

Aesthetic Society of Serbia
NGO “Green Pea” – Citizens’ Association for Art, Culture,
Media and Social Issues

PHILOSOPHY OF MEDIA: FROM ALTERNATIVES TO FREEDOM

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PHILOSOPHY OF MEDIA: A SCHOOL OF CRITICAL THINKING

The philosophy of media, as a companion to contemporary aesthetics and a new (sub)discipline of philosophy, is undergoing a turbulent phase of establishment and foundation. In this early stage of its development within our cultural sphere, the first volume of *Philosophy of Media: Ontology, Aesthetics, Critique* by Divna Vuksanović was published in 2007, and in 2011, an International Scientific Conference was held on the island of Cres (Croatia) under the title *Philosophy of Media: Questions of Foundation, Establishment, and/or Discovery*. The philosophy of media functions quietly and almost unnoticed. Yet, it raises skepticism among some contemporaries, while many thinkers and creators of our time remain largely indifferent to it. Although operating quietly, its emergence signals a profound intellectual effort to critically engage with the ever-evolving landscape of media. The initiative to establish the philosophy of media in the region was led by the association “Mladi Grašak” – dedicated to art, culture, media, and social issues – from Belgrade, and the Center for Philosophy of Media and Mediological Research from Zagreb. The significance of this endeavor was soon recognized by the Aesthetic Society of Serbia and the Croatian Philosophical Society, both of which also offered their support for the project, further solidifying its academic and cultural importance.

Like any branch of philosophy, despite its interdisciplinary focus and connections to related fields, the philosophy of media persistently interrogates its own theoretical and practical potential – its foundations, ideas, methods, and the very meaning of its existence. Faced with these challenges, it enters the arena of philosophical inquiry, where, having just begun its explorations, it must fight for its survival and endurance. It must continually assert its relevance and survival, facing challenges that mirror the dynamism of the media it examines. Although media, in various forms, have existed since the advent of writing, the philosophy of media has only recently begun to examine them critically (from the late 20th century to the first quarter of the 21st century). Importantly, it does not merge with earlier media theories and studies that preceded it, and for good reason. Its approach is distinctly philosophical, yet also critical, setting it apart from other reflective attempts to analyze the world of media.

In 2016, with the goal of fostering a more intensive and thoughtful examination of media, the *Section for Philosophy of Media* was established within the Aesthetic Society of Serbia (initiated by Divna Vuksanović and Dragan Čalović). The section's activities primarily focus on organizing scientific conferences, roundtable discussions, and encouraging public debates on contemporary issues related to media and media practices. One of the section's key tasks is publishing thematic collections of papers from these conferences. The anthology *Philosophy of Media: From Alternative to Freedom*, available in both print and online, offers a selection of works from the first six conferences organized by the Section for Philosophy of Media at the Aesthetic Society of Serbia: *Philosophy of Media: Media and Alternatives* (2017), *Philosophy of Media: Media and Conflict* (2018), *Philosophy of Media: Media and Loneliness* (2019), *Philosophy of Media: Media and Madness* (2020), *Philosophy of Media: Media and Science* (2021), and *Philosophy of Media: Media and Freedom* (2022).

The collection begins with fundamental questions on *media and freedom*, a theme explored by Ratko Božović, who examines the interplay between media structures and individual liberties. His analysis suggests that media globalization erodes meaningful participation in social life, reinforcing centralized control and propagating a homogenized popular culture that transcends national boundaries. Divna Vuksanović extends this discussion by addressing the *concept and practice of media emancipation*, and her article also raises important ethical concerns, using Julian Assange's prolonged detention as a case study to question whether modern media truly operate in the public interest. In that sense, her work contributes to media philosophy by challenging dominant narratives on media freedom, exposing structural constraints, and advocating for a deeper, more critical engagement with the role of media in contemporary society. The paper of Dragan Čalović probes the paradoxes of *freedom in the media society* when the author argues that the loss of freedom in media society stems from a weakening connection to moral principles, which are not immutable but shaped by evolving social structures. Katarina Šmakić further refines this debate by questioning the *boundaries of freedom in digital media*, highlighting the restrictions imposed by technological frameworks.

Moving beyond traditional perspectives, Miloš Agatonović's *Self-Locating Beliefs in the Simulation Hypothesis* raises existential concerns about media-driven simulations of reality. This theoretical reflection complements Fahira Fejzić Čengi's thought-provoking inquiry: *Is the End of Science and/or Media Happening?*, questioning whether the digital age signals an epistemological crisis. Meanwhile, Dragana Kitanović's analysis of *Scientific Imagination in the Medium of Film* examines how cinema shapes scientific discourse and in doing so her work expands the anthology's discourse by connecting media philosophy to deeper ontological and epistemological questions about human perception and the role of visual mediation in shaping our understanding of reality. Duško Prelević

interrogates *The Interested Science: Between Popularization and Propaganda*, exposing the media's influence on scientific communication.

As media consumption transforms human interaction, several authors explore its psychological and sociocultural consequences. Damir Smiljanić's *Audio-Solipsism: How Headphones Isolate Us from the World* considers how auditory technologies create social detachment. His article aims to critically examine the aesthetics of self-isolation while contrasting it with the inherently expansive and world-opening nature of musical art. Similarly, Marko M. Đorđević, Dobrivoje Ž. Stanojević, and Tamara S. Đorđević's *The Tragedy of the Selfie* critiques digital narcissism as a self-reinforcing phenomenon. Dragana Žarić's *Abolition of the Other or: On the Identity of Homo Digitalis* further challenges notions of identity in an era defined by virtual interactions.

The ideological mechanisms of media remain central to this collection. Boris Bratina's *Ideological Nature of the Media: The Example of Video-GIFs* examines how digital imagery perpetuates cultural narratives. Meanwhile, Predrag Jakšić interrogates the *Insanity of Verbiage: The Media as an Identity of Insanity*, questioning the excessive proliferation of discourse in contemporary media landscapes.

Media's role in shaping perception extends to its engagement with violence, propaganda, and representation. Ognjen Obradović's *Death of James Foley: Execution as Performance* critically examines media's spectacle of violence, while Biljana Ćorović's *John Pilger: Media War and the Triumph of Propaganda* explores the manipulation of war narratives. Olivera Nušić Terzić and Predrag Krstić's *We Took Up Attitudes: Star Trek and Conflict Trek* delve into media's portrayal of ideological battles through science fiction.

Finally, this anthology closes with an ambitious vision of media's future. Saša Milić's *Projected Future or How to Save the World Thanks to, or in Spite of, the Media* calls for a reflective engagement with media as both a tool for progress and a potential threat to autonomy.

Together, these works contribute to the ongoing discourse on media's philosophical implications, offering diverse perspectives on its power to shape thought, culture, and political agency.

We extend our gratitude to all the participants of the conferences, as well as those who have contributed papers to the collections, for shaping the future development of this unique school of thought. It is our hope that this practice will continue in the spirit of creative and fruitful collaboration, fostering thought-provoking collaborations, both among authors and within the broader scholarly and professional community.

Belgrade, August 9, 2024.

Editorial Board



Extrude
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2012

FREEDOM AND THE MEDIA

The endeavor to make the media an institutional basis for a free public sphere is far removed from the reality of societies in transition. Such a tendency requires both free media and a free society. However, this does not mean remaining within the patterns of the old ideological system, but that its traces are not fading and they are hard to erase. These are the traces that Leszek Kołakowski writes about, claiming that in socialism information lost its original characteristics to such an extent that no one was surprised when a cockroach was called a nightingale. Only the person who finds out that a cockroach is not a nightingale could get into trouble, according to the philosopher.

The media now only produce an image of reality that does not exist. The old methodology is as present as pre-election passions and post-election trade. Informative extremism and xenophobic madness have not subsided either. There has been no establishment and revival of critical public opinion. The ideals of tolerance, non-violence, and coexistence have not been established. Moreover, prejudices against the nation, religion, gender, minority, and beings with special orientations and individual characteristics have not been overcome.

In recent decades, the presence of global media and their strong influence on the establishment of a new scale of values has been of particular importance. These media and their mental matrices come from a world in which the disappearance of universal values is largely present. There is no meaningful existence. It is a drastic crisis of meaning. Modern man is confronted with a world without a compass and a consciousness without the sense of the meaning of existence. The emergence of global media is increasingly influencing the nature of national and state media, especially the media of countries in transition. In line with the market of liberal capitalism, the presence of global media acts as an unstoppable force, as an inevitable and convenient dictatorship. This is perhaps the only dictatorship that is accepted without resistance and completely uncritically. Global media do not operate as a possible option, but as a chosen option. So the question is not how to control these media, but how they will “network” their passive observers, their “consumers.” Media globalization is reasonably thought of as a major threat to the active participation in social life and direct involvement in people’s everyday life. The globalization of the media is taking place not only through its pronounced

centralization and control, but also through the baroque expansion of popular culture, which transcends regional and national borders.

This form of global culture thus essentially “breaks down” national and state borders in the area of values and establishes homogeneity even in the most distant parts of the world. Thanks to the strong influence of global media, marginalized and subordinate states are confronted with values such as individualism, human rights, especially women’s rights, minority rights and the rights of people with special needs. All this is not insignificant for establishing a democratic climate, but it is not insisted upon because programs of social significance are essentially neglected. The fact that these media favor “light entertainment”, spectacle, violence, and pornography shows that they are primarily geared towards shaping a consumer society and creating a “consumer”, not a free citizen.

On the civilizational stage, the commercial media already dominate in an overwhelming way. They are destroying the old and creating a new media landscape. This is a civilizational leap that has both its upsides and downsides. To complete the illusion, the spectacle is unavoidable, especially since, as already mentioned, it is the capital mediated by the image. This means that everything in the commercial media is subordinated to the capital relation and consumer mentality. If economic values have not only a central and dominant role but also supersede all other values, then consumption may not be experienced as a means, but as an end, with profit as the only value. There is no need to prove how absurd this is. The worst is that the consequences are far-reaching from the point of view of developing possible creative potentials and individual values. Today’s media problem also arises from the fact that the control of the political centers of power is being replaced by financial moguls. They become the owners of relevant media. This is often enough to block the civilizing energy of the media, free public opinion, and democratic political culture. It is then difficult to realize the concept of democracy and an open society, especially when critical public opinion and political maturity of citizens are lacking. And citizens who would freely participate in political life would feel co-responsible for the politics of their maturity of citizens are lacking. And citizens who would freely participate in political life would feel co-responsible for the politics of their community. They, together with free media, could become an indispensable force in transforming social and individual life. In free media, citizens’ initiatives could find their advocate, and arrogant power its greatest critic. Unfortunately, this has not happened here.

Instead, tabloids have emerged that seem like a weather catastrophe, but are nevertheless accepted with immeasurable approval, especially by the illiterate and semi-literate. Tabloidization as the violence of media is incompatible with any form of freedom. In the race for the market, it does not matter whether what they present is true and undeniably valuable; what matters is that it is interesting, unexpected, and sensational in its banality for the uneducated and culturally poor.

In fact, the dominant tabloids are the product of drastic commercialization, social instrumentalization, politicization, and chaos in the marketplace.

When there is little or no critical publicity and solid journalism, tabloids and showbiz lead the dance. These tabloids are directly linked to our voyeuristic speculation and pornographic fantasy. Intrigue, violence, and voyeuristic speculation are the favorite pastimes of our tabloids. The figure of the voyeur remains a constant and fits perfectly into the social environment where extremist behavior prevails, which the tabloids press inevitably deal with. What is particularly controversial is that anyone can be slandered with the most outrageous lies. And nothing happens! If intrigue is devised solely to degrade the gossiped person in social, moral, and professional terms, then malicious intentions turn into an act of destruction with broader social significance. Problems arise when assumptions create an atmosphere where slanderous fabrications appear as rumors that are believed, leading to confused scenarios where absurd possibilities seem real. Therefore, it is necessary to inquire about the social environment that allows gossipy hatred, primitive violence, and the degradation of sexuality to impose themselves as prevailing reasoning in public opinion. A gossip, and there it is in the tabloids, usually sends dirty news that is unfortunately not only provocative but also readily accepted. The more provocative and unfounded it is, the more it “takes root.” Often, an entire guerrilla of propagandists – specialists in fabricating intrigues, slanders, and insults – is set loose on “unsuitable” public figures. It is forgotten that the right to privacy is part of guaranteed human rights and freedoms.

Amidst the overwhelming noise of showbiz and tabloid press, nothing is heard or seen as it should be. It is enough to analyze the style and language of the journalists in the tabloids to understand who they may have included in their consumer and political deceptions. It becomes immediately clear how the literacy and overall expressive potential of such journalism has suffered. Street slang, brutality of expression and foul-mouthed vocabulary are supposed to represent communicative looseness and freedom of expression, but in reality it is all about intellectual and moral laxity. The worst thing is that with the help of such tabloids, which are an inappropriate mixture of vulgar satanization of projected scapegoats and excessive glorification of rulers, a political elite comes to power and seems to maintain power, accepting these forms of journalism as interested and unscrupulous allies.

The undefined and hybrid form of journalism, with the pronounced emotionalization of crime news and the extreme everyday life that becomes entangled in various pathologies, is to a great extent more than an incentive to capture human souls, especially those who survive in the confusion of values. When sensationalism is added to this journalistic eccentricity, feeding on bizarre, perverse violence, unexpected tragic events, human misfortune and unavoidable scandals that are favorite topics of the tabloid press, the readership's fire is fueled vigorously. The strategy of this type of tabloid is to make the content as non-

committal, down-to-earth and entertaining as possible. In such a presentation of extreme, pathological, and tragic events, day after day, pathological violence is dissected to such an extent that an almost detailed record of new “evidence” is kept to keep the readership in suspense, fear, and euphoria. In the constant detailing of an already announced calamity, it goes so far that the arbitrariness of evil and crime replaces measure, taste, and credibility.

No consideration is given, for example, to the family that is thus constantly emotionally hurt, sacrificed for the dirty market motives of tabloids. Essentially, this surpasses all normal informing and proper communication. There are also photographs that often drastically support this kind of journalistic narrative. The effect is unmistakable: the most down-to-earth and vulgar content attracts the most those who have almost become addicts of this type of trivial journalism. And today we could say that, to a large extent, both print and electronic media are a reflection of tabloid society.

Journalistic creativity, the most creative, is based on a reliable recognition of reality, while politics, as a thanatic game for power, thrives on a distorted image of reality, which its protagonists sometimes distort to the point of absurdity through the logic of political interest. Therefore, in dogmatic and autocratic politics, free and creative journalism is perceived as a “disruptive factor” in the exercise of political authority and political omnipotence. This is not only about the misinterpretation of the journalistic vocation and the disregard of the means by which a journalist expresses their view of reality, but also about the abrogation of their freedom and creative autonomy. It thus becomes clear that the mutual intolerance between repressive politics and journalistic creation arises from different views of reality and different understandings of the human being as the essence of freedom. Their languages, which are fundamentally different, diverge to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine that they speak about the same thing credibly and in the same way. And that alone is enough for the existence of dramatic misunderstandings. Foolish politics seeks to thwart the unpredictable influence of journalism in reality. This is the politics that is maintained by political violence and spinning as aggressive political marketing, which is a form of deception. In any case, base political pragmatism is incompatible with the gifts of journalistic investigation, especially with the effort to announce it as a corrective and critique of such politics.

Any subjugation of any creativity to the paw of politics, any instrumentalization of it, reveals a structural disorder in the existing value scale. The freedom of journalists is part of the effort to live according to the measure of their profession, for the journalist to be what they are in creative self-affirmation and moral identity. If journalism is not realized as a free form of existence, its essence is called into question. And to reach creative self-affirmation, a journalist must be a free being, which means not serving any purposes beyond the effort to reveal the truth and encourage the spread of freedom as a prerequisite for establishing civilizational

values and progressive aspirations. Therefore, any conditioning of journalistic activity, as well as its flirting with politics, is harmful and wrong. If a journalist is not free, it is difficult to question conservative reality and falsifying politics, and even harder to demystify it. Then there is no chance to establish an understanding that is close to the truth of human existence and its value orientation.

Journalists are, in fact, promoters of values. This means that they must have the ability to develop critical thinking. In the search for life forces that establish democracy, human rights, tolerance, and peace, the journalist, as a protagonist of awareness of the social community and human dramatic existence, becomes an indispensable creator of a critical mirror. They will succeed in this only if they have a “sense” for the essential, for the essence, for the truth, if they are free. In a free society, they can become an impartial witness and reliable interpreter of modern and postmodern understandings of the world. Therefore, the establishment of a value scale is unimaginable without the journalistic endeavor, its abilities, its talent, its conscience, and its freedom.

Apathetic journalists of the transition, accompanied by tension, unrest, nervousness, stress, and depression, have little energy necessary to stimulate individual and social change. Journalists who have not freed themselves from authoritarian culture and repressive politics are far from the ideals of tolerance, non-violence, coexistence, and civil rights. Worst of all, they are themselves prisoners of social stagnation. A competent, educated, and responsible journalist is extremely important in reviving the public sphere, structural changes, and public communication. The great trouble is that in the prevailing and simulated communication today, there is a lack of clear and sensible words, thoughtful thinking, and sincere feeling. In any case, it makes no sense for journalists to remain indifferent to the reality happening before their eyes but also to be biased towards any part of the political spectrum.

Without a doubt, the state of the media reflects the state of society. It is evident that there is no free society without free media. Political freedom arrives where the citizen's co-responsibility begins, where their political participation has occurred. As an indispensable intermediary, the journalist helps the citizen better understand their possibilities and recognize their desires. This is part of their effort to constantly react and act. Indifference, passion, and passivity are not suitable for them. Without their investigative passion, without individual freedom, there is neither truth about society nor knowledge about the aspirations of citizens.

As a vent for the critical potential of the public, free and socially responsible media are expected to support various forms of spontaneous civic initiatives and all forms of critical and alternative thinking. Journalists must have an ear for expressing both civic dissatisfaction and civil disobedience. For this, they need to possess a lived democratic political culture, and even more so, the power of empathy and altruism. Unfortunately, in our media, there has always been an excess of pragmatic-political and propaganda mediation at the expense

of life's immediacy and civic spontaneity. The media have not advanced far in understanding xenophobia and nationalist aspirations, as well as many other misdeeds. Hate speech and intolerance are dramatically present in Serbia as a form of radicalization and of political life. Influential electronic media still appear today as propagators of the anti-European "bloc," but also as foolish prompters of the protagonists of European integration. The contradictions and defects of globalization as a contemporary planetary ideology are often not understood. Globalist media that impose a value system are uncritically accepted, in which, instead of free citizens, "puppets" of the neoliberal myth are "shaped."

Media and democracy researchers agree: the media play an irreplaceable role in the democratic process, in interpreting and understanding of social problems. In contrast to a closed society, the concept of democracy and an open society is therefore directly linked to the media. Television that propagates primitivism, intolerance, and hatred should not be the television with national frequency. This also applies to television that is unimaginative, boring, networked with aggressive advertising and without media-pedagogically trained staff. Such television is doomed to betray its civilising potential and to serve itself and its base interests. Its social uselessness is immeasurable, and the greatest is that it destroys precious human time, humanity's most important asset.

In a state in which freedom and truth are not present as stimulating values, there is neither free media nor democracy. It is assumed that credible and comprehensive information has a decisive influence on participation of citizens in public life. Therefore, information standards have an important interrelation and inevitable reciprocity with free public sphere. Where there is no reliable information, a reliable political decision or freedom of choice cannot be expected or achieved. In contrast to an anomic and closed society, the concept of democracy and an open society is therefore directly linked to the media. In this context, the importance of a free journalist and a free public is immeasurable and irreplaceable.

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CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF MEDIA EMANCIPATION: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Dedicated to the spirits of my parents

Abstract: This text, from the perspective of the philosophy of media, examines the relationship between the philosophical interpretation of the concept of freedom and the possibilities of its practice in today's media. The understanding of freedom is one of the central themes of philosophy, while media, from a philosophical-critical perspective of our time, is a relatively recent area of research. Freedom in the media is often discussed as if it were a self-evident phenomenon. Most discussions about it are based on segmented, bureaucratically articulated "standards," which largely reduce it to impersonal figures or relatively arbitrary quantitative criteria. Moreover, media are increasingly permeated by the activities of artificial intelligence, with social networks being the main arena for its application. Therefore, expecting emancipation through algorithms, which are increasingly used in contemporary media, is absurd. It is also worth noting that independent journalism has been virtually expelled from the media scene, except for a few alternative media outlets systematically stifled and marginalized in the public sphere. Finally, how can one claim that modern media work in the public interest (including the pursuit of freedom), while Julian Assange, a symbol of presenting relevant facts globally, has been detained for a decade without evidence that, through WikiLeaks, he disclosed untruths or half-truths, a situation that applies to many other truth-seekers like him.

Keywords: freedom, media, artificial intelligence, Assange, philosophy of media

It seems that the concept of freedom, especially as it relates to media freedom, is an unconquerable fortress for human thought, and the understanding of freedom barely penetrates through these "walls." It appears even more challenging when it comes to the practice of freedom (in the media), as misunderstandings accumulate, and things seem to be slipping out of control. For example, contemporary media, in most theoretical discussions, are uncritically treated as an industry. Algorithms, or artificial intelligence (AI), have recently been increasingly involved in this systematic production of information, images, and sensations. The question that naturally arises is how new media technologies defend the so-called "public interest", preserving freedom of speech and expression in the media, and engage in the cause of universal emancipation. Has the industrialization of almost the entire

media sphere, operating in the interest of profit rather than truth and freedom, and facilitating the implementation of artificial intelligence in the processes of creating and distributing media content, transformed media into a field of action beyond the individual and the societal (media) community to which it belongs? If this is the case, have modern media become a kind of Leviathan duplicate, a vulgar surrogate of the idea of freedom, where substantive and ethical issues are left, partially or entirely, to algorithmic procedures of artificial intelligence? Within the framework of the traditional logical square, the concept of freedom can be defined in relation to non-freedom (and vice versa), while slavery, in the context of this interpretation, is marked as a special case of non-freedom, i.e., as a relation of contradiction. In this sense, we will attempt to outline the path that contemporary media currently traverse, moving from the starting point of non-freedom, potentially ending up in slavery. Furthermore, we will use a metaphor that we believe adequately reflects the situation in which modern (global) culture and its associated media find themselves. In this regard, we refer to the “rat king”, a metaphor that, in our case, relates to the situation of contemporary media, falling more under the broader concept of slavery than coinciding with non-freedom. To illustrate this specific difference between non-freedom and slavery, which, in our opinion, illustrates the current media situation globally, before and after the introduction of artificial intelligence into the realm of media (not only in the experimental phase), we will provide one of the popular interpretations of the mentioned phrase, aiming to clearly explain the focus of the article. The “rat king” is a signifier not for rats as individuals but for a living organism consisting of a larger number of rodents whose legs and tails are so intertwined that they form a single entity. This phenomenon is not determined by an individual/institution/leadership-type but by a bundle of 5–6 or more animals tightly entwined with each other’s tails and paws. Cases of connecting 50 animals have been recorded. The “rat king” practically cannot move and lives solely on the “offerings from relatives”. At the same time, the tails of the entwined animals are broken, injured, often dead, and mixed with mud and nesting material.¹ Therefore, this is an image of a semi-living/semi-dead symbiosis of today’s people, machines (media), and capital, which illustrates our leading association with the prevailing social or media pathology and an specially understood form of slavery. The relationship between media and freedom depends, of course, on how both of these concepts are fundamentally defined. When it comes to media, operationally speaking, it seems easier to define the concept of media since such an attempt always involves insight into some form of mediation. If this mediation is of a technical nature and assumes (mass) reproduction, such a form of communicative action is usually

1 See the article: “Fenomen kralja pacova i zanimljive činjenice o ovom fenomenu. Kralj pacova postoji”, <https://podarilove.ru/bs/fenomen-krysinogo-korolya-i-interesnye-fakty-ob-etom-yavlenii/>, 6. 6. 2022.

referred to as media. Additionally, with the inclusion of network communications, modern media encompass not only mass communications, but also one-on-one networking and mediation. Moreover, alongside the possibilities of mass and network mediation/communication, these definitions also include alternative, critical, guerrilla, pirate, and similar media, such as means of communication ranging from citizen journalism, blogs, to podcasts and other modalities of (subversive) media action. Broadly speaking, considering the potential for greater participation and democracy in these media (primarily in terms of their technical capabilities but also in the sense that they generally belong to the demos, and citizens often finance them, produce and reproduce content, and participate in them), openness, the absence, or minimal control of content is associated with such media. This implies a higher degree of media freedom, however, it is still subject to certain limitations. With the introduction of problematic community standards and so-called fact-checkers, especially during the so-called Covid-19 pandemic, numerous online media platforms became less free, and their overt censorship becomes highly debatable.

A specific segment of possible research undoubtedly includes artistic media, where, as expected, a high degree of freedom is expressed, viewed in the context of the coincidence of media and corresponding artistic practices. However, artistic media have a special status when it comes to questioning media freedom, as they delve into the freedoms of artistic expression as such and do not align with the, for art, overly narrow principles of freedom of information. The significance of media freedom of today is evident in the fact that the majority of constitutions or the highest legal acts of modern states contain paragraphs on media freedom, although they are interpreted and applied very differently in practice. This is because the understanding of the idea of freedom, generally speaking, varies depending on the context of interpretation (philosophical, historical, political, ethical, socio-economic, etc.) and its application. In this regard, it is clear that the more freedom is acquired in relation to the context of its interpretation, understanding, and practice, the more possibilities exist for media freedom – its regulation and realization. Intuitively, it seems entirely justified that media freedoms are confronted with the general concept of freedom, and it includes media freedoms as a specific domain of realizing that concept. However, in today's world, media freedoms are often interpreted as a prerequisite for all other freedoms (especially political), which is not surprising given the importance of the media for modern society. For the philosophy of media, it is crucial not only how media are defined (regardless of their diversity) and how freedom determines them, but also how the concept of freedom is thought/interpreted and then applied in the media sphere. The history of philosophy treats freedom as one of the most important, if not the most significant subject of philosophy, and the idea itself seems to determine not only this universal subject of thinking about freedom but also the path (*methodos*) that philosophy follows, both implicitly and explicitly (as in the case of Marx,

for example), culminating in the demand for the emancipation of philosophy itself. Considering that media today are an unavoidable and almost constitutive dimension of reality, the philosophy of media has the task of explaining in detail, primarily based on the understandings of freedom that its parent discipline and history deal with, what the idea itself would mean when applied in the field of action of contemporary media.

The theme of freedom² in philosophy, interpreted in a modern sense, is primarily associated, quite broadly, with the teachings of Kant, Hegel, and Marx. Kant, in addition to basing his entire system of critical philosophy on ethics, treated freedom as one of the three regulative ideas towards which our mind strives. Freedom, as a regulative idea, guides the movement of our mind (which is purposive), meaning that it opens the path to emancipation and that its movement is simultaneously emancipation itself.

On the other hand, Hegel sees freedom not only as a practical but also as a historical category. Simply put, history is the medium through which the concept (self-awareness, mind, spirit) moves and attains freedom; freedom is, in fact, the reality of the mind, and the mind is the presupposition of freedom. For Marx, freedom is not only a historical category but also the current achievements of class struggle. By overcoming the theoretical postulates on which the idea of freedom was affirmed, the practical proof of freedom remains to be demonstrated in reality. Hence, Marx's critique of Hegel aims to result in a revolutionary transformation, simultaneously confirming the idea of freedom and realizing it in a historical context. In this way, Kant's regulative idea of freedom, which is Hegelianly realized in the historical (mind) context of thought, gains full significance in the revolutionary transformation of the world based on class struggles, leading to the ultimate victory over bourgeoisie and capitalism, as Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach effectively suggests.³ It is worth noting that media freedom today, regardless of how its concept⁴ is defined, is primarily restricted to so-called mainstream media,

2 Here, for illustrative purposes, we will provide a compressed statement that adequately describes the general climate in modern philosophy, especially continental philosophy, shaping the context for understanding the idea/concept of freedom: "Freedom in philosophy is manifested primarily in the fact that, unlike all other sciences, it is not conditioned by anything outside itself in its scientific and systematic nature. It has no foundation in something other than itself, on which it would depend. Just as it does not presuppose its subject, it does not presuppose its method." Mikecin, I., "Philosophy as the Science of Freedom," *Philosophical Inquiries* No. 161, vol. 41, issue 1, Croatian Philosophical Society, Zagreb, 2021, p. 36.

3 To remind, the famous 11th thesis of Marx from 1845 reads: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." Marx, K., "Theses on Feuerbach," in: Marx/Engels, *Early Works* (Seventh edition), Naprijed, Zagreb, 1985, p. 339.

4 For instance, K. Norderstreng argues that in the Western tradition, press freedom is commonly used as a self-evident concept, part of an all-encompassing ideology rather

and adherence to guidelines, mostly of a bureaucratic nature, intended to illustrate how media freedoms can be achieved in a society that is civic (and democratic) in orientation. Anything else or different is often perceived as ephemeral or as a form of media abuse. In our opinion, one of the fundamental problems related to determining media freedom lies in its framing within civic values that are allegedly undisputed and represent a proclaimed or tacit consensus. This further implies that media freedom is ideologically limited in advance and, moreover, favors the civic, or bourgeois, class in power. All other options, in terms of achieving freedom as such, including media freedom, are generally not taken into account or are pre-emptively disqualified and treated as contrary to media freedoms. But is it really so? Furthermore, when it comes to evaluating media freedoms, the chain/network of bureaucratic institutions, spanning various non-governmental and governmental organizations, independent and regulatory bodies, agencies and individual experts (for monitoring, analysis, evaluations, etc.), all the way to parliamentary committees, ministries, and international organizations for assessing acquired freedoms, speaks in favor of the idea that media freedom, generally speaking, is assessed quantitatively – and often arbitrarily (subjectively), as it cannot be determined as a mere quantity. Additionally, it is often the case that the parameter for determining media freedoms is identified with the criteria of civil liberties, so that freedom is measured not so much by the diverse content disseminated in the media, but by the status of the journalistic profession in society, as well as the individual fate of journalists. Persecutions, threats, arrests, blackmail, mistreatment, and killings of journalists – in response to written or spoken words, or even just the intention to communicate the truth – are indicators of the negative determination of freedom in the media. So-called “blacklists” in media houses or lists of taboo topics and undesirable voices in mainstream media are also indicators of stifling media freedoms and the right to timely and truthful information. Undoubtedly, censorship, and especially self-censorship in the media, as well as politically motivated persecutions of truth-loving, justice-loving, and freedom-loving journalists worldwide, speak not only to the lack of media freedom but also to the intimidation of those who have not uncritically embraced the norms of the media industry and standardized reporting that is commodity-oriented.

However, the question arises: who has the right to arbitrate in the field of media activity, and what criteria (excluding quantitative parameters related to

than a rational doctrine. Therefore, criticism, both of the media and the “adopted” freedoms, is necessary, manifesting itself in his case as a kind of demonstration or a display of “deconstructing libertarian myths about press freedom”. Nordenstreng, K., “Liberate (Press) Freedom from Its Ideological Baggage!”, on the page: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-enjeux-de-l-information-et-de-la-communication-2016-2-page-157.htm>, accessed: June 8, 2022.

the killing, persecution, and mistreatment of journalists) are used to evaluate the achieved level of media freedoms in a specific geographical area? In practice, media freedom is often articulated and monitored through certain “matrices” that represent “tools” for researching and evaluating this area of social action.⁵ It is evident that both governmental and non-governmental bureaucratized structures concerning the media align the causes and effects of their actions within pre-established coordinates of matrix thinking, colored by bourgeois philistinism. This analytical approach simplifies the idea and practice of freedom, reducing it to columns in questionnaires, the completion of assigned tables, and, in general, “supervision” over emancipatory processes as if they were the growth of tomatoes in less favorable or unfavorable climatic conditions.

What appears questionable is the “grading” of the realization of media freedoms, often expressed quantitatively (according to categories that are insufficiently reflected and contingent). This, of course, says nothing about reality but exclusively refers to assumed criteria of valorization. Similarly, the question arises of how it is possible to gradate media freedom, as well as any other specific freedom, especially if the indicators of evaluation are insufficient to fully describe the type and nature of freedom in question. As mentioned earlier, the concept of freedom, as implied here, is of limited meaning and generally pertains to bourgeois ideology.

In such limited freedom, graded based on seemingly unclear, but actually precisely framed criteria, dictated by so-called experts on media freedoms – who are, in fact, officials promoting and practicing the “values” of civil society (including consumerism, for example), based on capital derived from the legalized and rationalized plunder of the oppressed class, the poor and enslaved, or colonized – media succumb to the fabrication of moments of “freedom” that are, in reality, non-freedom. The main indicator of this non-freedom is the absence of relevant criticism and problem-solving thinking in most modern media, as well as the intimidation, imprisonment, and liquidation of dissenters who advocate for truth in the media as a universal value.

