ISSN 2786-7242 (Print), ISSN 2786-7250 (Online)

UDC 101.1:316.422:316.77
DOI https://doi.org/10.31392/cult.alm.2026.3.15

Zharkykh Volodymyr,
Doctor of Sciences in Philosophy, Professor,
Head of the Department of Philosophy, History, and Political Science
Odesa Polytechnic National University
orcid.org/0000-0003-2829-9625
v.u.zharkyh@op.edu.ua

MANKIND IN THE CULTURE OF HIS TIME: THE SPECIFICITY OF VALUE ORIENTATION

The main goal of the article is to figure out how the 21st century's rapid development, be it in technology, climate change or geopolitical ambitions, is impacting the culture of the population and its ability to adapt and maintain its beliefs in the status quo that was present before. It's about trying to analyze the concept of culture as we know it and see whether it is still the same. Culture is understood as a complex web of signs, symbols, practices, and power structures summarized in a collective human response to reality and the correlation between the development of society and the identification of people acting in it. A person lives in the world of symbolic and practical reality which characterizes the cultural identity of his/her contemporary time. His/her social/personal orientations, principles and values are formed and based on the interaction of dominant features of cultural factors which lead to the appearance of constructive and creative social/personal relations.

Key words: culture, priorities and values of cultural identification, responsibility, dialogism.

Жарких Володимир Юрійович,
доктор філософських наук, професор,
завідувач кафедри філософії, історії та політології
Національного університету «Одеська політехніка»
orcid.org/0000-0003-2829-9625
v.u.zharkyh@op.edu.ua

ЛЮДСТВО В КУЛЬТУРІ СВОГО ЧАСУ: СПЕЦИФІКА ЦІННІСНИХ ОРІЄНТАЦІЙ

Стаття спрямована на те, щоб з'ясувати, як стрімкий розвиток драматичних подій XXI століття (чи то в галузі технологій, чи то через зміни клімату, геополітичні амбіції тощо) впливає на культуру людства, на його здатність адаптуватися та зберігати вірність попередньому стану речей. Ідеться про спробу проаналізувати поняття культури в його звичному розумінні та визначити, як воно змінюється в наші часи. Культура розглядається як складна мережа знаків, символів, практик і організаційних структур, що втілюють та водночас формують колективну реакцію людей на реальність, як взаємозв'язок між розвитком суспільства та самовизначенням людей, які в ньому діють. Людина живе у світі символічної та практичної реальності, що характеризує культурну ідентичність її сучасності. Соціальні/особистісні орієнтації, принципи й цінності людини формуються та базуються на взаємодії панівних рис культурних факторів, що сприяють виникненню конструктивних і творчих соціально-особистісних відносин.

Ключові слова: культура, пріоритети та цінності культурної ідентифікації, відповідальність, діалогізм.

© Zharkykh V., 2026

Стаття поширюється на умовах ліцензії відкритого доступу CC BY 4.0

Problems to be addressed. People live in the world of persuasions, ideas and beliefs of their time. It is the meaningful world of the perceived unstable real, which exists in the dynamics of permanent tension, moving from the obvious to the hard to believe in. The real stands on a sort of watershed, where the action of attractive forces causes vibrations and unrest. But these dynamics themselves are relative. The overwhelming velocity of 21st-century change has created a completely unique cultural phenomenon: liquid culture. Coined conceptually by sociologist Sigmund Bauman, this means that cultural forms, institutions, and relationships melt and reshape before they have time to solidify. Human culture used to change across generations; today, it changes across months.

The purpose of this article is to analyse culture as a dynamic socio-philosophical phenomenon that shapes human identity, and to demonstrate the role of human beings as active creators of culture, both pro-active and re-active, responsible for its development, transformation and humanistic content in the rapidly fluctuating modern world. The hyper-acceleration of the 21st century did not emerge from a vacuum. A literal projectile leading to this was the 20th century, which gathered massive momentum, shattered traditional stasis, and launched humanity into the "liquid culture" we experience today. Without the fundamental, violent breaks of the 1900s, the current velocity of cultural change would be structurally impossible.

