the integrity of Ukraine's socio-historical organism.

Over the preceding three decades, Ukrainian society has undergone significant transformations, leading to a shift towards fundamentally distinct operational principles, an altered economic system model, a wholly different social framework, an alternative political system model, the operation of an alternative social governance model, the restructuring of socio-cultural connections, and notably, the emergence of a novel socio-cultural

personality type for human identity. These outcomes of societal evolution necessitate comprehensive exploration across various domains of social and humanitarian knowledge. Undertaking research of this caliber requires substantial research groups or think tanks.

Although various publications by scholars, philosophers, authors, and artists have attempted to capture the essence of social shifts in post-Soviet Ukrainian society, the identified threats, hazards, risks, and challenges have not been adequately acknowledged by either the ruling faction (referred to as the elite) or the general populace. The Ukrainian ruling elite has struggled to transcend their narrow group-centric interests and prioritize the safeguarding of Ukraine's socio-historical integrity. The guiding theories that influenced Ukraine's ruling class have proven inadequate for the preservation and advancement of the nation, and the scientific developments of domestic scientists were not in demand. Those responsible for managing societal processes in Ukraine have overlooked the essential principle of dialectical harmony between social theory and social practice. Investigating the theory and application of governance within post-Soviet Ukrainian society stands as one of the most urgent tasks facing national academia.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

To explore the theory of social change within post-Soviet Ukrainian society, a foundational step involves delineating the methodological and theoretical underpinnings necessary for selecting pertinent scholarly sources on social processes in Ukraine.

A prominent figure in the study of social change theory is renowned sociologist P. Sztompka, who undertook a comprehensive assessment of the entire historical lineage of theoretical sociology alongside contemporary dialogues concerning fundamental social theory concepts. Sztompka (1993) highlights in the preface of his book that sociology, over nearly two centuries, has engendered numerous concepts, models, and theories pertaining to societal evolution, with sociological approaches to understanding these changes also undergoing transformations. Central among these sociological tenets is the principle of historicism, which asserts that comprehending any present-day phenomenon mandates an exploration of its origins and the evolutionary trajectories that led to

its manifestation. The same principle applies to the realm of ideas: comprehending contemporary perspectives on social change requires familiarity with their historical antecedents and the theories they contrast with (Sztompka, 1993). These concepts persist in contemporary interdisciplinary research (Howell, 2013; Krause, 2019; L'Etang, 2014; Warczok & Beyer, 2021).

Predominantly, the investigation into social processes within post-Soviet Ukrainian society has been steered by the scientific institutions under the umbrella of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, focusing on the social and humanitarian domain. The Institute of Sociology NAS of Ukraine, a pivotal entity within these establishments, has undertaken pivotal research endeavors such as the "Ukrainian Society. Monitoring of Social Changes," an ongoing initiative since 1992 (Vorona et al., 2013, 2019). Notably, researchers affiliated with the Institute of Sociology have undertaken a study examining social changes in Ukrainian society amidst the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Golovakha & Makeiev, 2022). Eminent scholars from the Institute of Sociology include V. Vorona, Y. Golovakha, N. Panina, M. Shulga, L. Sokhan (1966), L. Bevzenko, V. Burlachuk, O. Vyshniak, O. Zlobina, S. Dembitskyi, N. Kostenko, S. Makeiev, V. Pylypenko, I. Pribytkova, O. Reznik, A. Ruchka, V. Stepanenko, V. Tarasenko, H. Chepurko, O. Shulga, and numerous others (Vorona et al., 2013, 2019). The scientists at the institution have made significant contributions through their extensive and long-term research on institutional changes, the transformation of the country's social structure, the rise of social inequality and tension, and the examination of social contradictions and conflicts. Their work also delves into the shifts in social attitudes across various regions of Ukraine. Regrettably, despite these noteworthy achievements, the ruling circles of Ukraine have chosen to overlook the valuable insights and contributions provided by the Institute's scientists.

Prominent among the scientific institutions delving deeply into the study of social changes in Ukraine is the Institute for Economics and Forecasting within the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Distinguished academician V. Heyets et al. (2009), a long-standing leader of the Institute, has overseen a series of investigations concerning the Ukrainian economy and economic prediction. Notable works include comprehensive National Reports like "Socio-Economic Situation of Ukraine: Consequences for the People and the State" and "New Course: Reforms in Ukraine. 2010–2015"

(Heyets et al., 2009, 2012). The latter report was conceived to delineate a fresh conceptual trajectory for implementing overdue modernization transformations in Ukraine, with specific objectives and mechanisms shaped by the national academic community. Effectively, researchers have formulated a societal development strategy that has paved the path for Ukrainian modernization, grounded in the national interests of its citizens, while preserving unity and integrity.

Within the framework of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the Ptoukha Institute of Demography and Social Studies stands out as a specialized research institution uniquely focused on systematic exploration of demographic and social development concerns. The institute undertakes both fundamental and applied research, models emerging trends, generates comprehensive demographic forecasts, and establishes the conceptual foundations for state social and demographic policies. Among the institute's notable accomplishments are the publications authored by eminent scientists such as S. Pyrozhkov (2004), E. Libanova (2014), O. Gladun (2018), and others. The scientists have consistently directed their efforts toward preserving and fostering the demographic potential of Ukraine. Regrettably, despite their contributions, the ruling circles have chosen to disregard their developments. As A. Shnipko rightly emphasizes that the most tragic of the failures of the Ukrainian government is that it, having the necessary opportunities and resources for this purpose, failed to overcome the trend of extinction of the people. … With the active non-participation (…inability) of the national political elite, independent Ukraine failed to develop a Strategy of National Development of Ukraine for 20–30 years, which would meet modern realities, public expectations, and hopes.

This underscores a missed opportunity to address demographic challenges and formulate a comprehensive strategy aligned with contemporary needs and societal aspirations.

The Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine has played a pivotal role in the examination of global societal advancement, matters of worldwide security, and socio-cultural progress across diverse communities. The activities of this academic institution encompassed international economic and political investigations, as well as the formulation of directions for Ukraine's economic and foreign policy progression. The works authored by prominent scholars from this Institute, including O. Bilorus,

S. Krymsky, Y. Pavlenko, and Y. Pakhomov, reveal a comprehensive analysis of social phenomena and processes that give rise to potential threats, hazards, risks, and challenges for the Ukrainian populace and other social entities.

In essence, a concise survey of scholarly sources underscores that Ukrainian academics, in their exploration of social phenomena, processes, discrepancies, issues, threats, dangers, and challenges within post-Soviet Ukrainian society, have exhibited a desire to redirect the trajectory of Ukrainian society. Their efforts involve offering the ruling class scientifically grounded strategies and means for the modernization of Ukraine, while mitigating the influence of detrimental factors.

The hypothesis of this study posits that the system of social governance in post-Soviet Ukraine, orchestrated by the ruling class, exhibits a complete inability to effectively utilize the scientific achievements of Ukrainian scientists in preserving and fortifying societal integrity. The verification of this hypothesis involves a conceptual analysis of theoretical models of social change in Ukrainian society, perceived as a socio-historical organism. The author employs a research approach that highlights how the theoretical models developed by Ukrainian scientists are designed to bring about social changes that enhance the integrity of Ukrainian society. Simultaneously, the study aims to demonstrate how the practical disregard for these concepts by those in power has resulted in the weakening of Ukraine's socio-historical organism. The examination thus aims to underscore the discrepancy between the scientific potential available and the governance's failure to capitalize on it for societal preservation and strength.

The primary objective of this article is to analyze, consolidate and systematize the concepts formulated by Ukrainian scholars, which collectively contribute to the framework of the theory of social change within the context of post-Soviet Ukrainian society.

This objective is achieved through the pursuit of the following specific objectives:

- To provide a solid foundation for the methodological dimension of theoretical frameworks concerning social change.
- To pinpoint the principal trajectories shaping the development of the theory of social change within post-Soviet Ukrainian society.
- To delineate the attributes of concepts authored by Ukrainian scholars, which collectively contribute to the theoretical framework

of social change in the context of post-Soviet Ukrainian society.

METHODOLOGY, METHODS

The exploration of the theory of social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society necessitates the identification of methodological and theoretical foundations essential for selecting scientific sources on social processes in Ukraine.

A prominent figure in the study of the theory of social change is the renowned sociologist P. Sztompka (1993). He critically reflects on the entire historical legacy of theoretical sociology and engages in current debates over fundamental concepts of social theory. In the preface to his book, Sztompka emphasizes that sociology, over almost two centuries, has developed numerous concepts, models, and theories related to social change. Sociological approaches to the analysis of social change have themselves undergone transformations. A key sociological principle highlighted by Sztompka is historicism, which asserts that understanding any contemporary phenomenon requires an examination of its origins and the processes that gave rise to it. This principle extends to the realm of ideas, emphasizing that comprehending contemporary views on social change necessitates knowledge of their historical roots and an awareness of the theories they emerged from and oppose.

Sztompka (1993) delineated two essential aspects of social change research: firstly, the examination of real social phenomena and processes; and secondly, the study of theoretical or conceptual models of these same social phenomena and processes crafted by researchers. This approach is geared towards upholding the principle of the organic unity of social theory and social practice.

In his work titled "The Sociology of Social Change," sociologist P. Sztompka (1993) outlines his research objective as the exploration of fundamental tools for intellectual analysis, interpretation, and comprehension of social change, particularly within macrosociological or historical contexts. These tools manifest across three domains:

1. Common sense, where individuals assimilate general notions, concepts, and perceptions of social change to make sense of their lives.
2. Social and political philosophy, which elevates common sense judgments into independent, specialized, rational constructs that yield intricate categories, images, and doctrines.

3. The realm of social sciences encompassing history, political economy, social anthropology, and sociology.

These fields engage in methodical, critical analysis of shifting societal realities, leading to the formulation of more rigorous and empirically grounded theories (Beckert & Suckert, 2021; Brozović, 2023; Deng, 2019; Hanson-DeFusco, 2023; Hołyst, 2023). Given the rapid development of technology, scientific discourse today is directed towards this field as well (Becker, 2023; Beytía & Müller, 2022; Coeckelbergh, 2018; Da Cunha, 2018; Milakis & Müller, 2021). Sztompka (1993) focuses exclusively on scientifically oriented approaches to social change, particularly those suitable for a distinct sociological sub-discipline termed "sociology of social change." Consequently, the study of social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society necessitates an interdisciplinary perspective that entails comprehensive investigations spanning various social sciences and humanities. Worth noting that contemporary research narratives in the social and behavioural sciences gravitate towards interdisciplinarity (Frodeman et al., 2017; see also Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Haeussler & Sauermann, 2020; Lindgreen et al., 2020; Ming et al., 2023).

Scholars affiliated with the Institute of Sociology at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine underscore the paradoxical nature of social existence and the imperative for adopting a dialectical approach when scrutinizing social change in Ukraine. It is worth noting that in a number of studies we find the necessary arguments in favour of choosing such a strategy of theoretical analysis (Ahlqvist, 2022; Cavanagh, 2021; Fruzzetti, 2022; Lund & Vestøl, 2020; Ryoo & Crawford, 2023). This approach signifies that theory must be founded on practice and continually refined to align with the demands of socially relevant governance. Ukrainian scholars emphasize that both the theory and practice of social reforms and transformations in Ukraine constitute an evolving process devoid of predetermined solutions. The initial endeavors of independent Ukraine to hasten its integration into the modern civilized world unveiled the complexities and protracted nature of the transformation journey. Concurrently, it has become evident that grasping the intricacies of this prolonged process and formulating policy directives across its multiple dimensions necessitates systematic research on social transformations, the analysis of influential factors, the exploration of sociological theories concerning sociopolitical

dynamics and their adaptation to the Ukrainian context. Moreover, this calls for harmonizing the multidimensional transformation practices within Ukraine with broader global shifts (Tancher & Stepanenko, 2004). Thus, a key underpinning for effective social governance is adherence to the principle of dialectical synergy between social theory and social practice.

The exploration of Ukrainian society as a vast social system has captivated the attention of numerous domestic scholars. In my perspective, the pivotal criterion for assessing their significance lies in their capacity to generate novel insights that forewarn social actors about the impending threats they confront. Beyond the realms of material and spiritual production, individuals are persistently confronted with the challenge of securing safe living conditions — this encompasses their creation, generation, renewal, and preservation. Consequently, it is imperative to acknowledge the contributions of authors who have proven to be most compelling in addressing the threats, dangers, risks, and challenges encountered by post-Soviet Ukrainian society.

Centralizing the aspects of safeguarding functionality and integrity assumes paramount importance within the domain of social and humanitarian knowledge in contemporary societies. An example illustrating the pertinence of this issue is discerned in the perspectives of eminent intellectuals in Singapore concerning social change within their nation. Lee Kuan Yew (2000), who led Singapore's government until 1990, orchestrated societal dynamics for three decades, resulting in what was referred to as the Singaporean "economic miracle." In his publication "From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965–2000," Lee Kuan Yew (2000) delineates the intricate trajectory traversed by Singaporean society encompassing socio-economic, political, and cultural transformations that culminated in its prosperity. The author identifies several challenges encountered by Singapore post-independence: (a) external national security — seeking recognition as an independent state and acquiring UN membership; (b) internal national security — safeguarding civil order; and (c) a pivotal economic challenge — ensuring a respectable standard of living for the populace. Guided by these realities, Lee Kuan Yew arrives at a significant realization that for a city-country positioned on one of Southeast Asia's myriad islands, the conventional path is untenable. At any cost, Singapore had to evolve into a unified, formidable nation capable of adeptly adapting to transformations — a nation that could effectively

address the very quandaries others aimed to out-perform them in (Yew, 2000).

To transition from destitution to affluence within a span of thirty years, the government had to surmount seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In 1959, when Lee Kuan Yew (2000) assumed the role of prime minister, Singapore's gross per capita income stood at $400 USD. By the time he left office in 1990, this figure had soared to over $12,200, and further escalated to $22,000 by 1999. However, the current prosperity of Singapore does not grant its elite a sense of complacency. The challenge of formulating apt responses to the novel social realities is underscored by K. Mahbubani (2015) in his work "Will Singapore Survive?" the main question of which is how the city-state is preparing for new challenges. Inquisitively, the scholar poses the question: "Will Singapore survive?" and provides three potential answers: yes, no, maybe — each deemed plausible. The trajectory of Singapore's future as a city-state hinges on its society's capability to uphold its cohesion, and in this endeavor, the primary role isn't played by material factors, but rather by the intangible elements that define Singapore's spirit: culture, education, and the citizens' spiritual essence (Mahbubani,

2015). Hence, resolving the quandary of preserving societal integrity pivots on its advancement, on the character of social change, which is fundamentally influenced by the direction set by the ruling echelons of society.

In 2011, Ukrainian sociologist M. Shulga (2011), through his publication "Drifting to the Margins: Twenty Years of Social Change in Ukraine," cautioned that the social, economic, political, and cultural shifts have not merely resulted in the fragmentation of Ukrainian society, but have also imperiled its unity.

Researchers at the Institute of Sociology within the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, spearheaded by sociologists N. Panina and Y. Golovakha, initiated the "Ukrainian Society: Monitoring of Social Changes" study. The researchers emphasize that this monitoring initiative serves five key functions:

1. Diagnostic Function: The initiative enables the acquisition of sociographic data that constructs a reliable factual foundation for evaluating and analyzing swift social transformations. This is particularly pertinent when the societal structure, institutions, and normative and value systems undergo profound shifts.

2. Prognostic Function: Utilizing monitoring data, it becomes feasible to project the probable trajectories of transformation processes in Ukraine, encompassing the establishment of a civil society, the development of a market economy, and modernization of political system.

3. Project Function: Monitoring serves as a cornerstone for constructing models of social advancement throughout the transitional phase. This is achieved by pinpointing the factors underlying the emergence and escalation of social conflicts.

4. Planning Function: Monitoring facilitates the utilization of an accurate evaluation of social changes, integrating this assessment into the realm of day-to-day social administration. Furthermore, it informs the formulation of strategies for implementing social reforms.

5. Educational Function: This function encompasses two distinct components:
   - Information component: Monitoring materials find application within educational settings, aiding students in various social sciences and humanities such as sociology, political science, economics, and management. Journalists rely on this information for crafting TV and radio content, newspaper articles, and magazine

features. Furthermore, politicians utilize monitoring materials for drafting legislation and conducting debates.

- Scientific component: The conducted research forms the foundation for constructing a theory pertaining to society in transition within Ukrainian sociology. Notably, this theory encompasses the normative-personal concept of societal transformation by N. Panina (Zagorodniuk, 2013, p. 139). The outcomes derived from sociological monitoring hold exceptional significance for effective social governance. However, it is observed that authorities often overlook the insights provided by the scientific community.

Moreover, contemporary society has grown so intricate that conveying the essence of its ongoing processes through the lens of a solitary discipline is no longer feasible. To acquire a portrayal of the state and transformations of Ukrainian society that approximates reality, a comprehensive research approach is imperative. This holistic perspective entails the amalgamation of various disciplines, including sociology, political economy, political science, social psychology, cultural studies, global studies, geoeconomics, geopolitics, global security, and social philosophy.

In the conclusion of the twentieth installment of the compilation "Ukrainian Society: Monitoring of Social Changes," M. Shulga underscores that the majority of articles within it focus on the crisis phenomena afflicting Ukrainian society. These crises manifest across economic, political, geopolitical, social, spiritual, cultural, and other domains. When scrutinized at a more elevated level of abstraction, these crisis phenomena collectively present a commonality: they all pose challenges to society (Shulga, 2019).

The book authored by distinguished Ukrainian scholars S. Krymsky and Y. Pavlenko (2007), titled "Civilizational Development of Humanity," is dedicated to the advancement of novel approaches in comprehending history and attaining a comprehensive grasp of humanity's civilizational progression, along with Ukraine's positioning therein. The book offers insights into cognition within the context of cultural endeavors, unveils the defining principles of the civilizational process intricately interwoven with ethno-historical evolution, elucidates cultural archetypes and the civilizational identity of the Ukrainian populace, and discerns global cultural and civilizational shifts at the juncture of the millennium (Krym-

sky & Pavlenko, 2007). The comprehension of a society's socio-cultural distinctiveness represents a profoundly pivotal factor in the panorama of social change. Notably, it is the anchoring in a civilization's inherent nature that has emerged as a determinant in the successful modernization trajectories of Asian nations such as Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Japan.

The methodology for studying the theory of social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society should be grounded in the approaches advocated by P. Sztompka (1993), which involve two key aspects: an empirical dimension, focusing on the examination of real social phenomena and processes, and a theoretical dimension, centered on the study of theoretical models elucidating these social phenomena and processes. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of social change is deemed essential. A significant methodological foundation for this study is derived from the perspective of Lee Kuan Yew (2000) and K. Mahbubani (2015). According to their approach, the preservation of societal integrity and development, exemplified by the case of Singapore, relies on the ability of the ruling class to establish suitable models of social governance that align with the specific needs of a society at a given stage of its development. The scientific works of Ukrainian scholars underscore the existence of threats, dangers, risks, and challenges, such as crises in various spheres of Ukrainian society, within the context of the overarching issue of preserving the integrity and fostering the development of Ukraine's socio-historical organism.

The examination of the methodological facets inherent in the theory of social change has revealed the following key attributes: (a) effectively scrutinizing social change necessitates the utilization of an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating the conceptual frameworks from a variety of social sciences and humanities; (b) the fundamental characteristic underpinning the nature of social change is its orientation towards upholding the cohesion and unity of society; (c) a notable indicator of social change resides within crisis phenomena that present challenges of various forms to the fabric of society; (d) in the trajectory of social change, especially during the process of modernization, a significant determinant is the recognition and comprehension of the socio-cultural distinctiveness intrinsic to a given society; and (e) the efficacious administration of social processes hinges upon adherence to the principle of unity, which harmonizes theoretical understanding with practical implementation.

RESULTS

Building upon the theoretical and methodological foundations in social change research articulated by P. Sztompka (1993) and drawing inspiration from the concept that preserving the integrity and development of society hinges on the creation of models of social governance suitable for a particular society at a specific stage of its development, as scientifically substantiated by Lee Kuan Yew (2000) and K. Mahbubani (2015), the author of this study has formulated the concept of the transformation of the socio-historical organism of Ukrainian society. The core objective of this scientific research is to identify the primary directions of development within the theory of social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society. Subsequently, based on these identified directions, the study undertakes a conceptual analysis of relevant scientific works pertaining to the challenge of preserving the integrity and fostering the development of post-Soviet Ukrainian society.

A concise overview of the primary concepts of social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society reveals the following features:

1. Ukrainian social scientists consistently address the challenge of constructing a comprehensive portrayal of Ukrainian society, which undergoes dynamic transformations due to rapid and fundamental changes across all spheres and sectors of its life.
2. Amidst the multitude of social changes, a predominant concern emerges among various social change concepts — the investigation of the trajectory along which society is progressing.
3. A notable portion of scientists, particularly economists, underscored economics as the principal factor shaping the nature of social change.
4. Aligned with the civilizational approach, Ukrainian sociology introduced concepts like the dual institutional system and the socio-cultural development of mankind.
5. The escalation of crisis phenomena, processes of decline, and degradation in diverse social spheres, coupled with heightened social contradictions, prompted the development of theoretical models such as the concept of systemic crisis, social forecasting and design, the social matrix concept, and the transformation of the socio-historical organism of Ukraine concept.

DISCUSSION

Main Directions of Social Change Theory Development in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Society

At the inception of Ukraine's autonomy, the ruling echelons championed the trajectory of market reforms — signifying a transition from a centrally planned, state- and collectively-owned economic structure to a market-based economy grounded in private ownership. Consequently, economic transformations emerged as a pivotal, if not determinative, facet of social change. Analyzing the impact of market reforms on society thereby became a pivotal domain within the comprehension of social change in Ukraine.

The economic perspective in the examination of social changes in post-Soviet Ukrainian society is well-represented in scientific works. However, it has concurrently experienced artificial constraints limiting its development.

M. Pavlovsky (2001b) has provided a comprehensive underpinning for the concept of "economic reforms" as a pivotal driver of social change. He posits that economic reforms encompass transformations and shifts in the framework of economic governance, production organization, and economic management across realms such as monetary, financial, social, and environmental aspects. These changes influence the dynamics between distinct ownership forms, the interplay between state regulation and market-driven self-regulation, the balance between liberalization and protectionism, the duality of an open or closed society, the tension between equality and freedom, the dichotomy of globalization and economic self-sufficiency, as well as the dynamics between integration and national interests (Pavlovsky, 2001b).

