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## **POST-TOTALITARIAN SITUATION: Totalitarian Virtualization vs Democratic Free Thinking?**

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Post-totalitarian situation is a result of collapse of totalitarian system and establishment of the society of a new type. The post-totalitarian situation reveals general social and cultural tendencies. Hence it's not peculiar only for the countries, which experienced the dominion of totalitarian regime. Totalitarian utopias, the implementation, dominion and collapse of which characterized 20th century, are the universal projects of human's development raised and substantiated by the Modern civilization. These Enlightenment projects demonstrate the historical capacity and cultural productivity of social constructivism, which determines the modern Western civilization at large. Therefore collapse of different versions of totalitarianisms — with fascist or communist regimes — is a great lesson for the entire world.

One of the important tasks is to research in what manner the post-totalitarian situation has an impact on democracy culture. Assuming the primacy of critical thinking for democracy one should ask: "What does the post-totalitarian situation mean for the course of the thinking?". After World War II a famous European intellectual mentioned: "How can the mind exist after Oswiecim?" In the same way we may ask: "How can thinking exist after totalitarianism? What kind it should be of?"

As a matter of fact a totalitarian regime destroys free unprejudiced mind and makes the existence of its social correlate — independent competent intellectual — impossible. Totalitarianism and actual autonomy of mind are incompatible. Totalitarian system in one of its

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dimensions is a huge and effective anti-thinking machine. It is bound to destroy and to make any free and non-ideological intellectual movement impossible. That is why after the totalitarianism collapses the mind encounters urgent tasks — to overcome the anti-thinking system, non-freedom of the thought, ideological and theoretical prejudices and authority of mass myths. If a powerful inertia of totalitarian heritage is not overcome the philosophical mind will remain quasi-thinking bearing only artificial resemblance of actual comprehension. This is far much easier in the contemporary world overfilled with various intellectual simulacra.

Victory over from totalitarian society in the sphere of thinking is effectuated through a post-totalitarian discourse. The latter means trying to understand manifold aftermath of totalitarianism, consequences of its dominance and influence on the current state. However the post-totalitarian discourse is not so much accusation of the past as establishment of new standards of intellectual practice through reconsidering previous experience. Such reconsidering is impossible without thorough analysis of the essence of post-totalitarian society, decoding of all its components and analysis of its own consciousness.

The post-totalitarian discourse is being transformed into an arena, on which the thought, which is seeking for a freedom on the one side collides with a powerful inertia of old beliefs and stereotypes on the other side. This difficult competition is of importance not only for those societies, which underwent totalitarian transformations. It is an important impulse for the contemporary intellectual reflection in general and that is why it takes on universal significance.

### **Post-Totalitarian Discourse**

Implementing the post-totalitarian discourse is impossible without thorough analysis of the essence of post-totalitarian society, decoding of all its components and mastering its reflection. In doing so, addressing the Soviet Marxism philosophical heritage plays a special role. Actualizing the Soviet Marxism reception in the post-totalitarian discourse may be considered in two aspects: as a source of knowledge about the epoch and as a means of combating totalitarian engagement of the modern thinking. Since, to release thinking from the chimeras inherent to totalitarian mind, thinking must create new ideas and purposes corresponding to the requirements set by a new social perspective and, moreover, it must revise previous intellectual experience from the position of criticizing totalitarianism. This procedure enables not only to release thinking from multiple obsolete stereotypes and ideological dogmas, but also to actualize its intellectual and social responsibility.

The post-totalitarian discourse becomes the concern of thinking's survival, the arena where freedom of thought and slavery of beliefs and patterns collide. Therefore, it gains importance not only for those societies that have experienced totalitarian transformations, but also becomes a universal factor of modern intellectual reflection. This universality of the post-totalitarian discourse is derived from rational nature of totalitarian utopias, since totalitarianism is not a regret-

table mistake of the history. It represents a potential version of the European civilization social and cultural development based on the attempt of human mind to arrange human life according to own yardsticks. So, any society relying solely upon rational principles may face a threat of totalitarianism.

