

Conference Paper

Slipping Culture: Borders and Transitions in the Turbulent World

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Abstract

In the modern world, cultural transformations have acquired a global dimension. However, social changes always lag behind, failing to keep up with the changing culture. This compels us to turn to studying what is lying at the base of the transformation process, what it generates, directs, and organizes. The article shows that culture in a turbulent world should be a strategy of social change. In the transition process, one cannot do without the cultural basis of transformation, that is, without a culture of transition or, in the context of modernity, a culture of globalization. Otherwise, globalization as an integration process will catalyze endless provocations, manipulations, and conflicts.

Keywords: globalization, transformation, culture, transitional process, communication

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1. Introduction

Our changing world is becoming more and more complex and unpredictable in its scale, speed and mode of transformation [1–3, 9, 10]. The main contradiction here is that the escalating and expanding globalization increasingly flatten and unify disparate cultures (the style of everyday life), while, at the same time, reducing many cultures' capabilities to influence the globalizing process, or even completely depriving them of such capabilities.

What do we see? On the one hand, an obvious spread of democracy and the rise of digital communication technologies, as well as an abundance of goods and material comforts. On the other hand, half of the humanity is still at risk of being persecuted for their ideas and religious beliefs and live below the poverty line. For example, 6% of global population own almost 60% of all global riches. 80% of global population live in abject poverty. 70% of world's population are illiterate, and 50% are starving. The growing inequality exists not only in living standards, but also in access to modern communication. All of this inevitably influences both the speed and the scale of transformation. The internal resources of cultures increasingly come into conflict with the external compelling imperatives of the globalizing world. At the same time,

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the majority of nations still lack realistic capabilities to influence global decisions. The most dangerous globalization syndrome is the 'alienation from the flow of changes that is sweeping through the people's life' [2, p. 86] and time.

2. Cultural Research Issues in Global Transformation

Within the flow of globalizing processes, the world is changing at varying speeds, but at a relentlessly escalating rate. This process can be termed a *multispeedality* or *transspeedality* [6, p. 520]. In this situation, everyday world is rapidly becoming obsolete and lag behind the challenges of time failing to meet them. We see the increase in the structural gap between the speeds of changes in different cultural regions, areas and civilizations. This is what sets our modern globalizing culture apart from the previous ages.

There is another powerful source of growing uncertainty. An American sociologist William Ogburn showed convincingly in his theory of cultural lag that material conditions and technology develop faster than the cultural sphere. It should be noticed that each transitional fact registers a certain point of achievement marked by its binary opposition to the previous position that served as a starting point of this transition. Indeed, a person stumbling on a small stone would always fall not on a stone itself, but somewhere nearby (even if the distance is really small). At the same time, as noted V.O.Kluchevsky, this falling person would necessarily look at the stumbling place. That is, the source of the fall never coincides with the place of the fall. But our gaze looks at the spot where the fall initiated. Therefore, with each transitional shift, a culture moves to a position opposing its previous condition which had actually initiated this shift. However, the process of transition is a complex of various shifts, a series of successive – typically multiple-stage – rearrangements, both within the local and short-term changes and within the long-term systemic transformations. The long cycle of transition consists of several (sometimes many) transitive distances. This prolonged process is surely subject to the same rule of transformative transition – that is, the incongruity between the initial and the resulting locus.

Speaking in terms of cultural research, we should distinguish between several projections of global transformation: *anthropological* (human search for wholeness, 'development of the undeveloped' according to Frank); *ontological* (deficient-based, lack of reality *a la* Liotard, and the openness of being); *semantic* (compulsion to meaning, to signification according to Yu.M.Lotman); *sociological* (a drive to overcome

social alienation and a need for integrative structure according to A.Giddens and communicative action according to J.Habermas).

But there is another objective condition of modern era: "...the process of globalizing transition becomes a common fate, a common task for all countries and peoples" [8, p. 14]. At the same time, humanity exists in different cultural worlds. According to Dietmar Kamper, "People are kindred in body, not in spirit. Spiritual unity does not exist. There is only the different, and the folds." [7, c. 54] This statement seems to contradict modern civilization: all people are the same in their body (in their biological nature), but they are spiritually (culturally) different. It is all about *cultural folds*: between 'us' and 'them', between the structured and the unstructured, between the old and the new, etc. Modern humanities are faced with the necessity to explore these *folds, joints, connectors* and *bonds*.