One of the most prominent examples of the media’s relationship to truth, viewed globally, is the “Assange case”. Namely, he revealed the suspension of almost all civil and media freedoms when the global order felt threatened, so repressive measures were applied to defend against “instant leaks” (WikiLeaks) of the truth. Although Assange acted not individually but through the mentioned “WikiLeaks” platform and not as a professional journalist and editor but as an intermediary between citizens and documented truth, he was arrested and imprisoned without relevant evidence, as an example illustrating how media-published truth fares

5 Ref., for example, to the so-called “Media Freedom Matrix” – an online tool for monitoring the level of media freedoms by Civil Initiatives. On the website: <https://mediji.gradjanske.org/>, accessed: June 10, 2022.

in our time. This Assange-like alternative model of thinking and acting in contemporary media is undoubtedly synonymous with emancipation and the presentation of truth in the field of media because “WikiLeaks has published a total of more than ten million secret documents. There has never been any doubt about their authenticity.”⁶ Even though, supposedly, Western politicians and their accompanying nomenclatures rightly condemn violations of guaranteed human rights, at the same time, it happens, “whether intentionally or not,” that they “constantly overlook their own. That’s what hurts. And it has its name: Julian Assange.”⁷

Similarly, journalist Stefania Maurizi, in the context of dialogues held at the Philosophical Theatre on the topic of “Media Freedom and Whistleblowers,” regarding Assange, with whom she collaborated, states the following: “This is us or them. They must respect the laws, human rights, and everything we respect... The Assange case is a big scandal. It is unacceptable in a democracy for someone who publishes information in the public interest to end up in jail. (...) The case against Assange must be dropped! If not, after him, we are all next.”⁸ In other words, the “Assange case” manifests both the lack of freedom of expression in the media and real civic non-freedom, which means not only the prohibition of researching and publishing the truth in the media but also the condemnation, imprisonment, and mistreatment of journalists, editors, and whistleblowers by those institutions that should work in the public interest, not just for the ruling class and the apparatus of power it possesses. *Summa summarum*, the Assange case demonstrates the absence of human rights and freedoms in the global media space, as well as in the real world. Thus, as stated in an article published by The Guardian and signed by Slavoj Žižek, this case “shattered the myth of Western freedom.”⁹

Alongside the killing, imprisonment, and abuse of journalists, and the conventional censorship in electronic and print media – which typically involves suppressing content that challenges the ruling regime of thought, whether dictated by politicians, corporations, or both – the internet, once considered a symbol of “democracy”, has become a battleground for information wars and censorship in recent times. However, instead of traditional censoring actions, the role of content filtering has been delegated, initially, to network administrators based on pre-established community standards, usually relying on user reports.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 “Whistleblower Defense – Defense of the Right to Truth,” SEEcult.org, on the page: <http://www.seecult.org/vest/odbrana-uzbunjivaca-odbrana-prava-na-istinu>, accessed on June 9, 2022.

9 Žižek, S., “How WikiLeaks Open Our Eyes to the Illusion of Freedom,” The Guardian, June 19, 2014, on the page: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/19/hypocrisy-freedom-julian-assange-wikileaks>, accessed on June 10, 2022.

Apart from extreme content (such as racist or violent material, or explicit content, even in the evaluation of artistic works), the censorship by technological-media giants like Google search, or social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and YouTube, for instance, was not particularly conspicuous until a few years ago.

Two recent events, in our opinion, have decisively contributed to strengthening internet censorship, i.e., severely limiting freedom of expression in the digital network space. The first concerned the U.S. election and the personality of former President Donald Trump, whose Twitter account was promptly deleted in January 2021, similar to the removal of Facebook profiles supporting the Q movement, not only in America but globally. These censorship moves by high-tech companies were justified on security grounds. The second turning point concerned the functioning of almost all media, especially social media, during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the understanding of the owners and executive directors of these companies, such as Zuckerberg, a multitude of so-called fake news spread across the internet. To prevent the generation and spread of fake news on social media, fact-checking teams were formed to eliminate, cover (shadowban), mark, and exclude false news and profiles from social networks.

In this regard, questions arise not only about the expertise, moral correctness, and so-called “political correctness” governing censors (initially mostly journalists, later algorithms working for corporations) but also about the unquestioned and largely established censorship procedures significantly hindering the free flow and exchange of information in the digital environment. It is worth recalling, in this context, what John Stuart Mill said about the relationship between freedom and censorship more than a century and a half ago. He argued that contemporary society (European, American, etc.) had better access to information than before, with the number of available information being much larger, indicating that the scope of thought was significantly broader than in previous times. In contrast, Mill observed serious censorship, both intentional and unintentional. Speaking about freedom of thought, the philosopher insisted on its opposition to those contemporary legal and cultural forces that promoted censorship.¹⁰ According to our belief, and in line with philosophical and any other well-considered idea of freedom (including media freedom), which transcends particular class interests and strives for universality, Mill’s intuitions and views on freedom are still relevant today and can be applied to the current global media scene with minor corrections and additions. The original widely accepted illusion of freedom and democracy on the internet and social media (though technically correct) has been almost entirely shattered today, aiming to transform this space into controlled network transactions. Hence, a few owners and managers of the most popular

10 Caldwell, C., Caldwell, D., “Censorship, Liberty & The Media: Delilah and Chris Caldwell talk freely about the freedom of information for Mill”, https://philosophynow.org/issues/76/Censorship_Liberty_and_The_Media, 11. 6. 2022.

social media and platforms (not all, of course), seeking to increase control, have adopted and widely implemented automated suppression procedures for activities that, according to their understanding, are controversial and undesirable.

Within the framework of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), a few debates have taken place on the current use of artificial intelligence in the media, i.e., in the digital environment, as well as the possible repercussions on freedom of expression and pluralism of differences desirable in the media. One of the recent projects from 2021, titled “Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence and Freedom of Expression in Focus” (SAIFE), the results of which were published in the “Policy Development Handbook,” generally affirms the possible impact of artificial intelligence on users of media content on the internet, with a slight reservation that the views expressed here represent the opinions of individuals, as well as certain states and institutions, rather than the organization as a whole.

In the aforementioned handbook on artificial intelligence used in digital media, it is referred to as a “tool,” focusing on four main aspects of interpretation: in terms of security, then the detection and suppression of “hate speech,” next, from the perspective of creating and sharing media content (pluralism), as well as monitoring.¹¹ For our reassessment, the sections dealing with artificial intelligence as a factor in ensuring a pluralistic approach in the media (which is inherently nonsensical, as it pertains not only to technical but also to commodity unification) and monitoring, which is particularly problematic, especially in terms of privacy and personal user content, are particularly interesting.

“Diversity and media pluralism constitute the cornerstone of democratic principles, the quality of which is influenced by the rise of dominant internet intermediaries and their impact on public discourse. Internet intermediaries, especially social networks, have become a significant source, access point, and key distributor of information, including news content. The dissemination of information, and increasingly, aggregation, primarily occurs through algorithms for content curation and sharing, as well as recommendation systems. By utilizing optimization and analyzing human and non-human agents, these systems ‘deliver’ (...). Content recommendation systems, which rank content to determine what is presented to individual users, affect the freedom of individuals to seek and disseminate information, as well as the overall informational landscape and media freedoms.”¹²

Of course, this “informational landscape” is not value-neutral; rather, it is in the hands of corporations (i.e., major capitalists). Additionally, it is highly

11 Handbook for Policy Development – OSCE, pdf, p. 15.

12 Ibid, p. 56.

profitable, and it is designed and moderated by both algorithms and their creators, significantly influencing the shaping of users' thoughts and feelings, as well as their decision-making. In this context, the handbook raises the question: "Where does the responsibility lie in defining and implementing policies to establish priorities and codify media pluralism and diversity in the era of digital information?"¹³

In the section of the handbook that addresses the "tracking" of users, specifically their preferences that influence the placement of content likely to be consumed according to algorithmic calculations, there is a strict distinction, from the perspective of user protection, between the internal and external dimensions of the right to freedom of thought.¹⁴ The danger of acquiring, using, and even selling personal data, despite being illegal activities, poses one of the recognized real threats and jeopardizes the basic rights and freedoms of users. "Business models of major online data collection platforms enable the advertising industry to develop or rely on data-driven targeting strategies. Through this approach, companies identify and exploit patterns of behavior and characteristics of individuals or communities. The overarching term covering these manipulative techniques is 'tracking-based advertising', understood as a general term for digital advertising that targets individuals or groups, primarily through tracking and profiling based on personal data."¹⁵

"The international framework of human rights distinguishes between the internal and external dimensions of the right to freedom of thought. While the external dimension of this right may be subject to legitimate, proportional, and non-discriminatory restrictions necessary in a democratic society, the internal dimension of freedom of thought, the so-called forum internum, is absolute and cannot be waived," is asserted regarding potential limitations on rights and freedoms on the internet, particularly in relation to the issue of tracking. This has been condensed to "the right to keep our thoughts and opinions private" ("The Right to Keep Our Thoughts and Opinions Private").¹⁶

¹³ Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁴ "The international framework of human rights makes a distinction between the internal and external dimensions of the right to freedom of thought. While the external dimension of this right may be subject to legitimate, proportional, and non-discriminatory restrictions necessary in a democratic society, the internal dimension of freedom of thought, the so-called forum internum, is absolute and cannot be waived," is asserted regarding potential limitations on rights and freedoms on the internet, particularly in relation to the issue of tracking. Ibid, p. 79.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 80.

¹⁶ "The promise of knowing what we think and how we think is one of the selling points of the data economy." Alegre, S., "Protecting Freedom of Thought in the Digital

Initially, as argued by Jennifer Cobb in the article titled “Algorithmic Censorship by Social Platforms: Power and Resistance,” many social platforms adopted a hands-off approach to content, promoting the benefits of connecting people, sharing information, and facilitating the free exchange of ideas and perspectives.¹⁷ As of today, Facebook’s corporate mission statement reads: “Empowering people to build communities and connect the world.”¹⁸ It is evident here that power is mentioned in the context referring to the users who make up the global Facebook community. Does the practice confirm this? As time has passed, however, the leaders of major companies operating in the field of digital communications have shifted their initial mission and visions, turning almost entirely towards commercial purposes. Some have also been involved in scandals involving the large-scale sale of user information. Additionally, they have increasingly uncritically embraced the idea that content moderation in some form is desirable for various reasons, among which the most prominent are to protect users from each other and to remove content from networks and platforms that is offensive, illegal, and the like.

In addition to abuses related to the sale of user information, the strengthening of new forms of censorship, the impermeability of mainstream media and most social networks to matters of truth, the persecution of prominent individuals advocating for facts and the public interest, regardless of the political and existential consequences for them, their families, and those who support them, artificial intelligence, which seems “compliant” and neutral at first glance, is increasingly occupying space in the media. It performs the remaining tasks for corporations, further alienating the media from their basic functions, turning them, beyond data exploitation, into tools for surveillance and control. This is, of course, a path towards unfreedom, which over time can evolve into a form of slavery. However, this new form of slavery should not only be facilitated by artificial intelligence but, in addition, it would be voluntary. An example of this is the recently established political party in Denmark managed by artificial intelligence (Synthetic Party). In the case of this party, the media is envisioned as the main and sole intermediaries of its actions, and interaction with users, or the electorate, would take place through agents, namely chatbots.¹⁹ Finally, it is

Age”, Centre for International Governance Innovation, Policy Brief No. 165 – May 2021, p. 3, pdf.

¹⁷ Cobbe, J., “Algorithmic Censorship by Social Platforms: Power and Resistance”, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13347-020-00429-0>, 12. 6. 2022.

¹⁸ Facebook was founded in 2004. Since then, its mission, to which the owner publicly committed, literally states: “Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together.”

¹⁹ Cf. “Could next party in Danish parliament be led by AI?” in: The Local (dk), 4 August 2022, <https://www.thelocal.dk/20220804/danish-ai-driven-political-party-eyes-parliament/>, 13. 8. 2022.

worth mentioning the phrase “digital slavery”, prevalent in critically tuned media literature. It is not merely a metaphor for contemporary processes of enslavement through technical means, which stand in opposition to emancipation, but is, indeed, partly our reality driven by capital interests. In this context, the current model of mainstream media, the internet, and social networks is unsustainable, as its decline, akin to the collapse of a “king rat’s nest,” is linked to possibly the last defense phase of capitalism. Nevertheless, the moments of unfreedom, with hints of slavery that we are currently experiencing, can be problematically illuminated by pointing out their fundamental shortcomings. This can lead, for the majority of citizens, in a desirable direction. Philosophy of the media partially undertakes this task as part of a possible systemic critique of today’s (global) society, which is undoubtedly necessary for reflection and stimulation of future technological, media, and socio-economic development guided by the ideals of the common good, truth, justice, and freedom.

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200 × 270 cm
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FREEDOM IN THE MEDIA SOCIETY

Abstract: In understanding freedom, the author takes the position that the very *nature* of compliance with moral principles can be understood as something that is not immutable, and the loss of the ability to connect with moral laws is recognized as the cause of the loss of freedom in the media society. In the text, the social turn to unfreedom is linked to the rise of the dominance of the world of appearances over the free play of imagination. Having alienated himself/herself from the realm of the mind, one in search of freedom sets out on the path of affirming false inclinations and sensual desires, recognizing the world of sensory appearance as the only possible one, and the economic principles of the foundation of the media society, as a current form of realizing the world of sensuality, at the same time as those on which these principles and other social principles, including the laws of morality, build.

Keywords: free will, freedom, media philosophy, media society

The questioning of the limits of freedom and the possibility of its understanding, like many other problems that have occupied human's attention during the long development of civilization, began its foundation within the framework of philosophy, moving, much later, into the scientific discourse, which gave new dimensions to the approaches and ways of arguing it.¹ The questioning of special relations, which are directly or indirectly related to the issue of freedom, was, however, often approached without a sufficiently critical and comprehensive understanding of this concept, and, in the name of disciplinary pragmatism, support was given to its particular understanding. Like other disciplines, media studies have adopted this notion, bringing it into relation with the questions arising from the set object of research.

Discussions about the needs and ways of ensuring media freedom consequently opened up the issue of free access to the media, and the relationship between media freedom and forms of ownership. In addition, questions were asked about the influence of the media on the freedom of political decision-

1 The terms *human* / *people* are used in accordance with the linguistic tradition, but on a conceptual level without gender denotation (unless otherwise emphasized in relation to the presented theoretical point of view), and refer to members of the human species regardless of their gender or sex.

making, about the interpretation of freedom in media narratives and models of dramatization, about the attitude towards freedom in media discourses, about the relationship between media coverage and the understanding of the status of certain underprivileged social groups, etc. Most of these research approaches, however, focus their attention mainly on understanding the issue of freedom in relation to the content transmitted through the media, as well as in relation to the organizational structure and legal frameworks that determine the work of the public communication media. In the text that follows, we will pay attention to the understanding of the relationship to freedom in the conditions of the development of the media society.²

Before embarking on the examination of the mentioned problem, it would be useful to look briefly at the understanding of the concept of freedom. In Western thought, thinking about freedom often begins with the question of what freedom is not, i.e., in what circumstances and conditions do we recognize non-freedom. In an effort to define the framework for thinking about freedom based on the binary opposition, many authors interpret freedom as the opposite of subjugation. The roots of this understanding can be found in the ancient Greece, and in the distinction that was then made between free people and slaves. In contrast to unfree people, a free man was considered to be one who, in his actions and speech, is not limited by economic frameworks or social acceptance of his subordination in relation to others.

Thus, in many approaches, freedom has often taken on the interpretation of the possibility to do what one wants, but only within the framework of what one can want. It is an act that Berlin recognizes as an abuse of the positive understanding of freedom (*positive freedom – freedom for*).³ Berlin cites Rousseau as someone who was responsible for subordinating the individual to the concept of the general will, and who, as Berlin points out, distorted the concept of the self as an empirical individual into the self as a citizen. According to him, the aforementioned understanding of the self was later taken over by Fichte, Hegel and Marx, adapting it to their own theoretical concepts.

The thinking of freedom, which remains limited by the deterministic framework of its possible understanding, Svendsen very vividly problematizes

2 In the text, the concept of media society is seen as a current form of realization of the world of sensuality, and in the broadest sense it is connected with the explanation of Marian Adolf, according to which media society is understood as “[...] an emergent social formation that develops when the modern media system, by way of technological means, typical content, and a patterning communicative logic, enters ever deeper into the individual, institutional, and societal sphere of contemporary society”. (Adolf, M., “Media Society”, in: *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*, G. Ritzer (ed.): <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470670590.wbeog378>)

3 Berlin, I., *Četiri eseja o slobodi*, 223–240.

in the very first paragraphs of his *Philosophy of Freedom*. Commenting on the imaginary society described in the 1948 novel *Walden Two* by the psychologist B. F. Skinner (Burrhus Frederic Skinner), Svendsen draws attention to a long-standing problem in philosophy, the freedom to want to do something.⁴ The discourse of freedom, framed by a deterministically understood development of the will, is thus clearly recognized as fundamentally separate from the thought of freedom itself. But Svendsen here leads us to another question. Namely, is it even possible to think about freedom within the framework of pragmatic-applied scientific-theoretical concepts, that is, outside of solid philosophical frameworks? Although these concepts can often have their origins in certain philosophical assumptions, being focused on the strength of the practical effect, their application is often accompanied by the rejection of all those terms and concepts that do not fit, or are not recognized as directly related to the provision of mechanisms for reaching a certain practical goal.

This brings us back to the initial question, what is freedom, if it is something more than the opposite of subjugation. It seems that at this point it would be useful to dwell on the definition of freedom as the opposite of necessity, which is presented by Lino Veljak.⁵ Still, as Veljak further states, the way we approach the understanding of this contrast will direct our understanding of freedom. He points out that based on the refutation of determinism, the two most important dimensions of the concept of freedom took shape in Western thought, its understanding in the sense of free will (freedom), and its perception in the meaning of political freedom (liberty).⁶ Following the development of the concept of freedom, Veljak indicates that the understanding of this concept in the Western tradition gradually developed, expanding the meaning to its special dimensions. In ancient Greece, with most authors, including Plato, freedom was understood as an acquired or potential right of certain classes of Greek society, where the political dimension of the term was especially emphasized, i.e., the possibility of independent decision-making and action within the existing legal framework. However, in the Hellenistic age, within the Stoic school of thought, the idea of freedom as an universal human right was born, which, as Veljak states, will acquire an eschatological dimension with Christianity.⁷ Unlike the Old Testament speech about freedom, which is mainly focused on the freedom of the Jewish people, in the New Testament, freedom is approached as an attribute that belongs to all people, but this concept primarily refers to freedom from sin and death.⁸

4 Svendsen, L. Fr. H., *Filozofija slobode*, 13.

5 Veljak, L., „O povijesti pojma slobode”, 5.

6 Ibid, 6.

7 Ibid, 6.

8 Ibid, 8.

Subsequently, the concept of freedom will acquire new dimensions. Within the framework of modern thought, a particularly significant definition of freedom, which will later pave the way for the foundation of liberal political theory, was given by John Locke. Laying the foundation for the concept of a modern liberal and democratic state, Locke states the right to life, equality, liberty and property as inalienable civil rights, whereby freedom is understood as a state in which an individual, within the limits of the Law of Nature, decides on his/her actions and disposes of himself/herself and his/her property.⁹

A significant contribution to the understanding of the concept of freedom, which marked the central lines of the modern understanding of its concept, can be found in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Despite his emphasis on political freedom, which transformed natural freedom into civil freedom, and whose criticism, among other things, we find in Berlin, which was previously mentioned, in Rousseau's reflections the understanding that freedom belongs to the very essence of a human being was emphasized. Despite a certain idealistic view of the past, Rousseau develops a strong critique of social development, which, by moving away from life itself, necessarily led to moving away from freedom.

If we approach the understanding of the question of freedom in relation to the realization of the authentic self, then its perception remains inseparable from the consideration of freedom of will. Svendsen understands freedom of will as a special freedom of action. For him, having free will means having the ability to make decisions, that is, he connects it with having room for maneuver, starting from practical rationality.¹⁰ This issue, due to its complexity, requires that we, for our purposes, devote ourselves to it in more detail.

In principle, we could classify the different understandings into two opposing approaches, labeled as determinism and indeterminism. Indeterminism starts from the understanding that the will is free, that is, that human desires are not conditioned by cause and effect. According to this approach, the will is not limited by the motive. That is, although it may be *tempted* by different causes and reasons, the decision remains independent in relation to them. Such orientation presupposes especially the *feeling of freedom*, without which, ultimately, one could not even talk about the responsibility that a person has for his/her own wishes or actions that he/she does. Contrary to this, determinism starts from the position that the will is conditioned by natural laws and concrete circumstances, and remains inseparable from motives. Proponents of this understanding question the justification of the supposed feeling of freedom, because regardless of the extent to which a person feels free, he or she always, to a certain degree, remains limited by the laws of causality and existing social frameworks.

9 Locke, J. *Two Treatises of Government: The Second Treatise of Government*. (Compare: Veljak, „O povijesti pojma slobode”, 10–11)

10 Svendsen, L. Fr. H., *Filozofija slobode*, 20–21.

In the resolution of the existing conflict, we recognise two directions: compatibilism, which tries to reconcile free will and determinism, and incompatibilism, according to which only one of the two paths set can be correct, and within which we come across an understanding that affirms the existence of indeterminism in a world that freedom of the will makes it possible (libertarianism), i.e., to that which denies the existence of free will, either because of the understanding that determinism is true (assertive determinism), or because of the viewpoint that free will is not compatible with either determinism or indeterminism, i.e., that in both cases it does not exist (claims incompatibilism).¹¹ If we stick to the first point of view, we could ask ourselves how it is possible to reconcile free will and determinism. The central assumption of Hobbes' compatibilism is based on the position that people are free if they can do what arises from their desires, beliefs, decisions, intentions and will without hindrance and without restrictions, even though these intentions can be determined. In other words, although what is desired may be conditioned by various factors, freedom is understood in terms of the absence of external obstacles to doing what is desired. However, it remains questionable, whether we really acting freely by acting according to desires that are determined by some cause?

In Western thought, we find the question of free will already in Epicurus (although the approach to this question can also be observed in earlier authors). Starting from the position of Democritus atomism, Epicurus, in order to avoid falling into determinism, introduces the possibility of an uncaused deviation from the completely determined path of atoms, without which everything that man does would actually be determined by their movement.¹² The opposition to determinism in Epicurus, as well as in later thinkers, was guided by the view that belief in fate, that is, in some determinism of actions and events, is unacceptable, because it would leave people completely separated from the actions they perform. That is, how St. Justin observes, accepting determinism would mean avoiding all responsibility (and merit) for both evil and good deeds, because, thanks to their determinacy, people could not avoid them.¹³ Arguments for rejecting the determinism, St. Justin finds in Christian thought. If, namely, one's actions were predestined by fate, then divine reward, as well as punishment, would be completely unnecessary, that is, it could be recognized as an expression of God's capriciousness, which would be unacceptable from a Christian point of view. Based on this, St. Justin credits people with freedom of will and freedom of action, on the basis of which they take responsibility for what they do (and think). We find similar understandings in other Christian thinkers. As St. Anselmo of Canterbury states, God does not cause human choices, despite the fact that the

11 Gjurašin, M., "Elly Ebenspanger o slobodi volje", 440.

12 Pećnjak, D, *O problemu slobode volje*, 10.

13 Sv. Justin, *Apologije*, 70. (compare: Pećnjak, *O problemu slobode volje*)

possibilities themselves, as well as what precedes the choice, are something he created.¹⁴ It should, of course, be emphasized that according to the stated point of view, essential freedom lies only in doing good, because only with such a choice does a person get closer to his/her original essence.

Kant also believes that freedom cannot be understood as some kind of arbitrariness, that is, unmotivated action, because human behavior, as he believes, must be determined by something, and what determines freedom is crucial for understanding freedom.¹⁵ Kant starts from the position that man or woman, as a mental being, must be distinguished from other natural beings who act according to laws, while only man/woman acts according to the *representation of laws*, that is, according to principles or will, i.e., according to consciousness.¹⁶ In this sense, freedom should be understood as a property of the causality of a mental being, according to which he/she can act independently of external causes, which is a natural necessity. However, by understanding freedom as a property of the will that stands outside natural laws, it still does not mean that it is outside all laws. According to Kant's belief, freedom consists of two mutually conditioned components – independence from natural (instinctive) determinism (affirming the negative determination of freedom) and the possibility of determination by one's own mental principles (positive determination).¹⁷ The concepts of good and evil, as consequences of determining the will a priori, Kant sees as modes of the category of causality – if its determining reason consists in the mental representation of the law, which, as the law of freedom, the mind gives to itself, thus showing itself to be practical.¹⁸ Namely, the freedom of man or woman as a mental being is precisely recognized in his/her ability to establish the principles and laws of the action of the will itself, instead of being guided by the laws of nature. However, contrary to this possibility, man/woman does not always act freely in his/her actions, since he/she is often guided by his/her inclinations and the influence of sensual desires. Nevertheless, Kant recognizes the desire for freedom, that is, the desire to harmonize one's actions with moral principles, as something that is characteristic of all people, with the fact that not all are able to rise above their inclinations and instincts in order to really achieve it. Kant clearly gives priority to the categories of freedom over the categories of nature, in contrast to which, understood as thought forms that by means of general concepts only vaguely denote objects, the former, since they refer to the determination of free will, as practical elementary concepts, instead of a form of perception, as

14 Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works* (compare: Pećnjak, *O problemu slobode volje*)

15 Pavićević, V., „Predgovor”, in: Kant, I. *Kritika praktičnog uma*, 16.

16 Ibid, 16.

17 Ibid, 16.

18 Kant, I. *Kritika praktičnog uma*, 86–87.

a given lies in the basis of the form of pure will in the mind, that is, in the very power of thought.¹⁹

Based on the previously stated views, we can evaluate the question of freedom of will in the media society. Kant himself points out that actions also fall under the law of freedom, but at the same time, as events in the sensory world, they also belong to phenomena (emphasizing that the determinations of the practical mind will only be able to exist with regard to the latter, i.e., appropriate to the categories of reason, but not with regard its theoretical use, but only to subordinate the diversity of desires to the unity of the consciousness of the practical mind that commands in the moral law, i.e., the unity of pure will a priori),²⁰ the development of the media society, which multiplies the world of appearances,²¹ raising it to a higher level, questioning freedom of will in such changed circumstances.

The establishment of the media society can be understood as the elevation of the doubled apparent world. Although we recognize the roots of the development of such socio-historical circumstances in previous centuries, i.e., long before the emergence of modern mass-media, it was only with the establishment of technological possibilities of action within the world of representations that the true development of doubling the world of appearance began. However, the doubling of the world of appearances is still not a sufficient cause of endangering the freedom of the will. If we understand freedom, in the Kantian sense, as a movement towards mental principles, which, despite being reflected in the sensory world, remain separate from it, then no multiplication of sensory worlds can limit freedom of will, that is, limit our ability to follow internal laws. This limitation remains at the level of our ability to approach internal laws, and it manifests itself to the same extent both in the conditions of the existence of one and multiple appearing worlds. Even more, the multiplication of the appearing worlds could be understood as the expansion of the field of free will, by the very fact that the field of separation from external conditions is multiplied.

In an attempt to answer the posed problem, it would be appropriate to examine the quality of the property that separates media worlds from the worlds of sensory appearance that precede them. Since media worlds are not a part of the physical world, i.e., since they are a product of human labor, they remain inseparable from ideological assumptions, that is, from different interpretations of moral principles, which they reflect in their sensory appearance. But does the permeation of the media worlds with ideological principles really prevent the mind from rising to the realm of freedom?

Permeating the world of sensuality with ideological principles is not unknown to earlier periods of socio-historical development, since this practice

¹⁹ Ibid, 87.

²⁰ Ibid., 87.

²¹ Compare: Vuksanović, D. *Filozofija medija: ontologija, estetika, kritika*.

rose discontinuously with greater or lesser intensity. Historically, its appearance has been accompanied by the social strengthening of ideological awareness, or, personal affinities of particular importance, mostly interpreted as a separation from the conventional norm of mental health. The rise of media worlds of appearance, as an ideologically imbued world of sensuality, is not a novelty in that sense, just like the power of fascination with representations that take the place of the real, but indicates the affirmation of a certain social phenomenon that manifests itself in leaps and bounds in historical development. Therefore, media worlds do not fundamentally differ from the sensuous representation of social reality, even in that they can lead to the establishment of wrong principles and actions of the will. Following moral laws, at any point in human history, has not been without challenges, and the degree of their influence, which may indeed have varied, is still no justification for giving up an inner sense of morality. In this sense, although the rise of the social influence of the sense worlds may present a challenge to the mind to rise to the *realm of freedom*, obscuring that path with aspirations that are ideologically determined, i.e., that stand outside the mind itself, we cannot yet consider this limitation as preventing the mind to rise above these distractions. This point of view finds its foundation, above all, in the attitude that the mind stands outside the apparent world, so cannot be abolished by it, while the ideological interpretations with which sensory representations are imbued never fulfill the total range of mental activity, which, being free, is always endless.

However, although the strength of the social influence of the media appearance cannot be understood as the cause of the limitation of freedom of will, in the conditions of the rise of the media society, we see a reflection of the strengthening of the false consciousness that the search for freedom starts by affirming inclinations and sensual desires. Namely, if we understand the very *nature* of compliance with moral principles as something that is not immutable, then the loss of the ability (despite the existence of the desire) to connect with moral laws should be seen as the cause of the loss of freedom.

Indicators of the loss of this ability we find in the development of media worlds, in their dominant historical appearance. Based on the technology that enables the realization of an emergent reality freed from all conditionality by physical and socio-economic limitations, the development of media societies could be directed towards building a *realm of freedom* at the level of reproduced emergence. However, such a path, although not without sporadic initiations, has not been realized in the development so far. The paradoxical nature of this historical course is additionally strengthened by the fact that there are no technical limitations to the multiplication of media societies, but despite this, the reflection of the *realm of freedom* remains unrealized on any of the possible levels of their multiplied sensory appearance. The reasons for this should not be sought in a change in the concept of freedom, because it would (still) be difficult to agree with

the assumption that on a rational level, one chooses non-freedom, even though one can move toward it by his/her life orientation. If the rational rejection of freedom, that is, the distortion of its concept, cannot be taken as the cause of its loss, then where can we look for the roots of the social turn to unfreedom?

It seems that the emergence of media worlds already offers us an answer to the question posed. If we look back for a moment at the development paths of human's tendency to create multiplied worlds, we notice two basic tendencies – one that finds space for self-realization in the free play of imagination, and the other that starts by multiplying representations. We can assume that their manifestation went hand in hand, with the variable intensity of their interweaving or the dominance of one of them. Nevertheless, despite this, the greater period of human history is marked by the overwhelming dominance of the tendency to recognize the realm of imagination, rather than representation, as a more suitable space for the multiplication of worlds. This assumption is supported by the social power of religious and magical imagination, which, regardless of the historical degree of influence of the appearing worlds or the strength of connection with them, prevailed in the course of their multiplication. This relationship, however, is shaken in the modern era, marked by the development of mass-media, when the world of appearances gains dominance in this sense. We recognize the cause of this development in the rise of sensuality over the mind. The construction of the media society is actually a reflection of this development process, i.e., the tendency to give priority to the multiplication of worlds at the level of their sensory appearance over the space of pure imagination.

If we understand the multiplied worlds as an expanded space of self-realization, then this turn indicates a significant change in the *nature* of this process, which leaves the sphere of the mind to find its own home in the world of sensuality. This change is the actual cause of civilization's separation from freedom. Moving away from the ability to establish the principles and laws of the action of the will in the realm of the mind, man/woman becomes blind to the feeling of freedom, searching for it in vain in the world of sensuality.

However, it would be simplistic to assume that, by being established as sensory-phenomenal, media worlds, in their rise, indicate a move away from freedom. As pointed out, the establishment of split worlds is a practice whose development we recognize centuries before the emergence of mass-media. Besides, cannot the free play of the imagination find its expression in sensory representations? Therefore, the causes of human's alienation from consciousness should not be sought in the sensory-representational nature of the media worlds, they are, as mentioned, much more a reflection of such a development than we would see them as its cause. But in that case, in what aspect of the rise of the media worlds do we observe this development if it is not their sensory-phenomenal nature itself? The answer, it seems, lies in the understanding of another quality

of media worlds as worlds of sensory appearance that separates them from all previous ones.

Contrary to the previous sensuous-phenomenal worlds that never completely break the connection with the realm of the mind, leaving enough space to authentically reflect the freedom of the mind in their appearance, in stronger or weaker intensity, media worlds do so. Since freedom originates from the mind, it can only be realized in the sense-appearing world if the representations on which it is based are images of the mind. Although, being based as a world of appearances, the media society has the potential to affirm the realm of freedom in appearances, on the contrary, it does not do so precisely because the representations it creates are not pure images of the mind. Namely, the establishment of the media society, in its dominant socio-historical form, is an indicator of the rise of an unfree spirit, which arises from the oblivion of the mind, and which has as its ideal the illusion of freedom instead of freedom itself. And while in the past, surrendering to the sensory-perceptual worlds, one still retained the possibility to rise to the realm of the mind, and following moral principles to reach freedom, plunging into the realm of the alienated senses, severing at the same time ties with the mind, modern human loses the ability to connect with one's own free will. He/she remains powerless not only to move towards the path of liberation, but also to recognize his/her own unfreedom.

In order to explain this attitude, we have to answer the question, on what basis does the media society reflect the loss of one's ability to, surrendering to the world of appearance, connect with his/her mind and achieve freedom based on moral principles? It cannot be the spread of false ideas because the mechanisms of imposing ideology existed even before the emergence of mass- media and the media society, so in this sense, current circumstances are no different from many others that were founded on the perpetuation of false consciousness. However, what sets the media society apart from the establishment of others, also based in sensory-representational worlds of an ideological nature, is the rise of one's commitment to alienated work, as a reflection of inauthentic living that finds its affirmation in the pursuit of unfreedom.

Being economically founded, the media world remains inseparable from the work process, and in the understanding of the relationship to freedom of will, in the conditions of the development of the media society, this essential characteristic should not be neglected.²² The question that needs to be explained at this point

22 It is certainly possible to cite some examples of media activity that are not, or not predominantly, economically founded, but base this foundation on certain political, ideological, etc. principles. Nevertheless, the economic basis is the predominant feature of the world of media, without which, in the current socio-historical circumstances, it would not even exist. In other words, although the world of media allows the existence of fields that are relatively free from economic action, without ensuring the conditions of

is how participating in the world of media, if we exclude those direct cases of participation in the affairs of media industries or using the media as a means of working in special areas of the economy, can be understood as work in general. In *The Capital*, Marx sees work as a process between man or woman and nature, in which man or woman, through his/her own activity, enables, regulates and supervises the exchange of matter with nature.²³ Understood in this way, work presupposes approaching a certain idea, as well as subjugating one's own will in order to achieve the work, which becomes all the greater if the content of the work is less attractive, that is, if the work process brings less enjoyment. Participation in the world of media, being accompanied by enjoyment based on the false satisfaction of intellectual needs, entertainment, or socialization, is therefore most often not perceived as a process of subjugating one's will (and ultimately not even as work), although it actually is. Already in this phenomenon, we can see the strengthening of the supremacy of the false will over the authentic one.

