



## ВОПРОСЫ ИСТОРИИ, ТЕОРИИ И МЕТОДОЛОГИИ

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### Metamorphization of society: The factor of ‘side effects’ and globalization of nothing\*

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**Abstract:** Today physical, biological and social worlds develop increasingly quicker and in a more complex way that includes the phenomena of metamorphoses. Traditionally, they were considered as determined mainly by external factors, i.e. the forces of nature. Contemporary metamorphoses seem to become of a complex man-made nature. Compared to traditional metamorphoses with ‘rigid’ and predictable results, contemporary metamorphoses of societies can produce both negative and positive consequences, which proves the non-linear dynamic picture of the world. There is also a traumatic tendency — when something is metamorphosed into ‘nothing’. Due to digitalization, ‘nothing’ becomes more complex and ‘pure’ from cultural and humane characteristics, thus, revealing new expressions of the ‘death’ of the social: humans are metamorphosed into ‘digital beings’. Metamorphization of society can produce common goods as a side effect of the bad. The author argues that the formal-rational, pragmatic transformations of society and nature, like the scientific and technological innovations of mercantile type, deform and dehumanize life-worlds. The global traumatization in the form of ‘liquid’ catastrophes permanently changes the living and non-living nature, structure of soil, water and air, desocializes human relations, facilitates transformations of something into nothing, people into ‘non-people’, places into ‘non-places’, things into ‘non-things’. However, people as reflexive actors can turn metamorphoses into ‘things-for-man’. To start this process, it is necessary to change the pragmatic monodisciplinary principles of science by the interdisciplinarity ones to ensure a humanistic turn in science and technologies.

**Key words:** metamorphization of society; metamorphosis; non-linearity; ‘side effects’; McDonaldization; ‘something’; ‘nothing’; socialization; monodisciplinary; interdisciplinarity; humanistic turn

The Nobel prize-winner I. Prigogine developed the ‘arrow of time’ theory according to which physical, biological and social worlds change increasingly quicker and in a more complex way [21], and this process includes

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metamorphoses — physical and social phenomena. Today, their nature has changed significantly due to acceleration and complication of social and cultural dynamics; therefore, many contemporary metamorphoses became more complex, non-linear and functionally ambivalent, thus, contributing to both disintegration and integration and producing both harmful and positive effects. Contemporary complex metamorphoses are very diverse in qualitative features: they can act as ‘side effects’ and ‘collateral damage’ — produce unintended, unplanned effects that are harmful, hurtful and damaging for the social development [8. P. 4] but can produce ‘positive side effects of bads’ [9. P. 4].

### **Quintessence of contemporary metamorphoses and their dynamics**

In the most general form, metamorphosis is a radical transformation of something or someone, transition from one form to another with new appearance or functions. This process is evident in inanimate nature (metamorphosis of ice into water and into steam), in flora and fauna (metamorphosis of a seed into a plant, of a caterpillar into a butterfly). Traditionally, metamorphoses were considered to be determined mainly by external factors such as forces of nature, God or devil, i.e. acted as ‘thing-in-itself’ — uncontrolled, causing disasters or grace, radically changing the foundations of life-worlds, traditional values and norms. Theorists of Enlightenment (Ch. Montesquieu, J-J. Rousseau, and others) believed in the power of reason — that mankind can overcome all ‘backward’ forms of knowledge, which confirmed desacralization of metamorphoses. Generation after generation, people learned to manage uncontrolled metamorphoses and their consequences, which produced an idea of that some ‘things-in-themselves’ could be turned into ‘things-for-man’.

Sociologists believe that, unlike metamorphoses in inanimate nature with unambiguously ‘rigid’ results, social metamorphoses have another and diverse nature. K. Marx was one of the first scholars who studies metamorphization of society and made social metamorphoses ‘things-for-man’. According to Marx, the nature of metamorphoses depends on the historical-formative development, and they become a norm under the market relations. He believed that the essence of metamorphoses could be understood and foreseen, in particular, the nature of double metamorphoses: “The first metamorphosis of one commodity, its transformation from a commodity into money, is therefore also invariably the second metamorphosis of some other commodity, the retransformation of the latter from money into a commodity. The second and concluding metamorphosis of a commodity M–C, a purchase, is, at the same time, C–M, a sale; the concluding metamorphosis of one commodity is the first metamorphosis of another” [18. P. 75]. For instance, due to these metamorphoses, wheat can be metamorphosed into money and then into canvas or other goods.

