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The Technical Man's Existential Space

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Introduction

The period of the 20th century and the beginning of our century are the time of a very intensive expansion of the technical man (increasingly often defined as a kind of cybernetic man, or IT man). Creating his own type of culture, this kind of man has also caused the creation of a type of existential space that is specific for the technical man. Most probably, this specificity arises from the technical man's different approach towards the world surrounding him. He seems to be less focused on experiencing his own being (the spiritual or social dimensions of his existence), and, at the same time, places more emphasis on the aspect of the utilisation of the world (the practical manifestation of his activity). In the opinion of the present author, the accent the technical man places on management is a specific key to comprehend the culture of the postmodern era and the existential space of the technical man himself. The consequences of this kind of approach towards the world may be diverse and multifaceted.

It is the author's intention that this publication should be treated as a starting point for a discussion concerning the essence of the technical man's existential space. The practical aspect of such a debate is significant – getting to know the technical man, his fascinations, dilemmas, etc., we also – in a sense – are getting to know ourselves. Hence, our attempt to analyse the technical man's existential space should assume at its starting point that the “structure” of such a space will be determined by the following elements: the technical man, culture, management. It should also be assumed that in further

research work there might emerge some other, additional factors. In this article the research effort is going to be centred around these three already mentioned factors exclusively, as well as on an attempt to define the existential space *per se*. Broadly speaking, an analysis of these, and of other factors, should provide the initial data for the future formulation of a more or less coherent picture of the existential space generated by the technical man.

Existential Space

The existential space is the human space. It comprises the following four places: the home (household) – a place in man's immediate proximity; the workshop (factory, school, office, ploughland, forest, etc.) – a place through which man “becomes rooted” in the surrounding world; the temple – a place of special way of becoming rooted and finding one's feet in the world, a place where a specific relationship with cultural and spiritual values is realised, a place of an encounter with the sacred, with the Absolute, etc.; the cemetery – a place where the living encounter the dead, where heritage is taken over, the realm of memory and continuity [11]. Existential space is the environment where an individual experiences his or her being, one of the aspects of his or her existence [20]. The existential space is created by our senses, intellect, behaviour, culture, or the physical and biological environment. At this point, it is worth pointing out that the existential space has its own internal structure. The elements that comprise the existential space are personal space and interpersonal space.

As far as personal space [11] is concerned, it should be perceived as the space of human existence, a space circumscribed by invisible boundaries, which no intruder has the right to violate. The violation

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of personal space is considered as a disturbance of domestic peace. The boundaries of personal space change depending on various external conditions. In a crowd the boundary of personal space overlaps with the boundaries of the body. In normal conditions – the boundary of personal space depends on the intensity of emotional contact, on the distance, which is conventionally accepted for interpersonal communication, etc.

Interpersonal space [11] is the second element constituting the existential space. Within the interpersonal space, one can distinguish social space and sacred (sacral) space. Social space, in turn, is comprised of public space, domestic space, interpersonal space, and bodily space. The first type of space – the public space – consists of streets, squares, parks, etc. It allows the freedom to act according to certain socially defined rules. Domestic space is the domesticated space – it belongs to individuals or groups. It embraces places used by individuals or groups, for example playgrounds, clubs, cafés, etc. These are places that provide individuals or groups some extent of intimacy. Interpersonal space is another fragment of social space. It can be described as space having specific rules for entering and leaving it. The bodily space is also a fragment of social space – it is most private and inviolable fragment.

The sacred (holy) space forms part of interpersonal space. Sacred space is the continuance of the places in which man recognises value and strength. An individual can either rest inside such a space and make attempts to strengthen it, or he can avoid it and attempt to undermine it. According to van der Leeuw [24], the sacred space is at all times essentially a place of worship – it can be a house, a temple, or anything else. The significant fact is that the sacred remains sacred, even if it has been neglected for a long time.

The existential space typology referred to in the preceding paragraphs is not the only possible typology. For example, Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander propound another typology, not in the context of the entire existential space, but in reference to its fragment – to social space. The aforementioned authors divide social space into the following types: (a) urban public space – contains all places and devices accessible for all people; (b) urban semi-public space – encompasses all spaces under administrative control which are accessible for the general public (such as the town hall, orchards, schools, post offices, hospitals, bus and railway stations, garages, car parks, petrol stations, stadiums, cinemas, theatres, etc.); (c) semi-public space – includes places where public services and private property meet (companies, workshops); (d) private space – places controlled by administration, but at the same time operating for public or private interest (reception spaces, transport-related spaces, commercial spaces – shared gardens, playgrounds, laundries, etc.); (e) private family space – places belonging to one family, intended as, for example, places for living together as a family, eating meals, entertainment, meetings, spending time together; (f) space – places where an individual can isolate himself from others, be alone (e.g. one's own room).