Following Marx's point of view, one's activity in the work process causes a change in the object of work, which is set in advance as a purpose.²⁴ The process, as he further points out, is extinguished in the product, by which the work actually acquires its objectification. On the basis of this, we can understand the media worlds as tangible work, because they do not arise outside of work processes, that is, their existence cannot be understood as a physical phenomenon or the result of the action of the forces of nature. Going further in this direction, the whole process could be viewed from the point of view of the achieved results, that is, its product. According to Marx's observation, both the means of labor and the object of labor are manifested as means of production, and further, if some use value comes out of the labor process as a product, it can become part of another use value in the further development of the labor process, i.e., enter it as a means of production.²⁵ However, this flow of production work presupposes a special development of use value, that is, the establishment of a chain in which the product of previous work becomes a means of production in work, the result of which is a product of another kind. The production of media worlds presupposes maintaining this chain, but without moving to a higher level of production work. The product of participation in the world of media, as a special form of work (as previously mentioned), thus become representations and values, which again, as means of production, are included in further work, the result of which is a product of the same kind. The chaining process is absent here, and the product

economic foundation, the entire world of media, including these separated fields, could not exist without changing the social reality itself.

23 Marx, K., *Kapital*, 163.

24 Ibid., 166.

25 Ibid., 166.

is perpetuated as both a means of labor and a product that remains unchanged regardless of the level of appearance.

In the media society, the outcome of work is the very need for work, which establishes the work process as the perpetuation of the self-actualization of an alienated existence. This kind of existence is alienated precisely because it is identified with something that stands outside itself, with work as a consequence, and not with existence as a precondition for the realization of work. Man/woman tries to reach freedom through work, by which he/she chooses the path of enslavement, without awakening the thought that the freedom he/she is striving for is slavery, and the way to achieve it is actually the abolition of slavery itself. Having alienated himself/herself from the realm of the mind, man/woman in his/her search for freedom moves along the path of affirming false inclinations and sensual desires, (wrongly) recognizing the world of sensory appearance as the only possible one, and the economic principles of the foundation of the media society, as a current form of realizing the world of sensuality, at the same time as those on which all other social laws, including the laws of morality, are built.

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BOUNDARIES OF FREEDOM IN DIGITAL MEDIA

Abstract: Freedom of speech is an inexhaustible topic in any democratic society, but what is happening with freedom of thought? Is freedom of thought jeopardized in the era of digital technologies? Mass collection of user data, tracking-based advertising, and targeted advertising limit the right to freedom of thought of recipients of digital media content, all combined with techniques of unconscious influence on users' choices. The ability to select information of interest, join specific groups, or track certain events allows narrowing the vast range of information that users would otherwise be overwhelmed with, while simultaneously providing insights into their interests, desires, and attitudes. This paper provides examples of the unconscious impact of algorithms on user thinking and freedom of choice, detailing their mechanisms and overall emergence.

Keywords: captology, behavioral techniques, digital media, freedom, algorithm

In the past decade, social networks and online services have become the predominant means of disseminating information, leading to an unprecedented expansion of digital media users. The ability to select information of interest, join specific groups, or track events allows for a focused intake of information, preventing users from being overwhelmed. However, in this capitalist era, such information is crucial. Understanding the desires of each potential consumer has long been studied in marketing, now facilitated by digital technologies and specialized tracking tools. Marketing has evolved into a comprehensive sub-discipline of psychology, emphasizing consumer decision-making and attitudes to shape desires and opinions through successful campaigns in the digital age. The mass collection of user data, tracking-based advertising, and targeted advertising, however, raise concerns about limiting the freedom of choice for recipients of digital media content due to the use of techniques influencing seemingly conscious user choices.

The generation born after 1997, which came of age during the early stages of digital technology development, is commonly referred to as the first generation of "digital natives." The term "digital natives" was coined by Marc Prensky, an author and educational software designer. In his work, Prensky¹ emphasizes that this

1 Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrant. On the Horizon. MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>, 25.04.2021.

generation is the first to grow up with constant exposure to digital technologies from an early age, leading to a natural proficiency in using various digital platforms. The concept of digital natives has become fundamental in understanding how technology shapes the identity and behaviors of individuals born in this era. Marc Prensky, in his work, describes the transformation of today's generations due to the use of digital technology developed in the last decade of the 20th century. He sees this change not merely as a linguistic shift or a typical evolution observed in previous generations, but as a unique transformation resulting from the rapid growth and utilization of digital technology. He emphasizes that the educational system is outdated and does not cater to the needs of working with digital natives, as they do not fit into any education patterns that existed in the past. Digital natives possess their own language, a programming language, and digital immigrants often require assistance from them for basic tasks related to connecting modern equipment to the network.

Today, we witness a generation gap, with a lack of understanding on both sides; digital immigrants struggle to comprehend digital natives due to significant differences in communication. Prensky notes: "All of this leads us to an important question: Is programming (the ability to control machines) truly the key literacy of this century, and how, as educators, can we empower our students with it? This issue is particularly challenging because the majority of teachers, including many of our best mathematics and science instructors, lack the necessary skills. Most tools (and even the concept of programming itself) were developed long after these educators were born or trained."² The concept of teaching has remained largely unchanged with minor modifications over the decades, while the equipment varies depending on the school's location and its ability to acquire resources, leading to differences in the quality of education. Regarding pedagogical approaches, there are significant variations, but the overall concept remains the same. This has resulted in frustration for both teachers and students, with inadequately adapted methods for new generations, leading to poor results and mutual constraints.

The younger generation increasingly turns to internet searches and social media to acquire knowledge, and more recently, to artificial intelligence like ChatGPT for creating school-related assignments. This challenges the goals and outcomes of the current education system significantly. Initially, the internet was seen as a realm of free speech, a platform for speaking the truth, a place where individuals could become authors of their own content without institutionalized approval – the sacred grail of democracy, a space free from censorship. However, over time, these ideals have been contradicted. After decades of use, we realize that the digital content sphere is designed for the benefit of major corporations, serving as a space for control and censorship in many cases, catering to the

2 Prensky, M. (2008). Programming Is the New Literacy, *Edutopia*, <https://www.edutopia.org/literacy-computer-programming>, 25.03.2019.

interests dictated by the capitalist system. The youth is in a challenging position, as their way of life and social interactions heavily depend on the accessibility of social media.

The youth, accustomed to digital technologies as a source of information, often fails to critically evaluate the credibility and authenticity of the presented content. They uncritically approach content perception, as evidenced by numerous examples in their environment. It is challenging to articulate the values guiding their thought processes in the interpretation of digital content. The origin, quality, and credibility of the provided information have never been more unclear, posing serious social, educational, personal, health, and other consequences for the consumers of digital content. Social media platforms offer communication through images, emotions, comments, tags, forums, and are undoubtedly closer to the generation of “digital natives.” It is essential to consider that time spent with digital technologies enables the development of alternative forms of socialization in cyberspace, which is not under the supervision of adults. Communication via computers does not require physical presence, leading to infrequent positive and close relationships. Messages can be misunderstood or be unclear, and there is a lack of relational cues derived from the physical context, as well as nonverbal cues related to voice, body movements, facial expressions, and physical appearance.³ Digital media have opened up an inexhaustible source of information, with low production and distribution costs allowing anyone on the internet to become an author. However, it becomes challenging to determine the credibility of and responsibility for information in the digital environment. Today’s online content user is expected to autonomously assess validity of information. Studies by Fogg et al. (2003)⁴, Rieh (2002)⁵ and Eysenbach & Kohler (2002)⁶ indicate that users primarily consider the comprehensiveness of content, information source, accuracy, and objectivity when evaluating credibility. Digital natives, who grew up using digital content during adolescence, demonstrate a higher level of technical visual content recognition.

However, their influence on content choice is equally limited. Media and later digital literacy were introduced to empower consumers to navigate potential

3 Milutinović, Irina, „Između utopije i moralne panike: o društvenoj vrednosti Interneta”, *Časopis za upravljanje komuniciranjem*, broj 18, godina VI, Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2011, Beograd, p. 39.

4 Fogg, B. J., *Persuasive technology: Using computers to change what we think and do*. San Francisco: Kaufmann, 2003.

5 Rieh, S. Y., “Judgment of information quality and cognitive authority in the Web”, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(2), 2002, p. 145–161.

6 Eysenbach G., Kohler C. (2002, March 9). How do consumers search for and appraise health information on the world wide web? Qualitative study using focus groups, usability tests, and in-depth interviews. *British Medical Journal*, p. 324, 573–577.

information manipulation successfully. Still, the term “media literacy” remains vaguely defined, with various researchers citing different definitions, lacking a fundamental understanding. Sajjad Malik defines media literacy as “being informed and critically thinking about mass media, involving the study of techniques, technologies, and institutions involved in media content production, as well as the ability to critically analyze media messages and recognize the role of the audience in creating the meaning of these messages.”⁷ Hans Martens⁸ emphasizes the necessity of a clear definition for protection against potential negative effects and to enable people to use mass media more self-consciously. The key to immunity against information manipulation lies in continuous self-education, where individuals take the initiative to make their lives a constant process of self-learning, acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to be critical thinkers – a concept integral to defining media literacy. However, manipulation has taken on an entirely new form in today’s world.

Research on technology used to alter human behavior began as a new field in 1997, and scientists agreed to name it “captology” (Computers As Persuasive Technologies), a term coined from “computers as persuasive technologies.” Fogg defined persuasive technologies as “computing systems, devices, or applications intentionally designed to influence the attitudes or behaviors of users in a specific way.”⁹ The intent to influence attitudes or persuade in a planned manner reveals the creator’s purpose as a crucial point in utilizing these technologies. The technologies themselves don’t have the ability to persuade; it’s the creators who intend to use them to change human behavior patterns. These technologies have primarily been seen in marketing, healthcare, security, and environmental protection. Fogg suggests that captology should adopt existing persuasion theories from fields like psychology, communication, and media since these areas have empirical foundations, making their effects predictable and implementable in captology. Strategies used in new technologies to persuade users have already been observed and applied in traditional media but have now taken precedence in new technologies. The advantage of the digital sphere lies in the ability to measure metrics such as visits, clicks, views, and user interactions with great precision, providing accurate predictions about the user’s next steps. Designers and programmers adopting persuasive strategies in their applications, aware of their effects on users, must consider ethical questions. Carey Heckman

7 Malik, Sajjad (2008). *Media Literacy and Its Importance*, published by Society for Alternative Media and Research with cooperation of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and printed by Manzil Printers Posh Arcade, G-9 Markaz, Islamabad.

8 Martens, H. (2010). Evaluating media literacy education: Concepts, theories, and future directions. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 2(1).

9 Fogg, B. J., *Persuasive technology: Using computers to change what we think and do*. San Francisco: Kaufmann, 2003.

and his colleagues have focused on ethical concerns in the application of such technologies, proposing that all creators of such content must evaluate whether the persuasive strategies they use are in the user's interest and ensure users are the ultimate beneficiaries of such technologies.

The proposed ethical principles for designers of online content are as follows: persuasion must never be unethical, designers must take responsibility for potential user outcomes, respect user privacy, refrain from sharing personal user information with third parties, clearly communicate intentions, methods, and expected results, avoid misleading users to achieve outcomes, and adhere to the "golden rule" – never persuade users into something the designers themselves wouldn't accept. There is concern that modern technological tools, particularly those associated with captology (spanning areas like information technology, artificial intelligence, social media, etc.), have brought significant changes in how human intelligence operates.

This transformation is evident in diverse interfaces, two-dimensional reality (stereo reality), and information overload users experience. In this complex environment, understanding the economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects of each message becomes extremely challenging. The additional challenge arises from purposeful tools that influence unconscious processes in people, aiming to shape their responses, behaviors, and attitudes. This manipulation leads us into the gray zone of potential transhumanistic society, blurring the boundaries between human and technological intelligence. This situation raises questions about preserving traditional values that have guided humanity to date while simultaneously creating space for new forms of interaction and evolution. Captological tools, within the context of democracy, pose serious questions regarding the transparency and integrity of information. Data manipulation and targeted messaging through these tools can significantly impact political processes, undermining the authenticity of public opinion. This digital paradigm, combined with sophisticated methods of influencing the unconscious, poses a serious threat to democratic values. The development of regulatory frameworks and technological solutions, coupled with public education, becomes crucial for preserving the integrity of the democratic system in the era of pervasive digital manipulation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 18, states that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."¹⁰ Freedom of thought is effectively manipulated using persuasive technologies, altering human behavior

10 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – <https://www.poverenik.rs/images/stories/dokumentacija-nova/medjunarodna-dokumenta/UJEDINJENE-NACIJE/Univerzalnadeklaracijacir.pdf>, 24.03.2022.

patterns, and the ultimate beneficiary often perceives a semblance of freedom of thought without realizing manipulation in the final outcome. In the era of the global economy, behavioral principles and techniques are widely employed, converting specific patterns into algorithms predicting user needs and creating an environment in which users believe those needs originate. Nick Seaver draws a comparison between traps used to catch animals and techniques employed by captology. Identifying algorithmic recommendation as a form of trap, connecting knowledge and technology with theories of prey and values, Seaver suggests that we can overcome condemnation of such approaches by reforming the currently entangled social infrastructure.

The question might not be how to escape traps, but how to recapture and put them in the service of new worlds.¹¹ The processing of user information, creating databases, and refining this data through programs to predict user behavior are the dreams of every capitalist machinery. However, ethical questions and the freedom of human thought, will, and desires are more jeopardized than ever in history. Information collected in databases alone cannot influence someone's opinions or actions, but it is an essential part that captology needs to develop its mechanism and achieve expected results. The reliance on technology in various aspects has made it impossible to function in the modern world without using these tools. Raising awareness or introducing legal regulations successfully implemented could reduce the impact of captological tools on the freedom of choice and thought when using modern technologies. However, the power dynamics between the capitalist machinery favoring the metrics of captological tools for extra profit and individuals who are aware of their mechanisms currently exist in an extremely unequal relationship.

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¹¹ Seaver, N., *Captivating algorithms: Recommender systems as traps*, *Journal of Material Culture* 1–16, DOI: 10.1177/1359183518820366, 2018.

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SELF-LOCATING BELIEFS IN THE SIMULATION HYPOTHESIS

Abstract: According to the simulation hypothesis, it is possible that we live in a computer simulation. If it is true that we live in a simulation indistinguishable from a non-simulated reality, then self-locating beliefs, such as my belief that I am currently in Belgrade, are necessarily false. The aim of the essay is to demonstrate the implausibility of the simulation hypothesis through an analysis of self-locating beliefs, considering the perspectives of Perry and Lewis on one hand, and Bostrom and Chalmers' understanding of the simulation hypothesis on the other hand. The discussion highlights the problem that a simulation of me cannot possess my self-locating beliefs, thus it cannot have an experience indistinguishable from my own experience.

Keywords: self-locating beliefs, *de se* and *de dicto* beliefs, centered worlds, simulation hypothesis, simulation argument

INTRODUCTION

The simulation hypothesis claims that it is possible that we are living in a computer simulation, and its natural implication is selective skepticism.¹ The simulation hypothesis challenges everyday beliefs, such as my belief that I am currently in Belgrade, by exposing the possibility that this belief of mine has been induced by a simulation created by a computer to which I am directly connected. This possibility is certainly conceivable and, for some theorists like Nick Bostrom, technologically achievable.

Bostrom, in the article presenting the simulation argument, outlines assumptions about the technological possibilities and limitations of computing.² Based on known mechanisms, physical laws, and properties of currently available

1 Birch (2013) offers a discussion on the selective skepticism of the simulation argument. See: Birch, J., "On the 'Simulation Argument' and Selective Scepticism," *Erkenntnis*, 78, 2013, pp. 95–107.

2 Bostrom, N., "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 53(211), 2003, pp. 245–248.

materials, Bostrom argues that in the future it will be possible and cost-effective to create a simulation indistinguishable from physical reality for conscious beings within the simulation.³ Furthermore, he argues that it will be possible to create computer simulations of the entire history of humanity, which he refers to as “ancestor simulations.” A posthuman civilization could create computers of planetary scale with an approximate computational power of 10^{42} operations per second, using nanotechnological designs that are already known to us.⁴ Such a computer could create ancestor simulations using only a fraction of its computational capacity, allowing the posthuman civilization to run a vast number of ancestor simulations.⁵ If a posthuman civilization creates a vast number of ancestor simulations, then it is highly probable that we are already living in a computer simulation, which is the conclusion of Bostrom’s simulation argument. In his recently published book, *Reality+* (2022), David Chalmers aims to demonstrate that the hypothesis of living in a simulation cannot be ruled out and should be taken seriously. If the objections against the simulation hypothesis, such as the objection that it is impossible to create conscious beings or a reality like our own through computer simulations, are false, then considering the possibility of living in a simulation becomes a reasonable assumption rather than an arbitrary one. Moreover, Chalmers argues that even if we are living in a simulation, everything we know about the reality in which we live is real, but fundamentally it is not what we think it is, rather it consists of computational and digital processes.⁶

In this paper, the aim is to demonstrate that self-locating beliefs, as elucidated by John Perry and David Lewis, pose problems for the simulation hypothesis, revealing its implausibility. Beliefs about one’s own properties, such as my beliefs that I am conscious while presenting this paper and that I am in Belgrade, are more plausible than a belief that it is possible to create a computer simulation of the entire reality that is indistinguishable from reality itself, which undermines all my self-locating beliefs. The paper shows that under certain conditions, self-locating beliefs are inconsistent with the simulation hypothesis, contrary to Bostrom’s and Chalmers’ views.

3 Ibid, p. 247.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, p. 248.

6 See: Chalmers, D. J., “The Matrix as Metaphysics,” in: *The Character of Consciousness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp. 455–494; Chalmers, D. J., *Reality+: virtual world and the problems of philosophy*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2022.

SELF-LOCATING BELIEFS: BASIC TENETS AND THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS

According to the traditional approach in the theory of meaning originating from Frege, beliefs represent a relation between a subject and a proposition that represents the object of belief. For example, the object of belief can be the proposition “Belgrade is the capital of Serbia” (p), and the subject in the state of belief can be a person named Miloš. Therefore, the sentence “Miloš believes that p ” asserts that Miloš is in a state of belief with the object being the proposition p . However, the sentence “Miloš believes that p ” is not identical to the sentence “I believe that p ,” even though I am Miloš; the meaning of the word “I” depends on the context, whereby the sentence expresses what one or the other person believes when it is uttered and cannot be absolutely true or false.

John Perry gives an example in which it is possible for two different individuals to have the same belief expressed by a first-person sentence, while the belief cannot have the same truth value. According to Perry’s thought experiment, Hume, in 1775, had a belief expressed by the sentence “I wrote the *Treatise*,” while Heimson, who is insane, has an identical belief – “I wrote the *Treatise*.” Hume’s belief is true while Heimson’s belief is false, as Heimson cannot have the belief that Hume had about himself.⁷

Perry provides an example that highlights the essential difference between descriptions of doxastic states and beliefs in which the indexicals (such as the word “I”) cannot be eliminated. When I noticed a mess of spilled sugar on the floor of a store, I believed that some customer had spilled the sugar. However, upon realizing that the package of sugar in my shopping basket was punctured and that I was the one spilling the sugar, I changed my belief to the belief that I was making the mess by spilling sugar on the store’s floor. The belief that someone is spilling sugar on the store’s floor or the belief that Miloš is spilling sugar on the store’s floor fundamentally differ from the belief that I am spilling sugar. Based on the change in belief and my awareness of the situation I am in, I can also change my behavior by stopping the act of spilling sugar.⁸

Beliefs about one’s own position or situation are self-locating beliefs that inherently involve the essential indexicals. David Lewis refers to these beliefs as “irreducible *de se* beliefs,” distinguishing them from *de dicto* beliefs. According to Lewis, all beliefs are either self-locating or *de se* beliefs: *de dicto* beliefs are *de se* beliefs with respect to logical space, while irreducible *de se* beliefs are self-locating beliefs with respect to time and ordinary spatial or population terms.⁹ Lewis suggests that any self-locating beliefs should be understood as self-ascription of

7 Perry, J., “Frege on Demonstratives,” *Philosophical Review*, 86, 1977, pp. 474–497.

8 Perry, J., “The Problem of the Essential Indexical,” *Noûs*, 13, 1979, pp. 3–21.

9 Lewis, D. K., “Attitudes De Dicto and De Se,” *Philosophical Review*, 88, 1979, p. 522.

properties. For example, Hume and Heimson ascribe to themselves the property of “being the writer of the *Treatise*” when they have the belief expressed by the sentence “I wrote the *Treatise*” although Hume does so correctly while Heimson is mistaken. Additionally, Hume and Heimson can have beliefs that Hume wrote the *Treatise*, locating themselves in a world where Hume is the author, ascribing to themselves the property of “being an inhabitant of a world where Hume wrote the *Treatise*.”

Lewis presents an example of two gods in which both are inhabitants of a particular possible world, and they precisely know which world that is, as well as every true statement in their world.¹⁰ However, we can imagine a situation where these gods lack knowledge. In Lewis’s thought experiment, the gods differ: one lives on the tallest mountain and throws manna, while the other lives on the coldest mountain and throws thunderbolts. Importantly, neither of the gods knows whether they live on the tallest or the coldest mountain. Additionally, neither of the gods knows whether they throw manna or thunderbolts.¹¹ Despite possessing all knowledge about their world, each of the gods lacks self-locating beliefs concerning the population consisting of the two of them and regarding their spatial location. Consequently, neither of them knows whether he is the one living on the tallest or the coldest mountain and whether he is the one throwing manna or thunderbolts.

Lewis’s properties semantics, which he proposes as a replacement for the propositions semantics, is equivalent to the understanding of properties as classes of centered possible worlds.¹² The property of “being Hume” corresponds to the class of possible worlds centered on Hume. It is not possible for Heimson to have the property of “being Hume,” even though Heimson may believe that he is Hume, while clearly making a mistake. In these terms, Heimson does not belong to the class of possible worlds centered on Hume. According to Dilip Ninan’s interpretation, a centered world is a triple consisting of a possible world, a time, and an individual in that time and world.¹³ Thus, Hume has a belief that he wrote the *Treatise*, where the content of that belief is a centered proposition (p) that is true in a possible world (w), at a time (t), with Hume as the “center,” if and only if the centered world (w, t, Hume) belongs to the proposition (p). If Heimson has an identical *de se* belief, the content of that belief is not true since a world centered on Heimson does not belong to it.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 520.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 520–521.

¹² Ibid, p. 532.

¹³ Ninan, D., “Counterfactual Attitudes and Multi-Centered Worlds,” *Semantics and Pragmatics*, 5, 2012, pp. 551–567.

THE CHALLENGE OF SELF-LOCATING BELIEFS FOR THE SIMULATION HYPOTHESIS

If it is true that we live in a computer simulation that is indistinguishable from the non-simulated reality, then my belief that I am currently in Belgrade would necessarily be false. In that case, as a sim, I would exist in a simulation of Belgrade (Sim Belgrade). As Sim Miloš, I would have the experience of Sim Belgrade, which is indistinguishable from the experience of Belgrade that non-sim Miloš has. Furthermore, if we consider the possibility of creating simulations within simulations, the simulation of Sim Miloš (Sim Sim Miloš) would have the experience of Sim Sim Belgrade, which is indistinguishable from Sim Miloš's experience of Sim Belgrade, and therefore indistinguishable from Miloš's experience of Belgrade. Moreover, one could argue for a multitude of simulation levels nested within simulations, as Bostrom describes,¹⁴ leading to discussions of simulations of Miloš at different levels of simulation. Due to the indistinguishability of Miloš's experience and Sim Miloš's or any simulation of Miloš's experience at any level, I cannot know my place within the population comprising the entire array of Miloš simulations. In this regard, this thought experiment can be compared to Lewis's thought experiment of two gods, where the gods have the same beliefs while lacking irreducible *de se* beliefs about their individual locations. However, even though Miloš and Sim Miloš have indistinguishable experiences, we know that the properties of "being Miloš" and "being Sim Miloš" are distinct, just as "being Hume" and "being Heimson" are distinct. If I am a simulation of Miloš, then my belief that I am currently in Belgrade is false. I cannot be in Belgrade since I am a simulation of Miloš who is in Belgrade, similar to how Heimson cannot be the writer of the *Treatise*, even though he believes he is, as Hume is the author of that book. Therefore, under the given condition, the world centered on me does not belong to the proposition "I am in Belgrade" but the world centered on Miloš, of which I am a simulation.

However, there is no way to verify and thus contribute to my knowledge, whether I am a simulation or, more precisely, a simulation at some level within a nested series of simulations. According to Bostrom's simulation argument, comparing simulated and non-simulated worlds is not even possible in principle.¹⁵ (Agatonović, 2023). If I could compare simulated and non-simulated worlds from outside the simulation, it would imply that I live outside the simulation. In that case, the premises of Bostrom's argument could be true, meaning that it is possible to create a large number of simulated worlds indistinguishable from our own, without it being true that I live in a simulation. If I live in a simulation and

¹⁴ Bostrom, N., "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?," p. 253.

¹⁵ Agatonović, M., "The fiction of simulation: a critique of Bostrom's simulation argument," *AI & Society*, 38, 2023, pp. 1579–1586.

can observe the non-simulated reality within the simulation (for example, due to a glitch in the simulation), the simulated and non-simulated realities would be distinguishable, making the simulation argument and simulation hypothesis obsolete since it can be observed through a glitch and conclude that we are living in simulation. However, Bostrom explicitly claims that if an error occurs in the simulation, the simulator can edit the mental state of the observer in the simulation to save the simulation from failure.¹⁶

In the Matrix hypothesis, Chalmers assumes that to count as a simulation of physical reality, an abstract computational process must have computational elements that correspond to each particle in reality.¹⁷ Additionally, Chalmers posits that the computational processes should be connected to our experience in a relevant way, such that when we have an experience of an object, the underlying processes simulating the object must be causally connected to our experience adequately.¹⁸ Without a relevant connection between the simulation and our experience, there would be no reason to think that the computational processes underpinning the physical reality. However, if we live in the Matrix and have always lived in the Matrix, as Chalmers asserts in the Matrix hypothesis,¹⁹ we cannot verify whether there is a relevant connection between the simulation and our experience, or whether abstract computational processes underlie the physical processes of the actual reality.²⁰

In *Reality+*, Chalmers argues that we cannot rule out the possibility of living in a virtual world and develops a new version of the simulation argument. The conclusion of the novel simulation argument is formulated by Chalmers as follows: “Either there are sim blockers or we are probably sims.” A sim blocker is an objection to the possibility of creating enough sims, with some sim blockers claiming that sims are impossible while others argue that they are possible but will be created in insufficient numbers. Similarly to Bostrom, Chalmers aims to show that if the number of sims is far greater than the number of conscious beings who are not sims, then it is likely that we are sims. However, it cannot be verified whether sims are conscious beings. It is possible that sims are digital zombies, digital entities that are identical to a conscious being whose replicas they are, but lack consciousness.²¹ Therefore, my sim *doppelgänger* could be a digital zombie, a simulation of me with identical beliefs but devoid of consciousness. Certainly, the world centered on me is not identical to the world centered on my

16 Bostrom, N., “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?,” p. 247.

17 Chalmers, D. J., “The Matrix as Metaphysics,” p. 469.

18 Ibid, p. 470.

19 Ibid, p. 457.

20 Agatonović, M., “The fiction of simulation: a critique of Bostrom’s simulation argument,” p. 1579–1586.

21 Agatonović, M., “Review of *Reality+*,” *AI & Society*, 2023.

sim *doppelgänger*, so my belief that I am currently conscious, which is true as a self-locating belief in the world centered on me, is not true in the world centered on my sim *doppelgänger* who is a digital zombie. Bostrom and Chalmers believe that my sim *doppelgänger* would be conscious just like me, and the content of its beliefs would be identical to the content of my beliefs if we were dealing with a perfect computer simulation or an indistinguishable computer replica of myself. However, as stated, this cannot be verified.

CONCLUSION

When considering the possibility of living in a simulation, one may question the plausibility of self-locating beliefs. However, the credibility of beliefs about the computational capabilities of creating simulations that are indistinguishable from reality may also be questioned. Therefore, we can ask: is the belief that I am currently conscious more convincing than the belief that it is possible for me to be a sim, derived from the possibility of creating perfect replicas of myself in an incredibly large number? According to Bostrom and Chalmers, these two beliefs are consistent, as it could be the case that I live as a conscious being in a simulation if it is possible to create a great number of such sims. However, as I have outlined here, it is not possible to verify whether a simulation of me would be subjectively indistinguishable from me, while I firmly believe that I am conscious. Furthermore, my sim *doppelgänger* could be a digital zombie, and in that case, these two beliefs would be contradictory to each other, with my self-locating belief that I am currently in Belgrade, accompanied by my consciousness, being more convincing than knowledge about the computer capabilities of futuristic simulation technology.

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IS THE END OF SCIENCE AND/OR MEDIA HAPPENING?

Abstract: In his *Scientific American* article, John Horgan states that scientists do not invent the truth; they merely discover it, as the truths of the world already exist. He argues that the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is the noblest and most meaningful of all endeavors. However, he suggests that the era of groundbreaking scientific discoveries has come to an end. It seems that both scientists and the media must now settle for partial truths. Berkeley had already written about the end of science's golden age, a notion that Stent also supports, predicting its replacement by an era of total leisure. The idea of scientific progress functions as a form of scientific religion, yet Spengler argues that this belief is unsustainable and will ultimately be supplanted by religious and other forms of fundamentalism. In 1994, the U.S. Congress revoked a major infrastructure project – a 24 km-long tunnel in Texas – effectively halting a scientific initiative in favor of technical innovation. Similarly, in the media, the search for truth is increasingly replaced by casual browsing of fragments, trivia, half-truths, and entertainment.

Keywords: media, golden age of science, end of science, postmodernity

In today's society – marked by numerous dilemmas, uncertainties and tensions, what the German sociologist Ulrich Beck referred to as the “risk society” – one can rightfully ask whether science might eventually reach its limits. As humanity pushes the boundaries of knowledge, is it conceivable that scientists could one day understand everything? At the same time, the fundamental question of all these inquiries is certainly the one that says that our basic goal is to find out why we are here on planet earth, and what our mission is, and whether there is any other mission more valuable than ourselves.

In today's society – marked by numerous dilemmas, uncertainties, and tensions, what the German sociologist Ulrich Beck referred to as the “*risk society*” – one can rightfully ask whether science might eventually reach its limits. As humanity continues to push the boundaries of knowledge, is it conceivable that scientists could one day understand everything?

At the same time, the fundamental question underlying all these inquiries remains: What is our basic goal? Why are we here on planet Earth? What is our mission, and is there any purpose greater than ourselves? In this sense, the pursuit of knowledge, lifelong learning, and the continuous questioning of the world and consciousness is one of the most noble and dignified endeavors of humankind.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE? AND WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF MEDIA?

This also raises a broader question: What are the limits of human knowledge, and is it even possible to speak of an “*end*” to knowledge or science? On the other hand, the role of mass media- an integral part of modern society- raises similar dilemmas and questions. Can the function of media ever be fully exhausted? Could mass media become excessive or even reach a point of decline, much like an overly technicized science? Might the media themselves become mere technical tools of mediation, stripped of their emancipatory potential and original purpose?

Do mass media have their limits, and is it even possible to question such a thing?

This text will partly reflect on these questions and attempt to address various dilemmas, trilemmas, and dead ends. In his book *The End of Science*, John Horgan states: “If one believes in science, then one must accept the possibility that the great era of scientific discoveries is over” (Horgan, 2001, p. 15). He argues that human knowledge and the human brain have inherent limitations. Furthermore, science itself acknowledges that most of its theories are fragmentary and partial, meaning we will always lack a truly complete and rounded form of knowledge.

Horgan also suggests that science is nearing its end for another reason. He observes that science has thrived throughout modernity and the scientific renaissance, and that precisely because it has functioned so well, it is now approaching its conclusion. These ideas align with the views of researcher Gunther Stent, who discusses the end of the golden era of science, predicting that progress, *per se*, may halt within one or two generations (Horgan, 2001, p. 20).

A similar trend can be seen in media. The argument follows that mass media may also stagnate, as an increasing number of young people avoid complex, thought-provoking discussions in favor of leisure, entertainment, and a more relaxed lifestyle. As products of corporate capitalism, they tend to prefer easier and more consumer-driven narratives over challenging intellectual inquiry.

In that part of the supporting argumentation about the correlation of science, there is also an equally important argument that says that the mass media contribute to the hedonization of the world more than other social factors in everyday life.

IF CYCLES EXIST, THEN THEY NECESSERRILY OSSIFY

Here it is important to recall Spengler’s attitude from the cult discussion and the book “The Decline of the West,” in which the author says that science develops in cycles, when the cycles themselves ossify, and scientists become arrogant and

less tolerant towards other systems of thought, such as religion, philosophy, ethics, and in this work he predicts the end of science. But, even then, the Faustians, as Stent calls them, or those thinkers from ironic science as Harold Bloom calls it, that is, distinct individuals, will continue with these deep questions and hard-to-find answers to them.

The governments of Western countries may have moved away from the churches, but they are hardly moving away from science and scientists, is the point of the great thinker and scientist Feyereband, who said:

“Certainly, I go to extremes, but not to the extreme that people accuse me of, namely that I reject science. I’m against the idea that science is at the firstplace. That’s fine. Science must be applied on a case-by-case basis. Finally, scientists disagree on many issues. People should not take it for granted when a scientist says: everyone should follow this path.” (Horgan, 2001; 74).