In the context of post-socialist nations, M. Pavlovsky highlights the uniqueness of reforms executed in this milieu. These reforms are intrinsically linked to the transformation from a centrally planned economy to a market-based one. In this scenario, economic reforms catalyze societal changes and reconfigure the socio-economic landscape. Two models of reform characterized this shift from socialism to market-driven relations in the latter half of the 20th century. The first, championed by the Chicago neoconservative school and grounded in Friedman's Monetary theory, was adopted in both Latin American and post-socialist nations under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The second model, implemented by the People's Republic of China, was

rooted in M. Tuhan-Baranovsky's innovation theory, centering on innovation and investment in priority sectors.

Reforms aligned with the first model proved to be exceedingly costly and destructive. Over time, Ukraine's economic potential dwindled by nearly 75%, relegating the country to a position outside the top ten most developed nations worldwide and significantly beyond the 100th rank. In contrast, China, through its adherence to the second reform model, witnessed impressive GDP growth rates ranging between 8% to 12% annually. Moreover, the well-being of its populace experienced consistent growth across the entire reform period (Pavlovsky, 2001b).

Eminent scholars, including O. Bilorus, V. Vyshnevsky, L. Vorotina (2013), V. Heyets, O. Ghosh, V. Dementiev, O. Kendyukhov, E. Libanova, V. Lyashenko, Y. Makogon (2019), M. Pavlovsky, Y. Pakhomov, V. Sirenko, O. Soskin, V. Tarasevych, A. Filipenko, V. Chernyak (2020), M. Chumachenko et al. (2011), O. Shnypko (2011), and others, have diligently explored the economic landscape of post-Soviet Ukraine (Heyets et al.,

2009). Through their works, the essence and intricacies of economic and social processes have been unveiled, illuminating their ramifications on daily life and the trajectory of Ukrainian society.

In 2009, the release of the National Report titled "Socio-Economic Situation in Ukraine: Consequences for the People and the State" marked a significant milestone. This comprehensive assessment delved into Ukraine's economic, social, political, legal, and humanitarian development, taking into account the looming threats and risks linked to contemporary global crisis phenomena. The report meticulously scrutinized macroeconomic shifts, transformations within the tangible economic sector, as well as energy and environmental challenges. Notable emphasis was placed on tackling the conundrums tied to effective public governance, navigating the political crisis, achieving financial sector stability, fostering dialogue amongst government, business entities, and civil society, and reshaping the socio-humanitarian realm.

The authors of this report offered a strategic perspective along with approaches and mechanisms to surmount systemic crises and propel the nation towards dynamic growth benchmarks. They underscored the inseparable linkage between resolving socio-economic quandaries and the preservation and enhancement of demographic potential, the prioritization of human development, the consolidation of the Ukrainian political identity, and the formation of

a cohesive socio-humanitarian sphere within Ukraine (Heyets et al., 2009).

During the 1990s, Ukraine pursued a trajectory of neoliberal market reforms rooted in the paradigm propagated by economists of the Chicago School, most notably M. Friedman and F. Hayek, known as the "Washington Consensus." In an attempt to divert public attention from the detrimental repercussions of these reforms across various sectors of Ukrainian society, reformist endeavors stifled the advancement of political economy within the nation. Professor O. Ghosh (2004), in his assertions, upholds the historical mission of political economy, contending that the epoch of spontaneous operation and evolution of civilized human societies has faded into oblivion. It is important to note that political economy is devoted to many diverse works of modern researchers (Cheng, 2023; Filippetti & Vezzani, 2022; Hanto et al., 2022; Naseemullah, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). In contemporary times, neither post-industrial, nor industrial, nor traditional societies can navigate socio-economic processes without the guiding influence of state regulation, as elucidated by scholarly inquiry. This role of social sciences takes on heightened significance within post-socialist transitional societies engaged in profound overhauls of their socio-economic systems. The disruptive impact of economic reforms in such societies might have been mitigated had politicians grounded their decisions in robust political and economic research. Paradoxically, precisely when post-socialist societies most required these insights, a significant number of erstwhile political economists, under the sway of Western-driven reforms endorsed by the bourgeois elite, forsake political economy and aligned with the so-called "Fundamentals of Economic Theory," crafted upon Western economic theoretical foundations — the theory of market relations (Ghosh, 2004).

In the quest for pathways to surmount the systemic crisis, economists have proffered theoretical models for the transformation of the Ukrainian economy. Notable among these are the theoretical frameworks articulated by various scholars: O. Ghosh (2004) championed the model of state socialism; O. Kendyukhov (2009) elaborated on the model of post-industrial intellectual economy; M. Pavlovsky (2001a) put forth the model of a mixed multi-structured economy characterized by robust state regulation; O. Soskin (2014) pro-

posed a model of people's capitalism; V. Tarasevych (2011) formulated a model of state-socialized capitalism; a team led by S. Taruta devised a model of balanced development for Ukraine until 2030, and A. Filipenko delineated a model of people's economy (Kharlamova et al., 2018; Filipenko, 2010).

Hence, the economic facet of the theory of social change has emerged as a paramount focal point in comprehending post-Soviet Ukrainian society. However, within Ukraine, the advancement of political economy — the discipline delving into the genesis of wealth — was stymied by reformist efforts.

Simultaneously, the demographic dimension of the theory of social change was also taking shape. Disturbing patterns in population dynamics began to manifest in the 1990s, yet the gravity of the demographic crisis came into stark public awareness following the 2001 All-Ukrainian Population Census. Data from the 1989 All-Union Population Census revealed the population of the Ukrainian SSR to be 51,452 thousand individuals. By January 1, 1993, Ukraine's population had reached a peak in its history at 52,243 thousand. However, as per the 2001 Census, the population had declined to 48,457 thousand people. This indicates a decrease of 3 million compared to the previous census and a reduction of 3.78 million from its peak in 1993. Since 1993, the population reproduction in Ukraine has been marred by an alarming surge in negative trends that forewarned of an impending demographic catastrophe. E. Libanova's analysis indicates that, based on official data, the population of Ukraine dwindled by 299.7 thousand in 1995, 309.5 thousand in 1996, 311.6 thousand in 1997, 300.7 thousand in 1998, 350.0 thousand in 1999, 373.0 thousand in 2000, and 369.5 thousand in 2001. During this period, the Ukrainian population's decline accelerated, dwindling by nearly one thousand people per day (Libanova, 2014). It is important to highlight that the issue of depopulation continues to be a subject of contemporary scientific discourse in other countries as well (De Lucas & Prats, 2020; Larraz & García-Gómez, 2020; Meijer & Syssner, 2017; Onge & Smith, 2020; Vaishar et al., 2020).

Prominent within the realm of contemporary Ukrainian demography, notable works include O. Gladun's monograph "Essays on the Demographic History of Ukraine in the Twentieth

Century" and the collaborative monograph "The Population of Ukraine. Demographic trends in Ukraine in 2002–2019" (Gladun, 2018, 2019). This collective effort scrutinizes fertility, mortality, and migration trends from 2002 to 2019, projecting demographic scenarios up to 2100, and delineating key avenues for socio-demographic policy.

In the realm of comprehending social change in Ukraine, the socio-cultural perspective emerged prominently and rapidly ascended to a pivotal role within the national realm of scientific inquiry. Following Ukraine's attainment of independence, the formational approach, underpinned by Marxist theory, was discarded across the post-Soviet sphere as an antiquated relic incongruous with contemporary societal understanding. Concurrently, the civilizational approach, dominant in Western discourse, was introduced in Ukraine for societal examination, positing culture rather than the economy as the bedrock of societal existence. This paradigm shift in societal analysis spurred a radical transformation in research methodologies and tools, as well as the configuration of an alternative model for societal management. Presently, societal governance centers not on economic activities or accomplishments, but rather on cultural mechanisms aimed at shaping specific values — albeit frequently employed to manipulate collective consciousness. However, it is notable that this model of governance can often substitute genuine social processes with mere simulations. As with any methodological framework, the civilizational approach boasts both merits and limitations.

Contemporary states worldwide strive to chart the trajectory and course of their societies, necessitating a vision of their society's future configuration. The crux lies in steering the society's course from its current manifestation toward an idealized projection of the same society. Regrettably, in post-Soviet Ukraine, the national elite has consistently prioritized present interests while failing to engage in discussions about the future trajectory of Ukrainian society or the construction of a socio-political ideal.

In 2006, V. Volovyk posited that the quest for a socio-political ideal could hold promise if grounded in a profound, impartial analysis of Ukrainian society's historical evolution. This analysis should consider past experiences, current circumstances, and aspire toward a better future. The pursuit of an appealing socio-political ideal for Ukraine should be pursued within the framework of its historical advancement, encompassing the holistic development of society, its economy, and culture. This entails enhancing the material well-being of the populace, nurturing their spiritual flourishing, and fostering increased individual freedom. This freedom would empower citizens to develop their valuable and essential societal contributions (Volovik, 2006).

The Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine played a pivotal role in championing the socio-cultural trajectory for studying social change. Over two decades, the institute functioned as a Ukrainian "think tank," comprising 96 members including 2 academicians, 24 doctorates, and 45 candidates of sciences. However, on October 30, 2013, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NAS) Presidium made the decision to terminate the operations of the The Institute of World Economy and International Relations at the NAS. The Acting Director, O. Havryliuk, criticized this decision, characterizing it as a "crime" and suggesting ulterior motives related to resources and property. He claimed that in 2013, the institute was allotted UAH 6.3 million for maintenance, and its closure could be perceived as an effort to save this funding ("The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine Liquidated the Institute of World Economy," 2013). The decision to shut down the Institute of World Economy and International Relations was not solely due to the lack of financial support from the state. Two years later, in 2015, certain individuals within state-owned companies received substantially larger sums of money than what was required for the Institute's upkeep. In Ukraine, it appears that influential forces are aiming to dismantle domestic "think tanks" that advocate for Ukraine's national interests through scientific endeavors. This trend has led to Ukrainian society being depicted as a "headless horseman," wherein authorities often prioritize the counsel of foreign advisors over insights provided by Ukrainian scholars.

In comprehending the dynamics of post-Soviet Ukrainian society, the author also delves into the political dimension of the theory of social change. This facet involves uncovering the intricacies of the political system and its nucleus, which is state power. It further encompasses analyzing the framework of societal governance and the trajectory it follows.

Academician V. Heyets (2009) expounds on the factors underlying the emergence of a novel paradigm of societal governance in post-Soviet Ukraine. This period marked the formulation of statehood and the overhaul of social and economic structures, with "transformation" signifying the pursuit of a qualitatively distinct societal and

economic state. As the close of the 20th century witnessed the global triumph of market-oriented economies, where liberty and democracy stood as bedrocks in both social and economic spheres, decisions concerning the trajectory of development were inexorably linked to the unfettered market. This evolution from socialism to capitalism engendered a form of market absolutism, rendering it a type of authority that permeated all facets of public life, particularly the interplay between the state and business. Often unregulated, opaque, and even illicit market interactions between the state and business entities became the cornerstone of the prevailing path of market absolutism, seemingly granting carte blanche. While the stated aspiration was to evolve into a nation with a civilized market economy, reality saw the prior model of state absolutism transmuting into market absolutism. This transition to a framework of market absolutism within a liberal state catalyzed the conditions for widespread corruption within the state machinery and the consolidation of oligarchic power (Teichmann et al., 2020), fueled by a climate where "total freedom" evolved into the "new ideology," permitting unbridled enrichment with minimal restraints, leading to the dominance of pseudo-market relations, especially within the interface of the state and business interactions (Heyets, 2009).

The aspect of crime's role in shaping Ukraine's ruling class, its political and economic elite, remains an overlooked topic, with historical accountability of the ruling class toward the Ukrainian population for the extensive array of losses, deterioration, destruction, and societal decline seldom being discussed. Thus, in the current era of prolonged crisis, the primary challenge confronting the society is the transition of elites or the identification of capable elites equipped to confront the accumulated historical challenges. Nonetheless, the contemporary society grapples with its inability to effectively facilitate this change of elites, due to a range of factors such as weak and fragmented state institutions, underdeveloped intellectual capacity, feeble influence of political, scientific, and artistic elites, and the prevailing absence of social institutions designed to recognize and address these challenges. Moreover, the oligarchic core's lack of interest, coupled with their alignment with transnational corporations and international entities, further obstructs meaningful change, while a dearth of strong domestic intellectual and artistic elites exacerbates this situation (Shulga, 2019). This situation also has implications for other countries (Kuzio, 2017). Corruption in Ukraine is of research interest not only to national scholars (Denisova-Schmidt & Prytula, 2018; Osipian, 2017; Zaloznaya et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the trajectory of societal security emerges as a pivotal and unifying avenue within the theory of social change, encompassing various aforementioned dimensions and beyond. Note that such scholarly discourse is reflected in other states that face their own challenges (Høyland, 2018; see also Boustras & Waring, 2020; Bartoszewicz et al., 2022; Nilsen et al., 2018; Treich & Yang, 2021). When examining Ukraine's developmental security in a globalized context, O. Bilorus (2001) emphasized a paramount geopolitical query at the dawn of the third millennium: whether each nation can genuinely compete against the so-called "golden billion" countries, or if it will be relegated to financial subservience and relegated to the periphery of the global economy in the forthcoming decades? Presently, Ukraine faces this audacious challenge, standing at a crossroads between political subjugation, financial dependence, economic dilapidation, ideological decay, yet armed with a population marked by talent and industriousness, and preserving, albeit for the moment, a scientific, technical, and technological potential, coupled with an intact educational system (Bilorus, 2001).

The National Institute for Strategic Studies occupies a leading role in the examination of diverse

dimensions of Ukrainian societal security. One of the notable works produced by this institute is the monograph titled "The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront" (Horbulin, 2017). Regrettably, even though significant scientific efforts were invested in the realm of security, they were unable to prevent the military conflict in Donbas and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.

In the trajectory of advancing the theory of social change within post-Soviet Ukrainian society, several distinct domains have crystallized, encompassing the economic, demographic, civilizational, political, and security realms.

Domestic Concepts of Social Change in Host-Soviet Ukrainian Society

Sociologist M. Shulga underscores a pivotal issue and key task for national social science. Firstly, the capacity to construct an accurate portrayal of Ukrainian social realities, coupled with the competence to offer informed analyses and formulate explanatory theoretical frameworks for societal processes, primarily rests with Ukrainian sociologists. Secondly, the pressing objective remains to cultivate a sociological perspective of contemporary Ukrainian society. A robust theoretical model is indispensable for elucidating the dynamics of the nation and a comprehensive scientific framework is essential for crafting a coherent representation of society for practical application. The absence of this foundation results in an enigmatic and unmanageable social environment that defies predictability (Shulga, 2010).

In order to fully grasp the panoramic landscape of social change research, it is worthwhile to delve into the fundamental concepts germane to the evolution of Ukrainian society, its economy, and other facets of public life, as conceived by Ukrainian social scholars. These conceptual frameworks mirror the scholars' aspiration to address the challenges confronting Ukrainian society. These conceptual frameworks are rooted in a thorough analysis of the existing condition of Ukrainian society, encompassing its economy, social dynamics, cultural landscape, and other dimensions of public life.

As previously highlighted, during the 1990s, Ukraine embarked on a path of neoliberal reforms influenced by the principles advocated by economists of the Chicago School, such as M. Friedman and F. Hayek. This strategy was executed with the active involvement of foreign advisors, who wielded considerable influence over the policies of successive Ukrainian presidents and governments. Academician Y. Pakhomov (2003) recounts that in the early 1990s, J. Sachs advised both Russian and Ukrainian leadership on reforms. Sachs himself was eventually compelled to admit that they "put the patient on the operating table, cut the chest, but the client had a completely different anatomical structure" (Pakhomov, 2003, p. 6). In other words, Sachs realized that the impact of reforms he advised did not align with the inherent structure of Ukrainian society, revealing a mismatch between the foreign-designed reforms and the actual societal dynamics. This recognition led to a growing awareness among scholars, particularly economists, that foreign-authored theories were ill-suited and even detrimental to reforming Ukrainian society due to their failure to account for numerous national factors, including socio-cultural nuances.
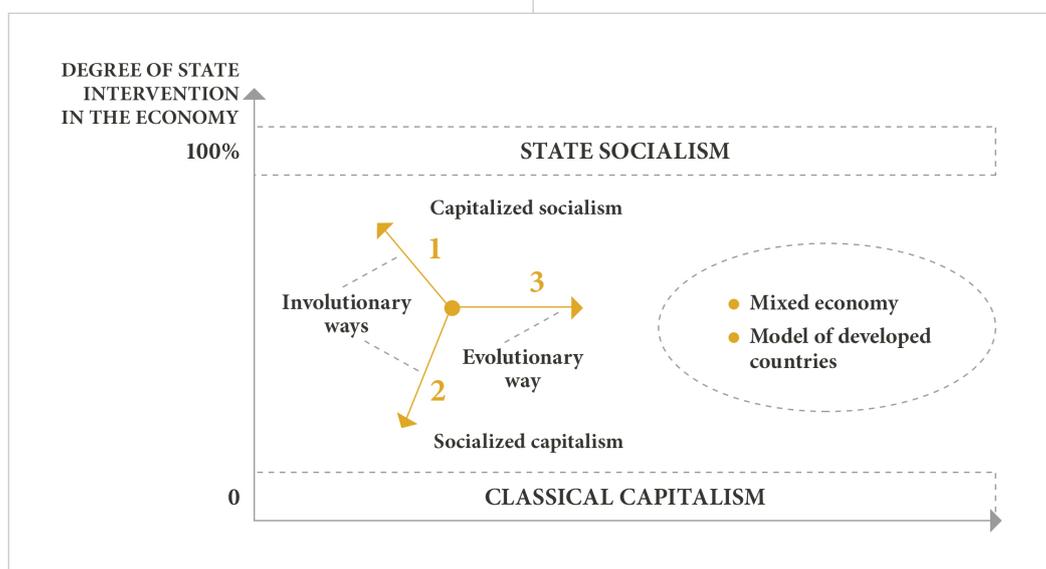

FIGURE 1. WAYS OF DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

Among the comprehensive studies examining Ukrainian society, a significant contribution is made by M. Pavlovsky's monograph "Strategy of Society Development: Ukraine and the World (Economics, Political Science, Sociology)." This work delves into various aspects of societal life during the initial decade of Ukrainian independence, contextualizing these changes within the global shifts occurring at the same time (Pavlovsky, 2001a). To identify strategic pathways for societal development, Pavlovsky devised a coordinate system called the "Degree of State Intervention in the Economy" (DSIE), illustrated in Figure 1 (Pavlovsky, 2001a).

Degree of State Intervention in the Economy is delineated by ownership structure and spans a spectrum from 0 to 100 percent. At the lower extreme, a level of state intervention at zero percent corresponds to the free market model (classical capitalism), while full intervention at approximately 100 percent aligns with the model of state socialism. With state intervention bound by these limits, this coordinate system serves

as a framework within which societal development unfolds. On one end, we find classical (unregulated) capitalism, while on the other end lies state socialism. Within this spectrum resides the realm of a mixed economy, akin to the model adopted by developed nations. A country's proximity to either limit determines its classification — closer to the lower limit signifies "capitalized socialism" (favoring social principles), while closeness to the upper limit signifies state socialism. If positioned nearer to the lower limit, the model may be termed "socialized capitalism" (prioritizing individual freedom). Although state socialism and classical capitalism differ in ideology and often stand in opposition (embodying equality versus individual freedom, planned versus market economy, state versus market regulation, closed versus open society, protectionism versus liberalization), they

share characteristics that are conducive to authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. Both models prove detrimental to national interests, fail to foster progressive development, and instead drive societal degradation (Pavlovsky, 2001a).

The crisis of 1932–1933 marked the waning of classical capitalism, subsequently mitigated by measures like F. Roosevelt's New Deal and Keynes' economic revolution in the United States. These initiatives aimed to enhance structured, purposeful state intervention in the economy, curbing market disorder, generating employment, and addressing social issues. This laid the groundwork for the mixed economy paradigm seen in developed countries. Similarly, state socialism exhausted its viability by the close of the twentieth century, culminating in the collapse of the socialist framework. Based on this analysis, M. Pavlovsky identifies three strategic pathways for societal development. Two involve a regressive course — reverting either to the state socialism of the early 20th century or the unfettered free market model of the 18th and 19th centuries. The third, evolutionary route entails aligning with developed nations through the adoption of a mixed economy model (Pavlovsky, 2001a). In essence, M. Pavlovsky underscores the necessity of an evolutionary trajectory for post-Soviet Ukrainian society, achievable through a *national strategy centered around cultivating a mixed economy in Ukraine.*

Academician V. Sirenko contends that the revitalization of Ukrainian society, averting further degradation and decline, hinges upon the establishment of a mixed economy model. He claimed that nearly two decades of reform experimentation have shown that Ukraine requires a synergy between state ownership in pivotal, revenue-generating, and foundational industries, alongside private initiative and ownership in service and support sectors of the national economy. The formula encapsulating this notion — a state stewardship of core means of production complemented by private enterprise in service, trade, light, food, and processing industries — not only charts a path to crisis resolution but also serves as Ukraine's salvation, guaranteeing its independence and aligning it more closely with Western developmental paradigms. He also pointed out, In contemporary times, state property holds a central position in the advanced nations, resulting in marked increments in national income. Take the United States, for instance, where state ownership expanded from 8% at the dawn of the twentieth century to 30% by its close, amounting to 1.5 trillion dollars. This influence has become a driving force propelling productive forces forward. It is through state ownership that the developed Western countries have the capacity to execute expansive education and healthcare initiatives, propel foundational science, explore realms such as space and the oceans, harness nuclear energy, overcome economic crises, and support agricultural production, among other accomplishments (Sirenko, 2009).

O. Soskin formulated the concept of people's capitalism due to Ukraine "facing a scenario that demands a qualitative transformation in the economic developmental model, necessitating significant changes in ownership structures and other institutional frameworks." He beliefs that to avert a deepening economic, financial, and societal crisis with potential severe ramifications for the economy and general well-being, Ukraine's economic approach must shift its orientation. This shift should move from incentivizing and financially bolstering large financial and industrial capital to fostering competition, optimizing the state's regulatory functions and its role in the national reproductive process, and invigorating small and medium-sized enterprises by all means possible. Essentially, this denotes a shift in Ukraine's economic developmental model — transitioning from the model of state monopoly, clan-oligarchic capitalism to the model of people's capitalism, which possesses genuine potential for more rapid and effective resolution of issues stemming from chronic state budget deficits and the rapid escalation of domestic and external debt. This shift aims to strike a balance between supply and demand, propel the growth of domestic capital markets, and steer the nation towards a trajectory of economic expansion (Soskin, 2010).