Markets became a significant factor of complex social-economic metamorphoses. As J. Burnham showed, the ‘revolution of managers’ became the metamorphosis of capital and led to the transition of power from owners of the means of production to those who managed production relations [10]. At that stage metamorphization of society did not stop but continued. According to K. Polanyi, “the transformation to this system from the earlier economy is so complete that it resembles more the metamorphosis of the caterpillar than any alteration that can be expressed in terms of continuous growth and development” [20. P. 44]. Under the metamorphosis of the economy the whole society is metamorphosed due to the subordination of the economic system to the market, which brings tremendous changes to the social orthography, and production of things is metamorphosed into production of goods. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ‘pure’ production of goods was metamorphosed into codes of signification and simulacrum of novelty [3].

Many contemporary metamorphoses are a product of man’s rational and mercantile attitude towards nature. Our intentional actions aim at its subordination to the interests of consumption, which has unintended side effects. People who uprooted forests to get arable land did not realize that they started desolation and together with forests they lost the sources of accumulation and preservation of water.

Today complex metamorphoses can have objective grounds and act as a social construct. Metamorphoses as a human artificial construct can turn into common good for people. Almost in all cultures, there are socially and culturally constructed practices of metamorphoses in the form of carnivals representing as if a real form of a life-world [2]. E. Goffman studied metamorphoses of class statuses that he considered as not something immovable, once acquired by virtue of social prescriptions or personal achievements, but as a subject of metamorphization under the instrumental manipulations with symbolic representations of social classes. The status can be ‘failed’ due to external pressures or personal mistakes due to careless observance of norms and manners. People with failed status are metamorphosed into ‘dead’ who continue to live among successes [11. P. 463].

Goffman also examined metamorphoses in ‘total institutions’ and showed that patients of asylums are exposed to such extensive control of time and space that their life is metamorphosed into ‘civil death’ [12. P. 25]. In the traditional society, the ‘failure’ of status meant the irreversible ‘social death’, but in the ‘liquid modernity’ [5] metamorphosis status, especially its consequences, become ‘liquid’: a person can rehabilitate himself and even become a celebrity; a ‘nonperson’ can turn into a significant self; the ‘normal’ can be metamorphosed into a ‘stigmatized’, and the ‘stigmatized’ has a potential to become ‘normal’ again. Among the tools that make the socially constructed metamorphoses with identifications possible, one can see the ‘area of games’ — bluffing, mystifications, performances. Even the age status that previously seemed irreversible became a subject of metamorphization: all sorts of tools are used to radically correct the human body, including surgical operations that allow to

regain some qualities or at least some simulacrum of the youth ('body metamorphization') [28]. Many complex metamorphoses became 'things-for-man' — can be controlled in some ways.

### **Complex metamorphoses as 'side effects'**

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> — early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the reflexive social-techno-natural reality developed. The world entered the 'turbulent times' of non-linear history and non-linear dynamic picture of the world. A number of complex metamorphoses appeared to witness that the inanimate and living nature in the non-linear way reflects intensification of the human activity. Moreover, the side effects of the increase in consumption due to the prevailing pragmatic values and the pragmatic trend of the scientific development led to irreversible metamorphoses of the environment: fertile soil is metamorphosed into 'dead land and water' [26. P. 149–210], and their 'vitality' cannot be restored in the foreseeable future. The climate, until recently considered a marker of constancy, becomes metamorphosed and acquired turbulent qualities with complicating consequences for the mankind and the world. Epidemics have also been metamorphosed: in the past, they were caused by underdevelopment and insufficient medicine, and were a pattern of poor societies in the limited space-time context. Today most epidemics are the side effects of the pragmatic scientific achievements: we face qualitatively new epidemics of a global and timeless nature (AIDS, microorganisms resistant to antibiotics, etc.). Quite often new epidemics are metamorphosed: they are not only of techno-biological but also of cultural nature (anorexia, gambling, schizophrenia), which, in turn, metamorphose the lives of individuals and groups.

The side effects of the agency play a special role in the production of new generation of complex metamorphoses. P. Sztompka defines agency as a complex quality of human collective actions that lead to creative self-transformation. The agency has become an important factor in the transition of the social development to the permanent incompleteness of social changes. The agency produces a huge diversity of social forms [27] together with their side effects, which is especially true for 'cultural traumas' such as declining birth rates and growing mortality rates, destruction of social relations, political anarchy, disruption of economic functions, and in culture — violated collective identities, rejected beliefs, crumbling idols [1]. Such traumas are accompanied by social gaps perceived as a shock.