At the same time, this scientist presented a valid and observable thesis: many people live well without relying on science. For example, tribes such as the Bushmen or the Kung people of Africa survive in conditions where most Westerners would not. It is true, the author adds, that people in the West tend to live longer- but when it comes to the quality of life, that remains far less certain

Probably the greatest danger for modern science is what Heidegger already predicted, that technology, both as a dominant tool and as a dominant medium of modernity, will take over the throne that once belonged to philosophy, theory, and pure science. Indeed, the U.S. Congress halted the superconducting super collider project, a decision that marked a turning point in scientific research. By the time it was terminated, the project had already consumed two billion dollars in Texas, with a 24-kilometer-long tunnel dug underground. The great hope of physicists was abruptly cut short in the fall of 1993.

Physicist Sheldon Glashow of Harvard University was outraged by the cancellation of the project, as he was deeply invested in the pursuit of a unified theory of superstrings, a potential “theory of everything”. He maintained that physics remained a house of riddles and that the search for the holy grail of knowledge must continue. Around the same time, a group of Harvard postgraduates shifted their focus from academia to finance, joining Wall Street firms. Goldman Sachs, in particular, welcomed them enthusiastically – ultimately bringing them under its influence.

IRONIC SCIENCE AND INTUITION ARE IMPORTANT

And all the others, beyond that corporate control, can be called ironic scientists, they simply believe that all theories and laws already exist, no scientist creates theories, he simply discovers them, so these theories exist independently of any historical or cultural context and in general from any effort to reach them. (Horgan, 2001; 89).

Witten, a physicist who is modestly willing to admit this, helped establish the view that superstring theory is impossible to test experimentally, but that theory predicts gravity. And for him, the realization that gravity is a consequence of superstrings is one of the greatest scientific discoveries ever (Horgan, 2001; 93). Today, a few scientists – such as Lindley – argue that if superstring theories cannot be experimentally verified, they belong more to the realm of aesthetics than empirical science.

And the superstring is neither matter, nor energy, nor anything that we recognize in the environment, it is some mathematical primordial substance that generates both matter and energy and space and time, yet does not correspond to anything in our tangible world.

As a result, further research into superstrings came to a halt, and technology swiftly took its place – driven by its practical daily applications across numerous fields, including medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, transportation, construction, and mass media. Therefore, with lightning speed, technology took the place of science, science, theory, and religion and therefore dominates our lives today and therefore the relationship of the mass media to the subject of this text is exactly as it is, very complementary and pragmatic. High-tech mass media, the Internet, and live broadcasts now offer instant access to everything a person could desire, ensuring constant connectivity, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This relentless flow of information has come to define the modern era, both scientifically and practically.

Techno-sphere has become another name for the modern first few decades of the twenty-first century. And it will most likely be like this for several decades to come. In the extraordinary trilogy ‘Technosphere’, Žarko Paić will state:

“...because what can only be expected from ‘future thinking’ belongs to something between openness of meaning and fascination with the new. An opinion that is imbued with the language of things and technical life remains little or almost insignificant... things are no longer in the world. What happens when the technosphere itself thinks and projects new worlds, becomes a task of thinking that can no longer be compared to anything previous in history. In deep darkness and blinding light we stand alone in front of an open abyss.” (Paić, 2018; 14)

The technosphere has become the most distinctive feature of modern life. It is the birth place of media presentations, shaping the classical functions of mass media, including information dissemination, education, and entertainment.

It is difficult to provide a precise answer to the question posed in the title of this text: *Is the end of science or the end of mass media happening before our eyes?* In a literal sense, neither science nor mass media will cease to exist. However, there is no doubt that science, media, and life itself lack sufficient synergy. Moreover, our era is undeniably a risky age, or rather, we live in risky societies – as highlighted by Ulrich Beck's metaphor at the beginning of this text. This suggests that modern crises are, more often than not, expressions of knowledge rather than ignorance – not failures due to a lack of scientific discoveries, but rather due to their misuse or non-application.

TECHNO SCIENCE INSTEAD OF SCIENCE

Modern science has escaped from its spiritual and philosophical roots without anyone getting angry except for a couple of philosophers and religious figures.

Thus, modern science is less bound to truth and more to current efficiency. Therefore, it is approaching its end or civil decadence. It becomes techno science. The science of extremes that promotes universal virtualization. Science without conscience is the calamity of the soul. Cybernetic technoscience accelerates reality and denies objective reality.¹ In 1996, sexagenarian suffering from cancer was the first in the world to apply the Australian law from that year under the name Final act, which means that he was connected to a computer to press 'YES' as doctor Nitschka doctor set in order to die. Within the legal deadline of 9 days, he pressed 'YES' again and the fatal injection entered his blood. It is about the science of programmed disappearance or suicide using a computer... What to say?

MAD is the system designed to orchestrate the planet's destruction – a doomsday machine for nuclear apocalypse – whose program was ultimately disrupted by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Globalization? What is it, and where do the media fit within its framework? The acceleration of telecommunications and the 24/7 live phenomenon has led us into passivity, confirmed by our increasingly virtual existence, and into a kind of sterility – life without true presence. We are losing the value of the action replacing it with immediate interaction. Global speed redefines the enormity of the planet Earth, where live-streamed light cancels out sunlight, rendering our local day insignificant compared to the global day we carry in our smartphones. The

1 Virilio, Paul: *Information bomb*, Worlds, Novi Sad, Beograd, 2000, p. 9.

stairs lost their meaning next to elevator. With airplanes, the depth and enormity of the ocean seems to have disappeared.²

Every time the speed increases, the value of our action decreases. Our power to act is alienated in favor of counteraction. And that's another name for interaction. Automatic processing of knowledge is another name for amnesia, which will be the last achievement of the industry of forgetting, when all analog information should be replaced by numerical computer coding, replacing the speech of images and things. *The number will be the future ruler of the world.* In order to abolish everything that has something to do with living beings and things.³

The speed of computation is replacing everything once required by philosophy, wisdom and spirituality. Modern art, rather than reflecting depth and contemplation, is increasingly becoming an expression of simultaneity and the present moment. The drama of real-time existence is evident everywhere today, job insecurity, fixed-term contracts, long unemployment, separated families, and universal fear of rapid change. The global economy operates through the automated interaction of value quotas, often disconnected from the actual wealth and production of nations – much like the oceans, which have become worthless dumping grounds for the world's waste.

The 20th century marks the end of the planet of living beings. The planet is transforming into new Babylon, a claustrophobic threat – cyber eugenics is coming. The genetic foundation of humanity is being reshaped, driven by vaccines. Einstein once spoke of three revolutionary forces: atomic, computer, and demographic. This third genome bomb will favor the artificial selection of the human race.⁴ Genetically modified plants and animals will be connected to genetically modified humans.⁵

Any displacement of an alternative to the dominant discourse is already an ideology. There is an emancipatory potential in the alternative. Habermas has long argued that science is also an ideology. Government expertise is actually a front for economic-political populism. All alternative medical theories are marginalized. Because it is logical that they exist

1. controversial theories and
2. alternative theories.

2 Ibidem, p. 123.

3 Ibidem, p. 122.

4 Ibidem, pp. 133, 134.

5 Ibidem, p. 134.

This is necessary as a democratization of the public sphere, including the media. Many powers remain discovered while hidden interests prevail, reinforced by rigid structures that suppress controversial or alternative theories.⁶

Because they mediate or construct realities from all forms and forms of apparent life or Foucault's 'world of life,' but also increasingly because they construct realities from the parallel, [the] technicalized world of *techné*, modern mass media are therefore forced to repeat the frequent mistakes of scientific or scientific discoveries or that they become carriers of an increasingly mediated and increasingly unfree world among people, in a world where people are more and more alienated from each other. Cyborgs of various levels and forms, trans humanized subjects of technical paradigms and requirements but less and less natural people as once witnesses of the perfect creation of the Creator of everything in the Cosmos. In some way we are witnessing a virtual or substitute world in which the great hopes of postmodernity are placed in all its fluidity or elusiveness which can neither be imagined nor realized without mass media on the one hand and technical discoveries at the place of science on the other.

CONCLUSION

To perceive what is otherwise invisible, one must rely either on intuition or on technical mediation that enables vision beyond ordinary perception. In both cases, human sight is intrinsically tied to the cosmic-biological evolution of humankind. Current time artificially constructs reality, and for that it needs quantification that has been arranged in tables. Digital code. That's why the combination of soul and mind, i.e., psyche and logos, is still necessary, so that the human being retains its original role and value system, and so that the world becomes harmonious again.

Should it even be stated at all – this world will not end except through an absolute catastrophe of cosmic proportions? Until then, it relies on the so-called vital mind, a term brilliantly premeditated by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, postmodern philosophy of life a much-needed elixir of meditation. This represents the strength and power of the original intuition, saying, "We Mediterranean people do not think clearly, but we see clearly." (Paić, 2018; 141). Since thought has become technically unified with technique, the path forward

6 At the conference on Media Philosophy in 2021 in Zagreb, philosopher Predrag Finci asserted that the media were always looking for ways to act subversively, recalling this example from Austria-Hungary. Predrag Finci: K. Kraus should not have announced the dismissal of the AU general. He then wrote a denial and thus in fact announced that Riddle was spying... as it is not true that Riddle was spying... "Today, every fact is interpreted as a subjective fact, and that is where the problem arises."

may lie in returning – through meditation – to a union of nature and extra-nature, a union of nature and the supernatural.

Truly, everything beyond and outside of God dehumanizes man. Being is always the totality of the relationship between the self and the world. What modern humanity lacks is the stability within change itself—both in the realm of science and in the sphere of mass media.

Indeed, at the end of this discussion, it can be said that the great philosopher from the last century, Oswald Spengler, was right, this idea of constant progress will be replaced by religious and other fundamentalisms because it is simply unsustainable. It is certain that when the American Congress in 1994 canceled the big physics project on superstrings, which buried a 24 km long tunnel dug in Texas, the ‘politics’ of scientific discoveries was stopped in favor of the policy of technical innovations. *Techné* took precedence over science. True scientific research and discoveries that are full of ethical value, creative creation, and true inspiration of the great minds of the human race have slipped away. They were replaced by designers, managers, and masters of illusion production.

Just as the search for truth in the media has shifted into leisurely browsing for fragments, details, half-information and entertainment, the media once genuinely sought Truth, Goodness and Beauty, portraying people and events with depth and meaning. Today, however, the media exist within the metaworld of the metaverse, consumed by virtuality, seduction, manipulation, and the surveillance of people and their freedom. This shifts signals the exhaustion, if not the end, of both true science and true mass media.

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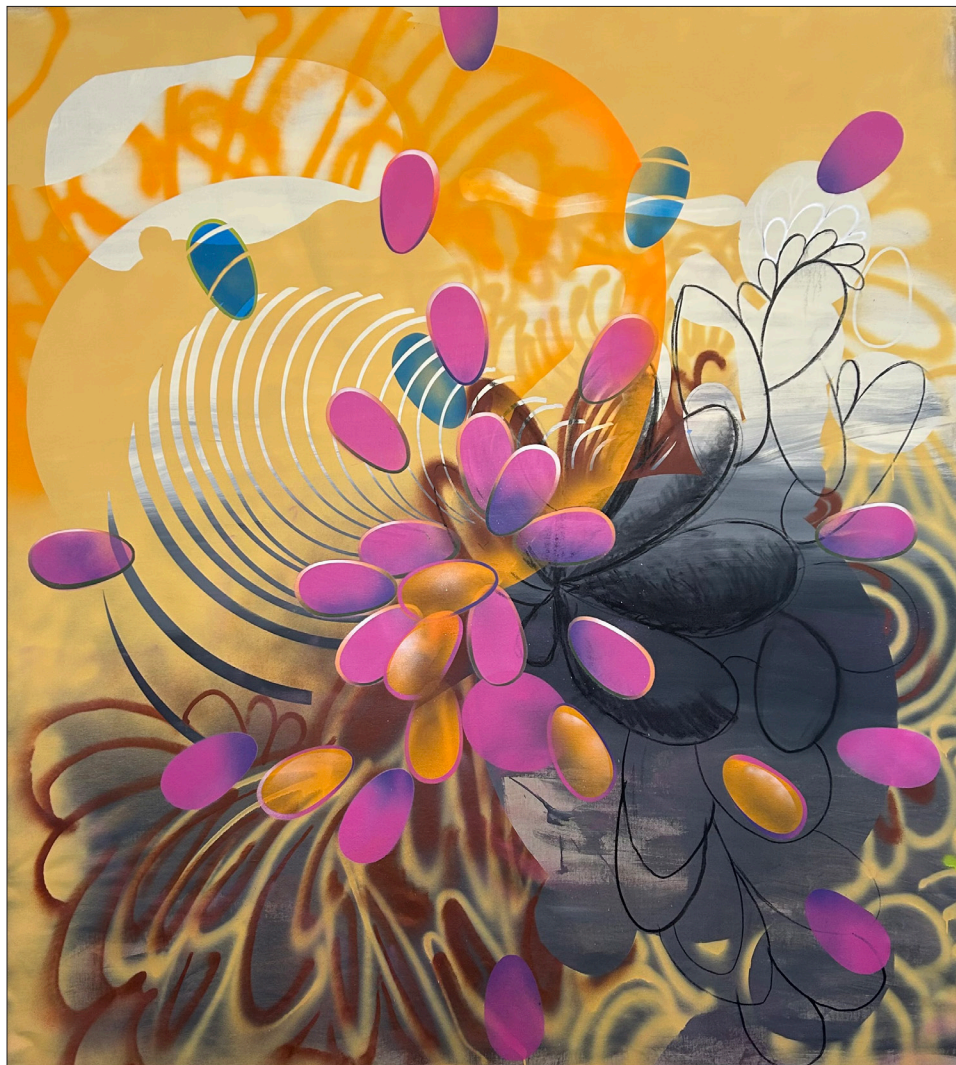
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Life Division
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 240 cm
2024

SCIENTIFIC IMAGINATION IN THE MEDIUM OF FILM:
(POST)APOCALYPTIC DESIRES IN WIM WENDERS' FILM
UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD

Dedicated to my friend, Tom Farrell, who played an impressive role
in *Until the End of the World*

Abstract: The article explores Wim Wenders' film *Until the End of the World* from the perspective of scientific imagination in the medium of film, focusing on the double paradox of media representation of *apocalypse* as a potential philosophical space *par excellence*. Starting from the assumption that contemporary Western culture becomes effectively blind and paralyzed to the full potential of the apocalypse, and that the omnipresence of reproduced images robs us of the capacity to comprehend the world in a truly imaginative way, we examine the structure of apocalyptic eschatology itself through the "unthinkable thought" of total world destruction as depicted in Wenders' film. On one hand, *Until the End of the World* offers a revival of the apocalypse as a subgenre through the imaginative use of spectacle and technology within the genre conventions of science fiction film.

On the other hand, it reveals subtle layers of end-of-the-millennium anxiety characterized by a constant longing for narrative mortality, i.e. death of the genre. Within such conceptual framework, we read the film as a critique of the technologization of the main characters' post-apocalyptic identities and their obsession with visual technology; in a broader sense, as an increasing dehumanization of the science represented in the medium of film, paradoxically fostered by the predominance of the ocular principle in visual media.

Keywords: Wim Wenders, science fiction, scientific imagination, apocalypse, spectacle, technology, post-apocalyptic desires

The filmmaker Wim Wenders locates his film *Until the End of the World* at the edge of the century, at the end of the millennium, with the following opening sentence: "In 1999, an Indian nuclear satellite went out of control." There is a kind of eschatological anticipation created by the calendar date (1999) and the imminent threat of a global nuclear catastrophe caused in the film by an Indian nuclear satellite going out of control. It is thus an accident, without evil empires and conspiracy theories, i.e., an accidental danger posed by nameless antagonists who are responsible for the potential destruction of the world. The fact that Wenders' protagonists continue their quest for their post-apocalyptic desires, in

astonishing indifference to the nuclear disaster, points to the double paradox of Wenders' attempt to depict the apocalypse.

The apocalypse is, specifically, represented in two ways: 1) as a catastrophe that brings about the end of the world (an object of ultimate horror) and 2) as a revelation that opens up direct, immediate access to essential reality, an access that bypasses representation and narrative, in the context of cinematic media and thus represents an object of ultimate desire, rather than ultimate horror. These two experiences of the Apocalypse – as catastrophe and revelation – share a common movement towards a primal, immediate, unified, and unaltered event, towards the fantasy of unveiling of the world and its purification, leading to final transparency and revelation. Although it is a need that is obviously not unique to the late 20th century, what sets apart the apocalypticism of the late 20th century is distinguished from previous ones by the sense that the apocalypse (whether cataclysmic or revelatory) may already have happened, i.e., we are already living in a post-apocalyptic world, and that technology itself is invested in the apocalyptic desires of the film's main characters.

The story of the film “Until the End of the World” indeed begins with the simulation, repetition, and postponement of its ending. After an Indian nuclear satellite falls out of orbit, scientists and political officials discuss the consequences. Meanwhile, Frenchwoman Claire (Solveig Dommartin) returns to France from Venice and gets into a car accident with two bank robbers. They entrust her with the stolen money, while secretly tracking her movements with a hidden electronic device. On her way home to Lyon, Claire meets Sam Farber (William Hurt), who is also on the run for unknown reasons. During their journey together, he steals a significant amount of the loot from Claire's car. Upon returning home, Claire discovers she has been robbed and sets out to find Sam. With the help of a German private detective and an expensive computer tracking program, she begins a technologically mediated search for Farber, locating and losing him across Europe, Asia, America, and finally Australia. As Wenders states, “it is a story of Penelope following Odysseus”¹, and if, as Jean-Luc Nancy observes, our history begins with the departure of Odysseus, then we seem to be confronted with impossible connections between the beginning of history and the end of the world. So we can pose the question – is it the end or just the beginning in the case of Wenders' film, a new beginning of the same exhausted world? The pre-millennial futuristic world of 1999, in which Claire is searching for Sam, is depicted as a world of fluid identities, proliferating plots, shifting genres, and complex interconnected networks of information and capital. Detective Winter (who models his identity as a private detective after American detectives and the clichés of hard-boiled crime novels) uses this global entanglement of information

1 Wenders Wim, “The Logic of Images” u: *Essays and Conversations*, Faber and Faber, 1991.

networks and capital to locate Sam. Claire herself enters the information network through the stolen capital of the two robbers (Raymond and Čiko) who have slipped through the network. At that moment, both the money and Claire are heterogeneous elements, outside the network, which now, in combination, have access to deeper levels of information and mobility within the networks. In this way, Wenders emphasizes the idea of fluid possession, as well as the idea of theft, including identity theft, as a prominent form of that fluidity.

During the journey, Claire falls in love with Sam and discovers the reason behind his pursuit – the possession of a special high-tech camera invented by his father, Henry (Max von Sydow), for the US Department of Defense. Henry's camera does not capture visual images but rather mental, neurochemical events of vision. These electronically encoded images can then be transmitted onto a screen and directly into another person's brain. Sam's mother, Edith (Jeanne Moreau), is blind, which is why he travels the world to capture images of Edith's family and friends, allowing her to see them again. In Australia, as Sam and Claire fly towards Sam's parents' house, a nuclear satellite is detonated, cutting off all communication with the outside world and erasing all computer memory. The protagonists are then left believing that the end of the world has come. Sam and Claire float in space, surrounded by silence, as the nuclear catastrophe has wiped out all electromagnetic circuits – in other words, computer memory, communication systems, and automobile and aircraft engines; essentially, everything that was the main driving force of the film until that moment. With Gabriel's song ("The Blood of Eden"), Sam and Claire touch down, and the lyrics of the song serve as a verbal commentary: "So we end as we began, with a man and woman, a woman and a man..."

To conclude, the key aspect of the film "Until the End of the World" is that the false apocalypse following the explosion of a nuclear satellite inaugurates a genuine sense of post-apocalypse in which the characters believe they have survived the end of the world. It is as if the world is dead, but unaware of its own death; the world awaits the "second death," a term derived from de Sade, but also appearing in the Book of Revelation. The "second death" signifies not only the end of the world, but also the end of the world's conceptual capacity, namely the complete destruction of the symbolic order. According to Slavoj Žižek, the "second death" implies a distinction between natural death, which is part of the natural cycle, and absolute death – the destruction, annihilation of the very cycle, which then liberates nature from its own laws and opens the way for the creation of new forms of life *ex nihilo*.² The space between the two deaths, the space that simultaneously follows and precedes the apocalypse, is the realm of the "living dead," a phenomenon that fully deserves to be called the "fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture." It is also a zone of return to historical trauma as a socio-somatic symptom. Žižek sees our fascination or enjoyment of the living

2 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, 1989.

dead (i.e., our fascination with their death and their imagined enjoyment) as the embodiment of the death drive, which is the direct opposite of the symbolic order, or the radical destruction of the symbolic texture through which so-called reality is constituted.

If we were to elaborate on Žižek's position, for the purposes of analyzing Wenders' film, we would come to the conclusion that the apocalyptic desire can and must be overcome through some form of narrative working-through, but on the other hand, such a "therapeutic narrative" is never complete and pure, as it is always subject to ideology or fetishization, making it in a sense a symptom itself. From here, we can infer that a non-fetishistic narrative that resists ideology would involve active recognition and to some extent the enactment of trauma – in Žižek's words, "enjoyment of symptoms." At the same time, such a narrative will attempt to merge trauma with the possibility of preserving desirable aspects of the past that can be useful in countering the extreme effects of trauma and in rebuilding social and individual life.

In that sense, Wenders' film revolves around two poles – the desire to destroy the symbolic order, while fully and fascinatedly merging with trauma, and the desire to rehabilitate the narrative in an attempt to work through the trauma. And Wenders, like Žižek, shows that these opposing accents are never completely separable. What Wenders presents when he takes his protagonists to Australia is a coincidence of the end of the world and the end of representation. The false or delayed apocalypse, due to the falling nuclear satellite, coincides with the success of apocalyptic technology, or rather the success of Farber's experiments. Farber's camera does not record optical images, but a neurochemical event of seeing, a pattern in the brain of the person who is watching or dreaming, which is why technology is apocalyptic in that it transcends mediation or representation. In the case of the act of seeing, the camera transcends the optical visual image and provides a direct connection from mind to mind. Thus, it does not represent an image, nor is it a form of communication, because two subjects see, so to speak, with one mind in a universal immediate language of neural impulses.

THE ULTIMATE NARCISSISM OF TECHNOLOGICAL SELF-REPRESENTATION

Edith's attitude towards the new technology that will free her from blindness is, at the very least, ambivalent. Although she is curious and excited about the possibility of regaining her sight, she also seems to stoically endure the role of victim assigned to her by her husband. She is hooked up to a machine controlled simultaneously by both father and son, marking, in a radically technologized Oedipal scene, an extreme male obsession with woman as fetish. Edit experiences

visual contact with her daughter as distance, separation, and loss, rather than the joy of reuniting.

The focus is on the technological apparatus and control processes, rather than the emotional implications of the events. Furthermore, the sad atmosphere of the entire sequence can be understood in terms of Roland Barthes' famous thesis that a photographic image is characterised by a sense of loss or death, since the presence of the photograph is the ultimate proof of the absence of the person depicted in it³. In this case, the gap between the signified and the signifier is caused by the reality of life as a continuum and the impossibility to bridge the gap between the past and the present – in Edith's experience, the referent returns like a boomerang.

So, while Farber's technology celebrates the miraculous restoration of her vision, they also lament the lack of direct contact with her. Edith herself chooses death instead of life, in a world that has become meaningless to her. Equating life with sight, Edit is unable to choose blindness and therefore chooses death, further highlighting and making the apocalyptic potential of Farber's camera even more striking in recording the dreams of other protagonists. What needs to be emphasized here is that Farber's technology allows for direct access to the primary process, without the mediation of memory and narrative. It bypasses representation in favor of pure presentation. In this way, technology eliminates the division between the conscious and the unconscious, and therefore between the self and the other. The self is united with desire, which is now revealed in its pure form, while the technological revelation of the dream can be read as a pure apocalypse of the film, marking the end of the genre, the end of narrative, the end of history, and the end of the world as a place of action and discourse.

In the late 20th century, the horror of nuclear apocalypse, fascination with televised catastrophes, and the postmodern, post-apocalyptic sense that "the unspeakable" has already happened and continues to happen are directly linked to the desires to put an end to both discourse and representation: to reach a discursive end of the world that will be a fusion with the primary and the fusion of all divisions.

Therefore, we can conclude that by giving a temporal and geographical identity to the end of the world, and by placing the conceptual and discursive end of the world under the sign of high technology, Wenders outlines a model of apocalyptic fears and desires of the late 20th century that form the basis of postmodern identities. As it turns out, Henry Farber's project is *de facto* suicidal. Claire and Sam become dependent on watching their own dreams, and their direct access to the primary process results in narcissistic or solipsistic madness, trapped in an endless cycle of primary feedback. The content of their dreams, therefore, is not abundance, unity, and wholeness, but rather loss, separation, and

3 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Hill and Wang, 1980.

trauma. The addictive fascination of Farber's technology users is not fulfillment and completeness, but rather a primary lack, a traumatic rupture that Wenders (together with Lacan and Žižek) establishes as the foundation of the Symbolic Order. Here, we approach Baudrillard's demonic nature of images⁴, which hyperbolically exclaims that it is a kind of primal pleasure, a brutal fascination with images whose fundamental power lies precisely in their amorality, without basis in aesthetic, moral, social, or political judgments.

Wenders himself depicts the disruption of techno-psychoanalytic transmission and conveys an interruption that can only be articulated in a discursive medium. He reverses the usual relationship between the visible image and discourse: if metaphysics of the visible is expected to produce presence, a direct and unmediated access to things through ocular representation of gaze, Wenders constantly undermines the clarity and distinctiveness of the image, demonstrating its intertwining with the technological devices we use to see the other side of technology: its intrinsic distortions and manipulations. Conversely, discourse and text potentially provide the space necessary for articulating the image shattered and fragmented by Oedipal visualization. The novel written by Sam Neill (Eugene Fitzpatrick), a former partner of Claire, is both a chronicle of the events of the film and its narrative framework, and Sam Neill explicitly expresses his belief in the "healing power of words and stories". By tying narrative power to Australian indigenous people and their healing psychic procedures, while depicting the process of Sam Farber's therapy, Wenders assumes narrative mediation, a version of psychoanalytic "speech cure," with apocalyptic possibilities of immediacy. This is supported by the moment of Edith's death, when Henry rejects the very process of mourning, that is, the narrative elaboration of traumatic events, thereby remaining locked within his own grief that he fails to transform into its active equivalent – mourning, just as Sam and Claire remain prisoners of their un-narrativized dreams, with no one managing to escape.

In this way, Wenders, like Freud, opposes the narrative emergence of neurotic, apocalyptic-psychotic repetitions. The final sequence of the film is a transcendent image of Claire in a space station. Claire has proven to be the most skilled user of Farber's camera, and her "technological ability" allows her to get a job in an environmental organization. At the end of the film, she is installed as a "high-tech angel" who protects the Earth from pollution. Therefore, we can conclude that Claire in space is the ultimate apocalyptic gesture in this film, orbiting the end of the millennium, redeeming humanity and technology. Wenders concludes the film with a problematic statement that Claire, or transparency itself, as a technological "natural," post-apocalyptic code that has gone through the neuro-video event of the primary process, will be the chairperson "genius" of the next millennium.

4 Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1984.

On one hand, the film's final shots represent the recuperation of the apocalypse as a genre, through Claire's escape from planet Earth within the control of the narrative form. But on the other hand, the fact that Claire is portrayed as an "angel" clearly indicates the anxiety of the end of the millennium, or the desire for the death of the genre and narrative as such. Moreover, Sem Nil, who carries the symbolic nickname 'broken ladder', becomes an emblem of failure and inadequacy of representation, even in the role of a "therapeutic narrative instrument". The film criticizes humanity's obsession with the visual, which seems paradoxical because Wenders' film depends on the combination of image and story, that is, the interconnectedness of audiovisual and narrative modes of representation. Wenders is thus caught in the trap of binaries (surface-depth, image-narrative) that the film itself fails to resolve.

In concluding this analysis, we will return to the beginning and the title of the film itself – "Until the End of the World" – and the insight that, even in its title, this film suggests the merging of time and space as key determinants of identity. The end of the world is both a moment (the destruction of the planet due to the fall of a nuclear satellite) and a place (the ultimate destination in the characters' journey around the world). In a unique way, the film launches a humanistic critique of the myth of a shrinking world: far from bridging the distance between people, their dreams and desires, and the modern technology of vision, machines are shown to be destructive and alienating. Wenders succeeds in cinematically capturing what Paul Virilio⁵ defines as the transition from the era of dialectical logic (photography, cinematography) to the era of paradoxical logic (videography and holography). Developmentally, starting with the film *Until the End of the World*, Wenders is progressively replacing place with space. Or more precisely, he replaces "space" with "time", defining his characters by temporal locatedness. When asked what he sees as the final shelter and last refuge for identity after the decline of space, in a time when identity loses its reference point, the precedence with which to identify oneself, and when it is being increasingly shrunk by the magic of technology, Wenders responds:

"Language. Love. Courage. Reduction. Resisting the continuous acceleration and rediscovering the beauty of slowness..."⁶

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AUDIO-SOLIPSISM: HOW HEADPHONES ISOLATE US FROM THE WORLD

Abstract: In the postmodern age, there is a noticeable trend of aestheticizing the subject's isolation from the surrounding world. Individuals increasingly find pleasure in withdrawing into their "inner", private worlds. Listening to music can serve as an example. In order to "consume" music in the best possible way, it is necessary to block out the influence of the surrounding world on the listener. Headphones are a medium helping individuals to enjoy music – which, after all, means taking pleasure in oneself. The task of the following essay is to reconsider the aesthetics of self-isolation and to contrast it with the "world-opening" character of (musical) art.

Keywords: art, world-openness, isolation from the world, self-indulgence, headphones, audio-solipsism

1.

The author found the inspiration for pondering on the topic of this paper quite by accident: He once noticed an interesting product on the German *Amazon* website, namely a T-shirt with the following inscription: HEADPHONES ON – VOLUME UP – IGNORE THE WORLD.¹ So we are asked to put headphones on our ears, turn up the volume and just ignore the world! What seems to be only a marketing gag can be interpreted as the effect of subjectivizing the experience of art in the postmodern age. The recipient has already been emancipated and constituted as the factor determining the quality of an aesthetic experience in the modern age. Thus, it is not only the artist's experience preceding or following the creation of a work of art that is important – but also the way the reader or listener experiences that work. As is known, this even led to the formation of a special type of aesthetics – the so-called *receptionist aesthetics*. The recipient's aesthetic experience rounds off the entire process from the inspiration and motivation of the artist through the conception and elaboration of the work's structure to its ultimate completion and presentation to a potential audience. These tendencies within art and aesthetics can be linked with the general trend of individualization

1 Cf. <https://www.amazon.de/Headphones-ignore-World-shirt-T-Shirt/dp/B07S-GS9D86> (accessed: 10/04/2024)

(referred to what the German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel called the “law of the individual”²) that begins to dominate within modern culture, while reaching unforeseen dimensions within the postmodern one – and it seems to be a never-ending story. There is an ugly side to the trend of individualism: the cult of narcissism as a hyperstylization of the self. While considering that trend, the author developed a thesis concerning the *autoaesthetic* (wo)man (*homo autoaestheticus*) in a different context.³ Here, too, we are to consider one aspect of the individual’s relationship with the world when enjoying themselves, that is, when being immersed in an aesthetic experience he or she ecstatically surrenders to.

2.

In order to understand the radicality of the reorientation from the object of the aesthetic experience to the subject itself, it is necessary to point out one essential definition of art that is increasingly suppressed by the subjectivization of aesthetic experience. Works of art open up a new *view of the world*. In a certain sense, the world itself is shown to us in a new light through art. The world literally opens up in front of us, we receive access to one of its dimensions that we would be deprived of, if it were not for a specific piece of art making us aware of that dimension when we perceive (watch, read, listen to, etc.) it. In the field of philosophy of art, there are authors explicitly elaborating on the “worldly” character of art, more precisely: a work of art. Martin Heidegger, who discusses the abovementioned character of art in the text *The Origin of the Work of Art*, certainly stands out amongst them. As part of phenomenological-ontological considerations, he examines the “work-being” of a work of art, distinguishing it from a mere item. His thesis is: “The work as work sets up a world.”⁴ Or, to put it another way: “To work-being there belongs the setting up of a world.”⁵ What does this mean? In a certain sense, the world is shown or revealed through the work only. Heidegger defines the world as “the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being”;⁶ and “[b]y the opening up of a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and

2 Cf. Simmel, G., *The View of Life: Four Metaphysical Essays with Journal Aphorisms*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 2010, pp. 99–154.

3 Cf. Smiljanić, D., “Homo autoaestheticus: od doživljajnog diletantizma do samo-prezentacije”, in: Draškić Vićanović, I., Vuksanović, D., Grubor, N., Popović, U., Novaković, M. (ed.), *Homo aestheticus*, Estetičko društvo Srbije, Beograd, 2017, pp. 245–268.

4 Heidegger, M., “The Origin of the Work of Art”, in: *Basic Writings*, Revised & Expanded Edition, Harper, San Francisco, 1993, pp. 139–212, quote: p. 170.

5 Ibid., p. 171.

6 Ibid., p. 170.

nearness, their scope and limits”.⁷ The consideration of the “work-being” of the work itself reveals exactly one dimension – the other lies in the “setting forth of the earth”: “The work moves the earth itself into the open region of a world and keeps it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.*”⁸ Earth symbolically represents the matter into which the work “sets itself back”, and in this way the matter finds its true character in the work itself (the “massiveness” and “heaviness” of stone, the “firmness” and “pliancy” of wood, the “hardness” and “luster” of metal, the “brightening” and “darkening” of color, the “clang” of tone and the “naming power” of the word). The world and the earth are not two opposite poles, they are intertwined, and it is thanks to works of art that they come into productive conflict without negating each other – on the contrary: they “raise” each other. “In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigating of this strife.”⁹ The next step in Heidegger’s argumentation is to show how “in an artwork truth is set to work”.¹⁰ However, this transition to alethiological considerations should not interest us here. It is more important to focus on the sacred character of the work of art and to clarify it further.