A. Filipenko (2010) outlined a vision of a *people's economy model* for Ukraine, which shares principles akin to the Scandinavian approach. This model advocates extensive citizen participation in all economic processes, commencing with genuine privatization and corporatization to serve the majority of society's interests (as opposed to a select group of oligarchs, as occurred in Ukraine). It also calls for citizen involvement in the management of enterprises and institutions across various ownership forms. To address the increasingly worrisome social situation, the model suggests limiting the concentration of property in the hands of a few individuals. This would counteract the phenomenon of latifundium in rural areas and curb the excessive concentration of industrial assets currently prevailing. In contrast to Ukraine, where citizen participation in enterprise management is

to possess more substantial capital and resources than the national bourgeoisie, thereby becoming a more potent national capitalist entity in service to the people. In contemporary circumstances, the concept of state socialized capitalism aligns more closely with this trajectory compared to the prevailing oligarchic approach (Tarasevych, 2011).

O. Kendyukhov (2009) puts forth the concept of establishing a post-industrial industrial economy in Ukraine. He argues that the modern state's fundamental purpose should be to ensure society's long-term well-being, which should determine its primary goal. Achieving sustained high competitiveness within the context of global competition is the key to ensuring the long-term well-being of Ukrainian society. In the foreseeable future, biotechnology, information and communication technologies, nanotechnology, new material creation, non-resource energy sources, transportation, and environmental technologies will underpin living standards and environmental safety. This trend will lead to intensified global competition for intellectual resources. Kendyukhov stresses that unless a post-industrial intellectual economy is established in Ukraine within the next 20–25 years, the nation could devolve into a territory accommodating hazardous industries reliant on cheap labor. The only viable course is to expedite the formation of a post-industrial intellectual economy in Ukraine by fostering the growth of intellectual capital and the development of intellectual labor as primary production factors. The impetus for this process should be initiated and actively driven by the state (Kendyukhov, 2009).

Sociologists N. Panina and Y. Golovakha have laid the groundwork for the **concept of a dual institutional system** as a methodological framework for studying social transformations within Ukrainian society through the lens of a civilizational (socio-cultural) approach. Their analysis substantiates the emergence of a dual institutional system in Ukraine during the latter half of the 1990s, a system that played a role in mitigating aggressive conflicts. This dual framework is characterized by two distinct elements. On one hand, the "backbone institutions" inherited from Soviet society, despite losing their legitimacy following perestroika and the dissolution of the USSR, retained their traditional legitimacy. This legitimacy stemmed from people's tacit approval of social norms rooted in the ideology of state paternalism, the retention of state ownership of major enterprises, socialist benefits for the populace and privileges for the ruling elite, as well as the steadfastness of the public sector in fields such

minimal or nonexistent, developed nations emphasize the role of trade unions in resolving both social and production-related concerns, effectively safeguarding workers' interests and engaging in corporate and firm governance. The modernization of Ukrainian society is closely linked to establishing a rational economy. This economy hinges on economic interest — the aspiration of entrepreneurs, shareholders, landowners, and capitalists alike to maximize profits. Landowners aim for fair rent, capitalists seek profitable returns on investment, and workers strive for wages that meet social needs (Filipenko, 2010).

Both the model of the people's economy and the model of people's capitalism advocate denationalizing the economy and rejecting oligarchic influences. The distinction between the two lies in their focus: O. Soskin's model prioritizes societal capitalization, while A. Filipenko's model emphasizes socialization.

V. Tarasevych (2011) advocates for the model of state socialized capitalism by emphasizing the need to align capitalization and socialization processes in Ukraine. Recognizing the demands placed on the young nation-state, Tarasevych underscores the necessity of strengthening it significantly. This empowerment would enable the state to steer a path of democratic liberal socialization within society and modernize the country in accordance with the national character and the majority of citizens' interests. The proposition is for the state

as education, healthcare, science, artistic culture, and the management of religious and interethnic relations.

On the other hand, the illicit (shadow) institutions prevalent in Soviet society, including the shadow market (entailing unauthorized production and speculative activities in times of scarcity), widespread corruption, organized crime, and a dual moral code (a disconnect between public and private ethical stances), underwent a transformation into ostensibly lawful elements of the "transitional society." However, these newly legitimized institutions struggled to achieve genuine legitimacy due to their widespread perception as "legalized lawlessness." This perception led to a general resistance to embracing these new institutions as the core institutional fabric of society. As a result, a sense of anomalous demoralization, mistrust, and discontent pervaded a significant portion of the Ukrainian populace. This ambivalence was a response to institutional formations lacking clear legal or moral foundations (Golovakha & Panina, 2006).

Despite the consistent emphasis by Ukrainian authorities on their alignment with Western ideology and aspirations for Western integration, the resulting "centaur state," characterized by a head turned toward the West but hampered from moving in that direction due to its "socialist hooves," emerged as a "transitional society." The status of the "transitional society" was becoming progressively less certain when viewed from the perspectives of both democracy and the market economy.

As this society evolved under the influence of multifaceted political and economic forces, it moved contrary to the initial expectations. The heightened nostalgia for a lost "social order" coincided with widespread disillusionment in the efficacy of democratic proclamations (Filipenko, 2010). The concept of a dual institutional system emerged as a tool to investigate various aspects of post-Soviet Ukrainian society, including the dynamics of value systems, the processes of group consolidation, and the identification of communities.

Distinguished Ukrainian theorists of socio-cultural development, S. Krymsky and Y. Pavlenko (2007), raised concerns about the deleterious impact of foreign influence on Ukrainian society. Ukraine's chosen trajectory, directed by the mandates of institutions like the IMF and other international entities — essentially Western — resulted in systemic degradation spanning all sectors of life, from industry and agriculture to healthcare, education, science, and culture. This degradation extended from sectors vital to societal functioning to areas encompassing biological and socio-cultural reproduction (Krymsky & Pavlenko, 2007).

Professor M. Lepskiy (2012) pioneered a significant field of scientific exploration in post-Soviet Ukrainian society by introducing the ***concept of social forecasting and the design*** of political, social, and eventually peacebuilding processes. The monograph "Strategic Forecasting of Political Situations and Processes" underscores the pressing need for a systematic conceptualization of strategic forecasting. The author underscores that as the theory of controlled chaos infiltrated the execution of strategic projects in various societies and the global community, there emerged a necessity for a scientific framework to conceptualize strategic forecasting in an environment characterized by openness, nonlinearity, imbalance, and uncertainty. In this context, researchers are compelled to enhance tools that organize and integrate forecasting methods and strategic management, especially in shaping the trajectory of political processes as they unfold into the future (Lepskiy, 2012).

The entirety of sociologist M. Shulga's scholarly work is dedicated to the exploration of social changes within Ukrainian society. His notable contributions include the formulation of the systemic crisis concept (elaborated extensively in the book "Drift on the sidelines: twenty years of social change in Ukraine") and the development of the social matrix concept as presented in the monograph "Glitch of the Social Matrix" (Shulga, 2011, 2018).

V. Skvorets (2019), in his endeavor to analyze social changes within post-Soviet Ukrainian society, formulated the concept of the transformation of Ukraine's socio-historical organism. This concept delves into the examination of social processes that impact the coherence of this organism.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, a concise overview of domestic concepts concerning social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society highlights several key points:

1. Ukrainian social scholars faced the continuous challenge of creating a comprehensive understanding of Ukrainian society, which underwent dynamic transformations due to swift and profound changes across all sectors.
2. The core concern across different concepts of social change was deciphering the trajectory that society was traversing.

3. A significant portion of scholars, primarily economists, regarded the economy as the primary driver.
4. Aligned with the civilizational approach, Ukrainian sociology has introduced the concepts of a dual institutional system and the socio-cultural development of humanity.
5. The escalation of crisis-related occurrences, the progression of decline and deterioration across various aspects of public existence, and the deepening of social disparities have provided the foundation for the formulation of theoretical frameworks such as the systemic crisis concept, the social forecasting and design concept, the social matrix concept, and the transformation of Ukraine's socio-historical organism concept.

In analyzing the primary concepts of social change in post-Soviet Ukrainian society, it becomes evident that Ukrainian scientists, while studying various aspects such as social phenomena, processes, contradictions, problems, threats, dangers, and challenges in post-Soviet Ukraine, have demonstrated a commitment to guiding Ukrainian society towards development and fortifying its integrity. They have provided the ruling class with scientifically grounded approaches and methods for the modernization of Ukraine, aiming to limit the impact of destructive factors.

The scientific concepts of social change developed by domestic scientists constitute a crucial intellectual resource essential for formulating an effective model of social governance in post-Soviet Ukrainian society. The future trajectory of research in the theory of social change lies in substantiating a model of social governance that aligns with the needs of Ukrainian society in the upcoming stage of its development — the transition from war to peace.

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THE IDENTITY

OF THE MODERN HUMAN AS A PROBLEM OF SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the problem of subjectivity and identity formation, the specifics of individual and collective identity research. It is noted that the study of subjectivity, "I" (self), which is the source of the formation of individual identity, actualizes the study of this problem in many social and humanitarian sciences. It has been established that in a broad interdisciplinary context, it is a search for an effective methodological toolkit for determining the dynamic matrix of subjectivity, which is constantly changing in the modern globalized society. In the context of the study of the phenomenon of subjectivity and identity, the socio-psychological theory — the theory of traits, the theory of roles and the humanistic theory — is briefly considered. It was found that all these theories cannot adequately investigate the subject's identity, the possibility of using E. Erikson's identity theory and the direction of social constructionism, where human subjectivity is constructed here and now in relations with other people using speech practices of discourse, was analyzed. It was determined that the discourse in the understanding of social constructionists is a kind of material basis of the practices of social construction of reality, thanks to which the "I"-construction of subjectivity is constructed.

Keywords

subject, subjectivity, identity, "I" (self), (self) identification, "self"-construction, discourse, discursive practices

INTRODUCTION

This article delves into the intricate terrain of understanding the human condition within the contemporary globalized world, aiming to assess the potential for substantial anthropological shifts and transformations. This topic is undeniably complex and interdisciplinary in nature (Cover, 2016; Delaney, 2016; Grimalda et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2022; Von Sivers et al., 2014). The focal point of interest lies in exploring the modern dimensions of the concept of "subjectivity" as a determinant of human identity in the realm of social and humanistic inquiries, particularly within the sphere of philosophical exploration. Given a wide range of modern human science topics, this issue is relevant for discussion (Cover, 2021; see also Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Rašković, 2020; Thulien et al., 2019; Udall et al., 2020).

In the backdrop of modern society, characterized by a culture of excessive consumption, a profusion of artificial subjectivities has flourished, often detached, either partially or entirely, from their biological underpinnings. This encompasses an array of diverse individuals marked by distinct sexual identities, including artificially constructed identities such as male and female homosexuals, BDSM practitioners, transvestites, transsexuals, bisexuals, and anti-sexuals, among others. The proliferation of these identities is marked by the rallying cry to "be oneself," to unearth one's identity, and to seek moments of personal happiness. This transformation has been facilitated by the infusion of neoliberal identity politics into Western society, a phenomenon that gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s and has since permeated various levels of state and societal existence in the capitalist realm (MacLeavy, 2020; see also Abildgaard & Jørgensen, 2021; Apostolopoulou et al., 2021; Moralès et al., 2014; Sikka, 2015). The ideology of neoliberalism today is given a lot of attention by various scholars and experts (Bettache et al., 2020; Eskin & Baydar, 2022; Grossi & Pianezzi, 2017; Saltman, 2023; Sweet, 2018). This brand

of identity politics is accompanied by persuasive discourse surrounding human rights, personal freedom — encompassing self-determination, self-expression, and autonomous existence — yet, simultaneously, it erodes traditional family models and deeply ingrained ways of life. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that scholarly investigations into post- and transhumanism theories, queer theory, and projections concerning the future human condition as a precursor to the emergence of a novel anthropological type have proliferated (Ferrando, 2019).

ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH

This unfolding scenario has captured the attention of notable contemporary philosophers, among them A. Badiou (2022), S. Žižek (2022), G. Agamben (2002, 2021), and others, who find themselves deeply concerned. During the closing chapters of the 20th century, the prescient Italian philosopher foresaw the ascendancy of an enigmatic anthropological archetype, Homo Sacer, in our contemporary society — a prediction that continues to manifest today (Agamben, 2021). Echoing this sentiment, the distinguished Swiss-German philosopher P. Bieri (2017) embarks on an exploration of the multifaceted nature of human dignity as a defining trait of subjectivity. He points out that we must contemplate the essence of being a subject. What attributes lend us the sense of being subjects — distinct from objects, things, or mere bodies? This query delves into the characteristics that Bieri postulates constitute the bedrock of "inner identity" (Bieri, 2017).

Moreover, it's worth noting that the intensified scrutiny of the state of subjective identity, coupled with its practical assimilation into quasi-collective

forms of identity meticulously imposed by structures of power, has incited the attention of other distinguished luminaries within the humanities, transcending geographical bounds. Take for instance the Italian philosopher Franco Berardi (2009), who observes the emergence of a novel human type over the past two decades — one relentlessly driven by the calculus of maximizing personal gain. Berardi (2009) contends that we find ourselves confronting a perilous mutation, inflicting irrevocable harm upon life, culture, and social cohesion. In a parallel vein, the recent work of prominent American sociologist and psychologist S. Zuboff (2019) accentuates apprehension regarding the present state of subjectivity formation, witnessing an alarming slide into rudimentary forms of behaviorism. The author conducts an examination of A. Pentland's seminal work "Social Physics," wherein a notable connection is drawn to his predecessor, the renowned B. Skinner (1971). Pentland (2014) advocates a form of subjectivity that erases autonomy, the inner essence, the homunculus, and the very spirit that traditionally animates an individual — a spirit championed by literature upholding principles of freedom and dignity. However, the contemporary landscape presents a stark contrast, as we now find ourselves living "under the dominion of the social environment" (Zuboff, 2019).

The contemporary state of Western society, and its influence upon the recalibration of subjectivity, finds detailed exploration in the oeuvre of the German philosopher of Korean heritage, Byung-Chul Han (2015), notably in his succinct yet profoundly insightful work "The Burnout Society." Similarly, the Argentine philosopher and writer Jorge Alemán (2023) offers a critical analysis of neoliberal ideology from the vantage of contemporary psychoanalysis in his work "Lacan and Capitalist Discourse: Neoliberalism and Ideology," uncovering how this ideology molds a novel breed of modern individuals and their artificial identities. This research theme is also embraced by the renowned contemporary Brazilian researcher Maria Rita Kehl (2018) in her work "Time and the Dog: Society and Depression," along with numerous researchers from various fields of socio-humanistic knowledge, spanning diverse directions of social and humanitarian cognition.

METHODS

The examination of the (self-)identification process, viewed from the perspective of the "I" (self), has

become a focal point in contemporary social and human sciences. This issue has gained interdisciplinary significance (Albarello et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2023; Knight & Saxby, 2014; Wang & Tucker, 2021; Woźniak, 2018). Employing an effective methodological toolkit is essential to elucidate various aspects of this complex problem and advance further research (Gill, 2020; Widdicombe & Da Silva Marinho, 2021). One of the primary factors influencing the identity of a social subject is the diverse speech or discursive practices employed by the subject, shaping their discursive identity. The research methodology, aligning with the exploration of discursive identity, is inherently complex. It amalgamates constructivism as a general method for constructing constructs, social constructionism for the subject's construction of social reality and their own "I" within discursive practices. This methodology relies on the constant utilization of methods such as comparative, phenomenological, interpretative, and lexical-linguistic methods in constructing lexical expressions of one's own "I" (self).

Purpose. The study aims to develop an optimal strategy for researching the interdisciplinary socio-humanitarian problem of identity. Specifically, the focus is on formulating a concept that explores the mechanism and primary factors influencing the formation of subjective identity. This represents the overarching goal of the study.

Results. Upon examining the problem, it was discerned that the foundation of discursive identity construction lies in the continual subjectivation of an individual across various discursive practices. These practices are delineated into distinct statements made by the subject within the realm of their speech. The study unveiled the antinomian nature of discursive practices in shaping identity. Consequently, a balanced concept of identity rooted in the subject's "I" (self) was constructed, drawing from social constructionism, M. Foucault's discourse theory and microphysics of power, Ten van Dijk's discourse of power, and P. Ricoeur's dual identity concept (Foucault, 2002, 1990; Ricoeur, 1996, Van Dijk, 2008). Simultaneously, identified were problematic aspects necessitating further interdisciplinary socio-humanitarian research into the broader realm of collective identity. This expansion aims to delve into the foundational aspect of the subject's identity at large.

Therefore, a crucial avenue for further exploration in understanding the problem of the subject's identity within the discursive space inherent in each socio-humanitarian perspective involves delving into the mechanism of transitioning from the "I" (self) and the internal sociality of the subject to the mastery and appropriation of its position in the external social space. Conversely, the study would also encompass the movement from the position in external social reality to the processes of interiorization, enculturation, and socialization. These processes collectively determine the intricate processes of (self-)identification for the subject. The reciprocal processes of subjectivization in both directions contribute significantly to the construction of the subject's discursive identity.

DISCUSSION

Consequently, across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (with certain existentialist and postmodernist perspectives forming exceptions), the prevailing approach to shaping subjectivity has been through sociocultural means. In essence, society molds the contours of individual subjectivity, defining the scope of the subject's identity. This leads to an intriguing inquiry: to what extent can individuals achieve freedom and autonomy within contemporary society, consciously crafting their genuine "self"- a debatable notion in today's interconnected world-and gradually self-actualizing without infringing upon established social, legal, and particularly ethical norms?

As an illustrative case, consider the domain of social psychology. Throughout much of the twentieth century, three distinct paradigms regarding the "I" (self) as the bedrock of subjectivity took precedence:

1. The trait theory. Advanced by H. Eysenck (1947) and R. Cattell (1950).
2. The role theory. J. Herbert Mead (1934), C. Cooley (1902), L. Festinger (1957), and E. Goffman (1956).
3. The humanistic theory. Espoused by F. Perls (1969), A. Maslow (1954), and C. Rogers (1961).

Each of these psychological theories of the "self" asserted its exclusive relevance, whether rooted in profound phenomenological insights into human nature (humanistic theory), supported by robust psychometric research (trait theory), or constructed as a highly rational analytical framework within the social sciences (role theory). Regardless of the specific approach — whether driven by phenomenological introspection or meticulous collection and analysis of extensive empirical data — all these
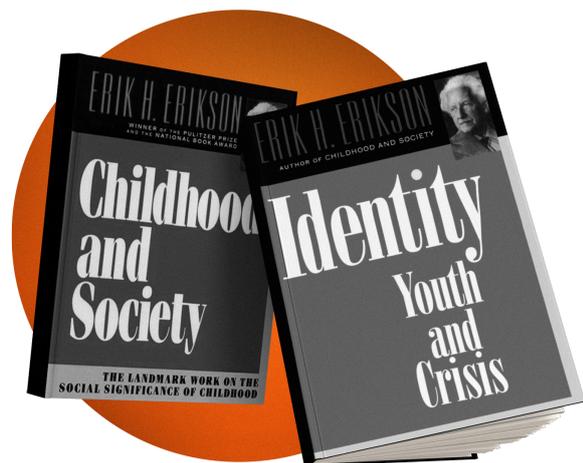
theories share a common theoretical stance, aiming for a systematic, incremental exploration and accrual of new, cumulative knowledge about humanity and its inner "I". The ultimate objective is to unravel the authentic nature of the "I," the subject, irrespective of the method employed. These theories continue to wield significant influence across the psychological scientific community, higher education, and beyond. Psychometric tests and questionnaires derived from these theories remain widely employed tools for investigating human psychology in various domains, including social, communication, and other branches of psychology.

Hence, a pertinent inquiry emerges: Do these theories align with the trajectory of modern society's evolution, which undoubtedly triggers substantial shifts in subjectivity, along with a transformation in the methodologies of comprehending humanity across the broader spectrum of social sciences and humanities? If we presuppose the ascendancy of societal shaping of subjectivity and the subject's identity, does the individual retain the agency to autonomously impact and reshape their identity at certain junctures? Moreover, how do the aforementioned psychological theories address this query? In the realm of psychological traits theory, the subject is viewed as an amalgamation of personal traits that collectively contribute to an imagined, dispositional identity. However, how does this theory reconcile with the findings of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1974), who posits that individuals undergo identity crises at various life stages? Similarly, within the context of role theory, how can it be postulated that these roles represent genuine, divergent identities often at odds with each other, as opposed to mere social facades adopted to conform to societal norms?

Erik Erikson's research, as a foundational contributor to the concept of individual identity, is no-

tably encapsulated in his renowned works "Identity: Youth and Crisis" and "Childhood and Society" (Erikson, 1950, 1974). These seminal works propose a perspective wherein human identity remains perpetually engaged in psychosexual, psychosocial, and psychohistorical development throughout an individual's lifespan, steadfastly oriented toward the future. Central to Erikson's theory is the notion of "development" within a personality, enabling the traversing of the various identity crises that individuals commonly encounter, particularly during adolescence. Addressing the question of how one perceives their own identity, Erikson (1974) posits that it surfaces as a subjective sense of inspiring integrity and uninterrupted continuity. Continuity, integrity, and development emerge as pivotal tenets in Erik Erikson's theory of individual identity. Therefore, when posed with the question of "what the condition of a person's well-being should entail, and how one experiences their identity upon recognizing the definite existence of it," Erikson (1974) answered that it presents itself as a subjective sensation of an inspiring integrity and an uninterrupted continuum (pp. 17–19). Continuity, integrity, and development stand as the principal tenets within Erik Erikson's theory of individual identity. Yet, a pertinent query emerges: Does this forward-looking theory concerning the shaping of the individual "self" and its identity adequately address the contemporary challenges we face?

Hence, it becomes imperative to illuminate an alternative approach to examining the issue of "self" formation, introduced in the 1980s by social constructivists, including K. Gergen (1944), R. Harré (1984), and J. Shotter (1993). This avenue of inquiry gave rise to discursive psychology by J. Potter and M. Wetherell (1987), narrative psychology by R. Sarbin (1986), and the dialogical "self" theory by H. Hermans (2001). Notably, this realm thrives on interdisciplinary collaboration. Apart from drawing from postmodernism and poststructuralism, advocates of social constructionism incorporate elements from narratology, hermeneutics, the philosophy of dialogue, the theory of speech acts, and literary studies. A distinguishing hallmark of this paradigm within social and humanistic cognition is the acknowledgment of discourse's primary role and interpersonal relationships in shaping the world and one's own sense of "self." This perspective entails moving beyond the quest for the essential nature of the "self" or identity, established norms of human attributes and behavior, and the absolutization of differentiating mental states and processes.

Put differently, individuals must consistently harness various discursive practices and narratives to proficiently articulate their sense of self ("I"), and engage in the process of self-experience. This entails employing a diverse range of means for self-expression, self-presentation, and the ability to present oneself to others, thus perpetuating a sustained level of subjective identity (Gergen, 1994).