The means and objects of labor have always been under the human control. Today some of them are metamorphosed into actants, i.e. objects (machines, computer networks, etc.) with self-reflexion. Some actants due to their side effects start to act as rhizomes [17] with their own 'will' that produces both challenges and discoveries in sciences. In the real life, metamorphizations of agencies and actants overlap, which produces complex social-techno-natural hybrids of global influence: nuclear power plants, large-scale hydraulic structures, mechanisms based of the artificial intelligence, 'smart cities and villages', global money, the Internet, etc.

Under the co-reflection of agencies and actants, the reproduced staged reality can get more symbolic and social significance than the objective reality. For our life worlds such innovations are certainly challenging metamorphoses.

Production of the staged reality becomes faster and more complex with the help of not only traditional mass media but also collective and individual actors of social networks (bloggers) — they produce defused meanings that increase uncertainty and chaos. Twitters, ‘likes’, ‘performances’ form ‘metamorphosis consciousness’ by producing uncertainties. Sometimes the discrepancies between events and ‘non-events’ disappear: for instance, the American media presented the war in Iraq with Hussein’s regime (before it even started) as a staged reality based on simulacrum, and for the viewers it was ‘more true’ than the truth [4. P. 76], i.e. ‘non-events’ were metamorphosed into events, and vice versa. Since then, the permanent production of the staged reality has become a ‘norm’ which we call a ‘normal anomie’ [14].

Many side effects of glocalization pose challenges in the form of social chaos forcing many people ‘out of place’ [25. P. 125]. Metamorphization turned national societies into ‘global disorganization’ [17]. This potential collapse of societies based on normative standards as a basis of stability and continuity [19] is accompanied by the huge decay energy that produces shocking transformations and fundamentally new forms of asociality and deviation: drug and shopping addiction, kidnapping, organ trafficking, gambling, racism, and new forms of terrorism. Perhaps the most dysfunctional are the side effects of metamorphoses in the spiritual life due to the increasing commercialization of the mass media: fake news and promotion of ‘stars’ instead of analytical information and educational programs. Traditional fears limited in time and space are metamorphosed into ‘liquid fears’ [6] associated with the instability and uncertainty of our lives.

Z. Bauman argues that not long ago the ‘collateral damage’ described only the military sphere, but under the ‘liquid modernity’ it is expressed in shocking surprises. There is metamorphosis of the traditional war: “Most present-day war-like actions, and the most cruel and glory ones among them, are conducted by non-state entities, subject to no state, or quasi-state laws and no international conventions” [7. P. 37]. Collateral damage from networked communities acts as metamorphization of communities based on stable social ties such as strong friendships and ‘love to the end of days’ into Internet communities that “are not meant for durability, let alone being commensurate with the duration of time. They are easy to join; but, similarly, they are similarly easy to leave and abandon the moment that attention, sympathies and antipathies, and moods or fashions, drift in a different direction” [8. P. 92].

However, metamorphization of society brings not only challenges but also hopes. Side effects and collateral damages of complex metamorphoses represent not the ‘pure chaos’ but its new degree and quality. This chaos becomes an attribute of the ‘global complexity’ organized in its own way. Contemporary complex societies

are ‘unusually organized’, ‘there is no simple growth of disorder’ [29. P. 19, 23]. Chaos and centrifugal tendencies can be managed, in particular, by strengthening symbolic, information, digital and communication regulators.

### **Globalization as a driving force of metamorphization of something into nothing**

Under globalization, there is a new tendency — something is metamorphosed into nothing. According to G. Ritzer, ‘nothing’ refers to “a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content” and makes sense only when paired with ‘something’ — “a social form that is generally indigenously conceived, controlled, and comparatively rich in distinctive substantive content”, and “there is a far greater demand throughout the world for nothing than something” [22. P. 165–167].

Metamorphization of something into nothing develops increasingly quicker and in a more complex way that changes dramatically the nature of places, things, people, services. Places were initially unique, had specific social and cultural meanings. For instance, not long ago each university was famous for its system of higher education and professional staff who taught and examined students individually. Today some universities are metamorphosed into ‘McUniversities’ — non-places (educational spaces without social meaning or image) which “eliminate the need for professors to reproduce and distribute materials to class” [13. P. 61]. Due to globalization, many things are metamorphosed into non-things (mass products that lack any geographical or cultural identity). A specific example of non-thing is non-food: indigenous food loses its homelike character, becomes universal and standardized, thus, acquiring the essence of non-things — hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza, chips, etc. [13]. Some people identified with their jobs and places of work are metamorphosed into non-people, for instance, refugees are non-people: untouchable, unthinkable, and unimaginable [7. P. 45]. Globalization based on the cultural openness led to metamorphization of services as individualized assistance in the national-local settings into non-service that presupposes non-human technologies and a predesigned process with a limited number of tasks. Even human bodies are metamorphosed: McDoctors provide cosmetic surgery and other services within the global industry so that the body can be radically transformed into non-body — of the same size, shape, and weight which are constructed, controlled, and devoid of distinctive representations.