Jurgen Habermas, in turn, has propounded a model of social space that guarantees the functioning of a democratic state ruled by law [11]. In his opinion, social space should contain the following components: (1) market space, management space, the space of state authority (indispensable for the correct market and economic functioning of a state) and (2) civic space. Habermas devotes slightly more attention to the latter. He claims that in a modern state such elements as market, management and the hierarchy of power cannot be the only dominant forms of social life. There has to exist the civic space, a space formed by citizens. What Habermas understands as civic space is the area of public space where unrestricted exchange of words takes place. It is a space of interpersonal communication – we influence ourselves and other people by means of dialogue and the power of arguments. In addition, it is the sphere of activities undertaken by voluntary organisations and social movements (the

domain of independent media, of cultivating arts and sciences, the domain of views and churches). According to Habermas any imbalance between civic and market/state space is conducive to, among other consequences, the colonisation of a civic community by the market and state structures. It triggers the demise of interpersonal solidarity – there arise such objectives as can be bought on the market or realised as the tasks of the state.

The Technical Man

The technical man is currently the greatest modifier of existential, social and natural space [13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18]. The term “technical man” designates an individual deeply entangled with technology. His entanglement is so radical, that it results in the creation of a socially (but not biologically) new type of man – *homo technicus*. This type of man has both an individual and collective dimension. In the collective dimension, the technical man endeavours to dominate in a total way over everything: nature, culture, society, etc. He is able to do it with the use of a new type of society – the industrial society. It should be added that in the area of industrial society, there exist strong tendencies that modify the technical man not only as a collective, but also as an individual. As the result of such action, the technical man comes to develop a new technical mindset characterised by technomorphic thinking and a new type of personality described by the name “mercantile character.”

According to Konrad Lorenz, technomorphic thinking is based on the prerequisite that “everything that may be done, has to be done” [12]. It consists in the belief that every development has to create new values. This happens because the possibility to act has been mistaken for the imperative to act. Thus, the new mindset of the technical man is pragmatic, technically oriented, focused on the reception of technological information. The problem is that such a pragmatic mind causes the technical man to gradually lose his ability to accept anything for free. Moreover, he is becoming increasingly less capable of doing somebody a favour. For the technical mindset the idea of gift, devotion, sacrifice, etc., seems dispensable and suspicious.

The industrial society generates a new type of personality in the technical man. Erich Fromm defines it as the “mercantile character” [3], and Sigmund Freud as the “schizoid character”. Broadly speaking, the mercantile character is responsible for the way in which the world is perceived and understood by means of creating in the technical man of the so-called manipulative intelligence, oriented towards the realisation of practical goals. Hence an individual with a mercantile personality perceives himself as a commodity, and he perceives his own value as a kind of “exchange value.” The attitude towards other people presented by this type of personality can be summarised as “I am the kind of person that you need me to be” [3]. As an individual, the technical man attempts to simultaneously exhibit and sell his personality for a profit. Unfortunately, this type of behaviour forces man to continuously change his personality; what's more, it deprives him of the right to cherish enduring values or to have his own beliefs. The absence of such beliefs undoubtedly upsets the present picture of man's existential space and may turn out to be significant for the existence of the real social space [10].

An individual with a mercantile character manifests the lack of distinct purpose of his or her actions – they only endeavour to work as efficiently and as effectively as possible. They make no reflection upon the motives and sense of their activities. They also show no interest in philosophical or religious aspects of human existence. This gives the impression that a man characterised by mercantile personality is gradually becoming a soulless instrument, lacking profound interpersonal bonds [19]. His cultural identity is based on the administrative participation in an industrial corporation or a bureaucratic structure.