As J. Potter and M. Wetherell (1987) emphasize, the "self" is verbalized within discourse in a manner that optimizes the grounds for one's voice to be acknowledged. Expounding further by drawing upon R. Harre's insights, they assert that the core objective of this transformative movement is to shift attention from the 'I' as a fixed entity to the mechanisms that construct the "self". In essence, the inquiry revolves not around the inherent nature of the self, but rather around how we discourse about the self. There is no single "self" awaiting recognition, but rather an array of 'I's' that manifest through diverse linguistic practices" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This underscores

the continuous construction of "self"-constructs. Furthermore, discourse and its practices do not merely depict social reality; rather, they construct it afresh within each context.

In the lens of social constructionism, human subjectivity takes shape in the present moment through interactions with others, facilitated by language practices, discourse, and narrative. Distinct perceptions of the world are intricately tied to intra-group consensus within various communities (ethnic, professional, scientific, religious) regarding existence and value. Inadvertently, subjective identity emerges, often unconsciously, driven by social objectives. In the realm of social constructionism, the creation of diverse and fluid "self"-constructs is guided by a spectrum of rhetorical devices, including metaphors, analogies, allegories, personifications, and metonymies. Yet, despite the dissolution of an intrinsic "self" within the "I," it becomes challenging to dismiss the profound symbolic facet of subjectivity. This feature surfaces

not solely in discourse-based "self" construction but is profoundly shaped by a myriad of discursive forms of identity. Within these, the "self" might even dissolve entirely, becoming a mere façade or simulation. Summarizing the foregoing, discourse, as perceived by social constructionists, serves as a tangible foundation for the construction of reality. Its underlying motif aligns with the idea championed by the French philosopher J. Derrida, "Everything is a discourse." This notion has significantly influenced the development of these particular strands of American social and humanistic thought during the 1970s and 1980s.

Undoubtedly, social constructionism focuses on taking into account such a crucial component of discourse as the preconditions for the formation of subjectivity and identity and as its power characteristic, and the latter is completely set by the ideological guidelines of neoliberalism and is tightly controlled by modern power structures at all levels, from global to state and local, institutional and entrepreneurial ones.

By the way, the construction of one of the varieties of the "self" in the discourse simultaneously constructs a certain type of dependence, sometimes rigid and undeniable. This is the so-called power characteristic of discourse, and it is already fully within the presumption of power. Discourse as a special speech practice also has a kind of "internal" power over subjects due to the inherent human need for self-determination and self-naming as components of identity and, thus, marking one's place or position in the fields of social reality. The power characteristic of discourse or discursive practice a priori implies the continuous, sometimes hidden, at the level of the unconscious, imposition of domination, manipulation, and subordination to the social group or its nominal representative on the subjects of relations, which define the individual's identity.

A well-known representative of critical discourse analysis (CDA), Teun van Dijk (2009), in one of his works notes that to dominate today means to have not so much an apparatus of coercion as the ability to determine (describe, explain, predict, construct) the current situation in society, formulating criteria of objectivity, impartiality, authority, truthfulness, and veracity.

This viewpoint is indeed contentious due to its limited pertinence, primarily within a narrow circle of humanities scholars. Notably, these scholars are often entrenched in widely accepted conceptual norms. This perspective remains largely unacknowledged among ordinary citizens, who are guided to varying degrees by ideological notions throughout their daily lives. This stance bears resemblance to the notion of subjectification — an idea introduced by the French philosopher L. Althusser (2001) in the last century. According to Althusser's proposition, dominant ideologies (whether they are neoliberal, conservative, nationalist, communist, or of another orientation) and the state and public institutions implementing these ideologies wield a process of ideological interpellation to mold individuals into ideological subjects. This process imparts upon the individual a distinct sense of responsibility that reflects their collective identity, often eliciting feelings of guilt or shame (Althusser, 2001).

However, Althusser's concept of subjectification no longer comprehensively addresses the challenges posed by modernity and the consumer society, with its proliferation of notions concerning free choice and autonomy in various forms. In this landscape, the dictum "do whatever you want" has become a guiding principle. M. Foucault's concept of the microphysics of power holds greater relevance today. It profoundly extends our grasp of the inherently powerful nature of discourse. According to Foucault's viewpoint, individuals, invariably enmeshed within discursive practices, unknowingly succumb to invisible forms of coercion (Foucault, 2002). This coercion effectively imposes a specific identity upon them, contingent on the place or role they occupy, expressed as: The speaker's identity is less significant than their positional context (Foucault, 2002). Hence, discourse and its domains encompass an array of identification frameworks, dispersed in alignment with social standings within the discourse's realm. These matrices of identity are recognized by individuals through distinct markers of social positioning.

To affirm the importance of dispositivity as an outcome of the power characteristic of discourse, it is logical to perceive it as an ontological element of power. This perspective draws from the insights of M. Foucault, who famously interprets the Nietzschean notion of power. According to Nietzsche, authority, characterized as the will to power, is neither an entity possessed by anyone nor a manifestation of domination; rather, it primarily signifies the interrelation of force with force. Elaborating on Nietzsche's interpretation, J. Deleuze (1983) asserts that the essence of force lies in its relational nature — for the essence of force is that force relates to others; it is this force that acquires essence and quality.

Much like F. Nietzsche, M. Foucault (1990) conceives power as a subtle essence pervasive in

all social relations, permeating "the very thickness and into all the pores" of society. M. Foucault (1990) identifies the origin of power, alongside subjectification and self-identification, in the confluence of mechanisms and focal points that shape the "microphysics of power" on the microsocial level of discursive practices. Consequently, M. Foucault's concepts of discipline, disciplinary society, and disciplinary spaces find relevance in discussions centered around contemporary forms of subjectivation, where the prominence of disciplinary spaces diminishes. "It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them" (Foucault, 1990, p. 90). Thus, subjectification, embodying the subject's reflection upon themselves through self-identification, entails that the subject's engagement with external forces that influence them gives rise to an internal self-relationship, shaping their identity. In this light, the subject emerges as the "effect" of external forces mirrored internally, representing the force's relation to itself. In essence, the subject aligns with the microphysics of power operating upon itself — power transmuted into an internal regulatory principle that underpins the subject's ontology through manifold dispositions within discourse and its practices. It can be contended that this portrayal of subjectivity within discourse resonates closely with the contemporary notion of collective identity.

Addressing the shift from the Cartesian individual subject's desubjectification, epitomized by the phrase "I think, therefore I am," to the contemporary discursive principle of collective subjectivity, encapsulated in "I exist because I make others talk about me," the eminent Armenian philosopher Karen Swassjan (2005) underscores:

"The personal is always just an unfortunate fragment in the unanswered (like a corpse) vastness of the linguistic continuum." It can be considered a requiem for individual identity, as it no longer exists in its pure form. Renowned Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2002) highlighted this aspect in his work. Through a careful examination of the tragic experiences of Auschwitz prisoners and drawing on the research of French linguist E. Benveniste (1971), particularly in his collection of articles titled "Problems in general linguistics", Agamben arrived at the paradoxical conclusion that language and actual discourse are entirely detached from each other in reality. There is no transition or connection between them; a gap exists between language and discourse statements. However, to make language its own, the subject employs special signs known as shifters or deixis. These are indicative symbols lacking a signifier, denotation, or referent. Notable examples of these indicative symbols include adverbs like "here," "now," "there," and pronouns such as "that," "this," "you," "he," and most significantly, "I."

The subject can only appropriate the "I" in an utterance, in the moment of live speech. However, as highlighted by J. Agamben (2002), another paradox emerges: when the subject masters the formal apparatus of utterances, and there is seemingly

no transition from language to discourse itself according to the first paradox, the use of "I," "you," "this," "that," "now," "here," and other indicative symbols in speech results in the subject being "deprived of any referential reality and can be defined only through pure and empty correlation with the given speech act." According to Agamben's study, the subject of an utterance becomes fully immersed in discourse, constituting entirely from it, yet paradoxically, unable to express anything within it, unable to speak. This leads to the realization that it is not the subject himself who speaks, but rather the discourse speaking through him. Consequently, the question arises: what kind of subjectivity and discursive identity can be discussed in this context?

In light of this standpoint, a specific issue comes to the forefront, warranting dedicated research attention — how do external societal and material factors and conditions translate into an individual's inner realm, shaping the process of subjectification and identity formation? A notable point is that these processes of internalization, inculturation, and socialization, encompassing language structures, inherently unfold without the individual's conscious guidance or control. This echoes the observations of T. A. van Dijk (2008), previously mentioned, who emphasizes that we will not understand how social situations or social structures invade text and language unless we understand how people interpret and represent these social conditions within specific mental models — contextual models. The same is true for the 'effects' of discourse that influence people — effects that must be described in terms of mental representations (Van Dijk, 2008).

This complex predicament centers on deciphering the mechanisms that facilitate the conversion of external elements into internal processes, the implementation of the identification process, and the relevance of contemporary notions of identity. In our viewpoint, the theory of double structuring, advocated by sociologist P. Bourdieu and epitomized by his concept of habitus, appears inadequate in today's context. P. Bourdieu (1990) outlines habitus as an acquired system of ingrained patterns that enables the unrestricted generation of thoughts, perceptions, and actions within the confines inherent to the specific conditions that produced the habitus. This leads to a dialectical fusion of external and internal identification, allowing external influences to be actualized in accordance with the distinct logic of the organisms they become integrated into — sustainably, systematically, and devoid of mechanization (Bourdieu,

1990). According to the French sociologist, habitus is designed to furnish diverse responses to varied situations encountered by individuals, grounded in a constrained collection of existing a priori templates for action and thought. Thus, the internal mirrors the external and vice versa, resulting in complete transparency.

The habitus is not only reproduced in familiar situations but also demonstrates the ability for subjective innovation when confronted with unfamiliar situations. This adaptability arises from the habitus combining a variety of social experiences in a specific manner.

P. Corcuff (1999), a follower of the French sociologist, delved into this aspect of discursive identification. He identified, at the core of the subject's self-identification, not only a relatively constant identity represented by the "I" (self), addressing the question "what am I?" but also an identity that answers the question "who am I?"—a dynamic process of becoming or subjectivation. This framework suggests that the subject is continuously engaged in an endless process of identification within the context of their life.

However, these theories both extend the domain of subjectivity research and complicate the comprehension of the identity phenomenon. On one hand, societal constructs of identity are imposed by society, encompassing its manifold communities, ideologies, governmental institutions, mass media, computerized potential of social networks, and advertising prevalence, among others. On the other hand, individuals, to some degree, endeavor to seek their own identity voluntarily. Yet, this identity is constructed through discursive practices, causing it to no longer be exclusively owned by the individual. The origin now rests within social or collective identity. The paramount query herein is to elucidate the very question previously mentioned: to what extent can an individual shape their identity, and where can this influence materialize? In this context, it's noteworthy that towards the conclusion of the preceding century, the renowned French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1996), in his work "Oneself as Another," advocated a dual-level approach to individual identity: one as bodily identity (Latin idem), signifying the individual level as a substance and entity, and the other as the mental self of the individual (Latin ipse). This framework amalgamates within the concept of "identity" a fusion of certain constancy and the ongoing alteration it undergoes, whether immediate or enduring. Additionally, the "I" or the subject's "self", in turn, determines the characteristics of identity that remain unwavering over

time, encompassing traits, behavioral archetypes, distinctive habits, preferences, tastes, and more. There are those facets that are malleable, even programmable through diverse methods. This implies, and permits, the construction of identity on the level of mental constructs throughout the process of individual and collective identification. According to P. Ricoeur, this underpins a subject's capability to associate with diverse collectives or communities based on values, norms, ideals, recognized social models, or ideal human figures. It's pertinent to acknowledge that during the early 1990s, the establishment of collective identity emerged as a predominant focus in political science, anthropology, and sociology, wherein the contrast between identity (largely understood as collective) and the "I" (self) became increasingly pronounced. The French philosopher's primary concern lies in the (self-)identification process of the subject — an integral prerequisite for subsequent integration into comprehensive communities marked by varying content and potential influences through collective identities (Ricoeur, 1996).

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the preceding discourse, it's crucial to acknowledge that the discussion not only revolves around the discursive aspect of the subject's identity as its primary contemporary feature but also encompasses the assimilation of individual identity into diverse collective identities. These collective identities endeavor to reshape individuals towards specific directions through the widespread influence of mass media, modern social networks, and comprehensive state structures. Individuals must resist these forces to align with their unique individual identities.

Consequently, the force attribute of discourse or discursive practice inherently entails the continuous, occasionally concealed, and unconscious imposition of domination, manipulation, and subordination by the social group or its nominal representative. This imposition shapes the subject's identity. The notion of power or the power characteristic of discourse and discursive practices is contextualized within M. Foucault's microphysics of power, L. Althusser's ideological subjectivity, and Teun van Dijk's discourse of power (Althusser, 2001; Foucault, 2002, 1990; Van Dijk, 2008). Within the realm of identity formation, P. Bourdieu's concept of habitus and P. Ricoeur's dual identity proposition are examined (Bourdieu, 1990; Ricoeur, 1996). It becomes evident that these individual theories and concepts fall short of comprehensively elucidating the intricate phenomenon of identity. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach is required, one that integrates modern developments in theoretical psychoanalysis and other social and humanitarian fields dedicated to exploring the multifaceted nature of identity.

The succinct analysis underscores the complexities entailed in studying identity within the contours of contemporary social and humanitarian knowledge, which is gradually being transformed into the study of collective identity, which is now becoming a decisive factor in considering the problem of identity. Future investigations will necessitate delving into the psychoanalytic theory of identity, particularly the evolution of modern theoretical psychoanalysis, as expounded by figures such as H. Alemán (2023), S. Žižek (2022), M. Dolar (2020), S. Benvenuto (2018), L. Chiesa (2016), R. Salecl (2022), M. R. Kehl (2018), and other scholars advancing S. Freud's theory of identity, contemporized by J. Lacan (1970). However, this theory of identity should be synergized with theories from other social and humanitarian domains dedicated to the exploration of identity. It is paramount to adopt the perspective that a novel interdisciplinary approach is indispensable for comprehending modern subjectivity, its myriad forms, and the diverse manifestations of identity.

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HOMBRE, CLARO...:

A REFLECTION ON NARCISSISM IN SPANISH CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Cultural Narcissism is a phenomenon that has been prevalent in Spain for centuries, and it has been reflected in the country's literature and film. This narcissism is often characterized by an excessive focus on one's culture, traditions, and a way of life based on elevating the motherland above all. As it would for an individual, this cultural psychological condition leads to a lack of clarity, a tendency to lie and exaggerate in social communication, a sense of superiority in the value system, and the idealization of certain cultural figures. One of these most prominent figures in Spain is the "sacrificial mother" largely inspired by the Holy Virgin, who is often idolized and placed on a pedestal in literature and film. In the works of famous Spanish authors such as Miguel de Cervantes and Federico García Lorca, the mother figure is often portrayed as a symbol of life, safety, and comfort, but also the very source of all narcissistic behaviors. They are the embodiment of Spanish culture, and their roles as mothers are celebrated and revered. Spanish film has also reflected this idealization of the mother figure often assimilated with the motherland. In films such as *All About My Mother* by Pedro Almodóvar, the mother is the central figure, and her role as the nurturer and protector is highlighted.

Keywords

INTRODUCTION

One of the most notable examples of cultural narcissism in Spain is the country's controversial attitude toward its history: internal wars, religious tortures, massive colonization and genocide, ethnic and religious cleansings, fascist dictatorships, intellectual persecutions and diasporas, perverse political strategies between its different regions, inbreeding in its dynasties, and a strong tendency for covering up its deeds with secrets and lies, have all ostracized the Spanish culture from developing alongside neighboring mindsets. The country's self-glorification of its historical past has resulted in a narrow perspective of Spanish culture that dismisses the experiences and perspectives of other cultures and peoples. Often ashamed of its cultural gaps in science and philosophy with the rest of the continent, the uniformity of its universities and the impotence of its institutions, the culture in-the-making has continued to exhibit in the last half century a Baroque taste for continuous festivities, carnivalesque popular confusions and fireworks of false hopes. In modernity, it also claimed it was *different* to attract visitors, but never cared to precise from where the difference came from… It constructed an identity that projected joy, diversity, freedom, inviting open minds, sensuality and sexual inspirations, competitivity and innovative industries. It became grandiose again through secrets and lies, transfers of responsibility unto its neighbors, and would rather compromise its existence than its reputation.

The culture kept on repeating the same pathological cycles of a condition that has been more contagious than any other diseases in the past fifty years: Narcissist Personality Disorder. The only difference is that it affected the culture at large and not only individuals. Cultural narcissism refers to the excessive admiration and love for one's own culture and traditions. It can lead to a lack of interest or appreciation for other cultures, as well as a tendency to view one's own culture as superior (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; see also Bertin et al., 2022). In Spain, cultural narcissism has been observed in various aspects of society, including politics and the arts. Narcissism became slowly but surely part of the Spanish cultural make-up. This essay will seek to offer a reflection on cultural narcissism in Spain and its effects on society.

One question remains before we can proceed, however: can cultures be suffering from the same pathologies than the ones Western Psychology has identified and defined for the individual? Also, if we do accept to look at cultural pathologies the same way we look at them for individuals, what should be our research methodology around the identification of patterns in a culture?

METHODOLOGY

The research on Spanish cultural narcissism and its correlation with territorial identity and irrational reverence to the mother figure employs a mixed-methods approach informed by Heinle's Cultural Psychology principles (Heine, 2019). The methodology is designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative data in contemporary cultural products (novels and films) in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions between cultural beliefs, identity, and psychological attitudes.

The research will employ qualitative methods to gather rich, contextual data on the cultural beliefs and practices surrounding Spanish identity, the mother figure, and narcissistic attitudes. These methods are grounded in the principles of cultural psychology, which emphasize the importance of understanding behavior within its cultural and historical context. They measure and analyze the prevalence and intensity of narcissistic attitudes, territorial identity, and reverence to the mother figure within the Spanish population. These methods will provide evidence of the relationships between these variables, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends within the data.

Furthermore, the research will incorporate cross-cultural comparisons to provide additional insight into the unique aspects of Spanish cultural narcissism and its relationship with territorial identity and reverence to the mother figure.

Overall, the methodology employed in this research is designed to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between cultural beliefs, identity, and psychological attitudes within the Spanish context. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods informed by cultural psychology principles, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Spanish cultural narcissism and its underlying psychological and cultural dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Let me open this discussion about contemporary Spanish culture with a disclaimer, before we get any further in this proposed discussion about a cultural pathological pattern I have been seeking to identify. Narcissism lays at the base of dozens of other cultures and what can be identified in Spanish culture is a much bigger monster elsewhere (Li & Benson, 2022; see also Fatfouta et al., 2021; Jauk et al., 2021). The pathology is global and can be observed in most cultures that have accumulated and suffered traumatic episodes in their history. Defense mechanisms to trauma include the narcissistic machine in their different responses. This chain of reactions connected to the pathology can be as cultural as individual, and the two realms can feed on one another. One place to take the temperature and look for symptoms of narcissism in a culture beyond its representation of its history is in its arts and letters. Spanish art, music, and literature are often seen as some of the most prominent and influential in the world, with large international followings. While there is no denying the contributions of Spanish cultural heritage to the world, such as the paintings of Goya or the works of Miguel de Cervantes, there is a clear tendency in Spain to prioritize these contributions over the creative work of other cultures. This cultural narcissism has led to a lack of diversity and representation in Spanish art. For instance, in Spanish literature, there is often a lack of representation of authors from diverse backgrounds. In film, Spanish-language movies tend to be overly melodramatic, with a heavy focus on love triangles, family dramas, and other clichés, giving little attention to

stories of underrepresented cultures or marginalized identities.

Simultaneously, today's Spanish culture has enough historical distance to contemplate the shallowness of its own past superlatives, such as the *world's greatest empire* it once was under Charles V and his son Philip II. Rather than Grandiose, the narcissism Spain's culture might shelter in the present day is more of a covert nature. Covert Narcissism is very hard to detect at first in the individuals who are affected by this pathology, as they expose a rather open-minded, liberal, educated and charming personality to seduce the empathic victims they will end up using as narcissistic supply. It is also typical of individuals who have experience a downgrading of status, generally through traumatic transitions in their history. It might be the cluster in which we find Spain and the particularities of its cultural pathologies. It is noteworthy that a broad range of research is dedicated to the topic of narcissism (Bocian et al., 2021; Choi & Kweon, 2023; MacDonald & Schermer, 2023; Rogoza et al., 2023; Sedikides & Hart, 2022; Šram & Dulić, 2015; Zeigler-Hill & Dehaghi, 2023).

Talking about cultural narcissism — and displacing a psychological condition unto a group of people, anywhere from a family to a nation — is not an endeavor to be taken lightly. What psychology has identified as *conditions*, since its confirmation as a discipline by Freud in the early twentieth century, have been strictly restricted to the realm of the individual. Cultural psychology is yet to affirm itself as a recognized and respected field of study. As Steven J. Heine (2019) sums up:

> [c]ultural psychology, as a field, is still a relatively new discipline, and it continues to produce striking evidence that challenges psychologists' understanding of human nature. In contrast to much conventional wisdom, this field has been revealing that culture shapes how people's minds operate — sometimes in profound ways. The past couple of decades have been an exciting time, as an abundance of research continues to demonstrate that culture is not just a thin veneer covering the universal human mind. Rather, this research has shown just how deeply cultural influences penetrate our psychology and shape the ways we think. The research underscores how human thoughts occur within cultural contexts, and shows that different cultural contexts can lead to fundamentally different ways of thinking. (p. XX).

My personal interest for digging deeper in the psychological condition of a particular culture of which I am not officially a member comes from my experience in attempting to become one and the challenges I was not able to overcome as product of other cultural psychological parameters and conditions. Trans-culturalism is not always a successful process. But it is still a realization of one's capacities and will to engage with another culture's psychology without it being familiar at first. And as in any individual or culture, psychology teaches us there is a surface and then a larger part of the floating iceberg underneath that line which separates the visible from the invisible.

Yet, over the years, a series of questions has arisen through the works of a variety of scholars and my own around the possibility of a deeply enrooted covert narcissism at the core of Spain's supposedly transformed and modernized culture in the 21st century. Any foreigner who has a sufficient exposure to the unifying culture of the Kingdom, although it constantly stresses its regional cultural differences to cover it, has come to be aware of many points of double morality and contradictory behaviors that make the old Francoist touristic propaganda of "Spain is different" or the holy trinity of *siesta, fiesta, paella* be questioned very seriously. What often lays below this image of overly enthusiastic land of leisure, recreation and delightful sensorial and culinary experiences can turn out to be an extremely disenchanting realization that it covers up depressive tendencies, physical exhaustion from unregulated work conditions, and very unhealthy and/or risky practices ranging from drug consumption to sex addiction. Indeed, deceitful and disenchanting is the moment of realization once the iceberg becomes total.