The above said particularly concerns the modern civilization characterized by world globalization and violent penetration of engineering and high technologies in the most spheres of human life. All-round “distribution” of the best (with reference to requests for their carriers) models of social structures and technological “improvement” of human capabilities encourage loss of individual’s uniqueness and opportunities to exercise personal freedom. There is a trend to supplant an individual with various virtual substitutes such as a commercialized consumer, PC user, mass media character, etc. The changes of this kind reveal vulnerable spots of the modern civilization originating from totalitarian mutations and, under globalization conditions, they may work as destructive forces of the previous humankind acquisitions in establishing the ideal of human freedom.

Let’s address a phenomenon of totalitarian consciousness as one of powerful causes of human virtualization. Constructivist nature is among key attributes of totalitarian consciousness. Being practical embodiment of rationally substantiated social life vision, totalitarian reality deliberately generates a form of consciousness corresponding to its needs. The said generation takes place by withdrawing human definitions of life from legitimate truths. A major subject in totalitarian society is not a separate individual, not a citizen, not a person with his/her unalienable rights, but a social integrity represented by progressive (working) class in the case of class totalitarianism. As a result, this is not a specific individual, but virtual totality that gains the meaning of starting point of the entire human life. And entire social reality is built to match the demands and needs of this rational structure. The whole spectrum of human and absolute in human existence is reduced to class interests. Inserting an individual into such a social system, where he/she has lost its determinative status, results in his/her virtualization: an individual rejects his/her nature in favor of socially engaged rationality.

So, a man is virtualized not only in totalitarian societies. Virtualization may be a result of any rational practice. Therefore, the problem of man virtualization by totalitarian thinking gains more and more urgency not only for post-totalitarian society. Techno-scientific societies, where impact of computer virtual realities does not yield to the power of totalitarian utopia virtuality, also need thinking over these scenarios.

Actuality of reflection over fundamentals of the totalitarian past is also due to the need to set the right optics to our post-totalitarian reality — “a side view” — from a Western observer’s perspective. His vision is often damaged with numerous stereotypes and prejudices towards “undemocratic” societies. The same way, analysis of totalitarian phenomena is mostly reduced to that of Soviet and post-Soviet societies. Such a topographic localization simplifies the essence of the phenomenon, withdraws it from the orbit of those societies, where the problem of individual’s

virtualization acquires especially menacing proportions. Therefore, my thesis is as follows: analysis of Soviet totalitarianism reveals not only nonproductive and regressive forms of post-totalitarian practices, but also terrible warnings to the modern world that totalitarianism may be resuscitated in future scenarios.

Let me remind that the totalitarian ideology - a system of views based on the Marxism theoretical propositions claiming scientific nature and objective character — dissolved an individual in the universal element. Individual's lifeworld is annihilated and absorbed by social totality, which is individual's certainty, a truth of his/her being in the framework of totalitarian ideology. At the same time, human life is mystified — dead becomes alive, and alive is replaced with fictitious.

Edgar Morin in his *Autocritique* demonstrates the mechanism of individual's virtualization by totalitarian mind based on his own experience. He believes that his conversion to Marxism resulted from his personal existential crisis that showed itself as the loss of life sensation and impaired his consciousness. Entering into active practice on transforming the world according to Marxist ideology meant for him "reconciliation with himself and the world" [Moren, 1998: p. 30]. The feeling of belonging to the collective efforts aimed at transforming the world into a terrestrial land moved own personal problems aside as they did not deserve attention. E. Morin writes: "This philosophy expressed the human need of liberation in a naked and ideal form. To be implemented, the philosophy was to be transformed into active revolutionary practice. One should have resigned himself to the laws of history in order to control it, one should have accept reality to subdue it. This was the active practice that transformed the world" [ibid.]. He believes it seemed as if "Stalinism sank to the animal state to adapt itself to the abominations existing in our world in order to clean it from the same" [ibid., p. 31]. So, a fighter for a communistic idea in many respects resembles a PC user who feels himself a creator of various worlds in virtual game dimension. A real world stops its existence in its certainty both for a totalitarian mind carrier and a modern computer hacker. Whatever the case, virtual engagement deprives an individual of his/her independence and turns him/her into a supplement to artificially generated realities.

