

THE CONTEMPORARY SUBJECTNESS AS A PRODUCT OF INTEGRATION OF ACTORS - NETWORKS

O SUJEITO CONTEMPORÂNEO COMO UM PRODUTO DA INTEGRAÇÃO DE ATORES - REDES

Evgeniya Nikolaeva

Professor, Department of General Philosophy, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation
E-mail: kaisa1011@rambler.ru

Aisylu Kamaleeva

Senior Lecturer, Department of General Philosophy, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation
E-mail: alslkazan@mail.ru

Mikhail Nikolaev

Senior Lecturer, Department of General and ethnic sociology, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation
E-mail: mihrutkanik@gmail.com

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Corresponding author:

kaisa1011@rambler.ru

Abstract: The modern world with its ever-more complex structure is inextricably linked to the rapid progress of science and technology. The digital revolution is not only affecting our physical life, but also our understanding of reality. This change in understanding has come about through the realization that today, human relations with the world and with other people are almost completely dependent on material artificial intermediaries. Everything created in the laboratory eventually leaves its walls, filling the planet with various hybrids that combine disparate human and non-human objects. The article presents a reinterpretation of one of the key categories of classical epistemology, subjectness, the authors expose its new form, which has such attributes as hybridity and distribution. The scientific and theoretical contribution of the work consists in expanding the theoretical framework of philosophical consideration of the modern subject of knowledge and the category "subjectness", which corresponds to the contemporary social-technical space. This contributes to a more complete understanding of the modern processes of integration of natural and artificial and the characteristics of the new type of subjectness.

Keywords: Subjectness. Hybrid subject. Distributed subjectness. Network. Actor-network theory. Digital environment.

Resumo: O mundo moderno, com sua estrutura cada vez mais complexa, está intrinsecamente ligado ao rápido progresso da ciência e da tecnologia. A revolução digital não está afetando

apenas nossa vida física, mas também nossa compreensão da realidade. Essa mudança no entendimento ocorreu devido à constatação de que, atualmente, as relações humanas com o mundo e com outras pessoas dependem quase que totalmente de intermediários artificiais materiais. Tudo o que é criado em laboratório acaba saindo de suas paredes, enchendo o planeta com vários híbridos que combinam objetos humanos e não humanos diferentes. O artigo apresenta uma reinterpretação de uma das principais categorias da epistemologia clássica, a sujeição, e os autores expõem sua nova forma, que tem atributos como hibridismo e distribuição. A contribuição científica e teórica do trabalho consiste em expandir a estrutura teórica da consideração filosófica do sujeito moderno do conhecimento e da categoria "sujeição", que corresponde ao espaço sociotécnico contemporâneo. Isso contribui para uma compreensão mais completa dos processos modernos de integração do natural e do artificial e das características do novo tipo de sujeição.

Palavras-chave: Sujeito. Sujeito híbrido. Sujeito distribuído. Rede. Teoria do ator-rede. Ambiente digital.

1. Introduction

The relevance of this work is due to two factors: ontological and epistemological. Under ontological factor it means the specificity of the modern world, whose main characteristic is the mutual integration of natural and artificial. The condition for such a joining was the rapid development of science and technology, which allowed things, as the British researcher E. Pickering (1995, p. 418) writes about it, to move away from the dry and wordless language of practice and finally really “speak”, turning the development of modern culture into “infinite open modelling”. As a result, of this kind of activity the structure of the universe has become much more complicated: the planet has populated not only human, but also many non-human objects, whose circle is wide and diverse. “Cyborgs, hybrids, mozyagus, chimera”, all of them, according to the American researcher D. Haraway (2005, p. 322), deeply embedded in our lives and blurred the boundaries between man, animal and machine. “Continuously active things” ceased to be mere notions of “unfleshy intelligence”, and acquired a concrete “material power”, directed at us as “bodily beings” (Pickering, 1995, p. 419).

The second factor is epistemological, marked by research difficulties arising from the specifics of the modern world. In our opinion, it is impossible to avoid studying omnipresent and global changes today. The reason is not so much the futuristic danger of potential human enslavement to technology, but rather the threat of a loss of self-understanding due to an increasingly blurred view of the subject lost among the many nodes of the global communications system. Human increasingly relies on the “mediation” of machines, devices and programs (Mitchell, 2012, p. 50) in solving his life problems and tasks, as a result of which his intelligence itself acquires the properties of “hybrid” human, natural and technological.