Since the Baroque period, Spanish culture has reflected on the art of *engaño* (deceit) and its hardly translatable counterpart, el *desengaño* (disenchantment). In the present, the same reference to the art of blurring any situation of clarity exists in a culture that often perceives its social interactions of all kinds, from the professional to the sentimental, in terms of mirrors, optical illusions, reflections, projections and distortions. With centuries of Catholic heritage in its history, as well as internal cultural differences and competitive complexes drawn from the still-recent traumatic experience of

four decades of dictatorship, Spanish culture might be showing signs of a 'narcissistic culture disorder,' which affects its media, its politics and its determination to project a modern identity. To connect the cultural narcissism that often characterizes the Spaniards from the perspective of stereotypes to the present-day systems of make-believes, this essay seeks to understand how and in which parameters Spanish culture permits or enables its nationals to blur clarities of education, status, ethnicity and sexuality in order to project them in a narcissistic contemplation. Clarity is the worst enemy of the subject in diagnosed narcissistic personality disorder. A culture that has been supportive and has relied on the relativity of clarity through optical plays and illusions can also be a culture that envisions his narcissistic attitudes to be mastered as an art. This article seeks to question whether this is the case of modern-day Spanish culture.

Obviously, Spain cannot be blamed for being the only country whose culture practices deceptive narcissism, among many other forms of *engaños* that can be indexed. Friedrich Nietzsche

(1873/2010) wrote in his essay "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense" in 1873 that:

> *[the] art of dissimulation reaches its peak in man: here deception, flattery, lying and cheating, talking behind the back of others, keeping up appearances, living in borrowed splendor, donning masks, the shroud of convention, playacting before others and before oneself — in short, the continual fluttering around the flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law that virtually nothing is as incomprehensible as how an honest and pure drive to truth could have arisen among men. (p.254)*

As we shall see, what is identified as universal here by the German philosopher has developments in the psychology of a geographically isolated nation with a Roman Catholic heritage and a history of terminated colonization. Fallen empires must cope in different ways, and the heavy narcissism of the Generation of 1898 is an initial sign that Spain overcomes this episode of ego reduction by a narcissistic compensation in its artistic productions as well. In the 20th century, from Salvador Dalí to Pedro Almodóvar, the country sees a series of initially creative figures turning into trademarks, brands, a phenomenon that finds its roots in historical traumatic moments when individuals belonging to a society agree implicitly that some of them will receive these marks of distinction and branding for the greater good of the entire culture.

I would like to isolate three particular episodes in Spanish History that are responsible, in my opinion, for the narcissistic attitudes noticeable in the cultural behaviors:

1) the ethnic, cultural and religious cleansing in the 15th and 16th centuries and the promoted idea of a *pureza de sangre* (purity of blood);
2) the conquest, the rise of the Empire and its fall and agony in the 19th century;
3) the experience of the longest Fascist dictatorship to ever last in Western Europe during the 20th century.

Of course, these three significant time periods do not constitute an exhaustive list, but they certainly highlight turning points in the developmental process of the culture we are proposing to study through the lens of psychoanalytical claims usually applied instead to the narcissistic
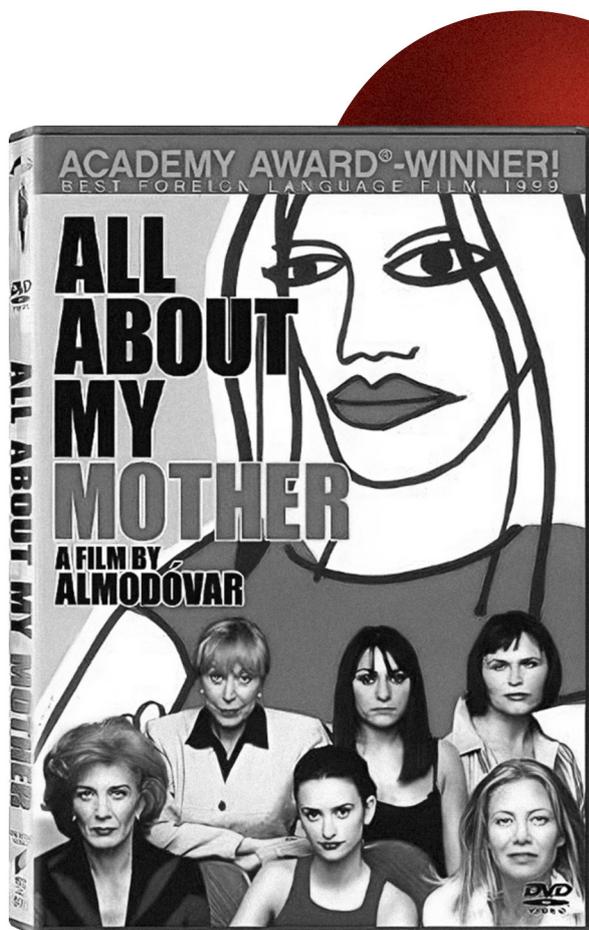

FIGURE 1. MOVIE POSTER FOR *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER* BY PEDRO ALMODÓVAR

individuals who might derive from it. However, a methodology has been applied to other Western cultures, and once again to the United States in particular, that isolate strategies of narcissistic survivals in the aftermath of traumatic historical events and/or time periods.

Discussing cultural narcissism began with Christopher Lasch (1979) in his well-known *Culture of Narcissism* first published in 1979, and now a national best-seller in the US in 2022 for the vision of the Trump years it had predicted 41 years ago. Although we cannot find a Spanish equivalent of such a questioning of one's own culture in Spain, we can very well find inspiration in the establishment of parallels between the US and Spain, as Lasch offers proposals in his book that are universal, even if essentially focused on the American narcissistic attitudes. Even though his work is focused on the future of the United States from the perspective that the 1970s might have had of a beginning of a 21st century and the rise of narcissism in the culture, Lasch points to some key ideas that could very well be applied to Spain from a different angle. Particularly in his identification of what he defines as "the new narcissist" and how this prototype for our century in the Western world is "superficially relaxed and tolerant," which once again makes us wonder what this *hombre claro* attitude might contain of traditional rigidity disguised in a somewhat

modern and progressive overall message.

Spaniards have an overall tendency, also, as Lasch points out about Americans, to have lived as if they are living their ancestors' lives and their offspring's lives, which is shown in the same transmission as a narcissistic practice in these two cultures; something other cultures precisely try to avoid, but often cannot. Yet, too many parallels between the United States and Spain would result void of sense given that Spaniards are nowhere close to the socio-geographical mobility observed in North America, as they often choose to cultivate a close connection with their land of origin and will only migrate for work but very rarely to embrace another region's culture as their own. Systematic self-association with a territory reinforced by linguistic and culinary differences (among others) is also very typical in Spanish culture. The territory as a guarantee of an imagined 'authenticity,' a concept altogether linked to the mentality once attached to the *pureza* de *sangre*, is simultaneously what makes the subject envision his/her existence as a link between the previous generation and the following. Charged with an inherited essence to pass along to validating children, Spaniards are in majority strong defenders of their traditions, the religion from which most of them derived, and the holy circle of the family whose core principles are often unquestionable. And this attachment

comes with a great deal of self-criticism in the many humoristic expressions of this culture. Canonical literature and contemporary films have always reserved a special space for this mirroring of cultural evidence.

Amongst other targets of humoristic self-evaluation, the repetitive nature of the professional, the religious and the sexual appears to be heavily represented. There is a certain trust and certainty in the repetition, as pointed out in Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze & Patton, 1968/2021) when the French philosopher was aiming at De Gaulle's conservation of cultural practices to the detriment of new possibilities for the younger generation. Spain never had an identified political revolution in this respect or any other; it has often emulated neighboring tendencies and navigated to maintain its deeply rooted European identity while exporting projections of innovation and modernity it wasn't always able to fully develop and express at home. The Spanish mechanisms of repetition in cultural practices has often meant internal conflicts and contradictions, which has ironically benefited its artistic productions and facilitated their international reputations. Self-derision is nowhere to be found as exotic and persuasive as it can be in Spain. Its repetitive cultural contradictions and voluntary omissions have seduced a world of tourists seeking a land where they could *'soltarse la melena'* (let their hair loose), as Spaniards would say, and embrace the lust for transgression found from the professional spheres to the sleep deprivation of the *fiestas*, cultural manifestations that also end up being a repeat of the previous edition. Outsiders find in Spain a temporary relief from their more rigid cultural practices; but those who end up staying longer and possibly decide to be part of and/or affected by the cultural psychology must face several moments of realization that might estrange them from the land that first provided some much relief. Eventually, repetition can be extremely exhausting for them. Yet, for most Spaniards, repetition is at the core of culture, without question.

The rebellion against this enduring aspect of the Spanish culture from within has moved generations of Spanish intellectuals toward new worlds of creativity, remaining spaces of undiscovered thoughts and territories to be conquered through the very suffering from one's cultural obligations and practices. Places where the assumed clarity of the *Hombre, claro!* expression was never fully assumed. And the purpose of this essay is also to contemplate a reasonable myriad of works of art as reaction against the opacity and narcissism that can be a cancer at the core of all cultures. Literature and film, but not exclusively, are these non-systematical spaces we shall convene in our discussion. However, these works also contain inevitably the very contradictions to which they are pointing and cannot commit to a full rupture with the traditions. As Giles Tremlett points out in *Ghost of Spain* (2006),

> *Tradition and modernity somehow manage to fit snugly together in Spain. It is a wonder to those of us from countries, or cultures, where the latter has wiped out much of the former. This strange conjunction of old and new produces some of the most endearing pictures — literally so, in the photographic sense — of modern Spain: the conical-hatted* nazareno *astride a motorbike; the turbanned* moro *from a Moors and Christians festival in Alicante, chatting on his mobile phone; or the woman bullfighter from one of Pedro Almodóvar's films, dressed in a glittering* traje luces, *a suit of lights. (p. 15)*

Somehow, the rebellion continues to operate within the same system without fully questioning its foundations, to which it still seeks to honor and abide. At first, it can appear as a complex cultural particularity when it might be the consequences of a culturally sustained narcissism that strives on maintaining this confusion for the external eye. A culture where cognitive dissonances become the norm and even justify the need for the repetitive cultural practices. The art of confusing with established and prefabricated discourses from both the political and the religious realms is omnipresent in a culture that has often self-represented by the stereotypical macho-man image of the *torero*, an epitome of narcissism, cocky and tricky, and whose special dance will confuse one of the strongest animals and kill him progressively in a spectacle of *engaño* admired by a whole crowd of *olé* whisperers. This very same principle of culturally accepted cognitive dissonance performed on a sacrificed animal is therefore widely accepted and admired by most of the culture. The ritualistic nature of most cultural behaviors in Spain can be, in this sense, a challenging pressure on the foreigner who has come to contact with the culture for an extended period. For many, what was originally a country of positive energies, enthusiasm and social connections, initially and from the outside, can quickly turn into a nightmarish situation of

total suffocation by the cognitive dissonances once inside the culture. Clarity becomes relative.

Hearing the patronizing and self-assured tone of the expression *Hombre, claro…*, used to title this article, is always an experience for the outsider. This culturally reproduced statement of the obvious often turns out to open the door for a lot of questions. Yet it functions as a shield against potential interrogations. A form of cultural narcissism that allows opting out of providing any kind of formulated answer. A common knowledge that never was for the majority, but generally limited to a group that is trying to reaffirm its identity, in fear of being absorbed by a larger political face to the world. And finally, an imposed closure on any topic that might be linked to the speaker's insecurities. The iron curtain that protects the many shops of Spain suddenly falls sharp on you, so you may not have the space to contemplate a reply. One can be left with a certain sense of sideration. Even when it is placed with humor, it serves that one and only purpose. Settle the deal, close the conversation and invite to move on to the next item without leaving a chance for further discussion.

One student once asked me why in every Spanish film we watched and discussed for class, there were always one character that would end up being psychologically and/or physically abducted by another, and particularly by their mother. I was rather puzzled and, at the same time, started having quite a revelation. Why was Spanish culture so tuned on to taking control? A very sudden relief from decades of dictatorship unleashed decades of accumulated demons, both individual and collective. But the collective has a way to always reclaim the individual in a culture whose history is composed of dark episodes of odd solidarities. And solidarity always bumps against the wall of leadership and dominion when narcissism continues to feed the very roots of the cultural tree. It follows the pattern of a natural cycle. As it does for many other cultures around the world. Control has been a dire necessity for every member of the Spanish culture at some point of their existence in its history, in an episode that has caused a traumatic response of which the culture offered a pre-made discourse. Whether justified or emulated by cultural dictates, this response belongs to the reservoir of phrases that emerge regularly in Spanish conversation. And conversations are the very space of dominion and power exchange. Phrases that are palimpsests of historical moments and mundane occasions to utter them, that have acquired authority over time. *Hombre, claro…*

Far from adopting an empiricist attitude in the face of the traumatic experiences in History, the ideologically fabricated phrases that populates social conversations within this culture of Western Europe seek to reaffirm a mathematically impossible unanimous consensus. Clarity, of
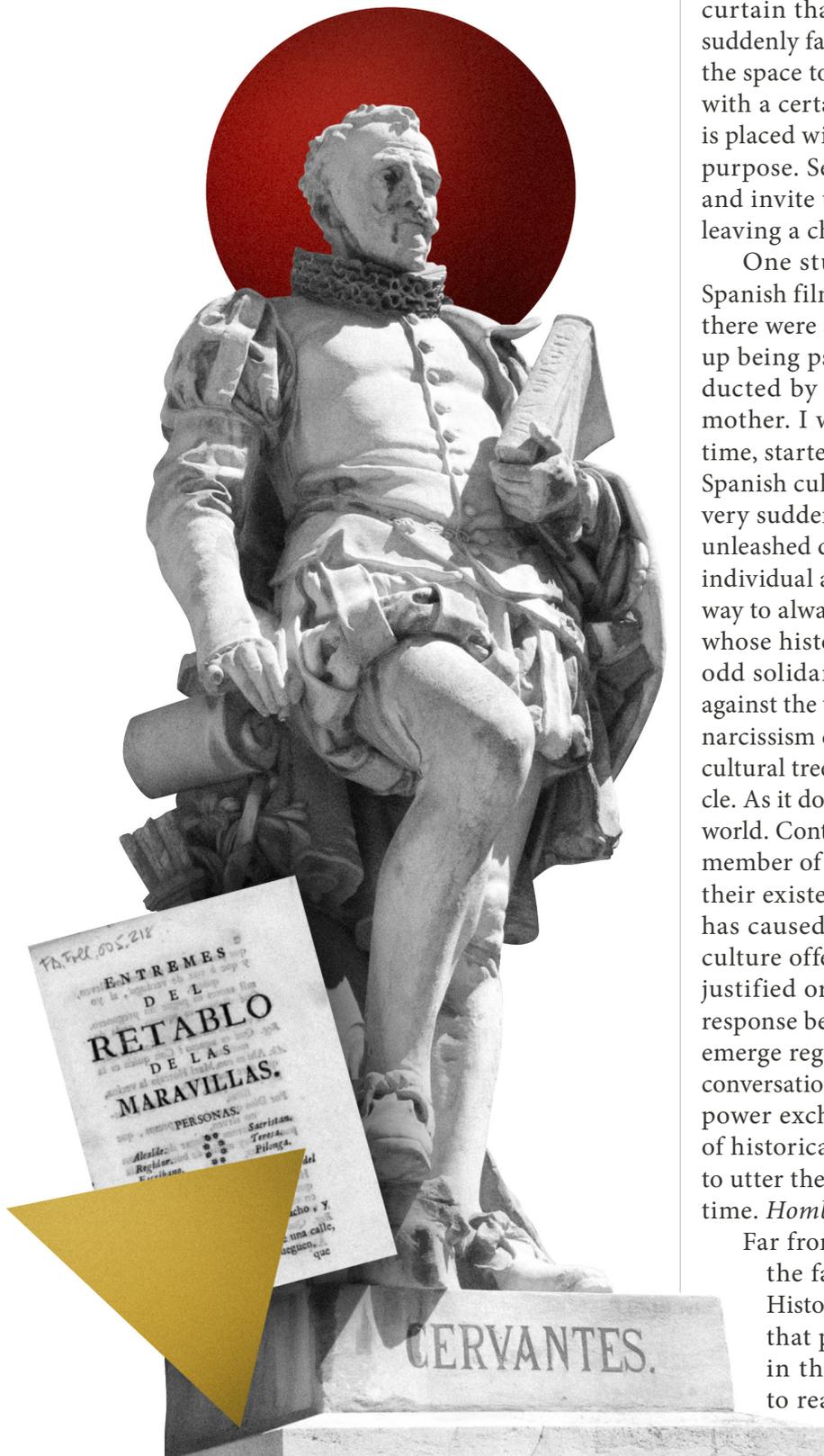
all things, is being invoked as the reason when clearly it is not. The extensive use of *claro* in phrases placed in conversations has eroded the word to a point of divergence from its original meaning that is unconceivable. Hence the more prudent Latin-American version of *cierto*, closer to the Italian *certo*, that prefers to not involve visual capacities, but rather a reasoning. But no consensus stands strong in the backstage, only an illusion of it. Miguel de Cervantes (2005) denounced this aspect of his culture at the turn of the seventeenth century in several occasions, but never so explicitly as he did in his *Retablo de las Maravillas*. In this short play called *entremes*, a play in between the acts of a larger performance, the author of the monumental *Don Quixote* shows how quickly a lie that serves the individual can become a norm for the entire group once it sparks on a stage of Spanish society.

Narcissism as a cultural phenomenon is observable through the usage of lies in small talks, a place where there should not be any reason to use them. If the reality around them is unpleasing to them, many Spaniards will not hesitate in altering it with all the necessary untruths. Rapidly a lie can be flipped in the new truth for the group who has started it. Anything is forgiven if the Honor — a remain from the centuries of feudal mentality this culture is based on — is preserved. The delusion of Don Quixote himself and his capacity to adapt reality to his imagination, as grandiose and caricatural narcissist, end up becoming the normative perception for anyone surrounding him after a certain time. The opaque is somehow made clear through the proclamation of untruths, and everyone agrees to see through it as if it were transparent. This amazing solidarity in the lies, the very cement of Spanish culture, is not observable so easily in other cultures. What makes this gregarious miracle possible is the omnipresence of Catholicism in the culture. But as Spaniards themselves like to point out, it is important to claim the religion as *Spanish Catholicism*, as it has a different flavor in the Peninsula as it does in the rest of Europe and the world.

El Retablo De Las Mentiras

In Spain, as in other parts of the world, the cultural permissiveness for every day's art of lying in the social interactions is very connected to the religious heritage of the country. This cultural narcissism is characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, preoccupation with the self and their immediate family, and lack of empathy for others. A portion of Spaniards often view themselves as unique, entitled, and deserving of admiration and special treatment. One reason why narcissists are also liars is because they often need to maintain their image of superiority and control. They may lie to exaggerate their achievements, status, or abilities, to cover up their mistakes or flaws, or to manipulate others for personal gain. In addition, narcissists may also lie to avoid accountability or responsibility for their actions, or to avoid negative consequences from others or society. They may also be prone to gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation where they deny or distort reality to make their victims doubt their own perceptions and memories. Overall, the tendency of narcissists to lie may stem from their underlying insecurity, need for validation and admiration, lack of empathy for others, and desire for control and power.

Paradoxically, Spaniards are simultaneously famous for their bluntness with a great variety of life opinions and orientations, the *hablar claro* which they like to remind one another oftentimes. Yet, this reputation is also true when it comes to the fabrication of alternative realities. The bright transparent face they often advertise about themselves comes with its dark side of untruth. The foreigner coming from a Northern or Anglo-Saxon cultures to the Iberian Peninsula will be shocked by the easiness Spaniards have in modifying the truth and adapting narratives to their own interests. Centuries of Spanish Catholicism, a monolithic religion built on the expulsion of and complete intolerance for other spiritual practices as well as the gregarious acceptation of alternative narratives, have blurred the boundaries between the *hablar claro* and the *mentir*, to the point that one can easily be confused with the other. Catholicism is one of the only Christian religion that allows the rite of confession as a lie-purifier for the believer. And within the wider spectrum of Roman Church, Spanish Catholicism takes pride in associating the religion with the cultural practices as much as possible. Other cultures have associated the national adjective to the religion they practice: Irish Catholics like to be distinguished from Polish Catholics and even worship in different churches in the United States, so they can also find in the house of God a place for linguistic segregation, cultural re-enacting, and social reassurance away from the homeland. How ironic it can be that *kathôlikos* means 'universal' in Greek, all these forms of Catholicism show a preference for a cultural closed circuit rather than

is in Spain, from Andalucía to Galicia.

Spanish Catholicism cares and focuses more on the social practices and the public displays than on the individual's spirituality or the interpretation of Scripture. Philip II of Spain can be thanked for keeping the Peninsula safe from religious diversity. He had taken his cue from his great grandparents, the Catholic Kings who reclaimed the entire territory in 1492 and enforced a cultural and religious cleansing. Muslims and Jews were forced to leave or convert, leaving Catholicism as the only option after centuries of prosperous diversity. Even those who accepted to convert to Catholicism were never fully considered "Catholics of old blood." Consequently, the religion is so attached to social class division in Spain since this era. Nowhere on earth is Catholicism such a religion of appearances and social performance as it is in Spain. Nowhere can one contemplate the Baroqueness of the Roman and Apostolic religion as much as at a Spanish wedding. This insistence on performance is obviously linked to the cultural narcissism that we are seeking to identify here. We can blame the peninsular geography of Spain for cultural isolationism and inflexibilities, but nowhere in the Catholic world is the religion so omnipresent and rooted in the deepest terrain of a culture. Even France and Italy, other daughters of the Church, have opted for secularist republics and are no longer entertaining a Catholic-proclaimed royal family descending in a straight line from the Bourbon dynasty.