The quintessence of an industrial corporation seems to consist in its technostructure. Technostructure is a specific type of organisation, and at the same time a group of people – the *homo technicus* elite. John Galbraith describes technostructure in these words: “this group includes all those whose specialised knowledge, skills or experience exert influence on the collective decision-making. It is – a group that constitutes the managerial mind – the mastermind of the corporation” [4]. These are top specialists – their opinion is decisive [23]. Their character traits are: first of all – loyalty. The code of unwritten rules applicable for those people forbids them to use their knowledge and the information they have, for example, to engage in stock exchange speculations. Second is the absence of aiming at profit maximisation. Profits are for shareholders. The technostructure is interested in the expansion of production and the dynamics of development. Third, they are afraid to take a risk. Loss is always a direct threat for their existence. Fourth – the habit of teamwork. Members of a technostructure are not individualists. Their decisions are collective in principle. Fifth, there is poor engagement in political actions. However, owing to their position, those people have much better access to newspapers, radio and television than professional politicians. Theoretically, their influence on politics can be significant, but they consciously forgo this possibility. Sixth is substantial social and state-building engagement. Members of a technostructure are able to identify themselves with corporate objectives, provided that their company takes part in social actions as part of its business, because social goals are more important in the hierarchy of a technostructure than the company’s own goals. A similar relationship exists between the technostructure and the state [4].

The presence of the abovementioned character traits results in the fact that forethought as a virtue is not popular with the members of a technostructure. Forethought used to be important when cost savings and funds had the decisive role in production. At present, according to technostructure, forethought is an old-fashioned and eccentric virtue, and what has been brought to the forefront is excellent education. Thanks to education, the technical man easily assimilates new scientific and technological achievements; he is also able to keep pace with the changes taking place both in production processes and in everyday life [25]. Education enables him to consume the products of the industrial system [4]. The problem is that not only can the industrial system gain man’s trust, but it can also effectively fuel the desire to possess and consume the ever new products of the industrial system [4]. This attitude assumed by the technical man influences to a great extent his existential space.

Culture – its Essence and Objectives

Culture is a significant element forming the existential space. According to Edward Hal, this is the case because culture is a “form of human communication.” According to his view, “culture is communication,” “culture is the passing down” – the passing down of sequences of behaviours, interactions, events, etc. [5, 6, 7, 8]. Culture is a subconsciously applied technology of contact with others [21]. It can be added to these statements that culture is the collective “memory” of the human community inherited from generation to generation. Culture is a non-material, but constitutive component of the existential space. Thus, transformations in the domain of culture set out the directions of changes in the existential space, the ways in which man perceives himself and experiences his own being.

It is in reference to the technical man that culture and technology meet. In Neil Postman’s opinion, “it is inescapable that every culture must negotiate with technology, whether it does so intelligently or not. A bargain is struck in which technology giveth [to culture] and technology taketh away” [22]. It is worth emphasising at this point that changes caused by technology in the sphere of culture and in the existential space are initially subtle and almost unforeseeable (e.g. ideological transformations). In the longer run, they are always profound changes

that radically transform, for example, the structure of human interests, the nature of the already existing symbols, the human community itself, etc. Technology in culture always reorients both the existential space and the social space – the arena where social thought develops.

The present model of technical man’s culture is no longer the culture of tools, or the culture of technocracy – it is increasingly the culture of technopoly. For Postman, technopoly is both a kind of postmodern culture and a state of mind [22]. Technopoly is a totalitarian technocracy. In a technopoly there is the surrender of human life under the rule of techniques and technology. According to this author, in the culture of technopoly, technology can, in a way, “do our thinking for us.” The technological (technocratic) view of the world gains absolute supremacy. This world-view successfully eliminates all alternative possibilities of perception of the world. Its mechanism is as follows: it does not delegitimize other world-views; it does not depreciate them or take their popularity away from them. A technological world-view makes other visions invisible, and thus also insignificant. It eliminates other visions of the world by changing the definition of what we understand as religion, art, family, politics, history, truth, privacy and intelligence. It changes definitions so that they can fit in its new requirements. The same happens in the domain of existential space – the previous understanding of existential space as the human space disappears and the idea of the technosphere comes into existence.