Ultimately, the researcher today finds individual in a difficult position: on the one hand, he must study the world, and on the other, he becomes completely helpless in the face of complexity and uncertainty of the object and subject of knowledge. There is a need not only to rethink the classical epistemology’s view of subject-object relations, but also to re-problematize and conceptualize the concept of “subjectness” in relation to modern realities.

2. Methods

Theoretical and methodological basis of this work are concepts of object-oriented ontology and the of actor -network theory. Within them the idea of ontological subject is rejected, since its presence builds up the hierarchy characteristic of classical ontology. The question arises as to what is meant by an subject. B. Latour (2015) argues that we cannot speak “about the

properties of active forces before their interaction” (p. 220), the object-object opposition itself is only the result of the test of forces between heterogeneous undefined entities. The works of representatives of object-oriented ontology G. Harman (2012, 2015, 2017) and M. Delanda (2002, 2006, 2017) allow to outline the ontological bases of understanding of subject-object relations unfolding in modern hybrid reality. In the context of object-oriented ontology, subject and object are located on a plane and ontologically equal. The object is not a passive object of study, but an active participant in the cognitive process, it is a condition of possibility.

Research of the representatives of the actor-network theory B. Latour, M. Callon (Callon and Latour, 1992; Latour, 1993, 2003, 2015, 2017; Latour and Woolgar, 1986) and J. Law (2006, 2015, 2018) help to characterize the gnoseological framework within which it is possible to comprehend the modern cognition subject, whose cognitive goals are changing, as is the mechanics of his perception of the world. The concepts of “network” and “actor” were the main tools that allowed to form a personal idea about the essence of cognitive subject and specifics of its cognitive activity.

3. Results

1. Modern reality is presented as a current “liquid” in which human and non-human actors-networks are dissolved. This part intended to define the specificity of a new subjectness in comparison with classical subjectness, and also describe the cognitive process through the prism of the concept introduced by us “distributed subjectness”.

In order to determine the distinguishing features of a new subject, first of all, it is necessary to make sure that there is in the modern world a subject as someone who has subjectness, Secondly, to produce a comparative analysis of the classical and new subjects. Following the classical idea about the subject of knowledge as a person, first of all, the question should be answered: “Does modern individual possess an unqualified capacity for independent action?”. Probably everyone could say with confidence that they are capable of acting independently, if it is not about children, the elderly or people with disabilities, although in these cases it cannot be sure otherwise. However, subject is a much more complex matter and we do not always manage to remain a subject as it is.

In 2020, the world was hit by a pandemic of new coronavirus infection COVID-19. It has shown how quickly people can be deprived of the ability to move, buy food, take care of their health, in other words, be limited in their ability to act. The smartphone was not just an external brain for storing information, not just a navigator, calculator or means of communication with other people, it became something that gave the person himself the opportunity to act as a member

of society. The presence or absence of a thing determined the presence or absence of an attribute of subjectness in a person.

Undoubtedly, the situation described is not widespread, but, illustrates the dependence of a person on things that surround him. Thus, it turns out that a person can not always self-model the role of subject and sometimes to gain subjectness he needs “help” of things. Of course, things, whether natural or man-made, can make life more difficult or easier for a person by resisting him or becoming his ally. So far, however, things have had little effect on whether a person is a subject or not, it is clear that today, as our example shows us, we are dealing with a fundamentally different type of relationship between man and things when the latter act as equal actors.

2. The second task is to carry out a comparative analysis of classical subjectness and new subjectness. It is worth to clarify that subjectness, is closely related to how the subject was understood at different stages of human thought development. The content of the category has changed, been supplemented and rethought over the centuries. In the classical tradition, for a subject to be himself, he must have the quality of being a subject. The classical subject is self-sufficient, has clear enough defined boundaries and when subject encountered in the process of our knowledge, it can be defined without any mistake because it always seeks to build up a hierarchy. It was always identical to a person or group of people, alone possesses his subjectness.