Analysis of research and publications. Unprecedented culturological and technological changes happened all through the 20th century. This time became a laboratory for human identity. The collapse of empires, two world wars, the rise of mass media and the digital revolution forced a radical re-evaluation of what it means to be human. People's historically proven habits and rules of their cultural reality have been shaken. However, there appeared new grounds and features for self-identification. It was a time of transformation in which a person had to adapt. We turn to the works of Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (Schiller, 1991), William James (James, 1983), George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1967), José Ortega-y-Gasset (Ortega-y-Gasset, 1997), scientists whose professional activity was closely interwoven with evaluation of these processes. The 20th century laid the grounds for the 21st, which is characterised by the huge shifts in technology, environment, geopolitics, and perception of truth. The world is changing fast and with it people's perception of life. We look at the ideas of some 21st century scientists like Sherry Turkle (Turkle, 2011), Byung-Chul Han (Han, 2017), Albert Bauman (Bauman, 2003; Bauman, 2011), Timothy Morton (Morton, 2013), Rupert Wegerif (Wegerif, 2007; Wegerif 2026).

Methodology. The research methodology consists of a philosophical and cultural analysis of transformations in culture and human identity under the conditions of social and technological changes of the 20th–21st centuries, drawing on the ideas of classical representatives of pragmatism and social philosophy, previously mentioned by the author.

The author uses: a historical-philosophical approach (analyzing changes in culture from antiquity to the present), a comparative analysis (comparing different cultural epochs and concepts), a cultural approach (considering culture as a system of symbols, values, and meanings), a socio-philosophical analysis (examining the interaction between the individual and society), interpretation of philosophers' ideas (to explain processes of self-identification and human adaptation).

The body of the article. The world is united by a wide symbol of "culture". As a social phenomenon, culture embraces all the forms and temporal intervals of human life. Individual and social culture is determined by the capacity of its representatives to generate ideas leading to the achievement of progress (James, 1983). As a phenomenon deeply individual and unique (Schiller, 1991, p. 72), the establishment of culture is simultaneously a process and a result.

Concepts and content of European cultural tradition go back to the antiquity of Ancient Greece. Its idea of culture, among other important and necessary principles, was based on the observance of norms, standards and rules of behavior of Man-citizen. Accordingly, special attention was paid to forming a socially responsible citizen and making a "mature Man" from an innocent child. The ancient Greek, and then the Roman ideal of Man/citizen's culture incorporated a high degree of ethics and morality, understood within the traditions of the time.

The Renaissance age opened a humanistic sense in understanding of culture. In it there

appears a concept of sovereignty which referred both to the state and the Man. Man in the epoch of Renaissance got the right to experience and cultivate his own individuality and enjoy the right of freedom to develop his creative forces. With the emergence of humanism the main maxim became the definition of human as the highest of all existing values. It guaranteed Man the right to "live according to his own volition" (Schiller, 1991, p. 72). Distinctive inner individual features of Man in the culture of Renaissance are self-sufficiency, pride, dignity, talent and self-affirmation of his own power. Culture acquires humanistic measuring, and Man is perceived as a creator, transformer of himself and his destiny. Humanism offered new ideals and standards to culture. It created pre-conditions and designed outlines of the environment for the origin and development of the modern understanding of culture and the role of people in their authentic identity.

Historically ideas, values and priorities of cultural identity are transformed in accordance with the challenges of time.

The 20th and 21st centuries have brought faster cultural shifts than any other period in human history. This evolution is explained as a tense balancing act between rapid technological progress, ecological crises, and shifting global power.