The religion that confesses its believers for absolution of this sin is consequently very permissive of cognitive dissonance in the day-to-day discourse of members of its culture. As largely determined by the psychoanalytical community, cognitive dissonance is one of the most evident features of narcissism. It is often the result of the permissiveness around lies that the child experiences and chooses to whether adopt or reject. When truths are altered or transformed, the development into an adulthood of clarity is deeply challenged, especially when maternal figures are responsible for these alterations.

an open mind embrace to diversity and difference. From the outside, Spanish Catholicism can appear quite intriguing at first. Nowhere in the Catholic world can one witness so many public acts and displays of religious fervor. If you walk around a town enough time, you will come across a *procesión* and find yourself quite uncomfortable with the *nazareno* figure, as it might remind you of the Ku Klux Klan activist about to burn one of his victims. The penitence-oriented nature of these cultural manifestations can make any outsider be fascinated and quite repelled at the same time. Although many Spaniards find the practice of the procession repulsive or depressing, a permitted invasion of the secular space by the religious monopoly, no one will ever stop to change the practice and has integrated this practice as normal without any further questioning. Usually, this portion of Spaniards is quite sensitive to those displays of hidden faces in the processions, and find them just as contradictory to the message of Christ as they find monarchy an obsolete and ridiculous entity in their culture. But very few dare to speak against tradition. Even in its recycled and parodied form of the *orgullo gay* with all its *carrozas* and its desire to replace religion with sexuality, the procession remains at the core of Spanish culture. Nowhere else in Europe is it so observable and so needed by the people as it

Optima Mater, The Irrational Reverence to Mother Culture

The mother figure in Spanish culture has been idealized for centuries, and this may be attributed to the Catholic Church's strong influence in the country. In Catholicism, the Virgin Mary is the ultimate mother figure, and this has translated into the Spanish culture, where mothers are often seen as selfless, nurturing, and sacrificial. They are regarded as the backbone of the family and are expected to provide emotional and physical support to their children. Cognitive capacities are first acquired through the mother, from gestation to birth to upbringing and education, if appli-cable. Mothers are an image that the individual generally lives with during the entire lifetime, a constant reference, whether it is a positive or a negative one. If clinical narcissism theory applied to the individual can also apply to a cultural phenomenon, then the figure of the Mother in Spain has an important role to play in under-standing the overall outreach of the pathology unto the culture.

In an 1927 song by Conchita Piquer titled *En tierra extraña*, known of most Spaniards interna-tionally, the Valencian singer cries her nostalgia of Spain from New York, as a daughter to a lost mother. The tone of the song evokes the depra-vation of maternal guidance and care in one's adult life. In comparison, one of today's popular TV shows in Spain, *Españoles por el mundo*, pre-sents Spaniards with examples of countrywomen and countrymen who left the motherland, and constantly make clear from their interview from abroad to their remaining non-migrant brethren watching back in Spain, that the Pen-insula, the Nation or the province of origin remains to a great majority of these Spaniards in exile the optimal maternal reference. They remind themselves, somewhat systematically so it seems in these shows, that the only reason that can make them leave the Spanish cultural way of life is economic. Even when emphasiz-ing a difference, those who have chosen to live abroad acknowledge the superiority of the culture of origin, as one would never want to dishonor their mother. No other lifestyle in the world, with financial gain included, is to be com-pared to the one transmitted by the National breast of Spanish culture. There is no natural reason to grow away from the mother.

There are many places to be searched to understand the strength of the umbilical cord that unites most Spaniards to the Motherland, and one of the first to highlight is the cultural image created over the centuries around their own mothers. Many are the forms of *maternalization* of the land around the globe, but Spain remains a country where it is the most obvious, due to its history as a nation and the unity often enforced around a potentially explosive cohabitation of cultures. Literature and the arts, from the medieval *Cántigas de Santa Maria*, to the realist depictions of castrating mothers in Peréz Galdos or García Lorca, to the many mothers we see collected in films of Almodóvar (1990), are an everlasting proof that the foundations to this cultural devotion are proven their strength throughout the centuries. The mother has unified and she has also purified.

España, a country that uses the feminine form, is more of her mother than a wife or a sister to its citizens. Centuries of patriotic motifs have merged the devotion to the Holy Virgin Mary with the adoration of the Nation in the collective unconscious. It is not uncommon to see a flag next to a statue of the Mother of Christ in all the places where she has appeared around the 'holy land' of Spain: from Montserrat to Lourdes, from Fátima to el Rocío, Mother Mary has shown her preference and protection for the nation who has guarded Catholicism safe from Judaism, Islam and Protestantism. Her many apparitions circling the Peninsula, and particularly Spain as its major territory, seem to point for her preference for Spanish Catholicisim, or rather, this expression of the Roman religion has a particular need for the omnipresence of the Virgin Mary in its public and private spheres. According to Linda B. Hall, "it is essential to understand the way in which her cult and image fit into the sacred landscape of Spain, metaphorically and literally" (Hall, 2004, p.17). Not only was this maternal image brought forward during times of Muslim invasion, it also became the cultural symbol of cultural unity and brotherhood. The *hermandades* (fraternities) established around the worship of a particular apparition of Mary in a certain town or village proves the need to gather as siblings under a same celestial mother. Once anchored in the cultural mind of a country, these images continue to impact each generation with a repeated assimilation of la *Virgen María* with each individual's mother, *metaphorically and literally*. The vision of the *Optima Mater*, a mother figure, somewhat merging the universal divine motherhood with the temporal biological one, unites in the collective unconsciousness the feelings of territory with that of motherhood and childhood.

For most Spaniards, nowhere else can the origin of all culture be found, as they often perceive their land as original, or in other words, a spring for other cultural modes, elevated enough to be protected from confluences, from a background where the concept of *pureza* remains attached to most cultural practices. In turn, the products of culture and cultures in Spain maintain a motherly familiarity in their senses. Maybe it is even more obvious in the migrants who express their nostalgia and separation anxieties from the motherland at a higher pitch of pain. Mother is never wrong; you will often hear Spaniards chant the natural superiority of territorial products, the one who were usually cooked and served by their mother, or another mother figure in the house where they grew up. Mother generally knows best in many areas of life, ranging from the *recetas de la cocina* (recipes) to the *recetas de medicina* (prescription), and has opinions about their offspring's private life beyond their marriage. She has mastered both Nature and Culture in the vision of her children. Her assimilation to the Virgin Mary, often characterized by a name composed with María or another apparition of the Mother of God, makes her somewhat omniscient and revered in their eyes. Her methods are not to be questioned, and she grows older in full respect and sometimes submission to the solutions she has enforced for every problem. Even alternative mothers who desire to appear more liberal and escape the rules can find themselves trapped in these dynamics with their own mothers or reproduce them against their own conscious will. Culture, when adopted as a whole and assimilated with an omnipotent motherhood, can be stronger in determining an individual's social behavior than an education in critical thinking and the liberal arts.

We owe a lot to the *manchego* film director Pedro Almodóvar for breaking the taboos around the *Optima Mater* throughout his cinematography, as it now well-known and has been commented in cultural studies in the past three decades. In his works, we often meet mothers who present similar, yet evolving, psychological patterns and struggles. His choice of actresses to embody these mothers is in itself an over-arching narrative. There must be a reason why he has chosen to couple Julieta Serrano and Antonio Banderas three times during his career as mother and son in one of his films

(in 1986 with *Matador*, in 1988 with *Women on the verge of a nervous breakdown*, and in 2019 with *Pain and Glory*). Perhaps the most obvious Narcissist Mother in all three is the one we observe in *Matador*. A caricature of a whole generation of mothers, Serrano offers in this film partially about narcissistic pathologies an incomparable representation of the repressive mother who feeds her son with guilt, invalidation and reproaches. More than a castrating mother, she stereotypes in a critical mode the temperament of the *Optima Mater*. In her, as in many other mothers, the maternal has absorbed the paternal, and she has assumed both responsibilities as a symbolically widowed mother.

Cultural psychologists such as Dr. Ramani Durvasula have worked on the impact of such caricatures of narcissist mothers that are to be encountered as such sometimes in real life. Narcissism in an individual is very linked to the relationship between the child and the mother when invalidation happens on a daily basis during the child's upbringing. In Almodóvar's films, the instances of such moments of invalidation by the mother are countless. The conservative figure of the mother constantly finds grounds to refrain her son from developing, therefore causing in him narcissistic behaviors to cope with the recurring downgrading. Whether Almodóvar suggests that this is a cultural phenomenon beyond the caricature is up to his public to accept or not. In a later film released in 1989, *Tie me up, tie me down (Átame)*, the reflection on Spanish narcissism will continue through the submissive relationship that

the two sisters, Lola and Marina, have with their mother, interpreted by Almodóvar's own mother, a non-professional actress who did not like to watch her son's films. In all instances of dominating mothers we find in his cinematography, it is shocking to see how the depicted narcissistic adults expose childish attitudes and use lies when they are confronted to their mothers. Almodóvar's comedies and tragedies also emphasize immediate changes of behavior in many of the characters when the mother enters the scene. The *Optima Mater* imposes herself by imposing behaviors around her.

Cultural narcissism can have detrimental effects on a society. It hampers understanding and appreciation of other cultures, fosters mistrust and resentment among minority communities, and promotes a false sense of superiority that can lead to ignorance and intolerance. Recognizing and addressing cultural narcissism is crucial to promoting diversity and inclusivity in Spain.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, cultural narcissism in Spain is evident in various aspects of society, including politics, art, and language. While it is natural to celebrate and appreciate one's own culture and heritage, it is crucial to recognize the contributions of other cultures and perspectives and avoid a narrow and myopic view of the world. Spain has a rich and diverse cultural heritage that should be celebrated and shared with the world, rather than used to promote one's own cultural superiority. The idealization of the mother figure in Spanish culture reflects the country's cultural narcissism. The mother is seen as the embodiment of Spanish culture and ideals, and her role as the nurturer and protector is celebrated. However, this idealization has also created unrealistic expectations and pressure on mothers, and marginalized other cultural figures and traditions. Cultural narcissism has resulted in a lack of acknowledgment of Spain's colonial history, where the country's influence on other cultures has been romanticized and downplayed. This is reflected in literature and film, where non-Spanish cultures are often portrayed as inferior or exotic.

FIGURE 2. JULIETA SERRANO IN *MATADOR*

For many scholars and students of Spanish culture, literature and film, the omnipresence of this narcissistic perception of one's culture can potentially become a demotivator. It is important, therefore, to address this issue and embrace a more inclusive and diverse cultural narrative in Spain's literature and film, within a broader and more inclusive European and global contexts, in order to continue to draw students to these fields of cultural studies.

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THOMAS PANGLE'S NEO-EPICUREAN READING OF
ARISTOTLE'S BIOLOGY
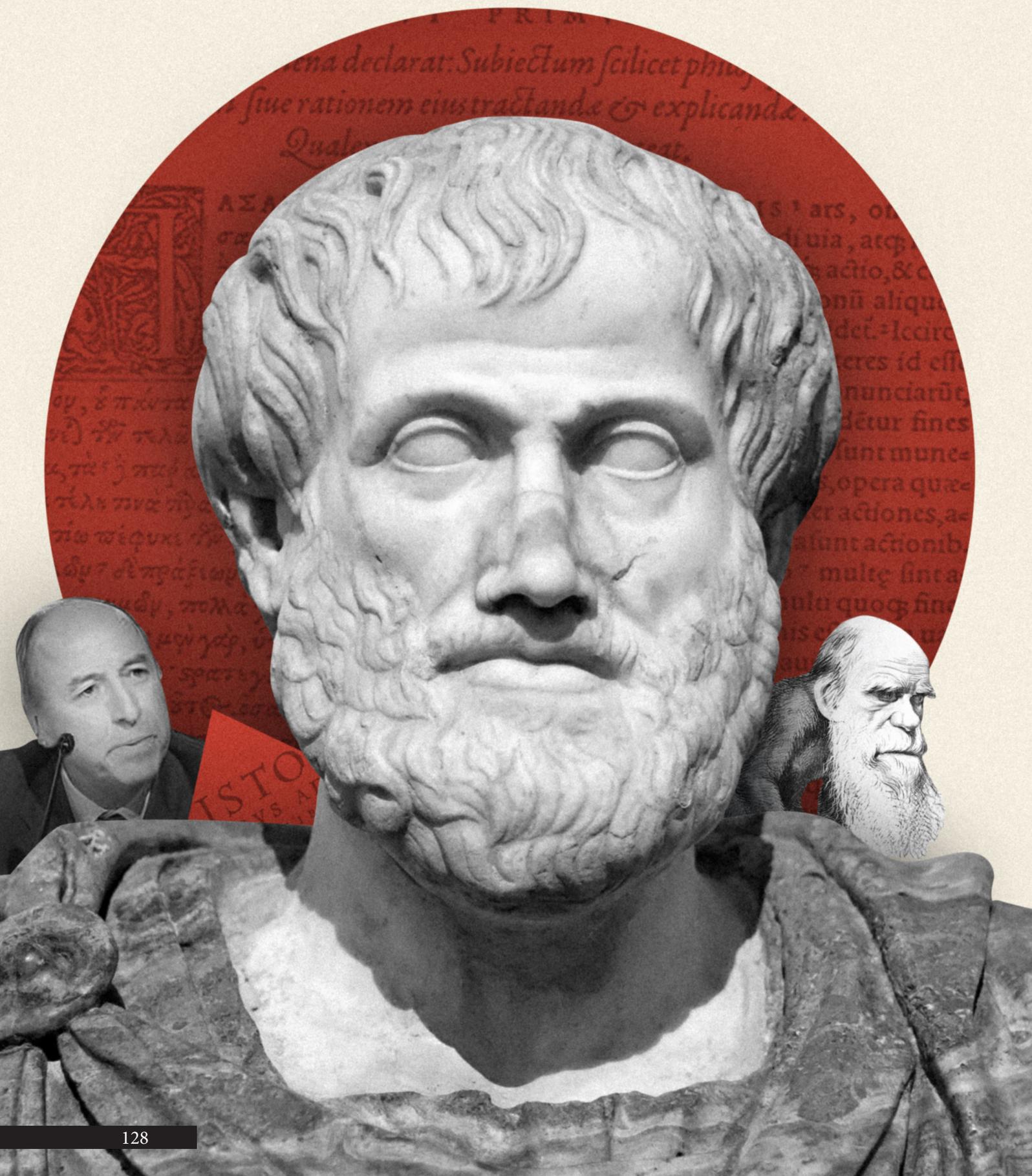
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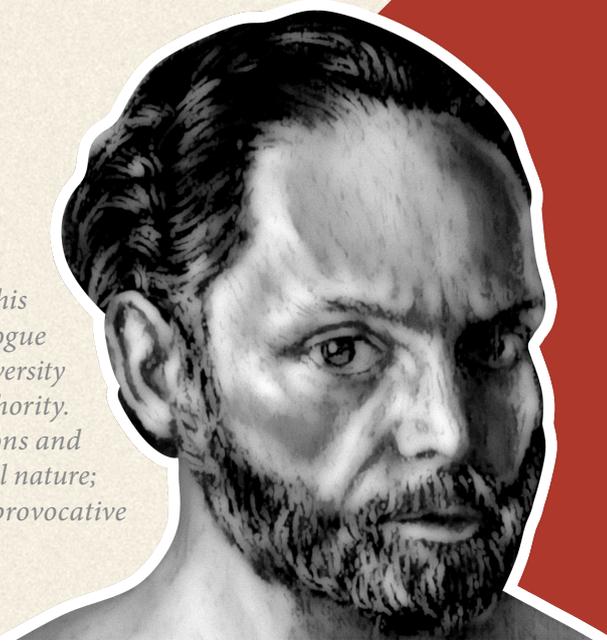
ABSTRACT

In his 2020 reading of Aristotle's biology, "A Synoptic Introduction to the Ontological Background of Aristotle's Political Theory," Thomas L. Pangle (2020) speaks *de facto* on behalf of contemporary Neo-Epicureanism. For Pangle reads Aristotle by way of advancing the cause of an Epicurean use of Plato. Proposing to liberate Aristotle from a 2,400 year-old Platonic tradition having allegedly unduly minimized the importance of biology in understanding both ontology and politics, Pangle argues for fundamental compatibility between the Stagirite and Darwinian evolutionism. The present article offers strong reasons to reject Pangle's central contentions.

Keywords

evolutionism, Aristotle, biology, Plato, epicureanism, materialism, metaphysics, rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

While the dawn of the modern world is marked by systematic intellectual opposition to Aristotle as most authoritative representative of the moral and intellectual virtues of classical antiquity, late modernity has returned to Aristotle — and other Platonists (Gerson, 2006) — as inspiration for validating the most authoritative doctrine of our age: evolutionism.[1] A "scientific" Aristotle has emerged at the price of the "pre-scientific" one being abstracted from his Platonic spine and reconstructed piecemeal to confirm the wisdom of modernity over and above the foolishness of antiquity and the evils of its medieval apologists. The scientifically reconstructed Aristotle is no longer a prophet of "thought thinking thought," but the advocate of an intellectual stance retraceable to Machiavelli and that Shakespeare exposed most remarkably as entailing a synthesis of Epicureanism (teaching that chance rules the world) and Stoicism (teaching that the world is ruled by necessity), whereby hedonism serves as foundation for the strategic use of eternal forms.[2]

Over the past few decades, the cause of a "scientific" instrumentalizing of Aristotle has been

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1 On the Machiavellian roots of the modern doctrine of evolution, see pp. 296-97 of Of Leo Strauss (1958), *Thoughts on Machiavelli.* See further Roger D. Masters (2018), *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power*; Michael Tomasello (2016), *A Natural History of Human Morality*; and D. M. Walsh (2015), *Organisms, Agency, and Evolution*; K. Juechems and C. Summerfield (2019), "Where Does Value Come From?". The Machiavellian "logic" of mastery or control of nature has trickled down, as it were, to color much of contemporary biology. See for instance, T. Egner (2017), *The Wiley handbook of cognitive control;* MacLean et al. (2014), "The Evolution of Self-Control;" and P. Rochat (2021), *Moral Acrobatics.*

2 On the contemporary phenomenon of "scientific reconstructions" of classical authors, see "The Scientific Reconstruction of Dante" (Andreacchio, 2023). For a recent defense of the synthesis of Epicurus's chance and Stoicism's necessity, where the driving "force" of chance inheres in "the universal necessities of life," see Franklin M. Harold (2022), *On Life: Cells, Genes and the Evolution of Complexity.* See further S. Kauffman (2019), *A World Beyond Physics: The Emergence and Evolution of Life*; and J. Monod (1971), *Chance and Necessity.*

aided most incisively by the "Straussian" Thomas L. Pangle (2020), whose 2020 reading of Aristotle's biology, "A Synoptic Introduction to the Ontological Background of Aristotle's Political Theory," [3] speaks de facto on behalf of contemporary Neo-Epicureanism.[4] For Pangle reads Aristotle by way of advancing the cause of an Epicurean use of Plato — a use made possible by the Machiavellian synthesis denounced by Shakespeare and later classicists.[5]

METHODS

The present study provides a close "phenomenological" reading of a text in the context of a contemporary academic trend, exposing the text's guiding ideas to more primordial ones. In this respect, phenomenology invites a genealogical work retracing certain concepts and systems built upon them to more fundamental forms of understanding, or underlying problems. The goal is to see conceptual superstructures in the context of underlying, permanent questions. While helpful in clarifying certain terms and arguments, references to secondary literary sources are limited in the interests of "internal" reading.

Conceptual compatibility between the target text and its own primary source — the latter being Aristotle — is verified with close attention to possible anachronisms, as well as to the possibility of projections of anthropological parameters onto properly ontological ones, whereby a study method can render prejudicial its own findings.

With specific reference to Aristotle, cardinal problems to be explored include the relationship between epistemic and rhetorical concerns, the status of thought vis-à-vis experience and the limits of mechanistic readings of nature.

RESULTS

The present investigation exposes problems at the heart of Pangle's reading of Aristotle, as well as a fundamental incongruity between the Stagirite's own work and Pangle's project to uproot it from its Platonic roots. As a spokesperson of modern mechanistic readings of nature, Pangle (2020) fails to do justice to Aristotle's "imitative" or "poetic" conception of natural generation, on account of which the primary mover of all finite being is its archetypical, divine, ontological perfection implying an absolute identity of form and content.

Notwithstanding its defects, Pangle's appeal to Aristotle can serve us as stepping-stone for renewed reflection on the enduring significance of Aristotle as representing a fundamental alternative to modern evolutionism. The central problem at hand pertains to the intelligibility or "mind" of change itself. Does the "dangerous" passage from chemical necessity to biological freedom an underlying *intelligible* reality, or is it to be explained *away* by more or less tacit appeals to a primordial vertiginous source of energy driving us to survive, if only by achieving "kinetic stability"? [6]

If Romantic voluntarism fails to respond to the challenge of mechanistic biology, that is because

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[3] Recent examples of a scientific reconstruction of Aristotle include, Roger D. Masters (2007), "Historical Change and Evolutionary Theory: From Hunter-Gatherer Bands to States and Empires," Even Michael Tomasello (2022) will appeal to Aristotle to support his "program" to retrace the evolution of agency understood in terms of "the individual's control," where modernity's individual stands *de facto* to software as biological necessity stand to hardware. On the contemporary "individualistic" or (neo-)Cartesian reading of mind, see further B. Rosslenbroich (2014), *On The Origin of Autonomy: A New Look at the Major Transitions in Evolution.* On the currently dominant academic tendency to read contemporary cybernetics into nature itself, as if man were an imperfect machine to be perfected via or by our technological society, see for instance J. Henrich (2016), *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter*; L. R. Santos and A. G. Rosati (2015), *The Evolutionary Roots of Human Decision-Making*;" Y. Fregnac (2017), "Big Data and the Industrialization of Neuroscience: A Safe Roadmap for Understanding the Brain?" and N. Wiener (1948), *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine.*

[4] On modern or neo-Epicureanism, see Leo Strauss (1953), *Natural Right and History.* On Pangle as Epicurean, see Harry Jaffa's "The Legacy of Leo Strauss: A review of *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, by Leo Strauss" (Jaffa, 1984).

[5] Giambattista Vico, Giacomo Leopardi and Leo Strauss stand among the few world-renowned writers who have exposed the core of the Machiavellian revolution as parasitic on Platonism. Epicureanism needed Stoic leverage to overcome Platonism, the offense requiring a distraction from the inherence of the eternal in the human. In effect, what the "neo-Epicurean" does is instrumentalize the eternal forms of ancient Stoicism, forms that are now conceived in strictly mechanistic terms. See further Bruce Alberts (1998), "The cell as a collection of protein machines: preparing the next generation of molecular biologists."