The totalitarian idea does not allow sovereignty of an individual. A person exists solely as the integrals of a universal body, social totality. Georges Bataille in his *Sovereignty* analyzed in detail this denial of individual's sovereignty by totalitarian experience. He considers individual's sovereignty as a principal quality of human existence. He defines sovereignty as a value opposing enslavement and conquest of an individual as they make an individual to live in accordance with the necessity, which limits are set by own labor. While "the sovereign individual consumes and doesn't labor" [Bataille, 1993: p. 198] enjoying the world gifts beyond the limits of his/her needs. Therefore, "the sovereign (or the sovereign life) begins when, with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit... Life *beyond utility* is the domain of sovereignty" [ibid.]. Sovereignty provides "*the miraculous* sensation of having the world at his disposal" [ibid., p. 199], that is it connects an individual with the *sacred* [ibid., p. 260].

In fact, Bataille with his sovereignty concept continues a prolonged, sustainable modern metaphysics tradition, with Descartes *ego* being its starting point, Kant's arbitrary (self-legitimized) personality being its classic expression, and various philosophical solutions — from Kierkegaard's *Existence* to Heidegger's *Dasein*, Jaspers' *Existence* and Husserl's *Lifeworld* — being its reproduction based on the ground of existential philosophy.

However, Bataille focused most attention on devaluation and loss of sovereignty by a modern man. It is no wonder that the larger part of his book is dedicated to analyzing the communistic version of totalitarian practices as he considers their core is denial of individual sovereignty. He defines communism as a controversial movement drawing its strength from the sovereignty that has been renounced. According to Bataille “communism is the countermovement, it is the repercussion that drew its strength from sovereignty only to overthrow it — and that owed its effectiveness to the opposition that sovereignty gave rise to. Communism is also that vast world where what is sovereign must come back to life, in new forms perhaps, but perhaps in the most ordinary form” [ibid., p. 261-262]. Under communistic reign, a man replaces the God and ruler and, particularly, God, who, according to Eckhart, is “nothing”. Anthropology replaces theology. This is “a man and his/her needs” (according to Stalin's definition) that becomes the centre of the world order and demands glorification. Labor becomes a fundamental definition of a man, is his essence and creates human. “The Sovereign value of Communism Is Man, but It Is Man Who, in Order To Produce Better, Has Renounced Sovereignty” [ibid., p. 313].

However, not only ordinary people were made to renounce sovereignty (it could be done in favor of the ruler and thus ensure the possibility to observe sovereignty in him being religiously delighted). But the sovereign himself represented by Stalin renounced his sovereignty — “he only had the *power* and not the *enjoyment*” [ibid., p. 323]. As a result of renounced sovereignty, an individual no longer belongs himself/herself and the world closes for him/her.

Ambivalence in understanding a man inherent to Marxism can be traced in the works of the famous Soviet Marxist philosopher V. Ivanov — a representative of Kyiv world-view school. In his book *Human Activity — Cognition — Art* he writes: “A man is such a reality, which has not only essence, but also is capable of *seizing* it as its object and thus transforming it into an organizing prerequisite, into motivation of practical life” [Ivanov, 1977: p. 102]. As a result, “a subject treats activity as its initiator, who has a primacy of sovereign goal-setting” [ibid., p. 105]. It is impossible to raise a man higher. But what man is in question? An empiric individual is least of all in question as he has been depreciated by Marxism in full. A man in his particularity and his purely private, individual precision in terms of Marxist understanding is something unreal and does not worth attention. He is only a moment in general, universal movement confirming a Man in absoluteness of his “essential forces”. The brilliant works by V. Ivanov visually prove that the Marxist theory really raises a man and asserts him as threshold ontological truth. But it makes so solely through reducing an individual to general definitions. Self-affirmation of

a man in his generality is gained through self-abandonment in his particularity, personality. So, sovereignty of an individual is lost.