Technology is no longer just a tool. It shapes human consciousness and relationships. We live in a hyper-connected age, and this creates a "global village". This exact tension lies at the heart of late 20th and 21st-century philosophy and sociology. Hyperconnectivity, facilitated by the rapid technological development, creates a paradox: it brings humanity into a single digital space, yet it tears apart the physical social fabric that keeps us grounded. When Marshall McLuhan coined the term "Global Village" in 1964, he predicted that electronic media would break down geographic barriers and unite humanity. However, philosophers quickly realized this "village" comes at a steep cultural cost. Global digital networks spread a flattened culture. Local traditions, languages, and unique regional customs are often erased or commodified to fit algorithmic trends. Media and digital simulations replace physical reality.

AI and biotechnology blur the line between human and machine. Technology drives cultural change faster than ethics can keep up. Shared cultural myths are replaced by algorithmic echo chambers (Sunstain, 2001).

Philosophers and sociologists argue that hyperconnectivity changes the quality of human interaction, shifting it from deep communion to shallow transactions. Technology can replace rich, demanding human experiences with effortless, digitized alternatives (Borgman, 1999).

21st century moved us even further along this route. If the 20th century was the era of "fragmentation and mass society", the 21st century is the era of hyper-connectivity, algorithmic mediation, and the blurring of the human boundary. In this century, the technological changes (AI, smartphones, biotech) and cultural shifts (globalization, climate crisis) are so rapid that adaptation is no longer a phase we go through, but a permanent, daily state of being. These changes impact on our self-identification. The self is now divided into a "data double" – a digital profile created by algorithms that often knows what we want before we do. The challenge is maintaining control when our desires are being manufactured in real-time.

Korean German philosopher Byung-Chul Han (Han, 2015) argues that the 21st century has shifted from a society of "prohibition" (Sartre's era of "You must not") to a society of "ability" ("Yes, you can!"). The boundary between work and life has dissolved due to smartphones and the gig economy and "work from home" pandemic times. We are always online, always accessible, and always expected to "self-optimize". The individual identifies as a "project" to be constantly improved, marketed, and monetized (the "personal brand"). We are both the boss and the employee. This leads to voluntary self-exploitation. The adaptation mechanism is constant activity, which leads to the defining psychic condition of our era: "burnout" and depression.

While Baudrillard spoke of the "simulacrum" (the copy without an original) in the late 20th century (Baudrillard, 1994), the 21st century has fully realized it through social media, deepfakes, and Metaverse.

For the first time in history, humanity has become a geological force capable of changing the planet's climate. Global warming, pandemics, and ecological collapse are what philosopher Timothy Morton calls "Hyperobjects" – things that are so massively distributed in time and space

that they transcend human comprehension, yet we experience them daily. The individual can no longer identify as separate from nature. Human adaptation nowadays requires a shift from egocentrism to eco-centrism. The self must be redefined not as an isolated consumer, but as a member of a vast, fragile, planetary web of life.

In the 21st century, adaptation is no longer about finding a stable identity to hold onto; it is about learning how to navigate "permanent instability" while retaining a sense of humanity.

To understand the "cultural component" of these shifts, we must look at how abstract philosophical concepts manifest in our daily habits, social norms, language, art, and rituals.

Here is how the cultural reality of the 21st century has adapted, categorized by five major cultural phenomena:

1. The Aestheticization of Daily Life (The "Instagrammable" Culture).

Under the influence of hyperreality and the curated avatar, culture is no longer about just living an experience but documenting and curating it. This leads to a shift in habits. Traditional milestones (weddings, vacations, dinners) are now designed for the camera. We acquired new cultural terminology like "main character energy" (viewing one's life as a movie for an audience), "clout" (social capital measured in digital engagement), and "FOMO" (fear of missing out). As a result culture has become highly performative. We curate our identities as brands, turning friendship, travel, and even grief into content.