[6] For a recent articulate mechanistic approach to the passage from chemistry to biology, see Addy Pross (2016). *What Is Life? How Chemistry Becomes Biology.*

both share a visceral rejection of classical — both ancient and medieval — *intellectualism*, as of radical openness to the intelligibility of change itself. Modern "Cartesian" or mechanistic reason fails to address the problem in question insofar as modern rationalism rises to eclipse a mind presupposed by the modern ego's mind, or a thought that is not a predicate, but a substance — not a function, but a source of consciousness (as of sense-of-self-certainty). For us to return to a pre-modern form of rationalism would be for us to question much more than we are currently willing to question. What would have to be questioned is the mechanistic character of modern rationalism and not merely the equally mechanistic character of the world our scientists "discover." Is it an accident that the world we believe to be discovering looks very much like the way we set out to discover it? Projecting our "ways" back onto our world might fit the bill of a Baconian knowledge-as-power agenda, where what is true is defined as what works — if only for us, *hic et nunc* — but cognitive/conceptual "black holes" remain, as Harold pointed out, if only optimistically, supported by *faith* in modern rationalism (Harold 2022).

Pangle's work helps us bring into focus the *anthropological* roots of modern biology (Pangle, 2020). More specifically, *de facto* Pangle's reading shows that Aristotle can be at least nominally harmonized with modern evolutionism if and only if the Stagirite can be harmonized with a Machiavellian conception of *human* nature or, more precisely, of the human being as naturally

compelled to survive. Compulsion is key, here, given the implied absence of a natural, supreme end entailing a natural hierarchy of ends. In colloquial terms, modern rationalism must ultimately reject any Aristotelian God by way of dismissing its relevance to our everyday life. Otherwise put, the world cannot be turned into a laboratory of total control as long as people fear divine retribution. The reduction of the human to the machine demands the radical elimination of God from our practical (moral-political) life.[7]

The evolutionist's principle of "survival of the fittest" is shattered by exposure to "meaning in nature," not in voluntaristic terms, but where life-forms are no longer seen as struggling for power or empowerment, but as spontaneously

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7 See Richard Dawkins (2019). *Outgrowing God: A Beginner's Guide.*

yearning for a perfection involving the identity (*coincidentia*) of form and content. Falling short of that *transcendent* perfection, survival remains, not a blessing, but a curse — as no being more than man has shown.

DISCUSSION

Pangle (2020) purports to liberate Aristotle from a 2,400 year-old tradition having unduly minimized the importance of biology ("terrestrial life") in understanding both metaphysics (Pangle speaks of "ontology" as "inquiry into being as such") and politics. In the attempt to make up for that *Platonic* tradition, Pangle argues that all of Aristotle's appeals to divine transcendence are to be read as mere rhetorical devices aimed at keeping unphilosophical masses at bay. What is Aristotle supposed to have done in spite of the pious veneer of his writings? He is supposed to have vindicated the wisdom of pre-Socratic natural philosophy, if only in a qualified manner. Although pre-Socratic materialists would have been wrong to assume that there is a material imperceptible reality underlying our empirical world, they would have been right to reject any Socratic call to think of nature within the limits of the human, or within the *polis*.

Now, however, Pangle (2020) presents the Socratic call as a rhetorical façade concealing Socrates's real, esoteric, or deep concern with natural philosophy. Socrates would have sought to dedicate himself to natural philosophy in private and thus unseen by crowds of non-philosophers who would have judged the philosopher's pursuit as essentially inimical to traditional morality.

Pangle's Aristotle takes the relay by arguing that Plato's "forms" are perceptible, if only unchanging or un-evolving "functions" of things, species to which real philosophers devote "field research and meditative study" in response to material forces retraceable to "a fathomless source." The picture Pangle (2020) offers us is one of a plurality of collective forms (what things are eminently, but also the "ways" we see them as) in which we may gain awareness of unconscious or subconscious forces responsible for the emergence of organisms out of inorganic compounds, where the supreme organism is man himself, or more precisely the man dedicated to Pangle's picture of things.[8]

There being no form aside from the perceptible functions of things — even as these functions transcend the outer "shapes" of things — there can be no God of nature for Pangle's Aristotle and thus no intelligence at work in the interstice separating one species from another: the context of the emergence of man is not characterized by divine intelligence, but by the material forces or mechanical necessity proper of a fathomless abyss.

In appealing to Aristotle's rudimentary biology, Pangle's lesson is strongly reminiscent of Heidegger's radical historicism (Heidegger, 1993). Aristotle's account of the formation of organs out of inorganic compounds is supposed to have fallen short of Pangle's project of accounting for the formation of whole organisms, above all man himself, out of inorganic compounds.[9] To achieve this latter end would be to fulfill Heidegger's own dream of

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[8] Compare Harold (2022), where life presupposes life as primordial "hunger." Confronting "biology's black hole" as biologists' utter failure to account for the "huge gap between a chemical network and even the simplest protocell," Harold appeals to the need for a primordial "source of energy and some machinery to harness it," lest we be compelled to fall back onto some "a priori anything that is not accessible to reason." It is not clear, however, how any primordial energy or "force" could be at once accessible to reason without being more than sheer force and thus without having noetic depths. When all is said and done, Harold's supplement to mechanical necessity is indistinguishable from Epicurean *Fortuna*. On a derivative, "conventional" sense of chance, see J. T. Trevors and D. L. Abel (2004), *"Chance and Necessity Do Not Explain the Origins of Life;"* and Denis Noble (2017), *Dance to the Tune of Life: Biological Relativity.* For a parallel appeal to "bioenergetics" as key to the passage from chemistry to biology, see further N. Lane (2015), *"The Vital Question: Energy, Evolution and the Origin of Complex Life."*

[9] We need not appeal to vitalism's "voluntaristic" *vis vitalis* in order to object to Dr. Frankenstein's assumption that life can be synthetically produced out of the lifeless. (For a recent revival of 19th century vitalism, see J. S. Turner (2017), *Purpose and Desire: What makes Something "Alive" and Why Modern Darwinism has Failed to Explain It*). Organs might, after all, be produced by human art out of inorganic compounds; indeed today we witness experiments in the production of entire synthetic cellular organisms (see e.g. *Scientists Create Simple Synthetic Cell That Grows and Divides Normally*, 2021). Where "life" (Aristotle's *psychē* in-itself) entails the ubiquitousness of intellective being as fundamental "form" of *all* "material" compounds, the fabrication or synthetic production of organisms out of the inorganic does not signal an absolute creation of life, but a mere modification of the conditions through which life becomes manifest to us or that life would "lend" us or make accessible to us, to begin with, as vehicle to divining life itself. In this case, life would have its own way of at once lending itself to and limiting our experiments/experiences.

a world that can fully or "scientifically" account for itself without any reference to a transcendent substantive being and so to any intelligible form of change itself. The mystery of a mind embracing all matter yields to the drama of discrete minds ultimately lost in matter.

Pangle's minds respond to their being thrown-in-the-world, to echo Heidegger, by applying the phenomenologically discerned forms/functions of things or *pragmata* to our ordinary experience, or to the ordering of our world. Not altogether unlike the poets of Plato's cave, as natural philosophers we are supposed to look at the forms of things as standards to administrate human/political life and order. What is the substantive difference between us and Plato's "cave dwellers"? We identify the forms we perceive in the dark with forms we see as enlightened natural philosophers. These forms, which we perceive 1. as stepping-stones to our standing or functioning at the top of a natural hierarchy of beings, and so 2. as building-block for our own authority, are forms that we do not question as forms, insofar as we assume that their ontological context is utterly unfathomable. In eminently practical terms, we are equivalent to Plato's cave dwellers, for they too see "forms" in the dark as stepping-stone to personal supremacy. Pangle's natural philosopher is the best "individual" of the best species (the human) in virtue of his field-research and meditation on forms of "momentously unique" beings (Pangle, 2020).

While Pangle seems to teach that his "forms/species" are essentially-permanent functions, he stresses that those forms have no conceivable being aside from "individual" beings. There is supposed to be no Man aside from "this" or "that" particular man; no "man in God's mind," for there is no God to begin with — no God of nature, to speak with a long Platonic tradition. Yet, what would *"ecce homo!"* mean where man's manifestation has no otherworldly background? In the absence of a divine dimension of things, or of the inherence of things in an eternal mind, where would things manifest from? Pangle leaves only one door open to us, here, and that door is the *machine* or mechanism — implying strict compulsion — through which "this man" is constituted within a special "function". For we are supposed to be fundamentally *driven* by the unfathomable into existence, or into existing within a given form proper to us as a species. As for our "uniquely divergent individuality," this is a momentous ("historically contingent," in historicist terms; "evolutionary," to speak with modern biology) entity that can be decomposed entirely in terms of a species-relative form/function and the material forces of an unfathomable context of general change/evolution (Pangle, 2020).

The words are not Aristotle's own, but Pangle proposes that the Stagirite, on one hand merely pretends that there is a mind or intelligence embracing evolution, while on the other offers

us a merely rudimentary biology limited to the formation of the "parts" of animals, while falling short of addressing the question of organisms as wholes, hypothetically because the Stagirite didn't live long enough.

Pangle's argument rests here upon the sense that the organism as a whole mirrors the organ as this one mirrors inorganic matter; as if the Higher mirrored the Lower (as its function), rather than the other way around; under the assumption that nature itself is devoid of intelligence (Pangle, 2020).

If for Aristotle art imitates nature given that nature imitates art, for Pangle the Stagirite could not possibly have taken seriously the latter condition. In presenting nature as a divine art, Aristotle would have been merely feigning piety. Nothing is said, however, of an alternative traditional reading on account of which Aristotle would have "rediscovered" nature in the mirror of art and so the human in the mirror of the divine — the human, Platonically speaking, "in his proper place," or as a tree whose roots are in Heaven.[10]

Not surprisingly, Pangle's Aristotle is an anthropocentric for whom nature is key to the political, even as there is no divine key to the human. The human/political problem is then a "decisive" one, one pertaining to "decisions" in the face of material necessity. If the human being, or more precisely Pangle's natural philosopher, is the highest of beings, then answers, rather than questions stand at the pinnacle of the Ladder of Being: answers we are to determine progressively, rather than questions we are meant to return to contemplatively;[11] a will to exercise, rather than an intelligence that volition could gather back into (Pangle, 2020).

In the absence of a God of nature, "evolution" must remain a mechanical building upward, where the Low is *proof* for the High, rather than its mere *sign* — as it is for traditional Platonism and unaided common sense, alike. Yet, Pangle (2020) sets out to topple this "older" path in the name of a "strict empiricism" that vindicates pre-Socratic materialism ("natural philosophy"), rather than

defending the inherence of the metaphysical in the ethical. Indeed nothing is said about the possibility that Aristotle's "biology" about the *parts* (organs) of animals represented the Stagirite's attempt to show *signs* that life is presupposed by the lifeless, or that life is permanently hidden within the (overtly) lifeless, even prior to its becoming manifest outside of it.[12] The notion that the inorganic stands as a potentiality for organs, or that all matter is necessarily informed (Pangle readily recognizes this lesson in Aristotle) would have been helpful to Aristotle in countering Epicureanism. Yet, that same notion could have been carried too far, serving the interests of a dogmatism no less inimical to Platonism than Epicurus, namely one represented by the resolution that the inorganic can fully account for organisms.

Aristotle's silence ("indifference to, or neglect of") when it came to a biological account of whole organisms would then point to the ethical-divine limitations of natural teleology, not in the sense that non-philosophers would persecute philosophers for daring to account for the human in strictly "naturalistic" terms, but in the sense that nature must ultimately appear to us as altogether fathomless as long as we do not see it "in its proper place," or as art. Wherever we perceive nature as devoid of mind, our own mind is emptied of nature, while our will imposes itself dogmatically as answer to all questions.[13]

In emptying nature of art, Pangle's Aristotle offers us an art devoid of nature; an art that can justify itself only as mastery of nature.[14] The Stagirite can stand at best as precursor of Pangle's "scientific" plan to devise a full biological account of man, such that would enable us to address political problems more successfully than ever before by channelling our material compulsions in and through our species-relative function as defined by Pangle's evolutionary biology. Our "function" would thereby be validated, if not to solve political problems once and for all, at least to stand as our best guarantor of freedom and order, without need to appeal to a higher God if not as a manner

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10 For a systematic exploration of the problem at hand, see *Medieval Teachers of Freedom: Boethius, Peter Lombard and Aquinas on Creation from Nothing* (Andreacchio, 2023).

11 According to Pangle's Aristotle , contemplation entails a finite mind's view of its own empirical "dealing" with "needful concerns" (Pangle, 2020).

12 In speaking of "lifeless compound-heaps," Pangle (2020) assumes that life presupposes the lifeless absolutely (Pangle's "ontological background"). Consciousness/intellect itself will arise from life (emerging in turn out of absence of life), as byproduct of the evolution of the "inorganic" (supposedly absolutely lifeless) reducible to "fourfold prime matter [that] changes constantly."

13 For a recent discussion on this problem, see my introduction to Wang Yangming (Satyricus M, 2023).

14 For a pertinent systematic questioning of contemporary philosophical Neo-Epicureanism, see Andreacchio (2019a, 2019b).

of speech useful to flatter Pangle's enemies into subjugation to Pangle's politics (Pangle, 2020).

What advantage is offered here with respect to the biology we are accustomed to as moderns? In turning to Aristotle, Pangle can expose the limits of a modern biology/rationalism that tends to reduce identity to relations, even though we might object that ultimately modernity appeals to relations only as a means to reconstruct identity on a "scientific" basis. But then, is this not precisely what Pangle is trying to achieve?

While formally objecting to modernity's value/fact dichotomy, Pangle (2020) accepts it in practical terms or hermeneutically, where nature incapsulated in definite arguments is approached in terms of "facts" used to solve problems, where problems stand *de facto* as fuel to establishing ever-new solutions. Otherwise put, nature outside of Pangle's "functions" is indistinguishable from the Cartesian *res extensa* that, throughout the "historical unfolding" of the Machiavellian blueprint for modernity's Brave New World, has served as stepping stone for the rise of Technocracy.

A cardinal and reasonable objection Pangle faces is the one modernity at large faces, for in the absence of a mind "external" to nature (or more precisely of the providence of a transcendent God), mind cannot be "in" nature without being utterly lost in it *even* as it justifies itself by "finding"/defining itself in terms of "functions" (forms) we can *use* to master nature, which is to say to use nature as material fuel for political decisions aimed at supporting natural philosophy (here, as advocated by Pangle). The only freedom that is recognized now is exercised only in overcoming natural necessity; a freedom presupposing, then, compulsion as primordial mover (Pangle, 2020).

Why does man emerge out of inorganic matter? Not because of any pre-human mind. So a single alternative imposes itself: human life evolves out of inorganic compounds as a result of the mechanical stream of an unfathomable vortex whirling through "forms". Now, while noting that for

Aristotle these forms "do not come into being," Pangle (2020) rejects the transcendence of forms and so, too, the traditional notion of forms in God's mind. If the forms or species-relative functions are not in God's mind, then where are they? We might say that the forms in question are those of place, standing as the "limit-functions" defining place, so that they are not strictly speaking anywhere. Pangle's forms will then be timeless, much as Heisenberg's physical particles are supposed to be, insofar as they are not "in space and time objectively," constituting rather the parameters within which specialized and temporalized matter/potentiality moves. Yet, the problem of context is not eliminated alongside that of time and space. Are the boundaries of "objective" space and time simply free-floating devises for the emergence of decision-making natural philosophers? Do those forms stand merely in the context of an unfathomable vortex? If forms of generation are by definition not generated, must they not be somehow substantively independent of their generated instantiations? One might argue that the forms are "active" in generation and "latent" outside of it, but latency here does not entail a mere conceptual abstraction, as Pangle seems to argue citing Aristotle's reference to universal forms as entailing "a certain composite whole" made of words and matter considered universally/overall or καθόλου.

On Pangle's reading of Aristotle, biological forms of species must arise in unison with their particular contents, without presupposing any form embracing all of its possible contents. Not being "in space and time objectively," the forms are not *eo ipso* immune to space and time. The fundamental question here pertains to their *raison d'être*: do the forms arise (as "objective" boundaries of space and time) due to mechanical forces and so material necessity, or are they eternally present in a substantive form embracing all matter? [15]

Pangle (2020) renders his Kantian-like answer[16] rather evident as he brushes off Aristotle's

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[15] In the former case, the forms would seem to arise to human consciousness, or relatively to us, as Pangle's evocation of Nietzsche's anthropocentrism would suggest.

[16]   Pangle's Aristotle is in *practical terms* indistinguishable from a Kantian, since in Pangle's "system of nature" (to borrow Giacomo Leopardi's felicitous expression) "eternal" forms serve as *formal structures* of a nature conceived mechanistically (on "system" in contemporary biology, see further F. Capra and P. L. Luisi (2014), *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*. Pangle's ontology is then essentially compatible with that of contemporary materialists who find no use for Aristotle. See for instance *Frontiers of Consciousness: Chichele Lectures*. Edited by Lawrence Weiskrantz and Martin Davies (2008); esp. Adam Zeman (2008), "Does Consciousness spring from the brain? Dilemmas of awareness in practice and in theory." Zeman's inconclusive account of consciousness points to a vulgarized version of Hegelian dialectics, whereby our material world comes to know itself "for the first time" in man and through his brain. For further evidence of Hegel's footprint in contemporary biology, see D. C. Dennet (2017), *From bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds*.

references to divine perfection on the way to making space for Darwinian evolutionism, or the notion that animals are fundamentally or primordially moved by a drive for survival, or for preservation of their "individual existence, forever." A reading of Aristotle as seeing animals as reproducing, not because they cannot *exist* forever "individually," but because they fail to reach up to eternal being (cosmologically, the actual boundaries of the universe), is left altogether out of the picture. Necessarily so, given that the only mind Pangle allows for is a finite one determined by material drives, where biological general forms or *genera* are "intellectual matter" (matter ready to be reasoned about) that allows us to think of zoological beings.

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RECLAIMING THE RIGHT TO PLAY IN THE
GOOGLEBURG GALAXY

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the concept of reclaiming democracy in the Googleburg Galaxy by emphasizing the need to separate from our current relationship with mediated technologies. It argues that digital spaces should be activated as public spheres, third spaces, counter-publics, and sites of contestation. The essay emphasizes the importance of participatory democracy, which requires freedom of assembly, thought, speech, play, and choices for individuals to be active agents in their lives. It discusses the intertwined nature of democracy and capitalism and highlights the role of critical media literacy in navigating mediated spaces. The essay also examines young people's occupation of digital spaces and social media, focusing on the impact of language and the importance of diverse

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stories and representation. It discusses the need for a free press in guaranteeing the protection of democratic rights and critiques Habermas' notion of the public sphere. The essay calls for reconfiguring the Googleburg Galaxy through third spaces and counter-publics and emphasizes the role of play, storytelling, and critical media literacy in reclaiming democracy. It explores the impact of COVID-19 on digital spaces and the need for alternative spaces, politics, and pedagogies. The essay concludes by highlighting the role of play as a subversive tool for reclaiming democracy and the importance of children's rights in digital spaces.

Keywords

democracy, mediated technologies, public spheres, third spaces, counterpublics, critical media literacy, play, resistance

INTRODUCTION

Critical media literacy can be viewed as an approach that encourages play. As a project of social justice, critical media literacy uses play to unpack issues of representation, ideology, and economics in media and technology. With the popular and political competition for global electronic attention, social media platforms have become contested advertising, recruitment, propaganda, and activism domains. Education, play, economics, and citizenship are in crisis and are the battlegrounds for reclaiming democracy. Education is only one component of social change. Political action and social movements are also necessary to produce more democratic, socially just, and eco-friendly futures. Play can and must reclaim its role as the

tool by which education moves into political action. Marshall McLuhan famously noted how technology could be viewed as an extension of the self (McLuhan & Lapham, 1994). For close to 300,000 years, language has been a human technology (Handwerk, 2021). Through language, the ability to play and tell stories has served as an extension of the self into physical and digital environments. However, language is more than an extension of self; it is also a core component of subjecthood. The choice of words (storytelling) we use to categorize, order, structure, and explain the chaos of human life offers different glimpses into our subjectivity based entirely on the language we select (the stories we tell). The words that describe the spaces we occupy impact how we exist within those spaces and, of course, who benefits from such interpretations. We use language to craft the stories by which we embody the world we live in. Language organizes one's place within that world by describing who belongs and who benefits from access and privilege. In the Googleburg Galaxy, a world dominated by Google, Apple, Amazon, Facebook, and more, subjecthood requires critical media literacy and an active engagement with media technologies to ensure diverse stories and media.

Storytelling, which is how sapiens use the tool of language, connects the self to one's environment. This is an act of play. From the earliest stages of humanity, play has served as the process by which sapiens appropriate language and remix it to tell their stories. Friedrich Schiller (2004) calls this the play impulse. Play embodies creativity and expression, functioning as the conduit through which our subjective experiences assimilate into our objective realities. It holds immense power to shape language, enabling the

validation or destabilization of prevailing power dynamics. Beyond a mere activity, play defines our humanity and influences our worldview. However, the dominance of technological entities has significantly impacted the apparatus through which stories are conveyed, affecting the regulations that govern play.

Reclaiming democracy in the Googleburg Galaxy involves reshaping digital spaces to serve as public spheres, third spaces, and sites of contestation. This paper delves into the essence of participatory democracy, emphasizing individual freedoms and choices within political and economic arenas. It highlights the regulatory limitations within democratic structures and the intertwined relationship between democracy and capitalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Johan Huizinga (1998), in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, emphasizes the significance of play alongside language and storytelling in human history. Play informs language for storytelling and engages individuals in challenging their roles in different situations, empowering them as active creators of meaning. Play is creative and expressive. Play is how our subjective selves digest our objective realities. It animates our language and, in doing so, has the power to legitimate or destabilize unequal power dynamics. Play is more than just something we do. It makes us human and shapes how we see the world. In *Homo* Ludens, Huizinga (1998) suggests that play is equal to language, storytelling, or myth in the history of humanity. As a system, play informs language to tell stories. As a technique, play engages sapiens in their concrete situations, challenging them to question their role in these situations and empowering them to engage as active meaning-makers.

Equally important is the connection highlighted by Schiller between actions of play and human beings' moral and civic freedoms. Schiller (2004) states, "But how does the artist secure himself against the corruptions of his time, which everywhere encircle him? By disdaining its opinion … let him resign the sphere of the actual to the intellect, whose home it is, but let him strive, through the union of the possible with the necessary, to produce the Ideal. Let him stamp it on illusion and truth, coin it in the play of his imagination and in the gravity of his actions, in every sensuous and spiritual form, and quietly launch it into infinite Time" (p. 52). As Karen Davis (2021) argues in discussing Schiller's arguments on play, "it is in this state of aesthetic play ['playfulness' that is free from physically or moral constraints] that we become most fully human." Play is creative and expressive, offering contestation, rebellion, and subversion opportunities.