What is a consequence of individual sovereignty destruction by totalitarian ideology and practice? Reduction of a person to social totality gives birth to *virtualization of a man*. Universal integrity by its ontological status may exist only as *virtual reality*. Upon totalitarian demand a man is forced to *disclaim* his/her life-world — abandon it as something invalid, for a virtual reality of a universal subject, which component he becomes. The totalitarian project itself should become a new world for a man. Utopia implementation turns into the basis of his/her vital activity, and ideological briefs into the highest regulations of his life. Therefore, all life truths yield to the truths of utopian aspirations. This turns a man into a fully virtual figure. It is virtualized three times:

Firstly, an individual exists in a totalitarian project aimed at implementation of a global-scale historical mission. But one can't live directly inside the project. The method of existence in the totalitarian project is mediation of every action, perception, reaction by the system of meanings built by the ideology.

Therefore, secondly, individual's lifestyle becomes absolutely virtual. He/she deals not with things, but with ideologemes; contacts not with persons, but with ideological masks; realizes not his/her life scenarios, but performs a role assigned by the utopia.

According to virtualized method of vital activity, an individual, thirdly, is virtualized. He/she stops belonging himself/herself. A personality at large arises exclusively in a field of the totalitarian project force. He is nothing beyond its limits. A man gets his/her justifiability, reality sensation and, finally, own "Ego" only within the totalitarian utopia space. A man exercises his self-identifications only via connection with a totalitarian movement and exclusively on the basis of taking part in the same. Eric Naiman's *Sex in Public. The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* is an interesting research into totalitarian virtualization of a man, where he considers the utilization by early Soviet ideology of the bodily discourse with a special accent on sex problems in order to reach larger manipulation of a man. The author asserts that sex was among the major topics in political discourse those times [Naiman, 1997: p. 4].

I would not go deep into analytics of man's virtualization by totalitarian ideology and practice. I think the sense of the situation is outlined in sufficient detail. In general, it was thought over many times by various critics and analytics of totalitarianism. Accusing intonations towards it became commonplace long ago. But the problem of virtualization of a man and his being, so toughly visualized by totalitarian experience, goes far beyond existence of totalitarian projects. This is what I want to emphasize.

I address virtualization of a man by totalitarian ideology focusing not on research into totalitarian experience or settling world-view accounts with the past. The problem lies not in the past, but it in what *is happening*. A man is virtualized not only by totalitarian ideology. In its own manner, but not less consistently and tough, *modern sociality* annihilates the world of an individual.

The fact that researches into individual sovereignty and its destructions develop eloquently proves this thesis. As I have already noticed, this was Bataille, who focused in full on the totalitarian practices. He sees the totalitarian utopia as a source of threat to human sovereignty. But, the modern researches into human virtualizations believe that the destruction of human lifeworld originates from far more differing sources. The forms of existence virtualization differ the same way — from captivity in narcotic illusions and artificial mass media worlds to computer games, prostrations of socially parasitic way of life and modern “functional man”.

Summarizing I would say: virtualization of human existence today is combined with destruction of its existential component and disintegration of his/her lifeworld and it became a universal characteristic of modern, *global sociality*. Modern western civilization, in its own way, reproduces the same process of human transformation that was inherent to the totalitarian project. So, — once we agree to this diagnosis — we are to think over many things and start reconsidering seemingly doubtless and habitual notions.

Thus, the post-totalitarian situation aggravates the problem of human freedom and free thinking. The post-totalitarian discourse enables the modern philosophical thinking rather to reveal any (often hidden) threats that new forms of totalitarian thinking develop than to satisfy the interest in post-totalitarian countries. Strengthened virtualization of a modern man is among risk factors for free thinking. That is why, analyzing the post-totalitarian situation one should consider not only the totalitarian heritage, but also the modern experience making its resuscitation possible. The editorial: *The Lessons of 1889?* in *Philosophy* periodical acknowledged that the modern philosophical thinking has failed to answer numerous questions raised by the previous century totalitarian practices. Appealing to Hegel’s philosophic image of the owl of Minerva flying only at dusk, they state that twenty years after “it looks as if? Far from soaring into the dusk, the owl of 1989 is still in its egg” [Philosophy, 2010, p. 2]...

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