A work of art sets up the world – and let’s add to that: it sets it up in relation to us. Or maybe better: as something in the center of which we exist. The sounds of a symphony belong to the world’s acoustic sphere – listening to that work of art, we experience the sonority of the world, the possibility of individual sounds coming together in a musical composition and thus leaving a certain aesthetic impression on us. Of course, Heidegger would distance himself from any subjectivist or semantic connotation of the reception of art: he is neither interested in what the subject “experiences” in themselves while listening to the music, nor whether the work “means” anything in particular. Do aesthetic experiences and aesthetic meanings not belong to the world? According to Heidegger, probably not – or only as much as they originate from the “work-being” of the work.

However, some thinkers would revise or expand the scope of the concept of the world: Karl R. Popper assumes that in addition to “world 1”, the world of material things, beings and processes, there is also a “world 2”, the world of psychic experiences, and even a “world 3”, the world of abstract entities (language, content of thoughts, theories, etc.).¹¹ According to this conception, we could

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

⁹ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ On the theory of the world 3 cf. especially Popper, K. R., “Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject”, in: Popper, K. R., *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, Eight Impression, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 106–152, especially pp. 106–122, furthermore Popper, K. R., “On the Theory of the Objective Mind”, in: *ibid.*, pp. 153–190, here relevant: pp. 153–161.

assign aesthetic experiences to world 2 and aesthetic meanings to world 3. In this sense, listening to a musical composition would include the realization of a special sequence of sounds (W_1), arranged (literally: composed) according to a certain creative code (W_3), which causes a certain acoustic experience (W_2)¹² of the respective piece. We could even go a step further and join, for example Nelson Goodman in his assumption of the existence of a multitude of worlds, where the world of music would represent a world on its own or a set of different versions of that world that can be regarded as separate worlds yielding a classicist, romantic, or avant-garde world of music. In this case, different ways of performing the same composition may create the possibility for the listener to “enter” new and various worlds.¹³

Regardless of whether we stick to the existence of one “monolithic” world, assume that there are “two” or “three” worlds or turn to an even greater extreme and postulate the existence of “countless” worlds,¹⁴ it is the work of art that *opens* that world or those worlds up to us. When we surrender to the work itself (be it to its being, our own reactions to that work or its actual meaning), the world opens up to us and we establish a connection with it through the work of art, moreover: the work itself becomes our connection to a special world.

3.

By their very definition, the *media* refer to entities mediating between the sender of information and its receiver, that is, between two subjects, but also between humans and the world, that is, subject and object. By doing so, they are involved in the way we relate to the world. However, what is usually taken as a provocation of the media is the fact that they are not only mediating entities, but also forming our worldview – or, moreover, they can be the very worldview themselves. In post-structuralist media theories such as Baudrillard’s, the world disappears in the media or is simulated through them.¹⁵ Despite these considerations, the media play an undeniable role in our process of gathering knowledge of the world. Even though it might be manipulated and ideologically construed, it is the information transmitted, for example, by the radio, giving us insight into what is happening around the world. It seems that the media equally *reveal* and *hide* the world from us. They can open up new horizons of knowledge

12 The above abbreviations refer to the type of world – W_1 means “world 1”, etc.

13 Cf. Goodman, N., *The Ways of Worldmaking*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1978, especially pp. 1–22 (*I. Words, Works, Worlds*).

14 For Heidegger, there is only one world, a separate world of art does not exist; Popper would reserve “world 3” for the meanings of works of art, while Goodman would distinguish several artistic worlds depending on the way a work is created or realized.

15 Cf. as a paradigmatic example Baudrillard, J., *Simulacra and Simulation*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1994.

about the world that would slip our attention if we did not use them. Just think about the famous scientific discoveries that we owe to the use of telescopes and microscopes as “extensions” of the organ of sight, as Marshall McLuhan would put it.¹⁶ By using certain media, we expand and enrich our perception of reality. We can even create a world, as shown by the use of 3D technology throwing us into a virtual space via a display on our heads and thus granting us the experience of being in a space dislocated in relation to the one we are physically living in. Hence, some media allow us to move away from the world in a certain sense, to leave its (real) framework and find ourselves in some fictitious environment – sometimes a “good old” medium such as a book with its multitude of narrative worlds can be just enough.

The two-way relationship we establish with the world by using media – entering and leaving the world or approaching the life-world as well as moving away from it – can be labeled as the media’s *world-revealing* and *world-concealing* function or tendency. While the former is already thematized within the philosophy of art, it seems that the latter is rarely exemplified in an aesthetic context. That the art is blocking our view and depriving our senses to perceive the world, that the world is vanishing due to art and becoming estranged from us, that we ourselves are “getting lost” in the face of it – this perspective on art may seem unusual, but it is as real as the opposite one regarding art as oriented towards the world and opening it up for us. The task of this essay will therefore be to show how, through certain media, we can isolate ourselves from the outside world and get lost in our inner world – how we can remain deprived of the experience of the richness and opulence of the world, when we lose the Heideggerian “ground” under our feet. For this purpose, a somewhat unusual example was chosen – the example of *headphones*.

4.

Headphones can serve a variety of purposes. Initially, they were designed for military purposes, like a great number of other media, but their function has changed over time. Among other things, they are meant to preserve hearing, for example when encountering deafening noise (caused by a drill, heavy weapons, on an airplane runway, etc.). Here, we are primarily interested in *music headphones*, that is, headphones the purpose of which is to listen to music. We are exclusively focusing on the type of headphones that area means of intensifying aesthetic reception, primarily of musical works. Headphones serve to enhance the reception of a piece of music or other auditory content (radio broadcasts, recordings of lectures, podcasts, audio books, etc.). Their use should exclude disturbances from

16 Cf. McLuhan, M., *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Gingko Press, Berkeley, 2013.

the environment that could interfere with the listener's auditory experience. That way, they can focus on what they are listening to. The use of headphones should allow for a more immediate, one could even say a more intimate, relationship with the audio content. Therefore, there is obviously nothing problematic in a fan of musical art using this medium in order to ensure the highest possible sound quality and focus on the content of what they are listening to.

However, in the postmodern age of hypermedia, it seems that the purpose of putting headphones on one's ears (or inserting them into one's ear canal, in the case of a different headphone model) is increasingly deviating from the original one. Headphones are becoming the *decoration* of a certain attitude towards the world or, perhaps even more likely, the attitude of turning away from it. At the same time, they are becoming an expression of an auto-aesthetic attitude, which will be discussed later. This is supported by the increasingly diverse models of headphones: from those that are almost imperceptibly hidden in the ear shell to those equipped with a cable in countless variants (length, shape, color, etc.), and those resembling equipment we would imagine on (potential) visitors from space. It is not only the quality of the sound transmitted by the headphones that determines the selection of a specific model of headphones. Individual preferences concerning the shape, size, color, aesthetic design and sometimes the amount of money to be set aside for the purchase of certain headphones are meant to make the choice easier (while often making it harder).

Through everyday life and through the media, we are familiar with the sight of people listening to music while they are enjoying physical recreation (sports, jogging, etc.) or moments of mental relaxation (e.g., on the beach, during a break between work assignments, etc.). There are also examples of publicly known personalities, minor or major "stars" (from the world of sports or entertainment) with headphones on or in their ears – and the impression is that they are not interested in anything around them. Seemingly absorbed in their (auto)aesthetic experience, they seem to live in a world of their own, without contact or desire for contact with the outside world. We can sometimes notice this in the facial features or in the movements of those who have lost themselves in the music via headphones to such an extent that they somehow lose control over their body – or more precisely: their body begins to shake and vibrate, as if in some kind of trance. Unfortunately, it is no longer the kind of trance encountered during ritual actions in times past, which enabled members of a community to participate in the performance of a specially coded social event or even in the attempt of making contact with members of some transcendent world ("world of spirits" etc.) and which is still present today in the remaining indigenous communities.

5.

It seems that someone who has immersed themselves in "their world" to such an extent that they do not notice the world around them anymore, represents and

lives an attitude that was called *solipsistic* in the earlier philosophical tradition, denoting the assumption of the respective person's sole existence (*solus ipse*). If that kind of distancing from the world or shutting oneself away in one's own inner world occurs at the level of *aesthetic experiences*, then we are dealing with the predominance of *internal concentration* over *external*, as it is paradigmatically described in Moritz Geiger's phenomenological aesthetics.¹⁷ The amateurish recipient of works of art – as Geiger designates them – is focused on their inner experiences rather than the structure or, moreover, the very values of the work of art; only the recipient concentrating on structural and value-related aspects of a work is able to experience the *eidos* of that work, upon which their experience will be aesthetic in the original sense. "In the extreme case of inner concentration ... the object of taste is not the music, or the evening landscape, but the mood. Taste is quite certainly perceived as originating from the object, from the music, but it is not the taste concerning the object *itself*. Accordingly, *observation* of the object itself cannot possibly be at work here."¹⁸ Geiger describes *contemplation* as a process of keeping the object one takes pleasure in and the enjoying self at a distance, which, according to him, is the main prerequisite for aesthetic taste – without such contemplation, such observation, there is no aesthetic taste. "There is no doubt that only external concentration is a specific aesthetic posture; it is indispensable for understanding the work of art in its values, in its essential structural peculiarities; as opposed to this, the work of art in its specific form is of no interest for internal concentration; it merely serves as a stimulus for taste, as a means of evoking feelings of any kind, as a means of evoking delight, exultation, rapture, sensibility, emotionality, stirring."¹⁹ The aesthetic dilettante remains on the surface of the work of art, while the true esthete penetrates into its depth. Thus, internal and external concentration correspond to the division of the *aesthetic effects* of a work of art into *superficial* and *deep*.²⁰ The dilettante solipsistically enjoys their feeling or "mood" caused by the reception of the work, while the joy for the esthete lies in the valuable core of the work of art becoming accessible to them as a result of the contemplation of true pleasure.

In order to indicate this kind of withdrawal into oneself, when one enjoys acoustic experiences – regardless of whether they are of a distinctly aesthetic or only pseudo-aesthetic character –, we can use the neologism '*audio-solipsism*'.

17 Cf. a brief elaboration on Geiger's approach: Smiljanić, D., "Homo autoaestheticus", pp. 248–252.

18 Geiger, M., „Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses", *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*. Erster Band. Teil 2, hrsg. von Edmund Husserl, Halle a. d. S., 1913, pp. 567–684, quote: p. 637. (All quotations from Geiger's texts were translated by the author – D. S.)

19 Geiger, M., *Zugänge zur Ästhetik*, Der neue Geist Verlag, Leipzig, 1928, p. 15.

20 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 43–66.

Today's *audio-solipsist* simulates ecstasy while being stimulated by their favorite music or other auditory content. If we slightly modify Geiger's thought, we could say that such a listener does not enjoy the music itself but rather their individual experience of it. In this way, they are deprived of the (valuable) essence of the musical work, they remain only on its surface, without delving into its structure. Musical art thus becomes a mere stimulus to the inflated ego of today's consumer instead of subordinating the self to eidetic experience. Geiger was once aware of the fact that the listener of music is especially receptive to the superficial effects of art and that they easily fall into (apparent) ecstasy and surrender to their own sentiments and moods. "In no art form does the dilettantism of internally concentrated experience celebrate such orgies as in *music*."²¹ Geiger's description of musical dilettantism is striking: "What could a large percentage of laymen expect from music other than artistic laxity in inner concentration, what could a symphony represent for them other than a means to enjoy their own feelings. They are revealed by their glazed eyes, their *ecstatically* [emphasis added – D. S.] absent look. For them, music is a form of emotional surrender, a kind of opiate. The work of art itself, its structure, its thematic transformation, harmonic structure, means nothing to them. They want to be carried away by the swing of tones and get into a dreamy mood."²²

The comparison with ecstasy is not accidental. Even in the context of audio-solipsistic experience we are dealing with the loss of one's self in feelings and moods, in pseudo-aesthetic pleasure. In the audio-solipsistic experience, we can recognize both: elements of ecstasy and trance.²³ The body of the audio-solipsist can be both stationary and in motion; the headphones serve to isolate them from the environment, but they can turn up the volume of the music player so that the people around them can hear it; headphones help them to isolate themselves even if they are in a vehicle or crowded room; they do not face a physical or psychological crisis since they do not lose control over their body or their consciousness under the influence of music; the sense of hearing is overstimulated, it can be stimulated

²¹ Ibid., p. 18.

²² Ibid.

²³ The French ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget makes a distinction between *ecstasy* and *trance*. They are described as different borderline psychophysical states – according to him, features of the former are: immobility, silence, solitude, lack of crisis, deprivation of sensuality, vivid memory and the appearance of hallucinations; features of the latter are: movement, noise, company, appearance of crisis, irritation of the senses, amnesia and lack of hallucinations. Rouget is aware that these conditions can concur: "Ecstasy and trance must ... be regarded as constituting the opposite poles of a continuum, which are linked by an uninterrupted series of possible intermediary states, so that it is sometimes difficult to determine which of the two is involved." (Rouget, G., *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1985, p. 11.)

by amplifying the sound, which in extreme situations can lead to its damage; the audio-solipsist intensely relives the current moment, so there is no doubt about whether their memory is active or they are falling into amnesia; they are certainly not hallucinating, but it is quite possible that their imagination is active while listening to music, so that they are imagining something and enjoying the images appearing in their mind's eye. Audio-solipsistic posture or behavior has features of dismissing the world in order to – if only for a moment – enjoy one's own experiences by disconnecting from external events. The use of headphones should technically ensure that kind of isolation of one's own self from the outside world.

6.

Although it should serve to preserve hearing, the use of headphones can have the exact opposite effect: excessive sound amplification can result in hearing damage. Given the fact that an increase of only ten decibel can almost double the volume, even slowly turning up the volume can affect and ultimately compromise your own hearing over time. This effect can be surprising – we assume that someone putting on headphones in order to listen, for example, to music, wants to exclude sources of possible interference from their surroundings. However, if they listen to music too loudly, then the noise comes “from within”, the listener themselves produces it. This almost reverses the perspective: the noise is not in the outside world but in your own head. One of the main questions then is why music listeners do this – why do they turn up the volume, if it can distort the acoustic experience? Such actions can grow into maniacal behavior, even some kind of violence against one's own hearing, against oneself. We could even talk about “audio-masochism”. This is not limited to listeners of aggressive or frenetic music such as *heavy metal* or *rave* as genres of popular music. The damage can also occur when listening to less intense music. Headphones are of no help here, on the contrary, they can only deepen the problem.

The comparison with extreme mental states or even diseases does not stop there. It would be interesting to compare the adoption of an audio-solipsistic attitude with the behavior of *autistic* people. They can be observed to show signs of mental absence or to be detached from a situation. Audio-solipsists, too, show clear signs of ignoring the happenings in their environment, which cannot be compared to the kind of exaltation resulting from a strong focus on some content or meaning. By secretly observing the solipsistic listener in this way, it can seem to us that they show signs of mental distraction (they can be manifested in lip movements, unusual sounds they make in their ecstasy, unnatural head movements, body movements, etc.). By self-isolation (putting headphones on the ears or inserting them into the auditory canal), the audio-solipsist is cut off from the world, and the senselessness of their body movements is precisely the

consequence of removing the (surrounding) world as a background in relation to which a person's behavior is making sense. This self-immersion in the shallowness of one's own experience can have a fatal outcome, as shown by the examples of people who suffered serious injuries while walking or riding a bicycle with their headphones on, and in extreme cases even lost their lives, if they, engrossed in the musical experience, committed traffic violations, for example when crossing the railway line. Similarly, an increasing number of mobile phone users, staring at the screen of their devices, neglect what is happening around them and put themselves (or others) in danger due to their carelessness. Thus, media autism can have fatal consequences.

7.

It is time to summarize our considerations on audio-solipsism. They must be put in the wider historical context of media reception and the way the media influence our perception of reality. As media history has repeatedly shown, the twinge of auto-aesthetic aspirations has turned the original functional or pragmatic impetus of the media to enable communication or at least facilitate it into a purely hedonistic motive to enjoy one's own experience of reality without knowing the intramundane character of the experience itself. It would not take us very far to justify the division into two types of reception – superficial and deep²⁴ – by the aesthetic character of what is listened to: the problem lies precisely in the fact that even an apparently competent listener of classical music can abuse headphones in an audio-solipsistic manner. The opposite case is also possible: that we can recognize the structures that are usually found in the compositions of classical creators (such examples are abound in *jazz music* or certain subgenres such as *fusion* or *prog rock*) by deeply listening to tracks from the domain of popular music. Neither do we need to share the propositions of Heidegger's fundamental ontology nor those of Geiger's phenomenology of aesthetic experience in order to be aware that the success of the reception of works of art depends on whether they have a recognizable ability to reveal the world to us – both in its facticity and in its ecstasity (the earth and the realm of values), and not on whether we, as sensory beings, are satisfied with it or not. *Fulfilling*, mentioned by Geiger, certainly exceeds a sensory stimulation – it may even be quite the opposite.

The ecstatic dimension of the artistic experience would again have to be transferred from solipsistic exaltation (literally) to the base of “worldliness” [*Welthaftigkeit*] as a key element of the work of art. Or, to use a quasi-Heideggerian expression: *The work worlds*. [*Das Werk weltet.*] Audio-solipsism forces us to escape into private worlds, and the understanding of artistic meaning freed from sentiment reveals the world as the common basis of all individual subjective

24 Analogous to Geiger's division of aesthetic effects.

experiences, which gives them a deeper meaning. Thus, we must postulate an adequate *use* of the medium of headphones: using them to delve into the world-revealing essence of a work of art, the listener can concentrate²⁵ even more on the work itself, which makes their experience of the meaning and value of the work more substantial. Therefore, it is not about rejecting the use of headphones, but about using them appropriately. Only the participation of several recipients in the act of watching, listening to or otherwise perceiving a work of art allows for a kind of participation in the occurrence of art uniting people as members of a virtual community, namely a community of aesthetic subjects. This does not mean that a work of art can only unfold its true essence through public performance, but that the involvement of a larger group of people in an aesthetic experience is more likely to create an aesthetic atmosphere than headphones on or in our ears, confining listening to music to a stimulus for private experiences.

In the end, we can recognize a paradox: seemingly isolating oneself from the world through headphones (preventing external events from disturbing one's inner sensation, i.e. contemplation), the listener surrenders to deciphering the world-revealing meaning that the artist has woven into their work. The symbolic representative of the figure of the audio-solipsistic consumer of art is the haughty narcissistic *sportsperson* with hypermodern high-tech headphones reducing the music they are listening to a drug-like stimulant. The world-revealing and -affirming recipient of art, on the other hand, is symbolized by the *hermit* wearing headphones, who in their isolation and loneliness, although seemingly turning their back to the world around them, affirm the world as a "condition of possibility" providing inspiration for such a productive escape from everyday reality. Let us, therefore, unhesitatingly highlight the following motto on our shirts: HEADPHONES ON – VOLUME DOWN – IGNORE YOUR EGO AND ENJOY THE WORLD!

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THE INTERESTED SCIENCE: BETWEEN POPULARIZATION AND PROPAGANDA¹

Abstract: At a time when science is highly professionalized, the need of scientists, the scientific community, and funders of scientific projects for appropriate promotion in society comes to the fore. In view of that, science was often (and still is) closely related with politics and media. The promotion of science is often done in the form of popularization of science, but also often in the form of propaganda either. In the paper, with a brief overview of the coronavirus pandemic, the connection between these two types of science promotion is explored in more detail.

Keywords: science, media, promotion, propaganda, popularization

As Immanuel Kant claimed, the interests of science (“the interest of reason”) can be theoretical and practical. The goal of theoretical science is to achieve knowledge (here we can add: explanation, understanding, prediction if available), while the goal of practical science is to achieve well-being². Bearing in mind that there is no science without scientists, and that the scientific community is, as a rule, interested in promoting its solutions, about science itself can be said that it is “interested” as well. Today this is obvious, but it should be said that science has always been like that, regardless of the fact that the distinction between theory and practice dates back to ancient times³. However, such a distinction, as is known, by no means led to the separation of the two domains, but quite contrary, it supports

1 The paper is a translation of slightly modified version of the paper, adapted for the needs of this bilingual collection, which was published in Serbian in the thematic volume *Filozofija medija: Mediji i nauka (The Philosophy of Media: Media and Science)*, edited by D. Vuksanović et al.; Belgrade: Aesthetic Society of Serbia, 2023, pp. 107–118.

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2 Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 677.

3 See, for example, Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, book VI.

the claim of their mutual intertwining. Thus, for example, Lucian of Samosata ridiculed the members of certain schools, who neglected questions about the blessed life, likewise Epictetus, who had in mind those philosophers who were only interested in logical paradoxes⁴. Competition between philosophical schools was a commonplace in antiquity, which can be seen, for example, in many of Plato's dialogues, and was sometimes depicted in the form of satire, as in Lucian's "Philosophies for Sale"⁵. In Plato's *Protagoras*, in which the old Protagoras and the young Socrates argue about the benefits of Protagoras' teaching, Protagoras is depicted as a charismatic sophist surrounded by his followers, who enchants them "with his voice like Orpheus, while they follow where the voice sounds, enchanted"⁶.

A clear expression of the idea that science is interested can be found in Arthur Schopenhauer, who considered the intellect (and the brain), with which we do science, a means of survival⁷. David Hume also emphasized the benefits of science for society as a whole⁸, and a similar thought was expressed by Ivo Andrić: "Man can observe nature with the aim of getting to know it, in order to defend themselves from it, or use for their purposes. Woe to those who observe it with different intentions, thoughts and feelings"⁹.

Here, however, it is important to point out that the interest of science and [of] the scientific community should not be equated with partiality, given that impartiality during research, sooner or later, pays off more than partiality and the mere pursuit of immediate benefit¹⁰. In the natural sciences, this was emphasized

4 See, for example, Епиктет, *О питањима карактера и моралног избора*, Српска књижевна задруга. Београд, 2019, book 3; Лукијан из Самосате, „Мудрост на продају!”, in: Лукијан из Самосате: *Изабрани списи*, Српска књижевна задруга, Београд, 2017.

5 Лукијан из Самосате, „Мудрост на продају!”, in: Лукијан из Самосате: *Изабрани списи*.

6 Plato, Protagoras. In: W. R. M. Lamb (ed. and transl.), *Plato: Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus*, Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge MA and London, 1952, p. 113.

7 See, for example, Schopenhauer, A., *The World as Will and Representation* (vol. 2), Dover Publications, New York NY, 1966, section 22; on this basis Schopenhauer built his evolutionary argument in support of transcendental idealism; see Young, J., *Schopenhauer*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, pp. 28–32.

8 Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis IN and Cambridge MA, 1983.

9 Andrić, I., *Знакови pored puta (osmo izdanje)*, Sezam book, Zrenjanin, 2017, p. 129; transl. D. P.

10 In this regard, Russell emphasized that impartiality is one of the important achievements of the Renaissance understanding of education, in which, as a rule, higher education was primarily available to aristocrats. Russell believed that even in the industrial

by Pierre Duhem, who at the beginning of the 20th century criticized the purely modeling approach in physics, which did not strive for its systematization. Here is what he wrote about the alleged usefulness of such an approach to industry¹¹:

“We shall remind industrialists, who have no care for the accuracy of a formula provided it is convenient, that the simple but false equation sooner or later becomes, by an expected act of revenge of logic, the undertaking which fails, the dike which bursts, the bridge which crashes; it is financial ruin when it is not the sinister reaper of human lives”¹².

When it comes to the promotion of ideas, let us recall the famous radio debate between Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston in 1948, in which Russell at one point criticized the cosmological argument, referring, among other things, to the results of modern logic, of which he was one of the founders. When Copleston reminded [Russell] that the plausibility of Russell’s argumentation largely depends on the acceptability of that new logic¹³, Russell replied:

“When the logic that you use was new, namely in the time of Aristotle, there had to be a great deal of fuss made about it. Aristotle made a lot of fuss about that logic. Nowadays, it’s become old and respectable, and you don’t have to make so much fuss about it. The logic that I believe in is comparatively new, and therefore I have to imitate Aristotle in making a fuss about it”¹⁴.

In general, Bertrand Russell can serve as a good example of a great philosopher who was well aware that the promotion of scientific (philosophical) ideas is very important and, who himself, as is known, in parallel with his theoretical work, was many times in the role of a political activist. He stressed the

age, in which science became largely dependent on the market, impartiality was important to protect the public interest from the interests of non-state corporations (Russell, B., *On Education*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010, chapter 18).

11 At the end of the 19th century, science came into an even closer relationship with industry (see, for example, Mumford, L., *Technics and Civilization*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1934, section 5.2).

12 Duhem, P., *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*. Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1991, p. 93.

13 Russell, B., and Copleston, F., „Text of the Russell-Copleston Debate”. in: F. Leal and H. Marraud (ed.), *How Philosophers Argue: An Adversarial Collaboration on the Russell-Copleston Debate*, Springer, Cham, 2022, p. 472.

14 Russell, B., and Copleston, F., “Text of the Russell-Copleston Debate”. in: F. Leal and H. Marraud (ed.), *How Philosophers Argue: An Adversarial Collaboration on the Russell-Copleston Debate*, 2022, p. 472.

importance of the phenomena studied by social psychology when he criticized certain theories of society, such as Marxism – like, for example, in his *Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, published after his meeting with Lenin and Trotsky – which he characterized it as “an impatient philosophy, which aims at creating a new world without sufficient preparation in the opinions and feelings of ordinary men and women”¹⁵.

Promotion is mainly done through popularization and propaganda, and it should be remembered that both words have changed their meanings over time. Today it is often (truthfully, not always) considered that popularization is something good and propaganda something bad¹⁶, but we also know that it was not always like that. The word “propaganda”, as is known, dates back to the 17th century, when it occurred in the name of the Catholic Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. In his famous book *Propaganda* from 1928, Edward Bernays recalled that this word acquired a negative meaning over time, primarily due to its misuse in the First World War¹⁷. It is noticeable that the use of the word “propaganda” varied at the time when Bernays wrote his book, depending on whether it was considered something positive or not. Commonly known examples of this are the abbreviation “Agitprop” (“agitation-propaganda”)¹⁸ or the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, headed by Joseph Goebbels in Germany in the 1930s¹⁹: it is obvious that supporters of communism and national socialism, unlike their critics, considered their use of the word „propaganda” to be affirmative. Probably, the forerunner of such institutions was the British Ministry of Information, which is noted by some authors, who claim that the Nazi propaganda was largely a reaction to British propaganda during the First World War, when it was clearly seen that propaganda could be a powerful weapon

15 Russell, B., *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1920, p. 7.

16 For example, in the public today, it is not uncommon to hear that someone had a contribution (or was awarded for it) in the popularization of science, but it is rare to hear that someone received an award for scientific propaganda.

17 Bernays, E., *Propaganda*, Horace Liveright, New York, 1928, p. 21. When it comes to propaganda, Bernays pointed out that “how much of the child remains in the average adult”, and provided a common example: “A group of citizen writes and talks in favor of a certain course of action in some debatable question, believing that it is promoting the best interest of the community. Propaganda? Not a bit of it. Just a plain forceful statement of truth. But let another group of citizens expressing opposing views, and they are promptly labeled with the sinister name of propaganda” (ibid., pp. 22–23).

18 See, for example, Kenéz, P., *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

19 Welch, D., “Introduction: Propaganda in Historical Perspective”, in: N. J. Cull, D. Culbert and D. Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present*, ABC CLIO, Santa Barbara CA, Denver CO and Oxford, 2003, p. xv.

in “total war”, in which not only professional armies participate, but the broad masses of the people as well²⁰. Moreover, Bernays also believed that a democratic society cannot function normally without appropriate propaganda, which offers a guidance in the public sphere in an endless amount of information²¹. Russell thought similarly in some of his writings, such as *Power: A New Social Analysis*, and others²². In the 1930s and 1940s, this theme was particularly prominent, and the relationship between scientific and/or technological achievements and mass media is thematized in the famous modern dystopian novels, such as Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*²³ and George Orwell’s *1984*²⁴. Russell, on the one hand, considered propaganda a necessary segment of a democratic society, but he was, on the other hand, also aware of the need to control it so that such a society would not become autocratic²⁵.

When it comes to popularization, it should be remembered that there are prizes for the popularization of science, such as the UNESCO Kalinga Prize. According to Julian Huxley, this organization aimed to achieve a “scientific humanism” aimed at ensuring peace and security in the world after the horrors of the Second World War²⁶. In some circles, at least in principle, popularization was conceived as a means of suppressing propaganda (as, for example, in the

20 Welch, D., “Introduction: Propaganda in Historical Perspective”, in: N. J. Cull, D. Culbert and D. Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present*, pp. xvi–xviii.

21 Bernays, E., *Propaganda*.

22 See, for example, Russell, B., *Free Thought and Official Propaganda*, Watts & Co., London, 1922; Russell, B., *The Scientific Outlook*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1931.

23 Huxley, A., *Brave New World*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1932.

24 Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1949.

25 See, for example, Russell, B., *Power: A New Social Analysis*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London, 1938, chapter 18.

26 See Huxley, J., *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy*, Euston Grove Press, London, 2010. Of course, the awarding of prizes in the sphere of science and art can be imbued with an appropriate ideology. There were (and still are) many awards in which scientific or other achievement overlapped with ideological suitability, such as the Stalin Prize, in which Agitprop was one of the decision-making steps in its awarding (Chengzang Z., “The Stalin Prize in Science and Engineering: Between Propaganda and Professional Recognition”, *Всесвітня історія*, 32, 2021, p. 258). It is also widely known that the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the German journalist and pacifist, Carl von Ossietzky (victim of the Nazis), in 1935 prompted Hitler to forbid his own citizens to receive it and to establish the German National Prize for Art and Science, which was awarded very briefly due to the collapse of the Third Reich (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_National_Prize_for_Art_and_Science).

Ideological conflicts were often fought in the field of science, as, for example, during the Cold War (see, for example, A., *Freedom’s Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 2018).

text “Popularization of Science”, published in *Nature* on April 3, 1937), and Watson Davis, one of the most active promoters of science at that time, believed that the importance of science for humanity had become crucial, and therefore communicating scientific results and forming an appropriate scientific attitude in the wider population [was necessary, was imperative, was required]²⁷. Davies’ research *A Survey of the Interpretation of Science to the Public* from 1939, however, belonged to the domain of “grey literature” (it was not officially published), and Martin Lafollette explains this fact by saying that the conclusion of Davies’ study was not in favor the original expectations (or wishes) of the person who ordered the study (the Rockefeller Foundation) because, among other things, it took into account representations of science in the media that deviated from how certain experts understood its nature²⁸. This may suggest that popularization, on the one hand, should prevent propaganda (if we understand it as something that is bad), but that, on the other hand, it does not have to be value neutral either. Furthermore, it may be noted that at one point in a 1935 speech, Davis used the words “popularization” and “propaganda” (and “publicity”) interchangeably²⁹.

Popularization implies, among other things, the simplification of certain scientific results with the aim of making them receptive to the widest audience. In this regard, one can mention the conclusion of a study conducted in Germany, which suggests that the popularization of science can create the impression among non-scientific audiences that science is an activity that is “too easy” an, which is certainly not the case³⁰. A potential disadvantage of popularization is that it, as a rule, simplifies popularized theories, which can lead to the distortion of their original meaning. Among many examples, let us recall attempts to popularize Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, a book that many of Kant’s contemporaries considered difficult to understand. Thus, for example, Friedrich Bouterweck – in a letter to Kant, which Ludwig Borowski printed as an attachment to his work, which represents one of the first Kant biographies (the only one Kant had the opportunity to read during his lifetime)³¹ – pointed out that Kant’s examples of synthetic *a priori* judgments in geometry are more convincing than those offered by Kant in

27 Davis, W., “Science and the Press”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 219, 1942, p. 106.

28 See Lafollette, M. C., “Whose ‘Science’ Is This? Reflection on a 1930s Survey of Popular Science”, *Journal of Science and Popular Culture*, 1, 2018, pp. 5–12.

29 Davis, W., “The Distribution of Science”. *Address Before American Association of Museum in Washington*, May 24, 1935, p. 2.

30 Scharrer, L., Rupieper, Y., Stadler, M., and Bromme, R., “When Science Becomes Too Easy: Science Popularization Inclines Laypeople to Underrate Their Dependence on Experts”, *Public Understanding of Science*, 26 (8), 2017, pp. 1003–1018.

31 See Borovski, L., „Prikaz života i karaktera Imanuela Kanta”, in: *Ko je bio Kant? Tri biografije od Kantovih saradnika*, Plato, Beograd, 2003, pp. 5–116.

arithmetic (and thus he used the former rather than the latter in his exposition of Kant's philosophy), but that their omission may give the false impression that Kant thought that there are no such judgments in arithmetic. Bouterwek commented on it with the words: "But that is how it is with popularization"³². In the same letter, Bouterwek expressed the view that presenting Kant's work in a Platonic-type dialogic form could contribute to its popularization. On the other hand, Karl Reinhold, as is known, tried to bring Kant's *Critique* to a wider audience by reversing the order of its presentation: instead of presenting at the beginning Kant's insights about synthetic judgments *a priori*, the possibility of justification of mathematics, physics and metaphysics, he emphasized the importance Kant's practical philosophy and its relevance to religion, to which, presumably, a wider readership was more receptive³³.

Now, let us turn to the recent example of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which was in focus during 2020–2021, and single out some details that might be relevant to our purposes. This pandemic can serve as a good example in which the media, science, politics and expertise (often politically motivated) were intertwined, and which often led to the legitimization and attempts to realize Orwellian scenarios³⁴. Political decision-makers in many countries often portrayed themselves in public as those who rely upon expert advice, yet it is noticeable that this was often done by „post-truth politicians”, who found themselves in power during the pandemic, and who in the recent past often ignored or openly ridiculed the views of experts on many questions³⁵. It would seem, at least at first sight, that

32 Bouterwek F., „Bouterwek Kantu”, prilog uz tekst Ludviga Borovskog „Prikaz života i karaktera Imanuela Kanta”, in: *Ko je bio Kant? Tri biografije od Kantovih saradnika*, Plato, Beograd, 2003, p 111; transl. D. P.