Metamorphization is facilitated by globalization — “the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the alike and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic area” [23. P. 73]. There are transnational network enterprises producing nothing in the form of flows of goods and services which cross borders of countries and their places of origin to ensure the transnational expansion of tastes, ideas, and images.

Due to digitalization, nothing becomes more complex and expresses new ‘deaths’ of the social. Digitalization has metamorphosed socialization, affects consciousness and behavior of the youth, which is manifested in their departure from the prescribed systems of social ties, social forms and attachments as parts of socialization and education. The youth witness fragmentation of society due to the fact that the educational institutions designed as mediators for the interests of the youth lose touch with them, which increases uncertainty in understanding the basic values. Students are addicted to ‘googling’, rely on the opinions from their mobile computers. Thus, the youth are exposed to the codes of good and evil from ‘googling’ and become dependent on the digital realities that determine their behavior based on the values of novelty. The youth’s way of thinking is deformed and resembles the computer functioning. If socialization means the transfer of values and norms from the older generations to the younger, which is necessary for supporting the existing social-political order, then now socialization is metamorphosed: “the young generations, on the contrary, were already born as ‘digital beings’. What was packed into the magic word ‘digital’ has become a part of their ‘genetic outfit’” [9. P. 189]. Some scholars even speak of metamorphization of economy into ‘anti-economy’, societies into ‘anti-societies’, persons into ‘anti-persons’: “we are beginning to see glimpses of the emerging anti-person who lives as if our being a symbolic species can be ignored most of the time” [30. P. 142, 254, 333].

### **Producing common goods as a side effect of bads**

U. Beck in the book *Metamorphosis of the World* described the nature of the contemporary metamorphosis as determining the potential transition to a different type of the civilizational development. Social sciences have studied social changes mainly in the form of evolution and revolutions. However, contemporary metamorphoses cannot be interpreted by such concepts as ‘change’, ‘evolution’, ‘revolution’ or ‘transformation’. “The theory of metamorphosis goes beyond the theory of world risk society: it is not about the negative side effects of goods but about the positive side effects of the bads. They produce normative horizons of common goods and propel us beyond the national frame toward a cosmopolitan outlook” [9. P. 4]. Metamorphosis of the world means “epochal change of worldviews, refiguration of the national world view ... It is in this space that national and other borders are renegotiated, disappear, and then built up anew — i.e., are ‘metamorphosed’” [9. P. 5, 6]. Before scientists interpreted metamorphosis as the final result of unexpected transformations, today metamorphoses acquire the nature of permanent incompleteness of non-linear changes which potentially produce positive side effects of the bads and create previously unthinkable alternative preconditions for human activities. How people use them depends mainly on them — a chosen trend of the development of sciences and technologies. “This does not mean

that it will be a successful path. It is possible that humanity may choose a path at the end of which lies its self-destruction” [9. P. 7].

Previous ‘certainties’ based on national worldviews ‘withered’: “it becomes clear that the ‘eternal certainties’ of the national worldview are shortsighted and wrong and lose their self-evidence as the beliefs of a whole epoch ... ‘Withered’ means two things: first, the world pictures have lost their certainty, their dominance. Second, nobody can escape the global” [9. P. 7, 8]. The global as the cosmopolitanized reality demands a fundamentally new ‘cosmopolitan methodology’ to replace ‘methodological nationalism’. Today peoples live in different tempo-worlds, some societies function traditionally with limited social mobility, while others acquire great acceleration. The theory of a ‘high speed society’ claims that social acceleration is an attribute of the modernity [24]. That is why it is necessary to use both approaches for the analysis of the complexity of the non-linear dynamic picture of the world.

Cosmopolitization covers both macro-realities and individual life-worlds, including even the body functions. “Those who eat only locally will starve. In fact, in times of climate change, those who just want to breathe local air will suffocate” [9. P. 11]. This metaphor strengthens the position of the theory of metamorphization but ignores the specificity of the cultural life-worlds of the people who know only the realities of their society.

U. Beck defines the ‘crucial difference’ between his approach and the majority of social theories and research: “Their very approach precludes the possibility of metamorphosis of the world. In contrast, my starting point is that it is only in the context of the metamorphosis of the world that we can explore the relations between metamorphosis, change, reproduction and its countervailing movements. The relative weighting of each of these factors is something that must be investigated empirically... Metamorphosis of the world says nothing about whether a given transformation is for the better or the worse” [9. P. 19]. Thus, latent, uncontrolled, unconscious metamorphization within the pragmatic trend of the scientific-technological development would bring mainly negative side effects and collateral damages.