2. Hustle Culture and the "Wellness" Backlash.

Flowing directly from Byung-Chul Han's "Burnout Society" (Han, 2015) the 21st century has seen the glorification of work, followed by a cultural rebellion against it. Culturally, we normalized working 80-hour weeks, having "side hustles", and constant self-optimization. Sleep was framed as a weakness; productivity apps turned our days into gamified schedules. As a counterbalance there appeared the counterculture (The "Soft Life"). Terms like "Quiet Quitting" (doing the bare minimum at work), the "Soft Life" movement, and the rise of "Goblin Mode" (embracing laziness and rejecting self-improvement) became cultural trends.

3. AI Companionship.

The normalization of talking to AI (like Replika or ChatGPT character bots) for comfort, advice, or even romance is shifting the culture of intimacy. Algorithms (Tinder, Hinge) have turned dating into a game of endless choice. Culturally, this has led to "ghosting" (disappearing without explanation) and a sense of dating fatigue, where other humans are treated as disposable options in a digital catalog.

4. Eco-Anxiety and "Cli-Fi" (Climate Fiction).

The cultural reality of climate change is marked by a background hum of ecological dread. Eco-Anxiety is becoming a cultural norm. For younger generations, the future is not seen as a promise of progress, but as a threat of survival. This has altered major life decisions, such as the cultural rise in some young people deciding not to have children due to climate change. There appeared a cultural expression like climate fiction (Cli-Fi). Literature, film, and art have shifted focus. We see the rise of "Climate Fiction" (movies like "Don't Look Up", video games like "Death Stranding", and post-apocalyptic literature) reflecting anxiety about the end of the world. Another trend is the appearance of a notion and a way of life like Green Consumerism, where buying reusable or vegan products is a cultural marker for sustainability, mortality and care for the future of the planet.

Another dominant factor in culture shifts and adaptation today is geopolitics. Power struggles have moved from local empires to global networks, reshaping identity and belonging.

Modern warfare – characterized by hybrid conflicts, digital information battles, proxy wars, and mass displacement – acts as a violent accelerator of "liquid culture". When war erupts today, it does not just destroy physical infrastructure; it reshapes the psychological and social architecture of belonging (where we feel we fit in) and identity (who we believe we are. Modern war has created the largest global refugee crisis in history. When millions are forced to flee, they enter a state of "liminality" – a threshold space where they are no longer who they were (e.g., a Syrian doctor, a Ukrainian teacher in their home cities). On the other hand modern wars have also reshaped belonging by creating global, decentralized networks of empathy that bypass governments. A new form of global belonging is emerging, where people identify not with their nation-state, but with a global community committed to human rights and peace.

All the factors mentioned above can strongly affect the psychological state of people and their perception of wellbeing. One of the ways to stand up to these challenges is to indulge more in dialogism, a philosophical and literary concept, which traditionally states that meaning is not solitary or fixed, but is constantly created through dialogue, interaction, and the interplay of multiple voices.

In the 21st century, the challenge of dialogism has shifted too. In our digital, hyper-connected era, communication is instant, but genuine dialogue is rarer than ever. "Conversation" (which is open, messy, requires vulnerability, and develops empathy) is being replaced by "connection" (which is clean, edited, and controlled via texting and social media). Because we can edit our texts and curate our profiles, we avoid the anxiety of real-time human interaction (Turkle, 2011).

The digital world has expelled "the Other" (Mead, 1967; Han, 2017). In a world dominated by algorithms, we only see things we already like and agree with (the "Like" button).

Dialogism should be part of human learning and development. Education shouldn't be just about remembering facts, but about opening up a "dialogism space" (Wegerif, 2007) – a shared mental space where students learn to see things from multiple perspectives. Digital technology can be productively used not to isolate us, but to bridge differences and teach global dialogue. In schools and workplaces, we must teach "dialogic intelligence" (Wegerif, 2026). This means teaching young people how to ask good questions, how to construct arguments, how to change their minds gracefully, and how to use digital platforms to collaborate rather than argue.