Understanding Management

According to Jeremi Królikowski and Jan Rylke, the way of spatial management depends on cultural harmony [11]. Culture contains values, patterns, laws, customs, etc. – elements necessary for management. Moreover, culture determines social organisation, interpersonal relationships and man’s attitude towards the world. With a view to defining the essence of management, these researchers refer to Józef Tishner’s findings. His impression is that the world is the stage of human tragedy [11]. Management is a kind of bond linking man with the world – it is resultant of reflection on this bond. Starting with these presumptions, Królikowski and Rylke notice that management is the transformation of one asset into another, the creation of a human environment, the creation of welfare and, finally, the ability to be aptly discovering the hierarchies of things and values. For man, to be on earth means to manage. However, in the management process, man has to appear not as an explorer, but as a responsible manager. If this is the case, the relationships of the manager with the world (and with other people) are defined by the reciprocity rule. Therefore, management is an expression of reciprocity. By management, man creates his world, creates himself as a manager, and puts the world in order.

With regard to the technical man, the model of management that invokes the idea of a manager has not met with approval. The technical man was much more frequently perceived as an explorer rather than a manager. There may be many causes of such a situation. Technocratism and the principles of operation resulting from it are one of the main prerequisites placing the technical man at the position of an explorer. Technocratism should be perceived as a model of civilisation transformations, an ideological and practical movement. Technocratism is an ideology shaping both man’s mentality and his social and political life. The program of technocratism is entirely materialistic, maximalist and oriented towards masses. The objective of technocratism consists in building a modern technological society, a society in which engineers and technicians will take the reins and realise concrete goals. In technocratism, the role of man is not that of a manager. He is an individual who creates increasingly sophisticated technical tools. He needs them for increasingly deeper and wider utilitarian conquest of nature. In the domain of nature, management can be summarized as the conquest and taking control of natural processes. The (so far) unachieved technical man’s ambition is

the programming of nature in a way similar to the programming of a computer. It results from a strong tendency towards the standardisation of the way of thinking, a tendency functioning in technocracy. One is expected to think in a strictly logical and specialised way, but the way of thinking does also become fragmentary as a consequence. Actually, this is not creative thinking, but data processing, in a piecemeal fashion. Such an approach to the problem reduces the human person and their entire existential space to a set of rules. Within this set all parameters are designable.

The Technical Man's Existential Space – the First Draft

Technological transformations of the recent centuries have divided the earth into two main zones. The natural environment zone, maintained in a near-natural condition (biosphere) and the area shaped by man – the increasingly artificial anthroposphere. The anthroposphere supported by technology has assumed the nature of a technosphere [2]. The artificial technosphere is currently the primary environment for the life of post-industrial man. The technosphere is the existential space of the contemporary technical man. It basically provides individuals with most of the products and services they need.

The fact of remaining in the area of the technosphere has caused changes in man's mentality. Various, sometimes extremely self-contradictory opinions and attitudes are noted to exist simultaneously. Also, the direction of thought has changed. The aforementioned technomorphic thinking is mentioned with an increasing emphasis. As a consequence, it causes a growing number of people to undergo changes in their attitudes towards, for example, other people, cultures or nature as such. Therefore, such ideas as mountains, forest, sea, museum, concert, theatre, etc., are increasingly often associated exclusively with holidays and leisure time. Real life is the city, factory, office, and so on. Adjustment to life in the artificial environment of the technosphere is at times so far-reaching that an individual perceives the world of nature as a wild and unfamiliar area, which may be unfit for living. This attitude, as noted by Dorst, is the outcome of the schizophrenic severance of man's ties with the rest of the animate or inanimate world [2]. Nowadays, many people treat nature (which, until recently, was a fundamental component of their existential space) as something of little value. Dorst illustrates this kind of attitude with the following example: a man who goes out walking on a Sunday unscrupulously picks up wildflowers, and then throws them away when he is bored with them. In his opinion they are worthless. However, the same man will not act in this way when he buys flowers at the florist's; they cost a certain amount of money. Wildflowers were for free – they can be thrown away because they are not a measure of profit [2].

The contemporary technical man has almost unlimited confidence in his strength and possibilities. He often does not notice the waste of matter and energy, or the not infrequently tragic side-effects of his actions. It is for these reasons, among others, that some groups of people accentuate the need for the reorientation of attitudes, the reform of civilisation and its harmonisation with nature as the only partner of man. They also realise the fact that the essential existential space of man has to remain in the sphere of the contemporary technical civilisation, because three quarters of humanity lives in its domain [2] and it seems improbable that the already existing technosphere be exchanged into some other reality. Thus, still remaining in its domain, developing all the "megatechnology," they demand that technology gradually assume more social responsibility. In highly industrialised countries, this demand has already gained the status of an organised social movement [9].

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