However, people as great reflexive actors can make metamorphoses ‘things-for-man’, and here two factors are significant. First, the need to overcome the limitations of the linear-mechanical picture of the world with the prevailing disciplinary monism which studies specific phenomena instead of complex challenges determined by the interconnected phenomena of social-techno-natural realities. For instance, ‘quantum theories’ of consciousness [31] consider the decision-making of reflexive actors as an open system with both internal (value orientations, beliefs, feelings, preferences) and external factors (social-technical environment). The practical use of these theories provides prerequisites for the transition from a linear-mechanical to a non-linear picture of the world reflecting the essence of complex metamorphoses and their possible consequences. Second, reflexive actors can put metamorphization at least under some control with the help of quantum physics, mathematics, risk-management and especially the humanities.

Such an interdisciplinary humanistic approach would allow to take into account all kinds of metamorphoses and their possible consequences, and to search for the scientific development and technological innovations adequate for the cosmopolitan humanism.

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Certainly, metamorphization of society develops, and scientists have already identified its general trend but the whole picture of complex metamorphoses. There are at least three basic types of them: 1) development in the form of sudden events and unintentional breaks due to the formal-rational, pragmatic transformations of society and nature and mercantile scientific-technological innovations, which deform and dehumanize our life-worlds; 2) global traumatization in the form of ‘liquid’ disasters that permanently change the living and non-living nature, desocialize social relations, transform something into nothing (traditional disasters are limited by local space-time parameters, the contemporary ones have a permanent and spatially unlimited character); 3) metamorphosis itself, which brings not only troubles and turbulence but also potential benefits and hopes for the transition to more a humane life.

The mutual influence, interference and dominance of specific types of metamorphoses have not been studied yet. However, their valid interpretation presupposes the transition from a linear to the non-linear picture of the world and, thus, from monodisciplinary to interdisciplinary knowledge. The monodisciplinary discourse still prevails, which hinders the cognition of complex metamorphoses. “Our science is organized by means of disciplines, each specializing in one category of phenomena”. The problem is that “the influence of one category dominates the influences of all others so that the latter can be neglected... the discipline-based science will encounter significant limitations when examining human life, society, and the biosphere because it will tend to treat them as if they have the characteristics of non-living entities” [30. P. 3–4].

To avoid bads of metamorphization of society, we need the system study of the mutual influence of human beings, society, biosphere, and the digital. There is no single science for thus — we need an interaction of theoretical-methodological approaches within the humanistic turn in all sciences [15].

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## **Метаморфизация общества: фактор «побочных эффектов» и глобализация ничто\***

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В настоящее время физический, биологический и социальный миры развиваются все быстрее и сложнее, что, в частности, выражается в распространении таких явлений, как метаморфозы. Традиционно считалось, что они вызваны главным образом внешними факторами, или силами природы, однако их современные типы приобретают все более сложный рукотворный характер. По сравнению с традиционными метаморфозами, имеющими «жестко установленные» и

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предсказуемые результаты, современные метаморфозы могут приводить как к негативным, так и к позитивным последствиям, что свидетельствует о становлении нелинейной картины мира. Появилась травматическая тенденция: «нечто» подвергается метаморфизации в «ничто». Под влиянием цифровизации «ничто» не просто усложняется, но лишается «чисто» культурных и гуманных характеристик, что выражается в новых проявлениях «смерти» социального: человек метаморфизуется в «цифровую сущность». В то же время метаморфизация общества может привести к появлению «общих благ как побочного эффекта плохого». Автор утверждает, что формально-рациональные и прагматические трансформации общества и природы, как и научные и технологические инновации меркантильного толка, деформируют и дегуманизируют жизненные миры. Глобальная трансформация в форме «текущих» катастроф перманентно изменяет живую и неживую природу, структуру почвы, воды и воздуха, десоциализирует человеческие отношения, способствуя трансформации нечего в ничто, людей — в «не-людей», места — в «не-места», вещи — в «не-вещи». Однако люди как рефлексивные акторы способны преобразовать метаморфозы в «вещи для себя». Чтобы начать этот процесс, необходимо перейти от прагматических, монодисциплинарных принципов науки к междисциплинарным — имеющим гуманистический стержень и предполагающим гуманистический поворот во всех научных и технологических инновациях.

**Ключевые слова:** метаморфизация общества; метаморфоза; нелинейность; «побочные эффекты»; макдональдизация; нечего; «ничто»; социализация; монодисциплинарность; междисциплинарность; гуманистический поворот