Conclusion. The 21st century has brought faster cultural shifts than any other period in human history. This is explained by a tense balancing act between rapid technological progress, climate change crises, and shifting global power. Adaptation is no longer about finding a stable identity to hold onto; it is about learning how to navigate permanent instability while retaining a sense of humanity. To stay human in a liquid, hyper-digital world, we must move away from monologue (curated profiles, echo chambers, self-optimization) and toward dialogue (messy conversations, facing the stranger, internal reflection, and existential resonance). Humanity is not something we possess individually; it is a quality that exists in the space between us, which we must actively protect and cultivate.

Bibliography:

Baudrillard J. (1994). Simulacra and Simulation. Michigan Press. 176 p.

Bauman Z. (2011). Culture in a Liquid Modern World. Polity. Cambridge UK, 144 p.

Borgmann A. (1999). Holding on to reality: The nature of information at the turn of the millennium. University of Chicago Press. 288 p.

Braidotti R. (2025). Posthuman Convergences: Transdisciplinary Methods and Practices. Edinburg University Press. 408 p.

Han Byung-Chul. (2015). The Burnout Society. Stanford University Press. 72 p.

Han Byung-Chul. (2017). In the Swarm: Digital Prospects. Translated by Erik Butler. MIT Press. 96 p.

James W. (1983). Problems of development of psyche. N.Y.UP. 432 p.

McLuhan Marshall (1994). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. MIT Press. 392 p.

Mead G. H. (1967). Mind, Self and Society: from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist. University of Chicago Press. 440 p.

Morton T. (2013). Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press. 240 p.

Ortega-y-Gasset J. (1997). Selected Works. N.Y.UP. 457 p.

Schiller F. C. S. (1991). Logic for use: an introduction to the voluntarist theory of knowledge. N.Y.UP. 224 p.

Sunstein C. R. (2001). Republic.com. University Press. 224 p.

Turkle S. (2011). Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other. Basic Books. 384 p.

Van den Akker R., Gibbons A., Vermeulen T., editors. (2017). Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. Rowman & Littlefield International. 248p.

Wegerif R. (2007). Dialogism Education and the Space of Learning. Springer New York. 328 p.

Wegerif R. (2026). Dialogic Intelligence: rethinking what education is in the age of AI. Study of education and development. Infancia y Aprendizaje. Vol 49. 20 p.

References:

Baudrillard, J. (1994). Simulacra and Simulation. Michigan Press. 176 p. [in English].

Bauman, Z. (2011). Culture in a Liquid Modern World. Polity. Cambridge UK. 144 p. [in English].

Borgmann, A. (1999). Holding on to reality: The nature of information at the turn of the millennium. University of Chicago Press. 288 p. [in English].

Braidotti, R. (2025). Posthuman Convergences: Transdisciplinary Methods and Practices. Edinburg University Press. 408 p. [in English].

Han, Byung-Chul. (2015). The Burnout Society. Stanford University Press. 72 p. [in English].

Han, Byung-Chul. (2017). In the Swarm: Digital Prospects. Translated by Erik Butler. MIT Press. 96 p. [in English].

James, W. (1983). Problems of development of psyche. N.Y.UP. 432 p. [in English].

McLuhan, Marshall (1994). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. MIT Press. 392 p. [in English].

Mead, G. H. (1967). Mind, Self and Society: from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist. University of Chicago Press. 440 p. [in English].

Morton, T. (2013). Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 240 p. [in English].

Schiller, F. C. S. (1991). Logic for use: an introduction to the voluntarist theory of knowledge. N.Y.UP. 224 p. [in English].

Sunstein, C. R. (2001). Republic.com. University Press. 224 p. [in English].

Turkle, S. (2011). Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other. Basic Books. 384 p. [in English].

Wegerif, R. (2007). Dialogism Education and the Space of Learning. Springer New York, N.Y. 328 p. [in English].

Wegerif, R. (2026). Dialogic Intelligence: rethinking what education is in the age of AI. Study of education and development. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 49, 20 p. [in English].

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 01.08.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 21.08.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 27.10.2026