33 For details, see Reinhold, K. L., *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005. In this regard, Karl Ameriks thinks that such popularization of Kant's philosophy weakened it to some extent, given that it was portrayed as dependent on an argument that was more demanding to defend (Ameriks, K., „Introduction”. in: K. Ameriks (ed.), *Karl Leonhard Reinhold: Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. xi–xii).

34 I addressed these issues in more detail in Прелевић, Д., „Постистина у време пандемије”, in: М. Бодин (ed.), *Зборник излагања 2020. / 20. Међународна филозофска школа Felix Romuliana [Зајечар], 29–30. август 2020*, Установа Народно позориште Тимочке Крајине – Центар за културу „Зоран Радмиловић”, Центар за примењену филозофију и друштвена истраживања, Београд, 2022, pp. 70–88; Прелевић, Д., „Пандемија и критика”, in: А. Лукић (ed.), *Патриотизам у доба пандемије: зборник радова*, Институт за политичке студије; Српско филозофско друштво, Београд, 2022, pp. 253–259.

35 See Прелевић, Д., „Постистина у време пандемије”, in: М. Бодин (ed.), *Зборник излагања 2020. / 20. Међународна филозофска школа Felix Romuliana [Зајечар], 29–30. август 2020*.

science and expertise finally got a significant role in legitimizing certain political decisions, but the case was actually reversed, given that, significantly, the false representation of science and reliability of certain scientific results occurred³⁶.

At this point, a contrast can be made between journalistic reporting in sports and the one we have in science. It is common knowledge that there is little sport in science (science, as has been said so far, is interested, and there is competition in the scientific community) as well as that there is little science in sport. When it comes to sports, or at least those sports that attract the most media attention at a given moment, an ordinary citizen can easily find out (by reading newspapers, watching television, listening to the radio, searching the Internet) who are the best athletes or teams. There, a clear difference can be made between winning (or participating) in a prestigious tournament and the same undertaking in, let us say, a fair competition.

However, this is often not the case in the world of science, and this was clearly evident during the coronavirus pandemic. In contrast to sports, it is for sure (surveys are not required for such an insight) that randomly selected respondents would be marginally able to enumerate several of the world's most famous epidemiologists and their views regarding the declared coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, it is generally known that in the domestic media „doctors whom the nation trusts” (as they were sometimes called; and not only doctors, but also veterinarians, and others), were present almost every day, unlike the world's most famous epidemiologists today. And while a local epidemiologist said (in April 2020) that the coronavirus pandemic is “more severe than any cataclysm”³⁷, the world-famous epidemiologist, John Ioannidis, stated in the same time (and later) completely conflicting insights³⁸. It might be said that their presence in the domestic media was in inverse proportion to their scientific rank in the world of epidemiology.

The coronavirus pandemic was marked by a kind of tyranny of expertise, which was most often reflected in the false representation of the nature of science and scientific rationality. Although Russell reminded long time ago that the critical reflection of reality is a hallmark of scientific inquiry, unlike certain religions and

36 For more details, see Прелевић, Д., „Модалност и епидемиолошки модели”, in: Н. Цекић (ed.), *Етика и истина у доба кризе*, Филозофски факултет, Београд, 2021, стр. 219–234; Прелевић, Д., „Постистина у време пандемије”, у: М. Бодин (прир.), *Зборник излагања 2020. / 20. Међународна филозофска школа Felix Romuliana [Зајечар]*, 29–30. август 2020.; Прелевић, Д., „Пандемија и критика”, in: А. Лукић (ed.), *Патриотизам у доба пандемије: зборник радова*.

37 See news available at <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/kon-pandemija-je-prirodna-katastrofa-zesca-od-bilo-kakve-kataklizme/>

38 See, for example, Ioannidis, J., “A Fiasco in the Making? As the Coronavirus Pandemic Takes Hold, We Are Making Decisions without Reliable Data”, *Stat*, March 17, 2020.

ideologies, in which militant dogmatism prevails³⁹, one gets the impression that such an insight rests on an idealized image of science rather than on how it is actually practiced. The idea that non-experts (or, more precisely, those who are not members of corresponding crisis staffs) have no right to question the opinions and decisions of experts was imposed in the public discourse, whereby the term “non-experts” often referred to physicians as well (even in the case of prominent scientists) who did not complete appropriate specializations (for example, in epidemiology or immunology), but some others, no matter how similar they were to those who were named “experts”⁴⁰. This also departs from earlier practice, in which investigative journalism was an important corrective to medical (and not only medical) expertise. It is enough to remind that journalists played an important role in exposing certain affairs. In this connection, there is a well-known case involving thalomid, a sedative that, among other things, was given to pregnant women for pain relief, but which, unfortunately, led to the birth of children with disabilities. This scandal was exposed by *The Sunday Times* journalist, Harold Evans, and his work contributed significantly to preventing the further distribution of this drug for the abovementioned purpose⁴¹. The next famous example is that of the MMR vaccine and a paper published in *The Lancet*, in which it was claimed that a link between receiving the vaccine and autism in children is not ruled out⁴². A journalist (also of *The Sunday Times*) with a philosophical background, Brian Deer, not an expert in medicine or pharmacology, disclosed that the lead author, Andrew Wakefield, had a conflict of interest and found out research illogicalities, which, after some time, led to the withdrawal of the mentioned paper from

39 See, for example, his account of Bolshevism in Russell B., *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1920; see also Russell, B., *Free Thought and Official Propaganda*, Watts & Co., London, 1922.

40 I have provided one such illustration in Прелевић, Д., „Постистина у време пандемије“, in: М. Бодин (ed.), *Зборник излагања 2020. / 20. Међународна филозофска школа Felix Romuliana [Зајечар]*, 29–30. август 2020.; see also Раденовић, Љ., и Нуркић, П., „Епистемички ауторитет и реторичке стратегије у кризним околностима“, in: Н. Цекић (ed.), *Етика и истина у доба кризе*, Филозофски факултет, Београд, 2021, pp. 153–180; Цвејић, С., „‘Струка’ у раљама политичке моћи: Манипулација медицинским делом Кризног штаба током пандемије ковида 19“, in: И. Спасић (ed.), *Пандемија, друштво и симболички поредак: Јавни дискурс у/о кризи изазваној пандемијом ковида 19*, Филозофски факултет, Београд, 2021, pp. 47–65.

41 The example is taken from Todorović, N., *Interpretativno & istraživačko novinarstvo*, Čigoja, Beograd, 2002.

42 Wakefield, A., et. al., “Hilar-lymphoid-nodular Hyperplasia, Non-specific Colitis, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder in Children”, *The Lancet*, 351, 1998, pp. 637–641 (retracted in 2010).

the journal⁴³. Finally, in recent scientific practice there are known examples of gross falsification of research data, such as the one attributed to the Dutch social psychologist, Diederik Stapel, many of whose papers were withdrawn from the journals in which he published them⁴⁴.

It also happened that some experts became dissidents overnight during the coronavirus pandemic. One example is the former vice president of the Pfizer company, Michael Yeadon, who shortly after leaving the company expressed doubts about the safety checks of the vaccine and the need for its indiscriminate use, and was then presented in the media as one of the icons of the anti-vax movement⁴⁵. Among many examples, one can cite one in which a whistleblower informed the public in the *British Medical Journal* about potential Pfizer's failings during the performance of a key study on the basis of which their product was approved as a prevention against COVID-19⁴⁶. Such news, which by all journalistic standards would be breaking news, initially went almost unnoticed in the English- and German-speaking media⁴⁷. In this respect, one gets the impression that top medical journals have taken over the role of daily newspapers, of course, with much less visibility.

During the coronavirus pandemic, it was shown (for the umpteenth time) that the media can be, as is often said, a window to the world, but sometimes provides an obscured view. The official media, public broadcasting services[,] and reality channels with national frequencies were many times significantly below the expected level when it comes to adequate reporting during the coronavirus pandemic. Investigative journalism had to be sought elsewhere.

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43 For more details, Deer, B., *The Doctor Who Fooled the World: Science, Deception, and the War on Vaccines*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 2020; Wakefield's view of the whole case can be found, for example, in Wakefield, A., *Waging War on the Autistic Child: The Arizona 5 and the Legacy of Baron von Munchausen*, Skyhorse Publishing, New York NY, 2012.

44 Taken from Ritchie, S., *Science Fictions: How Fraud, Negligence, and Hype Undermine the Search for Truth*, Metropolitan Books, New York NY, 2020, Preface.

45 See, for example, Stecklow, S., and Macaskill, A., "The Ex-Pfizer Scientist Who Became an Anti-Wax Hero", *Reuters*, March 18, 2021.

46 See Thacker, P., "Covid-19: Researcher Blows the Whistle on Data Integrity Issues in Pfizer's Vaccine Trial", *British Medical Journal*, 375:n2635, 2021.

47 See Bruckner, T., "PfizerGate: Media Silence about Vaccine Trial Scandal Lets FDA and Pfizer off the Hook" (updated). *TranspariMED*, November, 4, 2021.

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Robot's Wish
Oil and UV paint on aluminum
120 × 190 cm
2009

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IDEOLOGICAL NATURE OF THE MEDIA: THE EXAMPLE OF VIDEO-GIFS

Abstract: The media image – the image mediated by media means – shapes individual and group identity to a certain extent. Beyond any real doubt, the media are technical means that convey the ideological constructs of the government. A video-gif is a media expression of the audience's creativity, made with reasonably available means, to capture the essence of a current event. These low-quality images flood the Internet – they are unclear, edited, shortened or multiplied situations. Studying the forms of media means is necessary for understanding contemporary social reality and uncovering the algorithms of creating new historical mythologems, which aim either to change or to spoil the representation of the real (as many as there are). Relatively old/new terms such as “media revolution”, “media war”, “media hero” or “media personality” warn of the existence of a new historical reality with new historical figures.

Keywords: media image, video-gif, ideology, social consciousness

Studying the forms of media means is nowadays understood as necessary for understanding contemporary social reality and uncovering the algorithms of creating new historical mythologems, which aim either at changing or at corrupting the representation of reality (of course, insofar as reality can be talked about at all). Relatively new concepts such as media revolution, media war, media hero or media personality warn of a new historical reality with new (newly composed, sic!) historical figures that often do not exist. In another important sense, examples of such personalities can be Edward Snowden (the man who proved Big Brother and that he does not live in Moscow), Julian Assange (the man who exposed the crimes and intellectual-technological means of the Empire in the media), Jeremy Simmerman (the man who demonstrated the technique inside the very devices that enable the deprivation of privacy) or Mark Zuckerberg (the owner of Facebook).

The media image – the image mediated by media means – shapes individual and group identity to a certain extent. Beyond any real doubt, the media are technical means that convey the ideological constructs of the government. Here, above all, we have in mind the “most up-to-date”, “ultimate” carriers of action: the

Internet, television and mobile phones (including their smart variants). The media image forms general and individual opinions regarding various issues, managing and directing the construction of what is presented, as well as the judgment about it. As the dependence of the postmodern subject on the media is dramatically greater compared to earlier eras, the question of the relationship to what they reveal becomes increasingly important. For Baudrillard, “[t]he very definition of the real is: what can be reproduced” refers to media reproduction, which slowly breaks away from all real elements.

Video gifs are a relatively new phenomenon within the media space, which democratically and popularly, usually with small means, produces the dissemination of certain ideas and opinions. In her 2012 essay “In defense of a bad image” (Steyerl 2012), media expert Hito Steyerl conceived the significance of the phenomenon she calls “poor image”. It’s about unclear, edited, shortened, low-quality images flooding the internet. On the other hand, for Kate Miltner and Tim Highfield, “flexibility and versatility are the keys to the gif’s capacity for interpretive flexibility; by separating the gif from its original text, it can imbue it with multiple layers of meaning, which may not be universally accessible to all audiences”¹.

The spread of a certain medium, as well as the artistic, social and political initiative of the audience, is directly related to technological development: it is a tautology, a commonplace in the “crisis of common places.” Nowadays, there is a high-resolution camera in every modern mobile phone, so it is quite easy to record random or playful visual moments or to edit and retouch any photo or movie. It is also easy to post your own images online. Is it freedom of expression or just visual bait for wasting time?

Also, social networks such as Facebook, VK, WhatsApp, Viber or Telegram Web have become accessible and fast, and on chat portals more “exchange” is done with images (stickers, smileys, and memes) than with text – they have become far more effective. For example, Instagram represents a glaring example of symbolic social exchange on a visual level; there, history, past, biographies, significant events, and surroundings are almost entirely expressed through photography. For everyone, there is a picture, animation, screenshot, video clip, or “avatar” that represents us in communication with others. Graham Parkes even claims he “distinguishes several ways in which video can be used in the practice of philosophy.”²

The production of a high-quality cinematographic product has always been linked to a system of expensive culture, high-quality studio production, and the

1 Miltner, K., Highfield, T., *Never Gonna GIF You Up: Analyzing the Cultural Significance of the Animated GIF*, Social Media + Society, Vol. 3, pp. 1–11, 2017, p. 2.

2 Parkes, G., *Thinking Images: Doing Philosophy in Film and Video*, Educational perspectives, Vol. 42, pp. 36–46, 2009, p. 37.

cult of the original. In expensive blockbusters or glossy magazines, the ideas of happiness and success are conveyed with the help of “beautiful pictures” and video gifs, which are naturally associated with purchasing something. Visually today, as always, it serves wealth and power.

Accordingly, the low resources required to create video gifs can, of course, grow indefinitely according to the medium’s influence among other media. He will by himself, i.e., as a medium, in any case, be very quickly oversaturated with the most expensive variants within its domain, and so it is with video-gifs. Larger, optimized investments have greater ideological and ideological influence. The medium served money, and the artistic aspect was always relegated to the margins or used for purposes of acceptability for the target consumer group. So far, it seems that anything that a gifted individual can create can be reproduced and used by the ruling system for its own ends. The video-gif, again, at least ostensibly, breaks the hierarchy; internet memes rely precisely on online non-market solidarity. High-quality media saw the danger in the “visual underground”, which essentially expresses the polyvalent interest and protest of the audience.

Here we can also talk about pirated copies of otherwise quality products, which the system tries to keep under control, as well as the destruction of the “sacred original.” For example, earlier in the USSR, not everyone could paint Lenin’s portrait, but only selected painters; a child at school was not allowed to draw a picture of Vladimir Ilyich on the day of the great October Revolution. Today, there are no more inviolable characters – everything can now be crossed out, acquired, criticized, or given a romantic or comical aspect. The terms “original” and “copy” are completely relativized. Each result is endlessly redacted, imitated, reproduced, supplemented, multiplied, etc. The video-gif has nothing to do with reality, “We can re-edit the cut parts of the body and make a body that does not exist in reality, only in editing ... A form of life that exists only in editing and through editing.”³ Moreover, he is creating his own reality because the reality of his conditions is nevertheless “hardly” real.

Media exist only in permanent transformation; they are like a film strip, which can simply stand still, but which we can cut, twisted like a Möbius strip, then put together again and shown again. There is no final frame, just as there is no director or screenwriter – that’s the appeal of video gifs. It is open to the creativity of the masses, in Benjaminian terms. The video-gif emerges as a lightning bolt of already completed and/or other events. The author of this or that popular clip may not repeat his previous success because there is no reputation, no prestige, and no stable rating (by the way, no money). There is no constant creativity, but every idea on any topic can be shown so accurately and precisely that it will be viewed by millions, which in one moment leads to resonance, a multiplying effect and an increase in the flux of communication through the head media.

3 Steyerl, H., *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, London, 2012, p. 187.

The video-gif also introduces us to the reality of the carnival through its masks and opposition to prohibitions and hierarchy (Stein 2012). Like the carnival, it is the devil to all perpetuation, completion and end. Consequently, the video-gif carries an ideological point at the same time. In its change, it is never equal to the original and always carries the necessary metaphors and metonymies with it. There is no original because the film itself is not an original but a copy. His masks are born in a kind of liberating process. Steyerl writes that in modern times for the media, “[p]roduction ... is endlessly edited and recombined”⁴. And along with that, there is always an intended gap in the video-gif, which can be filled with your own interpretation. The video-gif is, in a way, similar to a carnival mask or costume.

The most famous mask in our time is the Guy Fawkes face mask from the movie *V for Vendetta*. “The mask of Guy Fawkes was adapted ... it spread as a viral, visual symbol of contemporary discontent”. In the film, it symbolizes an anonymous protest against the totalitarian system (it has been five years and it has become clear to the blind where Big Brother lives). By the way, this character was taken as its logo by the hacker organization Anonymous, speaking out against copyright policy in the US. This meaning of the aforementioned mask became transparent to all participants of various movements, from the Occupy Wall Street movement to the rallyists on Balatnaya Square in Moscow.

Video gifs can be doubly “dangerous”; they not only support the creation of a personal world of illusion but are also loyal agents of globalization. Availability replaces endless repetition – open conversation is conducted with hateful words. External impression instead of depth. Dazzled by brilliance instead of self-awareness. Steyerl says, “mimetic attitude towards the conditions to be criticized, a populist form of blind faith.” These are the formulas of aesthetic production. A video gif can be about anything, even if it is a simple repetition of something previous, and with that rudimentary possibility of new additions over and over again, it, together with the totality of all media, shows a tendency towards an infinite and immortal reality.

Video gifs are, therefore, part of a wider socio-political force created to rearrange reality. In the modern world, the artistic initiatives of the audience/mass are “flourishing” – reading, viewing, and writing. They all consider themselves writers, poets, photographers or directors (they would also consider themselves philosophers if philosophy were in fashion). Technical progress allows everyone to express themselves literary, make small films, make animations, or take photographs.

Graphomania and photomania spread unauthentically and occupy the territory of yesterday’s true artistic space. The author’s death was talked about half a century ago, when in Japan, during the literary awarding, it turned out that the

4 Steyerl, H., *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, London, 2012, p. 183.

so-called story “The Day When a Computer Writes a Novel” entered the shortlist. The story passed the competition of 1450 candidates. The story’s author was literally “Inhuman” – the program’s name, which does not yet represent artificial intelligence in the full sense, but it certainly strives for it. Stephen Inderman, the head of the software company Artificial Intelligence, assures us of the rapid development of machine algorithms in this field in the near future. When writing a story, stories and alternative situations are given, and “Inhuman” makes a choice and produces new plots. Another 11 robots participated in the competition but did not make it to the finals. Indeed, we can talk about the reality of robots compiling documentation or analyzing already written texts. Still, it seems difficult to say we discuss creativity in our example.

In general, it seems almost certain that modern media strive for the ideal of Leibniz’s monadological system of functioning. Namely, everyone can contact everyone, but only and exclusively through the “supreme monad”. It transfers contents from user to user, and nothing but what the “top monad” transmits enters the contents of individual ones, so monads really “have no windows.” In other words, they do not have independent communication, which is under the strict control of the central monad and is only possible as such. We have already pointed out how “subjectivity has lost all refuge. The system itself remains transcendent to subjectivity even though it is fully included in it. It seems that subjectivity has lost its power to transcend the system.”⁵

We see that this model of the mode of operation of modern media does not support free communication of media users, but, on the contrary, a targeted and closely monitored exchange of content, i.e., the exchange of those contents that are desirable to be exchanged – we could call it the imperial model of communication. Also, neither the so-called great Other has been removed, although for about 120 years, God has officially been dead, and not only in philosophy. No, because it is not in the interest of the monitoring system to remove this type of functionality. On the contrary, “Nietzsche is dead (in his signature) God”, with only one difference: instead of God, today we have the “holy” Google, which represents that central monad that sees everything and knows everything. The possibilities of emancipation from this type of slavery is not yet completely clear, nor is it whether emancipation will happen “with the help of slavery” (Hegel, Marx).

You also encounter the so-called good ideas in the middle of all that splashing with content. Like any other medium, video-gif is a way to use certain material to express collective ideals, even the ideals of marginalized groups. Video-gif is a medium for those whose voice is not heard or whose access to other media is closed and whose creation is not based on the principles of market rationality, justification, or benefit, at least in its original form. In other words,

5 Bratina, B., *Теория одного дня: тотальный контроль?*, Acta Eruditorum Br. 12, pp. 45–48, 2013, p. 45.

such a video-gif was created from what remained of the private sphere of man. Let's also mention that the private sphere is actually pledged to the Internet in exchange for popularity. For example, many narcissistic exhibitionists record their entire lives and show them live on some kind of blog (life online). In contrast to such bizarre things, the situation is quite different when it comes to “serious things,” for example, money, or when you become interested in secret services and organizations for reasons completely unknown to you. Then, human life can easily turn into hell.

To the question “What did you gain from all this?” journalists Martin Knobbe (Martin Knobbe) and Jörg Schindler (Jörg Schindler) for the German *Der Spiegel*, Edward Snowden (Edward Snowden) says: “2013 the public is aware of what was forbidden. With the fact that the US leadership can find out everything about you simply from your Gmail account. About not needing any legal order to do so ...”⁶ However, these are rarer cases despite their number; usually, people completely alone and without thinking about the consequences leave a large amount of personal information on applications such as Facebook, Google or Instagram, where they voluntarily accept all the terms of the application agreement.

One of the peculiarities of the media reality is the absence of any attempt to throw off the masks. Abandoning all tradition, national culture and copyright, these media products spread like seductive lures. Drama turns into comedy, personal into public, and mask into face. Nothing is reality, but everything is real. According to Steyerl, “[p]rofessional standards of truth production in journalism were overwhelmed by mass media production, cloning of rumors and their amplification in discussions on Wikipedia.”⁷ And when everything is real, then nothing is real. The omnipresent world of illusion lives on it: everything that is shown there is not real, and only that is real. The video-gif promotes the case and the possibility of the impossible with minimal means. Its reality also comes from the fact that its individual duration (as long as an advertisement or an ordinary piece of news) corresponds to an average intelligence. Whatever it is, “reality” is always accepted as truth at first.

Media in the age of social networks, tablets, smartphones, blogs and drones that send Wi-Fi straight from the sky live on the surface (or vice versa, at the bottom) of meaning that fills us with images with social, commercial and ideological content. However, he also embodies one of the universal ideas – V, the masked man from *V For Vendetta*, tells his killer: “Underneath that mask is something bigger than the body. There is an idea in it. And ideas don't die.”

6 Snowden, E., “Я нероссийский шпион”, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/-2017/09/08/n_10543604.shtml, 2017, accessed: 2017/09/08.

7 Steyerl, H., *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, London, 2012, p. 170.

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The Great Leader
Digital print
2000

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THE TRAGEDY OF THE SELFIE

Abstract: The development of social networks, new media, digital applications, and communication platforms has not only re-topicalized the problem of loneliness of contemporary man, but also contributed to the emergence of new phenomena that, although not directly, have to do with loneliness. One of them is death due to selfies. It is the activities and actions of individuals that lead to a tragic outcome even though they are primarily intended as a game. It is almost possible to speak of a new media genre, the tragedy of the selfie, which, among other things, can be linked to the ancient tragedy as a theatrical genre.

Every day we hear the stories of “tragic heroes” who lost their lives by taking photos with their phones, simply wanting to amaze the virtual audience with their “craziness” and uniqueness. At the core of their media-dramatic performance is playing with the categories of the real and the illusory, but also the need to attract attention and to impress others.

The tragic fall of the “hero” of the tragedy of the selfie, as well as that of the “tragic man” in the theatrical scene in ancient dramas, is related to certain recklessness or a mistake that anyone can commit. Both contemporary heroes and “mediocre characters” of the tragedy of the selfie, as well as those many centuries ago in Aeschyl’s works, can be blinded by the terrible Ate, the goddess of blindness, mental restlessness, and deception, and lure them into her nets and abysses.

The authors of this paper seek to explain the peculiarities of this media genre, comparing it, in certain aspects, with ancient tragedy. It is argued that the modern man, although in a high-tech communication environment, is a victim of loneliness, and that our world is deeply tragic and divided.

Keywords: selfie, tragedy, the tragedy of the selfie, ancient tragedy, media, loneliness

SELFIE AND DEATH

DEATH BY SELFIE could be the title of an article in the press or a televised story speaking of the persons who lost their lives while taking photos with their

mobile telephones.¹ The number of such persons around the world, and in our country, is on the rise, judging by the bizarre and sensationalist headlines seen daily in the media. Even the simplest search in *Google* web browser for this phenomenon springs before our eyes a multitude of silhouettes and photos of “tragic heroes” who disappeared from the life stage not to return seeking to impress the auditorium with their craziness and singularity.²

The settings of these tragic media performances, based on play, are most often high cliffs, skyscrapers’ rooftops, train car roofs, and, more broadly, such locations that differentiate themselves from everyday environments by their fundamental characteristics. Such places and spontaneous, sometimes even planned, action of these performances, could have an adrenalin and cathartic effect, both for the main actors participating in the creation of the selfie, and for the ones who participate in them via social networks, as audience.

The phenomenon of selfie and the term *selfie* most often associated with the social networks and auto portraits made by persons taking photographs of themselves alone or in company, with their own telephone or with a camera, in order to publish those photos on social networks, has been extensively written about and researched from the perspective of different sciences. Most of them are psychological research in which the phenomenon of selfie was most often associated with narcissism and egocentricity, as well as with the problem of loneliness.

An American psychologist and professor, Jean Twenge, and professor Keith Campbell in the book “Epidemic of Narcissism: Life in the age of rights” (2009), write about the “epidemic” of narcissism, and believe this term has evolved, since it was first used, more than a century ago, as a designation for personality traits; from diagnosis and disorder, via social etiquette to life style.

The authors of the book compared the scale of narcissism epidemic expansion among American students, since the eighties until nowadays, with vertiginous increase in morbid obesity, concluding that the generation of “millennials” encompassing persons born since the end of the seventies until the end of the previous century, is significantly more narcissistic, but at the same time less rebellious, less tolerant, and less happy than the previous generations.

Over the last decade, what certainly contributed to this was a vertiginous rise of the new media, mobile telephone, communications platforms, and social media which additionally favoured the development of egocentrism, narcissism, and the

1 <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.299.html:841854-U-smrt-zbog-selfija-Misica-poginula-pokusavajuci-da-napravi-savrsenu-fotografiju-VIDEO>, accessed on 30 Aug 2020.

2 <https://www.google.rs/search?sxsrf=ALeKk01dBSjGfJa7Bp70m1sIW-usItXRVA%3A1598799394966&source=hp&ei=-Ir5LX5jMOP6djLsPgdygs-AU&q=smrt+zbog+selfija>, accessed on 30 Aug 2020.

need to draw attention to oneself, opening new media spaces for their expression and representation.

When it comes to age- and gender-based differences, as well as to behaviour patterns related to selfie, one needs to mention the research conducted in 2016 in Norway by Dirr A., Pallesen S., Torsheim, T., and Andreassen, C. S. They focussed on three age groups: adolescents (from 12 to 19 years of age), younger adults (from 20 to 30 years of age), and adults (from 31 to 50 years of age).

Based on an online sample, consisting of more than 3,763 interviewees, by analysing behaviour patterns during taking, publishing and editing selfies, they reached the conclusion that females were much more active in using the possibility to crop and beautify photos using different filters, while adolescents more often publish personal selfies using different filters, as compared to young adults and adults, which could be linked, in line with development psychology theories and theories of creation of online identities, with specific period in development. That period is characterized by confusion, instability, self-searching, experimenting with different identities, seeking validation from others, attracting attention, etc. "In light of these theories, the findings that adolescents and young adults are much more active and engaged in posting and editing photos are interpreted as a behaviour through which their online identity is explored, experimented with, and construed. Likewise, they tend to disclose more personal information as compared to other groups since as they are in the phase of discovering themselves during which they build emotional intimacy and intimate relationships while the adults have already passed through that development phase." (Zdravković, 2019).

The company *Google* published, in 2014, statistical data stating that on Instagram social network alone, 23 million selfies get posted daily using *Android*-operated devices. Social media are used today by around 2.5 billion people, which means that information-communication technologies (ICT) are deeply embedded into the life of people and their manner of establishing communication with others.

Speaking on the phenomenon of "super-connectedness" and people's growing inclination to "techno-social life," American communicologist Mary Chayko (Čejko, 2019), points out that for the people who are digitally connected with others, those processes get incredible dimensions. "People can observe and notice how other people react to them in digital space" and, like actors, as believed by the sociologist Irving Goffman (Goffman, 1959), act out different aspects of their lives in online interaction with others, making a sort of spectacle from their own life wherever they may be. (Čejko, 2019: 138)

The mentioned context is the one in which we shall try to examine the specificities of a new media genre which we have called the *tragedy of the selfie*. Not questioning the issue of essential difference between the ancient tragedy as a theatre genre and the *tragedy of the selfie* as media genre, we shall strive to describe the second one in more detail.

SELFIE AS TRAGEDY OF “COMMONERS” AND “MEDIocre CHARACTERS”

Every day, the stories reach us of “tragic heroes” who have lost their lives while taking photos with a mobile telephone, simply to wanting to amaze the virtual audience with some of their “craziness” and “uniqueness”. *At the core of their media-dramatic performance is playing with the categories of the real and the illusory, but also the need to attract attention and to impress others.*

One could almost speak of a new media genre, the *tragedy of the selfie*, which, among other things, can in certain aspects be linked with ancient tragedy as theatre genre. Both the modern heroes and “mediocre characters” of the *tragedy of the selfie*, just like the ones from many centuries ago in Aeschylus’ plays, can be blinded by the formidable Ate, the goddess of blindness, mental restlessness, and deception, and lure them into their own nets and abysses.

By taking over moral role and by dealing with the tragic faith of the hero and with the universal issues of human existence, tragedy offered the viewers the possibility to raise above the everyday life, to “purify” their thoughts and in the events on the scene look for the key to the understanding of a higher organization of the world. At the same time, this was also the way towards a deeper knowing of oneself, own one’s inclinations, strivings, and, in a manner, to find the answers to many life questions through art.

“It was in the theatre, that a member of Hellenes watched the people’s heroes work and suffer, listened to them speak and compared his nature with theirs. This is where he looked for the first time into his soul via poet’s work, and saw conflicts occur in that heart: conflicts with one self, with circumstances, with society and state, with natural and human laws.” (Đurić, 2003: 240)

Twenty-six centuries earlier, before the eyes of an audience a million strong, entangled in the webs of media illusions, the conflict of mythical heroes and gods was replaced in the tragedy of the selfie by the tragedy of ‘common’ people and ‘mediocre characters’. Big moral issues and dilemmas have been replaced by trivial and banal topics, as well as by the superficial seductiveness of images. There are less and less elevated thoughts and heroic deeds, and in hectic search for the greatest possible attention and virality on social networks, “enterprises of simulation” (Virilio, 2000: 119) have enabled the creation of a suitable ambiance for the negation of all true values. The reality is brutally banalized, spectacularized and bared to folderol, while the justification is found in an omnipresent tendency for “total amusement” and relaxation.

The tragedy of the selfie just like the majority of modern media genres such as *reality shows*, *talk shows*, etc. are characterized by a high level of schematism and stereotypicality, with the presence of characteristic generalizations. The creative process is most often based on the use of “smart phones” with which the main

hero takes photos or records videos, and “directs” and make performances in virtual “amphitheatres” for the audience participating in them via social networks.

Main characters do not wear masks (Greek: πρόσωπον, Latin: persona), which was one of the most important props of the ancient theatre, but their faces are most often photographed in an unnatural pose, with false smile, pouting lips, and, not rarely, painted with different beautifying filters. In the visual sense, this contributes to the creation of caricatural-phantastic and grotesque effects.

The reactions of the audience come in the form of “likes”, and the goal is to collect as many as possible. This drives the main hero of the tragedy of the selfie to do something atypical and out of ordinary as it defines the virality, i.e., the popularity of the act and the number of viewers in “the amphitheatres.” It is recorded from one’s hand or by using a stick for the taking of photos (*selfie stick*), and the cadre is, most often, a close up, showing the head and partially shoulders.

The tragic fall of the “hero” of the tragedy of selfie, as well as the one of the “tragic human” on theatre scene in ancient dramas, is linked with certain recklessness or a mistake anyone can make. These do not have to be mythic heroes fighting cruel gods, but plain people and mediocre characters with all virtues and shortcomings.

We are speaking of “heroes” who want to impress the viewers by approaching a high cliff or standing on a high building roof top in order to take a photo right there and post the photo on *Instagram*, but for whatever reason they lose balance and fall. Not rarely, we find these “heroes” in railway stations and read about them in tomorrow’s press, how they have been climbing on the roofs of train wagons to make a selfie when they died due to a horrific electric shock.

SOCIETY OF NARCISSUSES AND “LONELY CROWD”?

The development of social networks, new media, digital applications and communication platforms over the last decade, has re-topicalized the problem of modern man’s loneliness and it has also contributed to the occurrence of new phenomena which, although not directly, have to do with loneliness.

Death due to selfie which is at the base of the media genre the *tragedy of the selfie*, could be, as stated at the beginning, linked both with this problem, and with Riesman’s notion of “the lonely crowd” which has become a general mark for alienation in developed post-industrial society, or, in our case, in a post-media society.

The ever-greater availability of information and the orientation of the young towards the use of new information and communication technologies and media-mediated forms of communication, has paradoxically led to ever more expressed alienation and feeling of absence of sense and loneliness.

Modern media narcissism, particularly typical for the heroes of the *tragedy of the selfie*, also contain in themselves the tragic elements which we also find in the ancient myth on Narcissus, and, to a certain extent, the whole culture and aesthetics of selfie rests on this myth.

Although his own reflection in the water, self-infatuation, and drowning in the lake, have been replaced by the deaths caused by watching the mobile-phones screens, some of the basic tragic features such as tragic hero, tragic guilt, and tragic end are still present.

The myth on Narcissus in the media environment of the *tragedy of the selfie*, receives some new meanings and dimensions, without losing topicality, and modern human, despite living in high-technology communication surrounding, becomes a victim of loneliness and the witness of the fact that our world is deeply tragic and divided.