Without going into detail of the evolution of the concept of subject since R. Descartes, should be noted that the classical subject was always considered as a source of activity, cognitive activity, standing in this respect against the passive object to be known. The world in which there is a classical subject is always hierarchical and the place of the subject is determined by the laws of that world.

The transition from a classical subject to a new modern subject is clearly traced in the classification of types of rationality proposed by the Russian philosopher V.S. Stepin (2013). They distinguish classical, non-classical and post-classical types of rationality. Each type of rationality corresponds to its ideal of the cognizant subject, which illustrates changes in the methodology of knowledge and place of the subject in the process of knowledge. The essential shift in the understanding of the essence of the subject occurs precisely during the period of emergence of the post-classical type of rationality.

Within the specified types of rationality, the relationship of the classical subject with things is structured according to the following schemes:

1. Subject and object. When a thing acts as something to which the research interest is directed, cognitive influence of the subject. It is deprived of “the right to vote”, subordinated to the subject, it can and must be “dissected” in order to obtain truth (even if relative).

2. Subject and instrument. When a thing (instrument) is used by the subject to obtain knowledge about its surrounding reality. In this role, a thing can only occasionally “object” to the subject of cognitive action, but is under his control. The thing is a helper, who can transfer part of his work, make him work for his own good, but not to the level of equal partner.

The subject, corresponding to the post-classical type of rationality, develops in the era of transition to the fourth industrial revolution in the society of fluid modernity. The Russian researcher M. Bilalov states that this time is “completion of the Personality era”, meaning the end of time when “the individual, mastering the laws of nature, realized himself as a subject of his life”. Appears “quasi-human, or rather, agent”, which, unlike the subject-personality, “continuing to be a carrier of intelligence, does not have ego...” (Bilalov, 2021, pp. 109-110).

In this respect, it should be noted that in classical and non-classical science we are dealing with a classical subjectness as an ego-centered self. The subject, which is inherent in such a subjectness, is clearly defined enough in its boundaries and in terms of predictability presents itself to researchers as a simple system, because the results of the activity of this actor can be predicted, even if it is a probability prediction in the case of a non-classical type of rationality.

In the digital age we have to enter into relations with things, but when describing these relationships, applying to them schemes “subject and object”, “subject and tool” shows its inefficiency, because the mentioned schemes can not fully reflect the essence of the processes taking place. This problem is due to two main reasons: first, in modern realities it is difficult to find the subject of cognitive action itself, secondly, things have acquired new properties and began to perform new roles that do not fit into the concepts of “object” and “tool”.

The cognitive process, characteristic of the classical understanding of a subject, can be analyzed by reduction, when the whole process can be studied by its elements. If the research process is compared to a surgical operation, then the scientist who examines the process of knowledge could, for research purposes, “cut” and “extract” at least the subject, object, and methods/tools of knowledge, each of which could individually provide insight into the specificity of the subject being studied. However, the situation is quite different when discussing a modern subject, as the body without organs literally lies on the “operating table”. In this case, it is possible to point to a certain area of the network and assume that something resembling a subject exists, but clearly defining its boundaries will be difficult, if not impossible.

3. Placing people and things to the same level has not only brought them ontologically into line, but also given things a potential opportunity to act as subjects. Now, before the test of forces, before entering into interaction with a network-actor we cannot know what an object is. However, it can be argued that this is only in theory, that in practice we still continue to observe a free, active person who knows the world. But does he have the full subjectness?

The example of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates an emerging trend in the changing relationships between humans and non-humans, driven by what we believe is the fourth industrial revolution, with new information technologies as its basis. The thing for man throughout history has acted as an object of study and a tool to facilitate work. Over time, things have been created capable of automating and “take over” some cognitive tasks of the human (calculator, computer), and today we are already witnessing the beginning of a new era, an era of artificial intelligence and neural networks. The modern subject cannot simply be identified with a person or group of people, it is a hybrid of person and things. This was possible because the person entered into cognitive interaction with the thing, created a network through which he could transfer his own personality to things, giving the right of things to act without human control. Thus, the idea can be put forward that in modern realities we have to deal not with a holistic subject representing itself as a single actor, but with a hybrid subject consisting of people and non-actors people, each of whom in the network is responsible for one or more areas of activity. Subjectness does not belong to one network actor, but is distributed among the network’s actors, that is, it represents a property of the network that circulates between its elements. To denote the described new subjectness, the introduction of the concept of “distributed subjectness” is suggested.