Reclaiming democracy in the Googleburg Galaxy demands separation from our relationship with mediated technologies. In its stead, digital spaces must be activated as play spaces, public spheres, third spaces, counterpublics, and sites of contestation. Access to the press is essential in guaranteeing the protection of the fundamental rights of democracy. For Habermas (1989) and his notion of a public sphere, ideas were passed on or communicated through a free, non-commercial press. The press, as described by Habermas (1989), was not yet a corporate organization
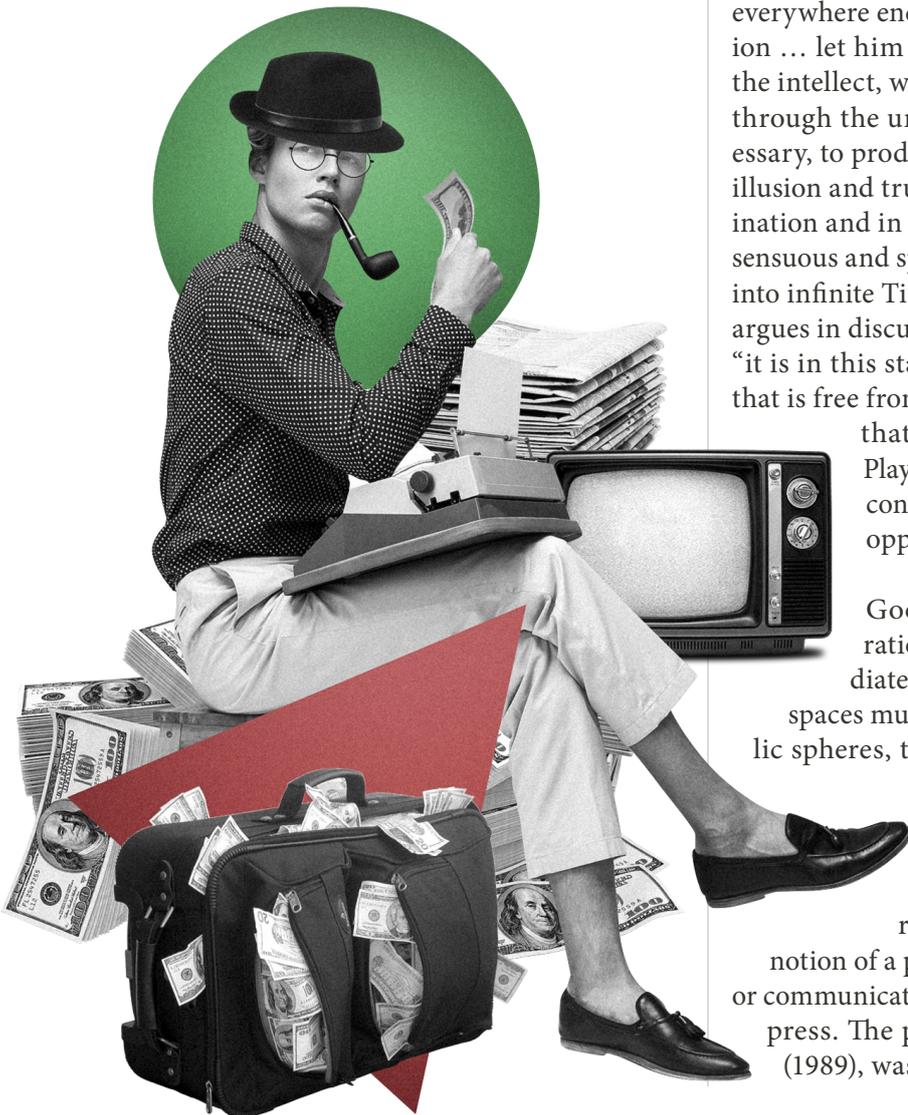
that required significant capital to participate in and with large-scale access afforded only to those accredited as part of the institution of journalism. Like social media platforms today, if an individual is both literate and possesses enough wealth to access the internet, they can publish and circulate their own ideas on whatever subject they choose, regardless of legitimacy or credibility. The challenge for Habermas was that as media became corporate, individual citizens lost their direct access to the media production system, thus closing opportunities for citizens to publish and circulate ideas about politics and the government. Instead, a professional press emerged, which became authorities on subject matters, whose ideas and opinions were deemed more important and accurate and believed to garner more influence over public opinion. As Douglas Kellner (n.d.) notes,

> *Habermas's focus on democratization was linked with emphasis on political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development…The two major themes of the book include analysis of the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere, followed by an account of the structural change of the public sphere in the contemporary era with the rise of state capitalism, the culture industries, and the increasingly powerful positions of economic corporations and big business in public life. On this account, big economic and governmental organizations took over the public sphere, while citizens became content to become primarily consumers of goods, services, political administration, and spectacle. (p.3)*

Without a free press, Habermas concluded, there could be no public sphere.

Reclaiming the public sphere requires using existing media spaces offered by the technocrati as third spaces, despite their heavy use of surveillance. Third spaces oppose the primary and secondary spaces of home and work by their very existence. Here, meaning is made, contested, and negotiated — despite a framework of colonialized and institutionalized unequal power relations. For Homi Bhabha (2004), third spaces describe the meeting point between dominant and oppositional cultures occupying the same physical space. Embedded within the folds of the dominant structure that envelopes the lives of its inhabitants and dictates

norms and opportunities (or lack thereof), these third spaces often go unnoticed or unseen until they grow to the point where their opposition presents a clear and present danger to domination. Graham Huggan (2001) notes that third spaces are where: "minority groups in the metropoles — marginal within the center — adumbrate a third rhetorical space that disrupts and destabilizes centralized authority" (p. 21). As a result, third spaces are often noted as liminal or oppositional in that they speak from the margins or periphery. However, Huggan rightly points out that third spaces exist within the same potentially oppressive structures to which they are liminal. Because they continue to be overlooked by those outside, third spaces can act as counterpublics, necessary for reconfiguring the Googleburg Galaxy.

Counterpublics exist as both subsets of and in opposition to dominant publics. For Michael Warner (2014), "A public organizes itself independently of state institutions, law, formal frameworks of citizenship, or preexisting institutions such as the church … It is self-creating and self-organized, and herein lies its power as well as its elusive strangeness" (p. 51). He notes, "A public in this sense is as much notional as empirical. It is also partial, since there could be an infinite publics within the social totality" (p. 51). Building on Warner's analysis, counterpublics are any oppositional or subversive public.

The digital realm, primarily social media, is a dominant space for play and communication. Despite limited opportunities for individual agency and narrative freedom across social media platforms, there is growing evidence of young people's digital activism on critical societal issues, such as climate change, the environment, food scarcity, gender equity, and racial inequality [Foot note 27].

METHODS

Play creates spaces where individuals assume distinct roles and behaviors. Humans play by entering spaces, like what Huizinga (1998) called the magic circle, "temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart" (p.10). Within the magic circle, individuals take on expected roles, actions, and personalities that differ from those outside the game. When controlled by a select group, these spaces shape shared narratives and solidify certain ideologies. Notably, tech giants have capitalized on platforms where stories are narrated and where play occurs, impacting the tales told and shaping societal discourse.

During the lockdown period of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I conducted a series of research projects to discover more about young people's digital "play" in a time of social distancing and isolation. This research is built on earlier ethnographic projects at York University in Toronto, Canada, dating back to 2011, and now includes more than 1000 Canadian children's discussions of digital play. Drawing on critical social theory and intersectionality and using qualitative research methods, such as photovoice, ethnography, surveying, and participatory techniques, I investigated young people's lives in the virtual public. This research provides a deeper understanding of how young people make sense of their experiences in an increasingly digital world. A greater understanding of young people's lives in digital spaces is now essential to promoting and preserving children's rights in law, advocacy, social work, policy, education, and play (UNICEF, 1989).

This research aligns with the recent importance placed on researching young people's digital lives as part of a parallel existence to their physical lives for scholars and activists of Children's Rights. UNICEF, for example, turned its focus in this direction with its 2017 State of the World's Children annual report "Children in a Digital World" (UNICEF, 2017). It also adds to longer-standing debates, such as those by youth critical theorist- Shirley Steinberg, dating back two-plus decades, but most recently in her introduction to *Young People and Social Media,* about how the lack of public space designated as youth space has continued to fuel moral panics

With an understanding of technology far more sophisticated than any previous generation, today's youth possess the tools, savvy, and possibilities to reclaim the Googleburg Galaxy. However, placing the sole responsibility of overcoming an infrastructure of domination on today's youth would be unjust. Especially when the technology required to activate change embodies them and subversively normalizes its presence into the backdrop of their every action. The materiality of objects we engage with (like iPhones and Google search engines) has become so subversive, regular, and ordinary that we no longer ask critical questions of the media, mediums, and messages we consume. For example, who owns the medium, what inherent bias exists in the technology, and how material objects inform our perceptions of truth, justice, and democracy.

This paper critiques the limitations of existing media ownership and representation in digital spaces. It emphasizes the need for broader inclusivity through the reclamation of social media platforms and digital networks as play spaces, third spaces, public spheres, and counterpublics, whereby young people as citizens challenge the dominant narratives perpetuated by traditional and digital media.

concerning young people gathering in physical and now in digital spaces and why digital spaces are an essential component to children's culture and youth culture (Gennaro & Miller, 2021).

RESULTS

In the opinions expressed by the young people who participated in this project, their play during the pandemic helped them to formulate a sense of self and a sense of purpose and to display those attitudes and feelings to others through play to remain connected and to feel normal. This connection and normalizing occurred online as well as in physical space. Based on these findings from this research, it becomes evident that young people who spoke to us in the Pandemic Project are aware of the changes to their lives due to COVID-19. They are also quite adept at adapting to these changes. Play has moved from liminal spaces or third spaces outside of adult control and direct supervision into the primary space of the home. One of the ways that young people re-assert a youth-centric space for identity formation and connection and stabilize their everyday experiences through play with their peer group has been to relegate play, work, socializing, shopping, fitness, art, culture, leisure, learning, music and more to the digital. As described, these activities sometimes remain in primary spaces- open for adult supervision and control. Other times, the movement to the digital, as explained to us, allowed for the escape from direct surveillance at a time where social isolation due to COVID-19 places young people even more under the direct control of adults in their lives than at any other time in modern history. In either case, we have discovered here that young people gather to play, whether in physical or digital spaces.

The material artifacts produced by the young people and their explanations show that Covid has moved all aspects of young people's lives online, including play, and that young people have adapted by treating their digital experiences with the same primacy/value that was previously only attributed to physical play and space. Therefore, by acknowledging the value of digital materiality for child and youth culture, I argue that the digital spaces of young people's play can no longer be "other" for corporations, workers, policymakers, and academics- all who occupy essential roles in the construction, surveillance, policing, and legitimation of digital play spaces for young people. Instead, in conjunction with adult allies, these spaces can be activated as play spaces whereby they operate as public spheres, third spaces, and/or counterpublics, to ensure the voices of young people are heard, the rights of children and youth are protected, and enforced, and that democracy is removed the pockets of corporate media and returned to the hands and mouths of the people for whom it exists in the first place.

DISCUSSION

Reclaiming Third Spaces

Participatory democracy requires the freedom for individuals to assemble, think, talk, and play. It also requires choices for individuals when presented with the politics of their societies as an invitation to be active agents in their own lives. For example, Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly states, "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: freedom of conscience and religion; freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication" (Government of Canada, 2018). Each individual in a participatory democracy is afforded the protection and opportunity to freely exercise choice within two separate and overlapping arenas: the political and the economic.

However, in the lived experiences of people in the Global North, freedoms are regulated, and choices are limited within the structural apparatuses that enact democracy. Democracy and capitalism are strange bedfellows. The political arena of democracy concerns the governing structures of society, and its apparatus extends to and includes education systems, media, and social institutions such as health, judicial, and penal systems. The economic arena of democracy encompasses the material conditions and transactions of individuals. This includes the general economy, the banking system, privatized personal credit, media monopolies (phone companies, television companies, film companies, internet providers, social media platform owners), and, of course, through convergence, the overlapping ownership of all these areas by a select few. Capitalism, on the surface, appears to be an economic system, yet the underlying actions that grease its wheels are ideological, based not on what gets sold but on how stories get told and consumed.

Media in our media world develops within existing sets of specific and overlapping economic, social, cultural, political, and historical

frameworks (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2016). The impact of these frameworks appears in and through shared symbols in media discourse, which either explicitly or implicitly make, mark, and maintain social inequality and difference. As economic and political citizens, we must hold all control systems and institutions accountable for fair and equitable representations and access. To do this, we require unfiltered access to the freedoms of speech, press, and association. These are the pillars of participatory democracy. However, when a small group of proprietors controls the magic circle, the stories that get told, shared, liked, and cemented into popular discourse are framed through their guiding principles. The guiding principles of the proprietors who own the magic circle are entirely profit-centered.

Habermas (1989) discussed the need for a safe, open space where the members of the bourgeois could congregate and discuss the reigning government and monarchs without fear of repression. The public sphere described by Habermas existed in places like coffee houses and salons across Europe. It was modeled in the Ancient Greek tradition of the agora, where trade and commerce intersected with discussions of philosophy, politics, the self, and government. The first and second spaces of home and work dominate the daily activities of citizens in the Googleburg Galaxy. Home is the primary space for individuals' lives, and work is the secondary space that occupies their daily routines, rituals, and interactions with the social world. The first and second spaces are heavily politicized. However, third spaces are spaces for de-politicization from dominant norms, ideas, and ideologies and re-politicizing the self through reflective and critical play. Social media spaces reshape the lines between the public and the private. With social media, public spheres can now exist in the privacy of one's home and no longer require a protected and safeguarded public space for public meetings of individuals to discuss politics. The digital public sphere and virtual agora are supposed to increase accessibility and participation.[1] To ensure this, we must reclaim these spaces as third spaces despite their totalitarian structure and economic dominance.

Digital third spaces are required; however, they remain just one dimension of the human experience in the Googleburg Galaxy. Humans still need to interact physically with the political in the first and second spaces of home, school, work, and community — even if many exist online after COVID-19. Considering the neo-liberal projects to dismantle the Welfare State, colonize the public sphere, and control all media communication, it is up to citizens, activists, and educators to create alternative spaces, politics, and pedagogies. As proliferating technologies become increasingly central to everyday life, and the lines between what is the extension of the self and what is the cyborg blur, developing oppositional politics in third spaces becomes increasingly essential. Changes in the economy, politics, and social life brought about by expanding social media into all realms of life in the Googleburg Galaxy demand critical and oppositional thinking in response to the ever-expanding marginalization of our material conditions.

Reclaiming Play Spaces

Shanly Dixon and Sandra Weber argue that most children's lives are primarily within the adult-dominated structures of home and school. As children live out daily experiences in these spaces, they are actively denied the freedom and choice of citizenship within the structures of primary (home) and secondary (school) spaces because of adult gatekeepers (Weber & Dixon, 2011). Still, third spaces for children's play exist — from hiding spaces and secret spaces to treehouses and bedrooms to ravines or basement forts — where "they both feel concealed and secret; they are spaces where a child might slip off alone escaping daily demands; and they are places in which to fantasize and dream" (p. 486). It is here that young people actively negotiate their social place and value. Therefore, play (both physical and digital) occupies a pedagogical role, acting as "a sense-making interaction with the environment through which they learn about the world, each other, and themselves. Through fantasy or narrative play, they represent and interpret their understanding of various aspects of the

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1 The internet as a public sphere is not a new idea. A simple Google search of the terms "internet as public sphere" on June 23, 2021, returned more than 77.3 million results, and a similar search on Google Scholar returns results of 723,000 articles or books with the phrase in its title. The connection between these two topics is often attributed to Mark Poster (1997), whose 1997 "Cyber-democracy: Internet and the Public Sphere," remains a canonical text decades later despite the rapid and dramatic shifts in the technology and access.

culture surrounding them" (Weber & Dixon, 2011, p. 488). Play also occupies a subversive position when activating inside a public sphere, third space, or counterpublic, enabling the safety to challenge, critique, and destabilize social norms. Mary Flanagan (2009) notes, "[p]lay is, by definition, a safety space. If a designer or artist can make safe spaces that allow the negotiation of real-world concepts, issues, and ideas, then a game can be successful in facilitating the exploration of innovative solutions for apparently intractable problems." Through play, children accept or deny the stories of their culture, media, and society, ensuring play's primary role in young people's cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological development.

COVID-19 forced the migration of all aspects of young people's lives to the digital. Around the world, outdoor public spaces are closed, schools are shut down, sports teams and clubs are canceled, and the opportunity to gather and congregate in public spaces is discouraged and even made illegal in some parts. UNICEF reported that COVID-19 displaced over 1.6 billion children in 190 countries, confining them to their homes and moving all their activities — including play- away from the public and physical spaces (UNICEF, 2021). Social media platforms emerged as a battleground for freedom, democracy, and subjectivity in the Googleburg Galaxy. COVID-19 forced the migration of all aspects of young people's lives to the digital, placing their actions of play — both re-enforcing and subversive play– into first spaces and a clear view of parents, teachers, coaches, practitioners, and other adults. This removed previously liminal spaces, third spaces for young people's lives. Whether in a virtual public space for all to see or in the privacy of handheld communication between contacts, play, storytelling, and being occurs almost exclusively on sites owned, controlled, and monitored by third parties who operate primarily on the economic interests of their shareholders.

Among those themes most often discussed in the stories told by young people when asked about their experiences of play during the pandemic were that play and digital play helped them to feel normal during the pandemic and how digital play served the role of the primary conduit for connection to others during COVID19 lockdowns. Herein lay the challenge with online or digital play for the Googleburg Galaxy since play, by its very definition, is supposed to exist outside of ordinary life. However, pandemic play research has shown that play during COVID-19 has taken on a more significant social role for young people. One of the ways that young people re-asserted a youth-centric space for identity formation and a connection was to digitally stabilize their everyday experiences through play with their peer group. As described, these activities sometimes remained in first spaces open for adult supervision and control. Other times, movement to the digital allowed for the escape from direct surveillance when social isolation due to COVID-19 placed young people under even more direct control of adults in their lives than at any other time in modern history. In either case, we have discovered that young people gather to play, be it in physical or digital spaces.
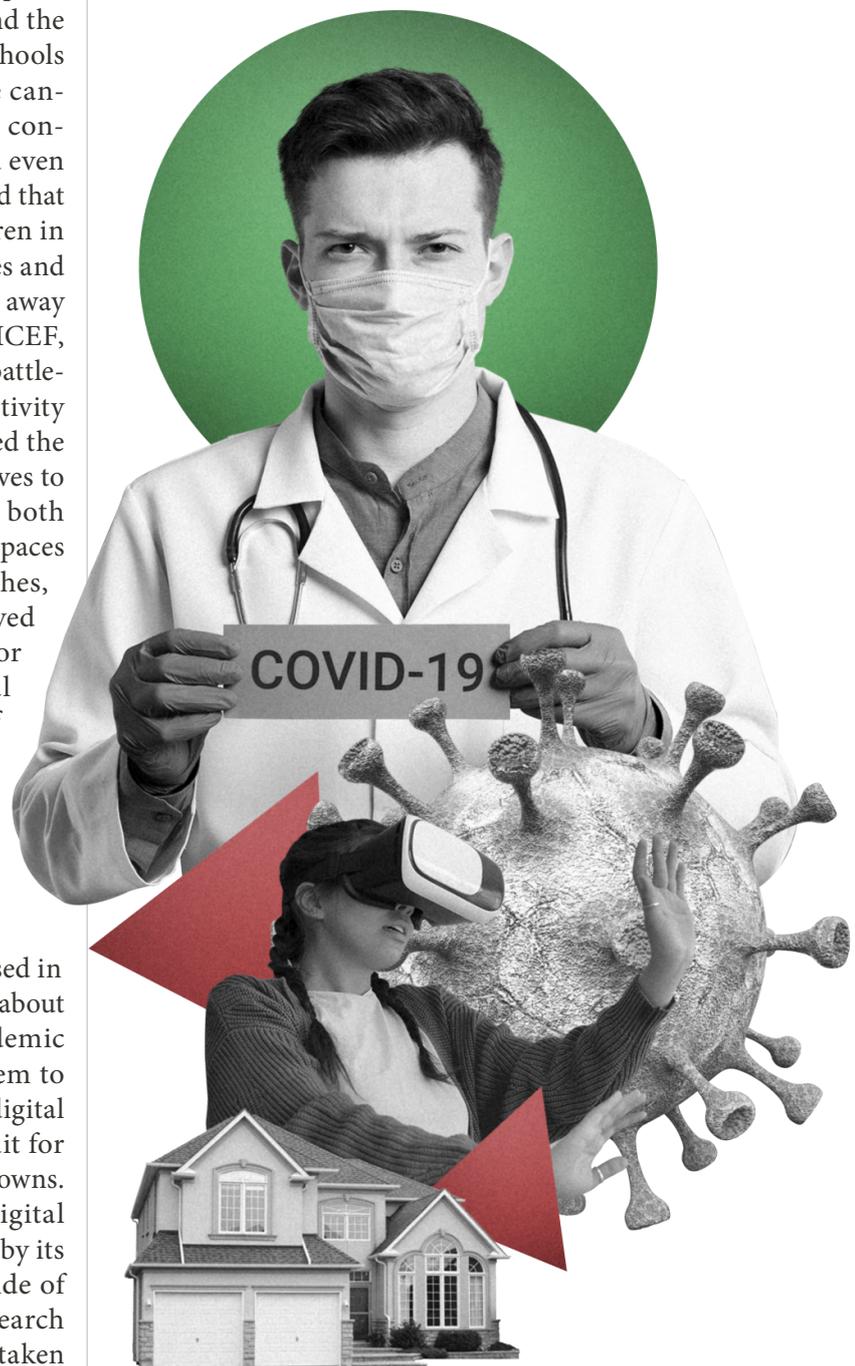
Play remains central to their sense of self and understanding of the changing world.

A rights-based approach that recognizes the digital in all elements of young people's lives: law, advocacy, education, policy, media, play, work, and family, is the requirement a priori if we are to reclaim the Googleburg Galaxy. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all young people have the right to play. Articles 12 and 13 address the need to establish platforms for young people to share their voices and the required allyship from adults and institutions for activation. These are fundamental human rights. Our struggle to reclaim the media, the public sphere, the right to resistance, and a participatory democracy begins with establishing and enacting children's rights in digital spaces.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper advocates reclaiming digital spaces as third spaces despite their surveillance-heavy nature. It underscores the importance of third spaces, counterpublics, and critical media literacy in fostering diverse, inclusive, and participatory democratic engagements within the Googleburg Galaxy. Because of the pandemic, young people are thrust into digital spaces and are navigating a landscape where play, storytelling, and identity formation occur under third-party surveillance. There's a growing need to recognize digital rights as integral to children's development, ensuring their right to play and shaping spaces for participatory democracy and resistance against hegemonic norms. Establishing and enacting these

rights is pivotal in reclaiming digital spaces as avenues for authentic expression and protest.

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