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ABOLITION OF THE OTHER OR: ON THE IDENTITY OF *HOMO DIGITALIS*

Abstract: Feelings of coherence, belonging, and value as components of identity have been seriously undermined by the emergence of a mixed reality. Contactless society, in which human and media are intertwined to the extent that they form one organism, essentially deconstructs the concepts of autonomy, trust, and relationship with the Other. *Homo digitalis*, isolated in a virtual cocoon, becomes an individual in the crowd, without human interaction and encounters. Without the Other, freedom and self-awareness disappear as key determinants of identity.

Keywords: Homo digitalis, identity, the Other, contactless society, mixed reality

DISORIENTED SUBJECT

At the end of 2021, the global media reported about the intentions of the South Korean government to build a contactless society, that is, to remove human contact from many areas of life, under the banner of economic growth, increasing productivity, and reducing bureaucracy. There were warnings from the academic sector that such an idea could threaten social solidarity and cause a social crisis.¹ Meanwhile, the headlines are flooded with stories about people falling in love with robots or about apps like Replica, an artificial intelligence “that cares.”²

The polarization of opinion between the praise of the “death of distance” and the ode to network/virtual interaction to the hyperbolization of a dystopian future is not a new one, but rather a continuation of the debate from the last century whose central questions are closely related to the concept of identity – whether mediated communication supports the process of individualization or cancels it.³ Now, however, there is a justified claim that elements of identity require new insights and that the technical-technological environment is the key cause of this requirement. After the modernist conception of identity, which is related to

1 Guardian, *South Korea cuts human interaction in push to build ‘untact’ society*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/10/south-korea-cuts-human-interaction-in-push-to-build-untact-society>, 31.08.2023.

2 <https://replika.com/>

3 More about this debate: Broadbent, S., “Approaches to Personal Communication” in: Horst, H., Miller, D. (eds.) *Digital anthropology*, Berg, London/New York, 2012, p. 129.

individuality, the presentation of oneself in relation to others, and the postmodern view of identity as instability, fragmentation, fluidity (decentralization and lack of coherence of being⁴), we have reached the point where we can talk about the complete disappearance of the entire conceptual apparatus that was used in thinking about human identity.

The term *homo digitalis* appears in scientific, artistic, and mass media texts of the last decade, although we cannot name the creator of this phrase with certainty. We refer to two uses of this term, consisting of different values. The head of the Belgian and Luxembourg branch of Google, Thierry Geerts, presenting the transition from *Homo sapiens* to *homo digitalis* in the book with the optimistic subtitle *How digitalisation is making us more human* concludes that technology is by nature neutral and, with correct (conscious) use, it can make us healthier and happier. *Homo sapiens*, the author claims, reluctantly accepts technological changes in fear of the disappearance of humanity.⁵

The Italian philosopher Diego Fusaro used the term *homo digitalis* to describe the transition from the Aristotelian definition of human as a being determined by sociality (*zoon politikon*) to a being that does not make contact with others, and is characterized by desocialization and derealization. Fusaro pointed out that social distancing is one of the key features of the new post-human normality, which gained full expression during the covid-19 virus pandemic. The abolition of physical contact “in the name of health” has strengthened “technological cocoons” in which individuals are confined, similar to hikikomori – Japanese teenagers who suffer from extreme social phobia, and make contact with their peers through technology.⁶ Contactless society gives primacy to the sense of sight over the sense of touch, contrary to Aristotle’s belief that “it is impossible for an animal to exist without touch” and that “without touch there can be no other sense.”⁷ In a contactless society, a person is not completely deprived of the sense of touch – they achieve a physical connection with the screen, cable, or virtual glasses. The expression, therefore, refers to the lack of human interaction, especially its more sophisticated forms, such as dialogue or bodily expression of feelings. *Homo digitalis* lives in a mixed reality, where physical and technologically generated, virtual objects coexist. Such an environment, just like in the American movie *Her*, in which the protagonist falls in love with a chatbot⁸, can create disorientation, strong alienation or the loss of identity.

4 Kellner, D., *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern*, Routledge, London/New York, 2003, p. 231–235.

5 Geerts, T., *Homo Digitalis: How digitalisation is making us more human*, Lanoo Publishers, Tielt, 2022.

6 Fusaro, D., *Globalni udar: terapijski kapitalizam i Veliki reset*, Akademska knjiga, Novi Sad, 2022, p. 199–207.

7 Aristotel, *O duši. Nagovor na filozofiju*, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1996, p. 93–94.

8 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/>

If we were to extract the common content from the numerous definitions of identity, then it would be the concepts of self-awareness and freedom. Although different, the approaches to defining and explaining the emergence of identity in essentialist and constructivist theories ultimately reveal a common thesis that identity implies subjectivity – authentic difference. In mediated communication, however, humans put themselves in the place of the object.⁹ If identity can be completed only in the community, as pointed out by Aristotle and later explained by constructivists, what happens to the axis of identity of *homo digitalis* and are they, without encountering the Other, capable for freedom?

An attempt was made to answer this question by introducing the concept of hybrid identity, which implies that people build relationships both offline and online. Media technologies, according to this point of view, reshape already existing identities, and in the human personality two regimes of thinking and feeling coexist with mutual influences.¹⁰ This answer, however, is not a solution to the problem of distancing oneself from authentic differences. Digital identity, understood as a component of the aforementioned hybridity, shows a tendency to overcome the “traditional” identity, which actually leads to the distortion of subjectivity. The online environment, as an assumed agent of digital identity, does not encourage interaction with others. On the contrary. The logic of computer algorithms refers us to ourselves and those similar to us. The concept of the subject “is increasingly losing its dignity, reducing its former role to the function of the so-called of a ‘weak subject’...”, and through the media the identity is “transferred into the market value.”¹¹

The problem of identity is, as has already been shown many times, especially pronounced in times of crisis. Contactless society and mixed reality are almost always discussed within the utopian-dystopian/optimistic-pessimistic framework and vision of the future, but often without a solution for the current consequences of the crisis that exists in interpersonal relations. As Epstein warned, physical contact between two beings will become a rare opportunity, and this will change the process of self-identification.¹² The history of philosophy points us to the importance of the Other, as a key agent in the creation of our own identities, both at the level of the individual and at the level of the collective. As Zagorka Golubović

9 Vuksanović, D., *Filozofija medija 3: ontologija, estetika, kritika*, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti u Beogradu/Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2017, p. 136.

10 About hybrid identity and mixed reality: Serrano-Puche, J., *Emotions and digital technologies: Mapping the field of research in media studies*, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2015, p. 4.

11 Vuksanović, D., *Filozofija medija: ontologija, estetika, kritika*, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti u Beogradu, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2008, p. 78–81.

12 Epstein, M., “Creative Disappearance of the Human Being: Introduction to Humanology”, in: Deretić, I., Sorgner, S. (eds.) *From Humanism to Meta-, Post- and Transhumanism?*, Peter Lang GmbH, Frankfurt, 2016, p. 164.

explained, forming an identity is “a painstaking process”¹³ which includes a series of cognitive-affective mechanisms. These processes are almost always related to the principle of difference – embodied in the Other.

Projecting the environment into the personal world of *homo digitalis* would require altered biological and social mechanisms. The definition of identity necessarily includes the relationship to the community,¹⁴ which is needed for the processes of learning, memory, development of values and emotions, [and] for building awareness and self-awareness. This also implies that freedom, as action in relation to consciousness and the world, is a component of identity. Does *homo digitalis*, as a being of altered interaction with the community, have a different attitude towards freedom? In the testimonies of researchers about children who grew up with wild animals, we find claims about the completely changed psyche of a human being living in a non-human environment. For most of these children, such an environment meant a lifelong inability to integrate into the community.¹⁵ Similarly, *homo digitalis* is a being who, in the personality-world relationship, rejects the world and thereby risks distorting his/her self-image.

In the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber or the psychology of Heinz Kohut, the Self does not exist without the Other. According to Buber, the relationship between I and You is immediate: Only where all intermediation is absent does the encounter take place.¹⁶ For Levinas, proof of our identity is responsibility for the Other. Thus, the concept of value is included in the definition of identity, often as a synonym.¹⁷ The crisis of values[,] as the embodiment of accumulated, and not always visible, processes of learning, adaptation, rejection, therefore points to a crisis of identity.

CONTROLLING THE DIFFERENCE

Fusaro represents the point of view that in the sphere of telematics there is no essence in the true, authentic sense and that being means presence in the real world.¹⁸ In a study on the social changes caused by the covid-19 pandemic,

13 Golubović, Z., *Ja i drugi: Antropološka istraživanja individualnog i kolektivnog identiteta*, Republika, Beograd, 1999, p. 9.

14 Ibid, p. 11.

15 Examples available in the online lecture: “Intimacy and the alienation: I-You relationship and contemporary psychotherapy”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByTxLjKnn9U>, 20.8.2023.

16 Buber, M., *Ja i Ti*, Izdavačko preduzeće „Rad”, Beograd, 2000, p. 12.

17 Tomović Šundić, S., „Međuzavisnost identiteta i aksiologije vrijednosti” u: *Dijaspora, identiteti migracije: mogućnosti i izazovi*, Fakultet političkih nauka, Univerzitet Crne Gore, Podgorica, 2021, p. 110.

18 Fuzaro, *Globalni udar: terapijski kapitalizam i Veliki reset*, p. 201.

Fusaro discusses the contactless society as a form of control over human freedom and the highest degree of dehumanization. Like Bentham's panopticon, the contactless society is an architectural setting of perfect totalitarianism in which there is no communitarianism, and everyone creates their own experience. On the trail of Elias Canetti, according to whom people create distances due to the fear of touch,¹⁹ Fusaro writes about the hermits of the masses, closed individuals. A contactless society is a society of controlling differences. In the sphere of the virtual, we are capable of living without flaws and without emotions – the ideal products of sapience. To arguments about prosperity and financial growth, critics of the contactless society respond with examples from the past history of the relationship between human and technology, which shows how many times human has allowed to be occupied by a machine. Contactless society, by controlling physical closeness among the human community, reduces the affective potential of the collective. These potentials are underutilized and "very suitable for media exploitation."²⁰

Computer intelligence feeds the architecture of a contactless society. The activities of *homo digitalis* make algorithms the new axis of identity. In the media and technology space, "we are flooded with images and data that make our view of the world more unclear instead of clarifying it."²¹ As Moisi predicted, the increasing complexity of the world will make everyone more self-absorbed. As an example of "food" for a contactless society, we can mention the use of emoticons, graphic representations of the human face that indicate emotions. A smile or a cry becomes just a series of binary codes comprehensible to computer intelligence. The heart emoticon for *homo digitalis* represents a love that is no longer woven from an authentic experience of otherness²², but becomes an experience of sameness – repetition of a technical pattern. That's why we can think about *homo digitalis* as a lonely being, deprived of encounters.

In the description of the Replika application, it is stated that the more you talk to the chatbot, the smarter it becomes. By creating a digital identity, we give data to big supervisors²³, and the media's favoring of large technological capital leads to the separation of the techno-elite from the disconnected and disunited individuals. This leads us to the thesis that *homo digitalis*, agreeing to the rules of a contactless society, gives permission to change its own identity. In nursing

19 Kaneti, E., *Masa i moć*, Grafički zavod Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1984, p. 9.

20 Vuksanović, D., *Filozofija medija 2: ontologija, estetika, kritika*, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti u Beogradu, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2011, p. 126.

21 Mojsi, D., *Geopolitika emocija: Kako kulture straha, poniženja i nade utiču na oblikovanje sveta*, Clio, Beograd, 2012, p. 181/182.

22 Badju, A., Trung, N., *Pohvala ljubavi*, Adresa, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 16.

23 Read more in: Zubof, Š., *Doba nadzornog kapitalizma: borba za budućnost čoveka na novom rubu moći*, Clio, Beograd, 2020.

homes in Japan, robots or caring machines, as Sherry Turkle has called them, become part of the social chain, cutting off contact and physical presence within the community. According to this author, authenticity is reflected in the ability to put ourselves in the position of the Other, to connect based on a common storehouse of human experience.²⁴ She calls out the widely accepted view of the *Disconnect to connect* movement that there is a void of empathy among young people who have grown up emotionally disconnected, while constantly connected to phones, games and social media.²⁵

According to Hartmut Rosa, social acceleration makes identity uncertain – it becomes unclear what constitutes identity.²⁶ The better the subject adapts to the conditions of acceleration, the more indifferent (s)he becomes to the *contents* of the acceleration or, we would say, to the transformation of values under the pressure of acceleration. A contactless society is a society of acceleration, which may, at first, seem like a paradoxical statement. As an example, we can cite the field of labor: Instead of using the potential of the digital for the purpose of (creatively) expanding leisure, online jobs have become a precariat's treasure trove. In the conditions of a constant online connection, the subject loses his/her freedom and gets used to the permanent absence of a human encounter: Absence that is well tolerated is nothing but oblivion.²⁷

A contactless society is an anti-erotic society. Under conditions of control of available differences, *homo digitalis* is unable to outgrow itself. Physical communication takes place with the abolition of the Other, based on auto-sensations and auto-touch. Fusaro would say that this fulfilled the old dream of capital – the neighbor was abolished. When, however, the difference is present, the “spirit of subversion”²⁸ appears and that is unacceptable to controllers of contactless society. *Homo digitalis* takes everything (s)he wants from the virtual component of mixed reality, without the ability to internalize the acquired experiences in the real, physical, bodily sphere. *Homo digitalis* is a being prevented – partly by his/her own decisions, partly by controlled conditions, from physical coexistence with the Other.

24 Terkl, Š., *Sami zajedno: zašto očekujemo više od tehnologije nego jedni od drugih*, Clio, Beograd, 2011, p. 27.

25 Terkl, Š., *Obnovimo razgovor: moć razgovora u digitalnom dobu*, Clio, Beograd, 2020, p. 357.

26 Roza, H., *Odnosi prema svetu u doba ubrzanja: konture nove kritike društva*, Akademski knjiga, Novi Sad, 2019, p. 267.

27 Bart, R., *Fragmenti ljubavnog govora*, Karpos, Loznica, 2015, p. 35.

28 Lompar, M., *Duh samoporicanja: Prilog kritici srpske kulturne politike*, Catena Mundi, Beograd, 2018, p. 66.

BIOLOGY AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE

Observed from the opposite angle, the body can be presented as a limitation, and entering the virtual sphere can be thought as liberation from the physical, a feeling of unburdenedness and ease of change. In such narratives, the subject is actually a fragmented combination of data. The Other is no longer a human being but another set of data or, ultimately, a machine. Human skin, in that case, is just a gate beyond which nothing physical exists. The virtual body is immune to physical weakness, disease, and death. The goals of technological inventions become immortality and perfection. *Homo digitalis*, as a being that lives in a still mixed reality, can build connections and relationships even without physical presence, which is a counterargument to the mentioned criticisms of contactless society. Mary Chayko found that people can express themselves significantly more easily in the physical absence of others and thus communicate more authentically.²⁹ Others, however, are marked here not necessarily as authentic difference but exclusively as physical otherness.

In recent decades, neuroscientists have greatly emphasized the importance of touch for the stimulation of emotional and social development. At the same time, the biological unwillingness to “immerse” in the digital space is often cited: the human brain functions according to previously created evolutionary principles, which do not recognize the architecture of the digital world.³⁰ Biological mechanisms thus impose themselves as a potential field of resistance to a dystopian version of the future: What technology forces us to do, biological evolution cannot follow, so human can accept biological signals and reject digital “add-ons.” By abolishing bodily functions, neuron pathways and dopamine levels change – medical research is focused on new diseases caused by a lack of physical contact, with consequences for almost all human organs.

If *Homo sapiens* went from biology to civilization, it is time to legitimately ask the question: Should *homo digitalis* be reminded of the biology? *Homo digitalis* becomes a virtuality, an idea, an abstraction. In a contactless society, avatars become substitutes for the body. Without a body, however, neither physical nor virtual identity can exist (at least for now). Even in the earliest research about artificial intelligence, it turned out that physicality is a big obstacle for its development.³¹ Just like in the movie *Matrix*, cyber accessories do not prevent physical injuries and everything that happens in the virtual space is reflected on

29 Chayko, M., *Superconnected: The Internet, Digital Media, and Techno-Social Life*, SAGE, Los Angeles, 2017. p. 76.

30 Media appearance of professor Ranko Rajović: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAm2Cgvvios>

31 Dreyfus, H., *Šta računari ne mogu*, Nolit, Beograd, 1977, p. 227.

the physical organism. Despite the “glorification of bodily disorder”³² and striving for liberation from the physical, the body remains an agent of communication and entering into relations with Others (even at the symbolic level).

EPILOGUE: (IM)POSSIBILITY OF CHOICE

Contactless society establishes a completely new relationship with human bodies. This was noticed by Virilio: The body becomes a whole. Hence, mass egotism and mass individualism.³³ Between essentialist notions of identity, the aspiration towards a socio-cultural turn and a return to the “human era” and towards *homo digitalis* or cyborg (as the next phase of *homo digitalis*?), it is necessary to answer the question: Do we have possibility of choice to freely understand and experience each others?

In the British-American series *Devs*³⁴, in reminiscences of theological explanations of free will, resurrection, and heaven are presented as a computer simulation. To the problem of the possibility of conflict between the aspirations of a physical being and an already separated virtual being, a possible answer is that it is necessary to ensure the freedom of the subject to choose whether (s)he wants a final “relocation” or a break between the mixed entities of the self. In the series, this freedom is provided by love and rebellion against the existing order. In our, still physical world, the (in)ability to choose is determined by relationship to power and the establishment/abolition of rights. The question, finally, is whether *homo digitalis* can recognize the Other as the source of its own rights and freedoms, and human interaction as a field of subversion of the techno-totalitarian order.

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THE INSANITY OF VERBIAGE: THE MEDIA AS AN IDENTITY OF INSANITY

Abstract: The essence of insanity is in its manifestation. In this paper, we deal with the identity relationship between the media and insanity. The media appear not only as a means by which insanity is identified, but as the identity itself, a complete or predominant part of the identity of insanity. We point out to three main points of this identity connection. The media thus appears as a channel for the manifestation of the already existing insanity, which is manifested and revealed precisely by means of the media; then the media appear as creators of insanity – by being used, created or controlled by those who fall into insanity due to their own role (most often through the development of egomania); in the end, the media appear as propagators of insanity. The type of media does not represent a particularly important segment in the emergence of insanity itself, but it is an important segment in the intensity of manifestation and the consequences that insanity can produce.

Keywords: identity, manifestation, insanity, media, nonsense

I

The essence of insanity is in its manifestation. The media manifestation of insanity is particularly significant because of the consequences that some individual insanity presented in the media can cause at a wider social level. However, the contagious nature of the media, and thus the insanity spread through the media, is only one part of the relationship between the media and insanity. Although to a certain extent everything that we state in this paper can be applied to media in general, to various traditional media such as literature or painting, we focused on contemporary media (electronic and digital media above all) as a phenomenon that has outgrown its own projected nature and mastered its own masters. The type of media thus does not represent a particularly important segment in the emergence of insanity itself, but it is an important segment of the intensity of manifestation and the consequences that insanity can produce. At one time, McLuhan, vividly explaining the effect and consequences of new technologies that appeared throughout history for the printing press, stated that “it has gone from zero to infinity”¹ by the fact that for the first time in human history the factor

1 McLuhan, M., *Poznavanje opštila – čovekovih produžetaka (Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man)*, Prosveta, Beograd, 1971, p. 159.

of precise reproducibility appeared, with which printing practically introduced the concept of endless repetition to people². And modern electronic and digital media are far more powerful and destructive than the press. The modern media can therefore be seen as a monster that broke out of its cage and “monsters” freely. In this context, individual insanity, as an intimate monster of the individual, has a complex relationship with the media. Contemporary media and the individual, here specifically the insanity of the media and the insanity of the individual, are connected by an identity relationship. The media does not appear only as a means by which certain insanity is identified for another, publicly presented and revealed, but the media in modern society appears as the very identity, a complete or a predominant part of the identity of insanity. The media becomes the point where cause and effect, process and product meet, and the individual, man, transmissibly becomes part of the media and the medium becomes the man himself. We have always viewed the media as human extensions, as McLuhan points out, as extensions of “our own body and our senses”³.

II

We can say that there are three main points of this identity connection are media and insanity. The first is the one in which the media appears as a channel for the manifestation of the already existing insanity of an individual or group. That's how insanity is manifested and exposed/discovered with the help of the media, and thus insanity gains independence and separates itself from the madman who created it. In this way, the destructive nature of insanity, and insanity is always destructive to someone and in relation to something, as a part of the intimate sphere, metastasizes as an external, independent of the individual, destructive force. Then, the second significant point is about the media as the creators of insanity.

Although it is difficult to make a difference between the already existing insanity marketed and discovered through the media and the original media insanity, by analyzing the chronological development of a certain idea, let's call it *mad*, or a certain media personality, let's call it a *media madman*, it is possible to follow how the use of the media, the creation of media content (who do not primarily have to be mad, insane, or crazy) and by controlling the media by individuals (most often the owners of the media, but not only them) essentially creates a new insanity. The individuals who originally controlled the medium, selected and created the contents, inevitably, over time, due to this kind of role and influence that the media extensions they control and which are beginning

2 Ibid, p. 159–160.

3 Ibid, p. 160.

to control them, fall into insanity, and a certain idea that is given to a media monster without real control becomes monstrous. Most often, this kind of insanity is reached through egomania, through the so-called God complex, as the strongest and most destructive form of insanity, for which the media, as people say, gave their souls, and even more precisely, what they give their souls for. We can see this through the media dictatorship of various insane discourses that, under the guise of desirable and recommended, are imposed as the ones with no alternative, the only possible and compulsory ones, and which as “no alternative” and “exclusivity” with the use of force represents one of the strongest features of insanity. An example of a scientific discourse that is no longer scientific-research methodological and revealing, but becomes a discourse of scientific consensus as crucial for determining the non-alternativeness of a certain scientific conclusion, precisely reveals the insanity that is the subtext of new scientific truths supported by the media as the very identity of insanity. It should also be emphasized that the content itself does not have to be important or decisive for human existence, and it can be a banal, irrelevant content, and yet in the media mechanism, such content manifests itself in the end as insanity, senseless and banal, but still as insanity. The third point of this relationship, although being only a consequence of the previous two, is often mistakenly considered to be the main one, is the role of the media as a propagator of insanity. Whether it is a traditional, common-sense view of certain forms and manifestations of insanity, whether it is a covert insanity and the subliminal influence that such media insanity exerts on the recipients.

III

A special segment of this relationship between man and the media is the psychological need of people for support in a world of alienation, a world in which the moral frameworks that supported the mental health of individuals and groups have disappeared. In this sense, rightly, for decades, psychoanalytic theory, more precisely the part about psychological defense mechanisms, was taken as the key to explaining and overcoming this human need. At the same time, it was an easier way for humanity to maintain the outward appearance of normality. In this sense, it was believed that undeveloped personalities, in order to avoid unpleasant and difficult life situations and retreat from reality, fled into physical symptoms, or as Freud specifically puts it, “fled into illness”⁴. Symbolically, we could say that people today, primarily with the help of the Internet and mobile phones, run to the media in order to vent, find support (regardless of how real, virtual or fake it is), and hide the problem from themselves. This flight to the media can also be seen as a modern form of sublimation. Sublimation has always been a way of temporarily

4 Glavan, I., *Živčane bolesti*, Medicinska knjiga, Beograd, Zagreb, 1957, p. 787.

overcoming insanity, fighting, or more precisely establishing a truce, with one's own insanity or the insanity of the world. This kind of contemporary sublimation through co-existence or subjugation to the media, by participating and agreeing to a formally limited, but practically non-existent control over the same media, which is actually serving the monster, becomes the legalization of insanity as the new normality⁵. It used to be said that "every person, even the healthiest one, can in certain circumstances react with psychogenic and psychoneurotic phenomena if life difficulties exceed their emotional tolerance"⁶, but today we see that the use of terms such as emotional health, mental health, normal, healthy, etc. is completely avoided. The exception has become the rule. This relativization of the terms normal and insane is primarily a consequence of the identity nature of the media as a part of the identity of the modern individual. They cannot reject / overcome their own insanity, because they cannot reject / overcome the media, the media image, and their need for the media. It is a slave mentality of serving to insanity. One of the key terms for the relationship between an individual and the media in the matter of insanity is therefore nonsense. On the one hand, nonsense defines modern media in the shortest way, while on the other hand it defines human existence and persistence in insanity, whether it is the insanity of narcissism, as is most common, whether it is the insanity of idolatry, which is the other side of the same coin, or the same mirror. Verbiage with words, pictures, acts, the inflation of nonsense that is taking on the proportions of the biblical flood of humanity is visible all around us. This frenzy of verbiage, let's just say chatter, through and with the help of the media, or inspired by the modern media, leads to a huge exposure of an individual to idle talk⁷. It is the exposure of a person to the insanity of the environment, including the media environment, but also the exposure of the environment to the insanity of the individual. This cumulative effect and this defenseless exposure create the modern identity of both man and media, and that is the identity of insanity. All drives and instincts end at the point of insanity, and, in fact, they do not end there, but develop all possible forms of insanity in the form of a new normality. In the past, non-organic nervous diseases, neuroses and psychoneuroses, were called "hormopathy", from the Greek word "horme", which means instinct, drive⁸. Today we see that most instincts and urges are completely released through identification with insanity and with the blessing and creative role of the media. And this insanity, although obvious, remains unnoticed, because it is generally accepted by the media. We can take a kind of schizophrenia in the form of the avatar life of a person on social networks as one example, but also the entire media image of an individual or society, which is

5 The term new normality must also be understood as a form of concealment of insanity.

6 Glavan, I., *Živčane bolesti*, p. 787.

7 Purić, J., *Glas pastira iz Ostroga*, Oktoih, Podgorica, 2006, p. 114–115.

8 Glavan, I., *Živčane bolesti*, p. 785.

essentially different from real life, and often diametrically different. This media image is adopted as life at least as much as real life is hated and despised, and that hatred is nothing but insanity.

IV

When we said that the essence of insanity is in its manifestation, we did not mean that unmanifested insanity is not. Insanity of thought is another serious issue that needs to be talked about. In order to achieve their own calmness, an individual fights the biggest fights with their very thoughts, with “unmanifested insanity”, we will not go into the problem of the nature of those thoughts and the impact on a person of having such thoughts. There are even claims that with their thoughts, that is, their unmanifested state, an individual also strongly influences everything around them, because an individual is “a being of thought energy, he is a *thought apparatus* that radiates their thoughts to other people and the whole world”⁹. There is such a thought and a physical war, so “we make war with other people first in our thoughts, with our thoughts, and then we start arguing with them with words, so that, in the end, the original thought war becomes a visible, physical conflict and war”¹⁰. In this sense, there is an oppositional relationship between insanity and passion, on the one hand, and the pursuit of calmness, on the other. The media creates and inflames passions, the passion of insanity above all, which can also be a form of depression and addiction to loneliness, therefore calm does not seek the media, but runs away from them. Therefore, in humility, in the fight against the insanity of nonsense, man strives for a living icon within himself. Unlike that living icon that we find in humility, the media is an anti-icon¹¹, an image and seed of insanity in us and around us, which destroys this icon in us.

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10 Ibid, p. 38

11 Purić, J., *Glas pastira iz Ostroga*, p. 77.



Cromeosome 12
Oil and UV paint on aluminum
40 × 40 cm
2008

DEATH OF JAMES FOLEY: EXECUTION AS PERFORMANCE

Abstract: This paper examines media transmitted executions from the perspective of theatre and performance studies and philosophy of media, with a focus on the execution of American journalist James Foley by members of the Islamic State. Using the concepts of *theatricalized event* (Janelle Reinelt) and *cultural performance* (Milton Singer, Erika Fischer-Lichte), we will try to inspect the basic features of the mediatized execution, the role of the audience in this event, as well as the staging strategies used by the Islamic State in designing Foley's execution.

Keywords: ISIL, theatricalized event, cultural performance, media, violence

The Islamic State, a transnational militant jihadist organization, has so far executed thousands of prisoners, among who, beside military prisoners, were civilians (religious minorities, journalists, humanitarian workers, etc.). The first case that attracted the attention of the international community was the execution of American journalist James Foley, which was followed by a series of other filmed executions. The resonance of Foley's execution, its significance for the US and the Islamic State, made this execution what theorist Janel Reinelt describes as a theatricalized event.

In order for a public occurrence in everyday life to become theatricalized as aesthetic and social inquiry, there are a number of identifiable elements that must be present. First, the event must be of significant gravity to the well-being of the nation or a segment of the society that constitutes the audience; second, the event must attract a critical mass of public attention; third, the event must take a recognizable form, either as ceremony, game, or ritual, or else have unfolded in a form of narrative that can be apprehended in terms of protagonists and plot – in short, an old-fashioned butwell-known Aristotelianism; and fourth, the event must have been perceived by the public as the symbolic staging of other, recognizable, features of their national or local lives [...].¹

In the contemporary world, it is difficult to imagine an event attracting the aforementioned critical mass of public attention without the participation of

1 Reinelt, J. "Toward a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events: In the Case of Stephen Lawrence", in: *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* (ed. Carol Martin), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 31.

the media. The members of the Islamic State were counting on this, and Foley's execution was prepared and recorded for watching on the screen. The video was posted on YouTube in August 2014 under the title *A message to America*. Although the clip was deleted soon, it could not stop the further circulation of this media-transmitted execution. The fact that this execution was transmitted by the media has multiple effects on its character and is particularly important for understanding the role assigned to the audience. It will be clearer to us if we compare this mediatized execution with those "classic" executions, which took place in front of the (physically) present audience.

Writing about executions in the 17th and 18th centuries, Foucault points out that "the public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual"² and emphasizes that the role of the people during that act is twofold – they are observers and witnesses, but also participants in the execution.³ Foucault notes that executions did not always go as planned and that the people, especially in cases where the punishment seemed unjust, decided to intervene and redirect the course of the executions.⁴ Considering the role of the audience during the execution, Foucault writes: "they could intervene, physically: enter by force into the punitive mechanism and redistribute its effects; take up in another sense the violence of the punitive rituals."⁵

The executions described by Foucault can be unreservedly understood as cultural performances. It is a term coined in 1959 by Milton Singer, which refers to events that have a limited duration, beginning and end, performers and audience, as well as a specific place and occasion for performance⁶. The high degree of unpredictability of the executions described by Foucault can be linked to the immanent qualities of the performance.

According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, every performance, be it artistic or cultural is determined by its processuality and transience: the performance does not create any tangible work, as is the case with some other arts, but exclusively itself. More precisely, the performance is formed thanks to the energy exchange between the performers and the spectators, which is defined as an *autopoietic feedback loop*.⁷ That is why each performance is unique and unrepeatable, but also unpredictable, because it depends on the elusive action of *autopoiesis*.

2 Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books, New York, 1995, p. 47.

3 Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 58.

4 Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 61.

5 Ibid.

6 Carlson, M. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, p. 20.

7 Fischer-Lichte, E. *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2014, p. 18–23.

When it comes to Foley's media transmitted execution, the audience has no role as a co-creator. The performance does not take place *now* and *here*, the physical presence of the audience and participants in the execution has been abolished. The audience cannot participate in the creation of the performance through the screen and cannot change its course in any way. Therefore, Foley's execution cannot be defined as a performance in the true sense of the word, yet we should think about it as a media-transformed cultural performance. This performance has all the elements of cultural performance described by Milton Singer, except for the fact that the intended audience is on the other side of the screen.

The audience of a mediatised execution finds itself in the position of watching an execution staged for its eyes, but whose course it cannot affect. It does not exist without the gaze of the spectators, and they cannot take an active role in it. The only choice the audience has is whether or not to click on the video of the execution. This limited scope of action puts the audience further into a passive role, aware that no direct action can change the course of an already completed and mediated act. In addition to the suspension of the feedback loop due to media transmission, there are two other important factors that reduce the audience's compassion for Foley: one is related to the way violence and death are treated in the media, the other to the doubt over the authenticity of media content.

If we look at the wider context, we can easily state that contemporary media is full of scenes of violence and death. As Divna Vuksanović points out, "today's media is so overwhelmed by violence that we hardly even notice it [...]"⁸ The author states that, along with sex, violence is "[...] an important moment of the media industry. In order for violence to become an even more significant resource for mass exploitation, systemic media transmission is necessary, which brings violence into a direct relationship with entertainment."⁹

From the end of the sixties onwards, numerous film authors, such as Sam Peckinpah and later Quentin Tarantino, to mention only the most prominent ones, based their poetics on the depiction of scenes of violence. Numerous genres of video games (action, shooting games, RPG) keep this scale quite high, exploiting violence and murder as the basic mechanism for reaching the goal. It also seems that violence is an inevitable part of some of the most successful television projects in the new millennium (such as the series *Game of Thrones*). On the other hand, we increasingly find scenes of real violence in the media, which is no longer just part of breaking news from the battlefield. Owing to the development of technology, news about fights in schools, in restaurants, or on the street are often accompanied by photos and videos of that violence, recorded by one of the witnesses or a surveillance camera.

8 Vuksanović, D. "Filozofija medija: je li nasilje zabavno?", in: *In medias res, časopis filozofije medija* (12), Zagreb, p. 1826.

9 Vuksanović, D. „Filozofija medija: je li nasilje zabavno?“, p. 1828.

The accumulation of scenes of violence and death on our screens, especially those of a fictitious nature, has led to the fact that even scenes of real violence take on the character of fictitious ones. The border between reality and fiction has been thinned, and the audience's threshold of sensitivity to these contents has been raised.

In addition to the lessening distinction between fictitious and real violence, we can also make a more pessimistic conclusion: considering that fictitious worlds have reached the extreme limits in the depiction of violence, the hunger for sensation that such content has largely created has shifted to scenes of real violence that can more easily shake the dulled perception of the spectators.