4. The categories of subject and subjectness in this work are interesting to us in the context of cognitive activity. In this respect, based on all the above, the question arises regarding the cognitive process through the lens of the concept of “distributed subjectness”.

For the network “to know” is equivalent to “to include in the network”, therefore any cognitive act will be accompanied by the inclusion of the object under study in the network. However, the inclusion of the object under investigation in the relationship network does not always mean that the object becomes part of a hybrid subject. If the subject meets the criteria, that is, capable of independent action and does not need external control, only in this case the subject can be allocated to it. Therefore, in the hybrid subject, where subjectness is distributed among the actors, each point of the network, in every moment something “knows”, that is, receives information about another point of the network. For example, “Alice” (Virtual Voice Assistant) gets information about our favorite places to walk, Yandex music - about preferences in music,

robot vacuum builds a map of the apartment where we live, and we find that the front camera smartphone all this time was depicting us slightly more beautiful, what we are in life, and ChatGPT is not yet able to clearly answer the question “what is the meaning of life?”, but it is good at finding information. The object under investigation becomes part of a hybrid subject and the object as such disappears, the subject-object dichotomy is superimposed.

The union of a person and ChatGPT can be defined as a network, as there exists a channel between the two actors through which knowledge is exchanged. This knowledge flows in both directions, with new information (knowledge about the world) being generated not only by the program but also through the interaction.

ChatGPT does not require control in the process of forming a text, however a person cannot completely exclude himself from the writing process due to program imperfections. The complete exclusion of a person would mean, as we think, a return to the traditional model of the subject, when subjectness would again belong to one actor, -artificial intelligence.

4. Discussion

The philosophers of the past did not emphasize subjectness in analyzing a classical subject, because it had long existed as an obvious fact until it disappeared from the radar and the French postmodernists were in no hurry to announce “death of the subject”, forcing researchers, as the domestic researcher A.P. Fomenko (2016) expressed, “to constantly seek new theoretical justifications” (p. 8) for those cases when they still turn to the category of subject. However, today we see that the subject has not died, but has changed its essence and form of existence, having ceased to be a sufficiently static object and transformed into a dynamic network. The hybridity of the subject, its complexity, its new relationship with things, it shifts the focus of interest from the subject to the subjectness, because this property is what defines it.

Digital technologies, becoming more sophisticated and integrated, have had a tremendous impact on the transformation of society and the world economy. American researchers E. Brynjolfsson and A. McAfee (2014) called this period the “second era of machines”. In their eponymous book they compare the modern stage of development of technology and technology with the “first era of machines” (the first industrial revolution), when machines largely replaced human labor. “The second era of machines”, according to E. Brynjolfsson and E. McAfee (2014), is characterized by the automation of cognitive tasks, when machines controlled by software or artificial intelligence, “have been able to overcome the previous narrow limits of possibility and

have begun to demonstrate extensive abilities in pattern recognition, complex communication and other areas that were once the exclusive human domain” [(p. 126).

The automation of cognitive tasks is perhaps the most important symptom of the changes that have occurred and are occurring in technology development. The invention of artificial intelligence, capable of performing tasks that were traditionally considered exclusively human, makes us look at the world of things not as a passive cluster of objects ready for use, but as actors capable of independent action.

The development of digital communications and artificial intelligence technologies, as well as the growing influence of digital platforms transform subjectness not only in the field of education, but also affect the socio-political sphere. The classical subjectness, which has traditionally been one of the key elements of the structure of power and society, is now giving way to a new subjectness with a distributed character, which in turn leads to significant changes both in the field of top management, and in everyday life. In 2020, the VTsIOM conducted a study of artificial sociality that emerged from the development of online culture and artificial intelligence technologies. “Artificial sociality is the empirical fact of including AI agents in social interactions as their active mediators or participants” (Rezaev et al., 2021, p. 44). The results of the study showed that artificial intelligence becomes autonomous and integrated into everyday life and decision-making processes, as well as changing the social environment itself.