According to V.M.Mezhuyev, technetronic "world experiences transition to something that has many names but still lacks a unifying definition." [8, p. 13] Transformation is a human destiny, but at the same time it almost defies definition. As Willhem Fluesser puts it, "It seems that the globalizing culture is constructing for us a mode of being for which we are not ready yet." These codes exist on a level that can be accessed only by jumping over a gaping abyss. We have to brave the 'horror'. [7, c. 85]. At the same time, 'the 'transition' from one fixed point to the other is an abyss'. Characteristically, in Russian, the noun *abyss* (*propast'*) is homonymous to the verb *to perish* (*propast'*).

D.Kasper points out that "at the extreme point of the computer age, there is a growing pain of loss, of need, of damage. The emptiness of modernity becomes literally unbearable. This absence marks an insurmountable boundary of human will even within the most advanced medium. The world turns away from an object and faces the horizon." [7, p. 76]

Globalization is fueled by the processing of local cultures, but today these local cultures are increasingly short in demand, since modernity has all but eliminated cultural territories and areas untouched by global transformations. The dilemma of globalization is the relationship between the global and the local (an increasingly conflicted relationship: nothing new is born without a struggle); between the universal and the individual; between the transnational and the national; between the innovation and the tradition; between multiculturalism and separatism [4, 5].

3. Rapid Response Cultural Service: An Analysis

When a society lives primarily by projecting itself into the future, the imaginary almost always substitutes and destroys the real, the given [7, p. 48]. The future is always institutionally undetermined – therefore, it generates risks. Here we face a syndrome of institutional delay with which culture reacts to the challenges of our age. The changes are happening faster than they are institutionalized by culture. Where no institutions exist, myths come into power. But in the modern world, dramatically, demythologization and deritualization lay bare this mode of cultural adaptation. We are left with nothing but props, simulacra, disposable values [10].

Globalizing modernity urgently requires a *rapid response cultural service*. Such a service would be somewhat similar to an *Urgent Anthropological Research* service working in collaboration with UNESCO. Moreover, this rapid response is required on both ends, bringing together the local and the global.

Therefore, culture becomes not only the biggest global disruptor, but also a saving bond, connecting and holding power of social change. At the same time, transcultural consolidation of different societies will be impossible, if each of these societies is not structurally identified, normatively ordered and socially open – that is, it will not be possible without a well-developed system of democratic and institutional government. Otherwise, order+disorder=disorder.

Despite the complexity and multilayered character of socio-cultural transitions and interconnections, we can identify several types of transitional states within the cultural historical process, depending on the scale and content of cultural transformations. In general, phenomenology of transition should differentiate between the three *transformational modes* (types): *onthological* transition (macro-transition), *positional* (paradigmatic) transition (meta-transition) and *institutional* transition (*media-transition*). I describe each of these modes in detail in my book 'Culture in Transition: Transformation Imperatives and the Possibilities for Development' [6].

To sum up, cultural process expresses *transplication* of various transitions. The fate of the modern culture – and therefore the fate of humanity itself – largely depends on how we interpret and experience them. The challenges of globalization are, first and foremost, the challenges of transition [3].

4. Conclusions

Our present moment is characterized by the fact that the transitional processes under the globalizing conditions *transplicate* (interlock) into a multifaceted complex of cultural components. One way or another, even the most untroubled cultures from the far-flung frontiers of human oikumene become involved into the transformational movement. In the products of this transitional *transplication* the future contours of planetary civilization are emerging, becoming visible. At the same time, modern age presents us with a global interlock of all transitional states that can potentially develop into a multifaceted configuration of intercultural relations and an integrated spatial and temporal continuum of universal interdependency. A degree of globalization becomes simultaneously a degree of individualization.

The globalizing culture is obviously trying to govern us. "It is difficult to force the pace of transformation," says Immanuel Wallerstein, "It is perhaps Quixotic even to try." [1, p. 247]. All we can realistically do to ensure global sustainable development is facilitate the direction of transformational development and help create a strategy for global consolidation. But who can say that this is too little? Humanity is incapable of managing the stream of life, but it can use culture to reinforce its banks. Therefore, everything that supports cultural development ultimately supports the life on our planet.

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