However, it is evident that even before the spread and popularization of artificial intelligence, the state attempted to distribute subjectness when implementing a system of public services (Unified portal of state and municipal services).

The introduction of EPSU system allowed “to copy” state structures in electronic form into the federal state information system, allowing citizens not to come into direct contact with government officials. Thus the state transferred part of its personality to a portal, a site that became an intermediary/backup in communication with citizens, and therefore it is possible to speak about hybridization of the subject of power.

General digitalization of the state, according to Russian political scientists, “paves the way for the formation of a new algorithmic socio-technical reality and the evolution of classical subject-object relations towards masking the subject of power by numerous intermediaries between it and society in the form of digital corporations, virtual officials, Digital service platforms” (Volodenkov and Fedorchenko, 2022, p. 51). This trend leads to the formation of a new type of state, which as a hybrid subject, losing its “humanity” (in the sense that citizens are less and less interacting with other people representing the state), is perceived by society as an “empty center” or is presented

to the people in the form of a Roman throne. The state, by distributing its subjectness, is blurring its borders, which leads to the birth of an image of anonymous power whose operations are not fully clarified and hidden from the observer.

5. Conclusion

1. Based on the synthesis of ontological representations of object-oriented ontology G. Harman and M. Delanda and gnoseological provisions of the network theory B. Latour and J. Law in the study has been defined ontological and gnoseological framework, within which rethinking of the specificity of existence of a modern subject occurs. The object in the study is understood not only as an active element of the process of cognition, but also as a condition of any cognitive activity, which implies to consider the subject itself as one of many objects.

2 The idea of a modern (hybrid) subject of knowledge as the bearer of a new subject, the source and sphere of manifestation of which is the socio-technical space, has been developed. The specific features of this space are: first, the continuous process of forced change of identities that force the cognizing subject to constantly restock; second, total globalization, which has formed a new hybrid reality, where in one plane coexist and enter into interaction human and non-human actors-networks; third, the joining of physical, biological and digital environments leading to the expansion of space in which a new subject arises and exists.

3. The demarcation of the concepts “classical subjectness”, interpreted as a property of the subject with clearly defined boundaries of being, and “new subjectness”, understood by us as a property of hybrid subject, having an undefined blurred boundary following the same property of networks, where there is no differentiation in principle between internal and external. Inclusion of subject and object in the network of cognitive relations, where each of them is located in the space of the plane and is an equal actor of the process of cognition, is a necessary condition for the existence and organization of their various interactions.

4. The author’s concept of “distributed subjectness”, which marks the attribute property of a modern hybrid subject whose mode of existence is a dynamic network with blurred boundaries in which cognitive activities are implemented, based on the distribution of subjectness between human-actors and non-human-actors. The new subject includes complex self-learning objects of non-human nature, and also exists only under the condition of permanent reassembly.

5. The features of cognitive activity of hybrid subject as a carrier of distributed subjectness are highlighted. Because the hybrid subject is a network of actors-people and actors-not-people,

its cognitive activities are not aimed at obtaining objective knowledge about the world, but at producing effective knowledge for the achievement of the goals of the network or to maintain equilibrium. Any cognitive act is accompanied by the inclusion of the object under study in a network of relationships, where it becomes part of the hybrid subject (assigns subjectness) provided that there is the ability to act independently without requiring external control.

In such a way, subjectness in the digital age is a result of the test of the forces of objects and expresses the ability of objects to operate autonomously. The specificity of the new subjectness is determined by the context in which it was formed and exists. Today we are witnessing a process of total globalization, which is expressed in the destruction of the usual hierarchy of the world of people and the world of things and leads to their gradual merging. The result of this integration is the birth of complex and unpredictable hybrid actor-networks without a defined hierarchy and direction of movement. Once autonomous physical, biological and digital environments are now fused together, creating a new space of existence in which not only humans but also complex self-learning objects of non-human nature can function and interact. The modern subject is a network of people and non-people, and acts as a carrier of the new subject. This hybrid subject is the result of the fusion of previously autonomous environments, such as physical, digital and biological, which blurred the spatial boundaries of the existence of the subject. This circumstance leads to the fact that the subject acquires a distributed character.

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