Doubts about the authenticity of what was shown also contribute to the fictionalization of the media transmitted execution and the reduction of empathy towards the victim. Modern media have long proven their power of manipulation, both in recreating images of reality and in creating non-existent virtual worlds. We can never be completely sure of the truth of what we see. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the news of the execution was followed by headlines and videos about its credibility: *FBI believes Foley video is authentic*¹⁰, *US checking authenticity of ISIS video showing Kassig's beheading*¹¹, *Japan says ISIL beheading video likely authentic*,¹² etc.

In the case of Foley's execution, doubts about authenticity proved to be fully justified. As reported by the Telegraph and other media, forensic experts believe the footage of Foley's execution was most likely staged. Namely, Jihadi John, in all likelihood, was only playing the executioner because of his British accent, while the actual murder happened off camera. The evidence for this is that there are no traces of blood on the video, even though Foley's neck was slashed at least 6 times; the sounds Foley makes are considered inconsistent; during Foley's speech, a beep is heard, which probably had the function of signaling the victim to repeat the line he had spoken once more.¹³

One more element of the media-transmitted execution of Foley, as well as subsequent victims, can confirm its staging. Namely, many asked the question,

10 Reuters. "FBI believes Foley video is authentic – GlobalPost. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-beheading-fbi/fbi-believes-foley-video-is-authentic-globalpost-idUSKBN0GK1GC20140820>, 2014, accessed 11. 8. 2018.

11 Firstpost. "US checking authenticity of ISIS video showing Kassig's beheading". <https://www.firstpost.com/world/us-checking-authenticity-of-isis-video-showing-kassigs-beheading-1805373.html>, 2014, accessed 13. 10. 2018.

12 Aljazeera. "Japan says ISIL beheading video likely authentic", <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/japanese-hostage-beheaded-isil-150131201857344.html>, 2015, accessed 5. 9. 2018.

13 Gardner, B. "Foley murder video may have been staged", *Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/bill-gardner/11054488/Foley-murder-video-may-have-been-staged.html>, 2014, accessed 10. 9. 2018.

how is it possible that the victims spoke in such a calm tone a few minutes before their death. The reason may lie in the fact that they did not even know that they would be executed. It is possible that the jihadists lied to them that they would be spared so that they could act out their last words exactly as planned. The members of the Islamic State probably wanted to create the effect that the executed, just before their death, said these words calmly, not because they were forced to do so, but because they understood those words to be (their) truth. The detailed consideration of the staging and directing of the execution may at first glance seem too sophisticated for the fanatical members of the Islamic State, driven by extremist ideas. That would be a hasty and probably inaccurate assessment.

In the book *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, Atwan explains that ISIL's activities are driven by a highly deliberate media strategy, describing them as "masters of the digital universe".¹⁴ "The range, quality, and availability of today's digital equipment, such as HD cameras, editing software, special effects libraries, and so on, enable Islamic State's professional media teams to produce the slick and gruesome high-definition videos [...]"¹⁵ The combination of their technological skills and ideological aspirations creates a powerful paradox in which the ambitions of the Middle Ages are revived in digital space.¹⁶

Is the paradox we are talking about in relation to the Islamic State – in which inhumane sadistic brutality and conservatism meet with superior digital and technological literacy, a feature of modern media and their content? Doesn't the same paradox connect the Islamic State with the TV series *Game of Thrones*? The plot of this series takes place in an unspecified medieval era of bloody confrontations, which are shown in an extremely spectacular way, thanks to expensive production and superb special effects.

At the beginning of the video of the execution, Jihadi John talks about the reasons for Foley's execution. In fact, he talks about the guilt of the United States of America, accusing the U.S. of being at the forefront of aggression against the Islamic State.¹⁷ The executioner is dressed in black and has a mask on his face. The function of the clothes is to hide his identity, but at the same time it erases his individuality, so he can be understood as an allegorical figure embodying the *righteous wrath* of the Islamic State. In fact, in this carefully crafted performance,

14 Atwan, B. A. *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, p. 15.

15 Atwan, B. A. *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, p. 16.

16 Ruthven, M. "Inside the Islamic State", *The New York Review*. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/07/09/inside-islamic-state/>, 2015, accessed, 10. 9. 2018.

17 LeakSource. "Islamic State Beheads American Journalist James Foley", <https://leaksource.wordpress.com/2014/08/19/graphic-video-islamic-state-beheads-american-journalist-james-foley/>, 2014, accessed 2. 9. 2018.

opposite sides of conflict are United States, represented by Foley, and the Islamic State, represented by the executioner.

Apart from what Jihadi John says, it is important *how* he says it, as it is in any performance. As we have already mentioned, the executor speaks with a fluent British accent, which has important meaning implications. His accent should implicitly suggest the strength and scope of the jihadist movement, whose members are also in the ranks of developed Europe, where they would least be expected, which contributes to the feelings of fear and panic that the jihadists wanted to create.¹⁸

Owing to modern media, the digital scaffold has been expanded beyond the frame of the recording itself and allows other actors to be included in it, before or after the act. After the video of the execution of James Foley, the then President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, gave a speech in which he emphasized that the world was appalled by what had happened. He called ISIL a cancer that needs to be prevented and eliminated, because they have no future, since “[...] the future is won by those who build and not destroy. The world is shaped by people like Jim Foley [...]”.¹⁹ In his speech, Obama espouses the democratic values of tolerance, but also expresses the firmness to resist ISIL. He tries to produce the effect that the values represented by Foley are winning in this conflict. Despite being killed, he, as a hero of the tragedy, loses his life, but at the same time wins by proving the superiority of his values. At the same time, Obama wants to indirectly attach the same humanistic values to an enlightened America, which shapes the future, unlike the jihadists who destroy it.

What is the resolution of this theatricalized event? Which of the two warring sides is winning the ISIL–US conflict, reflected in Foley’s execution and the reactions that followed? Which values prevailed? Those of Jihadi John and Foley’s speech or those of Obama?

The answer is probably: neither. In the eyes of the spectacle, Foley and Jihadi John are not opponents, but allies. The main heroes of the spectacle are neither the victim nor the executioner, but a commodity form that continues unhindered on its way to its absolute realization. “By invoking any number of different criteria, the spectacle can present these oppositions as totally distinct social systems. But

18 As there were four Islamic State soldiers who spoke English with a British accent and were in charge of foreign prisoners, media named them the Beatles. Foley’s executioner, later revealed to be Mohammed Emwazi, was chosen to be John (Lennon), probably because he gained the most popularity of all.

19 The Washington Post. “Transcript: President Obama’s remarks on the execution of journalist James Foley by Islamic State,” https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-president-obamas-remarks-on-the-execution-of-journalist-james-foley-by-islamic-state/2014/08/20/f5a63802-2884-11e4-8593-da634b334390_story.html, 2014, accessed 10. 9. 2018.

in reality they are nothing but particular sectors whose fundamental essence lies in the global system that contains them, the single movement that has turned the whole planet into its field of operation: capitalism.”²⁰ From the perspective of the media, Foley’s execution, which we have analysed as a theatricalized event and a media-transformed performance, is also a commodity whose value is determined by the number of clicks.

There is another, seemingly minor, but very important detail. If we look more closely at the video of the execution, we will see that Jihadi John, in addition to black clothes and a mask, is wearing another item of clothing. These are *Timberland* shoes. *Timberland* is a famous American brand, known for good quality shoes. Isn’t this detail the best proof of the quiet victory of capitalism, which found its way to the feet of the executioners of the Islamic State? In other words, the main hero of our performance is neither James Foley nor Jihadi John, but these cream *Timberland* shoes.

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²⁰ Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*, Bureau of Public Secrets, London, 2014, p. 22.

Firstpost. “US checking authenticity of ISIS video showing Kassig’s beheading”. <https://www.firstpost.com/world/us-checking-authenticity-of-isis-video-showing-kassigs-beheading-1805373.html>, 2014, accessed 13. 10. 2018.

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JOHN PILGER: MEDIA WAR AND THE TRIUMPH OF PROPAGANDA

Abstract: This paper analyzes the insights of John Pilger, one of the leading journalists of our time, with the aim of answering why journalism today has been reduced to transmitting the interests of the powerful, disseminating propaganda, and controlling the minds of the population. The paper examines the investigative work of John Pilger, who, as a war correspondent, covered a wide range of wartime events in Southeast Asia, from Vietnam to Cambodia, East Timor, Egypt, India, Bangladesh, Biafra, and the Middle East. The focus of our examination lies in Pilger's investigations presented in the documentaries "The Search for Truth in Wartime," "The War on Democracy," and "The War You Don't See," which offer a powerful and timely inquiry into the role of media in war. These works trace the history of propaganda and deception in media reporting, from World War I, the destruction of Hiroshima, and the invasion of Vietnam, to more recent wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and the catastrophe in Iraq. "As weapons and propaganda become more sophisticated, the nature of war evolves into an electronic battlefield where journalists play a crucial role, and civilians are the victims. But who is the real enemy?"

Keywords: information warfare, media, propaganda, journalism, censorship, strategies of deception

"The moral interpretation of world events in an era of universal rule of lies" or establishing "truth as a powerful weapon against injustice" are among the definitions of the work of John Pilger, an Australian documentary filmmaker who arrived in Europe in the early 1960s, beginning his journalistic career as a freelance reporter in Italy and later in Britain, at Reuters and the London Daily Mirror. At the time, the Daily Mirror was the most widely circulated British newspaper, which, during the establishment of the (neo)liberal counter-movement under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ("Thatcherism"), was transformed into a "serious tabloid."¹ As a leading war correspondent² Pilger has, through his articles and

1 See also: John Pilger, "Breaking The Mirror – The Murdoch Effect", Network First, 1998.

2 John Pilger quickly became a leading foreign correspondent, reporting from around the globe on numerous wars waged by the imperial West under slogans of fighting communism and "making the world safe for democracy." In his twenties, he became the youngest journalist to receive Britain's top journalism award, Journalist of the Year, and he

documentaries, revealed the truth about imperial wars around the world, all of which had “hidden agendas,”³ the title of one of John Pilger’s most significant and provocative books. This work decodes the layers of media manipulation, the formatting, and the logistics of perception that prevent us from understanding how the world truly operates. From Britain, to Burma, to Vietnam, to Australia, to South Africa, Pilger, in *Hidden Agendas*, uncovers the concealed history of modern wars, in conditions where propaganda, mind control, and virtual reality have supplanted genuine reality.

MEDIA: CULTURAL CHERNOBYL

In the chapter “Cultural Chernobyl”⁴ from the study *Hidden Agendas*, Pilger shows that the process of media takeover by financial magnates was carried out for the purpose of creating a powerful propaganda apparatus for the total war of the “power elite” against the population. During the 1980s, this media takeover was marked by the actions of the “media mafia”⁵ led by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who turned news into entertainment by creating a new form of media programming, infotainment, with paparazzi as the leading journalistic professionals tasked with photographing celebrities.⁶

“Those who ran the TV news had to degrade themselves further to keep up with Murdoch. Everything Murdoch touched became desensitized, like the horrors that appear on the front pages every day, until, after some time, we become accustomed to them.”⁷ Pilger’s analysis points to the reasons why we can no longer speak of an independent and free press, as well as the convergence of media culture with the totalitarian intentions of a globalized society in which spirituality is continuously suppressed, and the imperial cultural matrix scientifically-technologically enhances a turbo-expansive endo- and exocolonial cultural model. The media fit into the war machine for producing a surplus population, working to create a consciousness that will no longer be able to question or threaten the order of power. The first reason Pilger shows the importance of power, success, and resources needed to run mainstream media, and how large media corporations

was the first to win it twice. In the United States, he reported on the civil rights movements and upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s. He marched with America’s poor from Alabama to Washington following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He was in the same room in June 1968 when Robert Kennedy, a U.S. presidential candidate, was assassinated.

3 John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, Vintage, London, 1998.

4 Ibid., pp. 445–485.

5 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 448.

6 See: *Ibid.*, pp. 449–451.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 451.

are vertically and horizontally integrated into each other, leading to the expression of one-sided views in various media (newspapers, TV, and radio stations) because these views come from individuals or groups who have absolute control over mainstream media.⁸ “Australia is the first world Murdochcracy in which the American citizen Rupert Murdoch controls 70 percent of the urban press. He holds monopolies in major cities and provincial centers. The only national newspapers are his. He is the dominant force on the internet, on television, and in publishing. Known as ‘Rupert,’ he is the main boss.”⁹

Rupert Murdoch’s dominance is based on political extremism, which is a consequence of the enormous concentration of global wealth in the hands of a few. He earned the title of “media demon”¹⁰ due to the actions of the media under his ownership. This does not guarantee the collapse of his media empire, since the media operate according to a propaganda model, with key structural factors in the global order stemming from the fact that dominant media (mainstream media) are firmly embedded in the global system. Melbourne journalist Paul Chadwick, one of the few who rebelled against Murdoch, called this system a “hunting” – “a small group of generals who are above the major institutions... [it’s] a junta, except by name.”¹¹ The concentration of capital during the period of so-called “globalization” reveals the methodology of the media “junta,” according to John Pilger: “Consider the rise of the junta. In the U.S., at the end of World War II, 80% of newspapers were independently owned. By 1987, 15 corporations controlled the media, of which six now dominate. Their ideological message is a mantra. They promote global and domestic economic piracy and the cult of ‘eternal war.’ This is currently [in 2012, when the text was written – note by the author] serving the ‘liberal’ president who tracks whistleblowers, sends drones, and chooses [who will be next up for elimination] from his personal ‘kill list’

8 Robert Greenwald’s 2004 documentary *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism* convincingly reveals the ways in which Rupert Murdoch establishes control and ensures bias at the Fox News television station. *Outfoxed* shows that Murdoch-owned media have a reach of 4.7 billion people worldwide and demonstrates the enormous influence these media exert on the global population by formatting opinions, beliefs, and perceptions. Through interviews with former journalists from this media house, the film exposes how Murdoch manipulates the public. David Brock, a researcher and liberal political consultant, and founder of the media monitoring group Media Matters for America (MMfA), states in the film: “He doesn’t believe in objectivity” and “He [Rupert Murdoch] wants news to be opinion.” The film compellingly demonstrates the power Murdoch has over employees, turning them into mere puppets on strings.

9 John Pilger, “Murdoch may be a convenient demon, but the media is a junta“, <http://johnpilger.com/articles/murdoch-may-be-a-convenient-demon-but-the-media-is-a-junta>, 30 June 2012.

10 See: *Ibid.*

11 See: *Ibid.*

every Tuesday. In Britain, where the propaganda of big capital dominates, the historical convergence of the two main political parties is rarely news. Tony Blair, the architect of the greatest crime of this century, is promoted as a ‘lost talent.’ In all these agendas, especially in promoting war, Murdoch’s press often plays a secondary role to the esteemed BBC.”¹² “Cultural Chernobyl quickly erased all standards of professional journalism and, under the banners of ‘media freedom,’ and ‘ending state control over the media,’ began a cultural engineering based on obscenity, following the pattern established by long-time Australian media baron and businessman Ezra Norton: ‘Give me breasts, pizza, and a gun.’”¹³ The true culture, which is based on the relationship between people in society, shaping into attitudes, customs, and morals – cultural patterns that form the basis of behaviors, expectations, and societal value criteria – has been replaced by media-cultural engineering. After the fractures in culture were exploited by powerful media, a parallel reality was created, conceptually promoting obscenity and systematically implementing a policy of spreading “black” information – negative news and (dis)information – in order to produce apathy and despair among the population. The production of culture in the form of tabloid reality has proven to be a powerful form of predictive programming capable of shaping perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes of people who will serve the interests of power, with the population unaware that their beliefs are being generated.

Under the banner of “It’s all just entertainment and show business,” surveillance, the disappearance of privacy, and obedience to supreme authority have been normalized. The factual evidence in media information, communication, and the discursive universe has lost its connection to argumentation and has become a matter of power discourse and its frequency. In conditions where the value-referential myth has become a hypostasis of profit and the value categories derived from it, media have become subordinated to the logic of corporate capital (from ownership to program content). All the symbols and validations used to promote the new global order have acquired the status of meaningful structures that the dominant discourse uses to ensure symbolic communication and cooperation among disciplinary practices and punitive policies, colonizing the entire discursive universe. The “ethics” of billionaire Rupert Murdoch revealed its monstrous methodology and goals from the very beginning of his career, as precisely documented by Richard Neville in his study titled *The Life and Crimes of a Global Goebbels*.¹⁴ “The first death that I am aware of, which occurred as a result of headlines in media owned by Rupert Murdoch, took place in Sydney in 1964,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Richard Neville, *The Life and Crimes of a Global Goebbels*, CounterPunch. Available at: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2006/09/01/the-life-and-crimes-of-a-global-goebbels/>.

when a student committed suicide.”¹⁵ Rupert Murdoch’s tabloid *The Daily Mirror* of Sydney published that year a diary of a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl under the title “We have a diary of a schoolgirl’s orgy.” A thirteen-year-old boy, Digby Bamford, who was identified as a participant in the orgies, was expelled from that school. Shortly afterwards, he hanged himself. The “sex diary” was later found to be a fake. The girl was examined by a doctor from the Department of Child Welfare, who determined that she was a virgin. The diary was therefore the result of a child’s innocent sexual imagination.¹⁶ After Richard Neville, the editor of *Oz* magazine, visited the boy’s family and was deeply moved by their grief, he wrote in his autobiography: “It seems that some publishers can commit murders and get away with it.” When he later confronted Murdoch with the consequences of his newspapers’ actions, he received the laconic reply: “Everyone makes mistakes.”¹⁷ An almost identical “mistake” was repeated soon after Murdoch bought the *News of the World* in 1971, in which he published the adolescent diary of a fifteen-year-old girl, Samantha McAlpine, which led to her suicide. A forensic pathologist later declared her a virgin and her diary “pure fantasy.”¹⁸ The privacy violations committed by Murdoch’s media, carried out for the sake of profit, led to numerous “collateral damages” for which no one was held accountable. On November 24, 2011, former Formula 1 boss Max Mosley accused the British government of being “completely in the pocket” of newspaper editors.¹⁹ Max Mosley was the victim of an article published by Murdoch’s *News of the World*, which accused him of participating in a “sick Nazi orgy,” an accusation Mosley strongly denied. However, the main “collateral damage” was his son, Alexander Mosley, who died from a drug overdose. Reflecting on the possible impact of the media-driven and spread story of the “Nazi orgy” on his thirty-nine-year-old son, he said: “For my son, the images of his father in such a situation in the newspapers, across the entire network... it was something he truly couldn’t bear. He went back to drugs.”²⁰ This kind of ethics led Rupert Murdoch to the major international media stage, where his outlets were among the first to support the wars initiated by the West. “Murdoch personally supported President George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003. In the lead-up to the invasion, Murdoch’s publications and television channels in the UK, the United States, and other parts of the world worked overtime to build a case that would justify the attack on Iraq. Two years prior, Britain and the United States created dossiers on nonexistent weapons of mass

15 Ibid.

16 Cf. John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, op. cit., p. 450.

17 Ibid., p. 450.

18 Compare: Richard Neville, *The Life and Crimes of a Global Goebbels*, op. cit.

19 Compare: Sam Marsden, Rosa Silverman, Brian Farmer, “Max Mosley: Ministers in ‘thrall’ to Murdoch”, *Independent*, 24 November 2011, 14:03.

20 Compare: Ibid.

destruction in Iraq to justify the invasion.”²¹ The media controlled by Murdoch immediately began the constant buzz about the imminent threat posed by this (nonexistent) weapon to the security of the West.

WAR CORRESPONDENT: FROM HERO TO PROPAGANDIST

John Pilger’s 1983 film *The Search for Truth in Wartime* raises the questions: “What is the role of the media in war? Is the role of the media in war simply to record events, or to explain them, and from whose perspective – the military, the politicians, or the victims?”²² The film is inspired by the book by Philip Knightley *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*²³ which discusses the history of media war reporting and the boundary that should not be crossed in order for journalists not to become mere tools of propaganda. The updated edition of the book, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, was published in 2000 with a foreword by John Pilger.²⁴

“First casualty of war is truth”²⁵ stated U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson in 1917, and in his now-classic history of war journalism, Philip Knightley demonstrated the absolute truth of Johnson’s statement. From William Howard Russell, the first special correspondent (war reporter) of *The Times* of London, who described the horrors of the Crimean War, to journalists, photographers, and filmmakers who depicted the reality of the Vietnam War, Knightley traced the history of war journalism from heroism to secret deals, censorship, suppression, and the creation of myths. After the experience with Vietnam, the “elite powers” became much more adept at managing the media, so in the new chapters on the Falklands War, the Gulf War, and the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Knightley concludes

21 John Cherian, “The Warmonger,” *Frontline*, Volume 28, Issue 16, Jul. 30 – Aug. 12, 2011. Available at: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/fl2816/stories/20110812281601500.htm>.

22 John Pilger, “The Search for Truth in Wartime”, director: Ross Devenish; producer: Nicholas Claxton (53 mins), 1983. Available at: <http://johnpilger.com/videos/frontline-the-search-for-truth-in-wartime>.

23 Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty – From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1975.

24 Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, Rev. ed. with a new introduction by John Pilger, Prion, London, 2000.

25 Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty*. Available at: <https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/first-casualty>.

that the role of the war correspondent as a seeker of truth has nearly disappeared. Knightley presents insights showing the complete symbiosis between politics, the military, and the media, whose behavior does not differ from that in previous conventional wars, which was based on the demonization of enemy leaders, the dehumanization of the enemy population, and all forms of propaganda. “Reporting on the war on terror returns to the level of World War I,” Knightley argues, “filled with propagandistic and criminal stories, while journalists rely on official information because they themselves can learn little... CNN, BBC, and American generals in the Pentagon tell us what they have decided we should know about the war.”²⁶

In the film, Pilger tracks war reporting from the Crimean War²⁷ to the Falklands War²⁸ specifically on the front lines. Filmed immediately after the Falklands War, the first war carried out under a plan by the British Ministry of

26 Ibid.

27 The Crimean War (1853–1856) was the first global war. The Russian Empire fought against a coalition of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain, the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Caucasian Imamate, the Principality of Abkhazia, and the Circassian army, with the active “neutrality” of the Austrian Empire and the monarchies of Prussia and Sweden. On the Russian side, the Georgians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs fought. For a broader perspective, see Sergey Pinchuk, *Крымская война и одиссея Греческого легиона* (Crimean War and the Odyssey of the Greek Legion), Veche, Moscow, 2016.

28 The Falklands War, also known as the Malvinas War, was fought between Argentina and the United Kingdom from April 2 to June 14, 1982. For understanding the Falklands War, significant analyses have been made by Adrian Salbuchi, an Argentine scholar, economist, and expert in globalization, founder of the Argentine Second Republic Movement. In his article, *Argentina: From Falklands Blitz to ‘Treaty of Versailles’*, written 30 years after the war, Salbuchi analyzes the long-term and devastating consequences of Argentina’s capitulation to the Empire. Before Argentina was considered the best student of the IMF in the 1990s, the country had already sealed its fate and became a laboratory for a new American/British brand of “democracy” betrayal, which began with the signing of the Treaty that “ended” the state of war but marked the beginning of foreign privatizations, the sale of Argentina’s national resources, and the loss of its sovereignty. The text ends with a chapter titled *The moral of the story*, in which Salbuchi states: “It is much better (and easier) to avoid an open military invasion of defeated nations; instead, impose the American/British brand of ‘democracy.’ This is done by financing the worst, most immoral, and most treacherous local politicians, pushing them into powerful positions like presidents, ministers, senators, congressmen, judges, and governors. Then, all you have to do is what you want. This is called ‘democracy’ and it works well [...] for the global power elite! Oh, and make sure that local media never remind the public [...] that the American/British brand of ‘democracy’ is a very dangerous Trojan horse.”

Source: Adrian Salbuchi, *Argentina: From Falklands Blitz to ‘Treaty of Versailles’*, Voltaire Network, 2 April 2012. Available at: <https://www.voltairenet.org/article173379.html>.

Defence to control the media, following the assessment of journalistic activities on the battlefield during the Vietnam War. “The original plan,” Philip Knightley states in the film, “was that no reporting would be allowed until everything was finished and Britain had successfully restored sovereignty over the Falklands. But, under pressure from Downing Street, the British Ministry of Defence had to relent. Nevertheless, there were no neutral journalists. There were no American correspondents, no French, or from any other country. Only 16–18 British reporters, none of whom could be independent. The presence of Donald McCullin, the best war photographer of today, was not allowed. They didn’t let him in, claiming they couldn’t provide accommodation!”²⁹ After the aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999, Knightly asked the question: “What has changed between Vietnam and Kosovo? Essentially, the military has won its 150-year battle with war correspondents: journalists want to tell the public everything; the military’s stance is: ‘Don’t tell them anything until the war is over, then tell them who won.’ Defeated by the military, the government, and spin doctors, war correspondents now face an agonizing choice. If they can no longer be heroes, do they still want to be propagandists and myth makers, subordinated to those who lead wars? A turning point in this struggle was the Falklands Islands. The nature of the campaign – a naval task force sailing to attack a group of islands 8,000 miles from Britain and 400 miles from the nearest landmass – meant that correspondents could not get to the war unless the Ministry of Defence took them. In exchange for access to the action, correspondents had to accept the Ministry of Defence’s rules.”³⁰ Knightly questions why reality disappeared from media reporting during the Kosovo War: “The revolution in communication technology; satellite phones – the stars of the war; instant TV connections from the front to the studio and among correspondents in the field; electronic transmission of photographs; and the latest arrival on the front – the internet; all were available to provide the public with an unprecedented overview of the war. Ordinary citizens could know more about the conflict than any war in history. Instead, we drowned in a wave of words and images that led nowhere. ‘Kosovo [...] turned out to be the most secretive campaign in living memory,’ wrote British war historian Alistair Horne. ‘We received a lot of material, but not information,’ said Sky war correspondent Jake Lynch. British journalist Peter Dunn wrote that it was ‘the first international conflict led by journalists.’ General Sir Michael Rose, former commander of UN forces in Bosnia, said that in NATO ‘rhetoric replaced reality.’”³¹ Ian McDonald, the spokesperson for the British Ministry of Defence during the Falklands War, knew during press conferences organized during the war that no one present knew what

29 John Pilger, “The Search for Truth in Wartime”, op. cit.

30 Phillip Knightley, “Fighting dirty”, *The Guardian*, 20. 3. 2000. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2000/mar/20/mondaymediasection.pressandpublishing>.

31 Ibid.

was happening on the ground, as stated in the film by John Shirley, a journalist for London's Sunday Times. Morley Safer, a correspondent for CBS News during the Vietnam War, who reported on the systematic burning of South Vietnamese villages by U.S. Marines in Cam Ne in 1965, testified in the film about the different position of journalists and the media during this war, where reporters contrasted their photographs and video footage from the field with false military reports, thereby discrediting them. On August 5, 1965, CBS aired a shocking report by Morley Safer showing U.S. troops in Vietnam burning the village of Cam Ne. This was one of the first news broadcasts in which the U.S. military was portrayed in a negative light, and many viewers were outraged at CBS for airing the report, ready to label it as a communist media stronghold. Despite a direct complaint from U.S. President Johnson to the CBS president, the network continued airing Safer's on-the-ground reports.³² "What you need to know," says John Pilger, speaking about the Vietnam War in the film *Searching for Truth in Wartime*, "is that it wasn't just the media that invented the image of the Vietnam War, but the CIA invented the war itself"³³ as stated in the film by Ralph McGehee, who spent 26 years in the CIA, most of which was spent in Vietnam. McGehee was an expert on CIA media manipulation and the author of the book *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*.³⁴ In his book, McGehee testifies about the manipulations of the intelligence apparatus, conducting secret operations, and deceiving the American public in order to establish American dominance in Asia.

THE WAR ON DEMOCRACY

The War On Democracy (2007)³⁵ using archival footage collected by Carl Deal, shows how a series of secret and public U.S. interventions toppled a number of legitimate governments in Latin America from the 1950s onward. Explaining the creation of this film, Pilger said: "*The War On Democracy*" is my first cinema film. It came after I had made 55 documentaries for television, starting with "*The Quiet Mutiny*", which was made in Vietnam. Most of my films spoke about human struggles against predatory power and attempts to undermine and control our historical memory. It is this control, this organized forgetting, that has always fascinated me both as a filmmaker and as a journalist. It is described by Harold

32 "Reporting Vietnam: Cam Ne", #ReportingVietnam, Newseum, 5. 8. 2015. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%23ReportingVietnam.

33 Ibid.

34 Ralph W. McGehee, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*, Open Road Media, New York, 2015. file:///E:/PDF/Ralph%20W.%20McGehee%20-%20Deadly%20Deceits%20-%20My%2025%20Years%20in%20the%20CIA%20-%20pdf%20[TKRG].pdf.

35 John Pilger, "The War On Democracy", <https://vimeo.com/16724719>.

Pinter as the great silence, uninterrupted by the constant swing of the media, which reassures the powerful in the West that the fight of entire societies against their crimes was only superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged... That never happened, even while it was happening, it never happened. It didn't matter. It wasn't of interest."³⁶ When the president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, was overthrown in 2009 through lobbying and spinning, the details revealed by the publication of Wikileaks diplomatic cables and investigations into lobbying activities evoked unpleasant memories of the "banana republics"³⁷ and the role public relations (PR) played in earlier "regime changes" in the region. In 1954, the same corporation, United Fruit (now Chiquita), in neighboring Guatemala³⁸ led to the overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected president, the socialist and moderate reformer Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán. United Fruit was particularly displeased after the new government gave some of its unused banana plantations to peasants, prompting the company to hire Edward Bernays, the creator of the "public relations" field. During the McCarthy era, Bernays managed to convince the American public, the press, and the CIA about the communist revolution in Guatemala, leading to a brutal military intervention. Three years later, the CIA destroyed Árbenz's government, returning Guatemala to United Fruit's control. The tragic consequences – decades of tyranny in Guatemala, during which hundreds of thousands of Mayan Indigenous people were subjected to displacement, torture, and death – did not concern Bernays or United Fruit, which paid him a large sum of \$100,000 per year for his efforts.³⁹ Bernays' documentation clearly shows that the U.S. recognized Latin America as ripe for economic exploitation and political manipulation, and the propaganda war he organized set the pattern for future interventions in Cuba, Vietnam, and up to the present

36 John Pilger, "The Rising of Latin America - the Genesis of 'The War On Democracy'", johnpilger.com, 13 June 2007. Internet, <http://johnpilger.com/articles/the-rising-of-latin-america-the-genesis-of-the-war-on-democracy>.

37 The term "banana republic" was coined at the turn of the 20th century to describe the economic and political dominance of the United Fruit Company (now operating as Chiquita) over weak and/or corrupt governments in Central America. "For much of its modern history, Honduras has been a quintessential 'banana republic,' a poor country ruled by a small group of wealthy elites, with national politics controlled by multinational business interests, particularly those of 'Chiquita.' In fact, 'Chiquita' was historically known as 'El Pulpo' ('The Octopus') in Honduras, as the company's tentacles firmly controlled the national politics of the country."

For further reading, see: Brendan Fischer, "A Banana Republic Once Again?" PR Watch, Center for Media and Democracy, December 27, 2010. <https://www.prwatch.org/news/2010/12/9834/banana-republic-once-again>.

38 Reference: Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1982, p. 112.

39 Reference: Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin*, op. cit., pp. 164–165.

day. It was a pivotal moment in history that revealed the nature of the alliance between political power, corporate interests, the PR industry, and the media, thus opening the possibility to act behind the scenes by manipulating public opinion. Bernays was a pioneer of the industrial techniques that achieved this invisibility.⁴⁰ In the film *The War on Democracy*, John Pilger analyzes the role of the CIA in covert campaigns against democratic countries in the Latin American region and explores the work of the “School of the Americas”, a U.S. military training center established in 1946 in Georgia. Over sixty thousand soldiers and police officers, mostly from Latin America, were trained there in counterinsurgency and combat skills. As the film shows, “Pinochet’s torture squads, along with tyrants and death squad leaders from Haiti, El Salvador, Brazil, and Argentina, were trained there.”⁴¹ The democratically elected Chilean government of Salvador Allende was overthrown in 1973 by a coup organized by the CIA, replacing it with the military dictatorship of General Pinochet.⁴² On the list of countries attacked by the United States were Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador, entering into the “updated review of U.S. foreign policy records”, which was published by American historian William Blum until his death in 2018. Blum showed that “since 1945, during the so-called golden age of peace, the U.S. has killed or helped kill around

40 Scott Cutlip, an academic and pioneer in the study of public relations (PR), referred to this action as “invisible power,” as highlighted in the title of his 1994 book: Scott M. Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, A History*, Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995.

41 Reference: John Pilger, *The War On Democracy*, <https://vimeo.com/16724719>.

42 According to declassified materials published by the Archive in 2016, “the intelligence community began generating significant information about preparations for the coup on September 8, 1973. Initial reports indicated that the coup was planned for September 10; the CIA later issued a special ‘critical intelligence’ dispatch reporting that the coup would take place the following day, September 11. A summary from the Defense Intelligence Agency, dated September 8 and classified as ‘Top Secret Umbra’ provided detailed information about an agreement between the Chilean army, navy, and air force to take action against Allende on September 10. A CIA dispatch, dated September 8 and classified as ‘Secret,’ stated that the Chilean navy ‘would initiate the move to overthrow President Salvador Allende’s government in Valparaíso at 8:30 AM on September 10’ and provided detailed information on which branches of the military and police would take control of key strategic locations. The dispatch identified key Chilean officers and officials who had signed an agreement to support the coup. A CIA dispatch dated September 10 and classified as ‘Secret’ indicated that the September 10 date had been postponed ‘to improve tactical coordination,’ but that the ‘coup attempt would be launched on September 11. All three branches of the Armed Forces and Carabineros were involved in this action.’” For more information, see: Peter Kornbluh, “CIA Cover-Up on Chile 1973 Coup against Salvador Allende. Release of Classified CIA Documents,” Global Research, December 15, 2016. Available at: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/cia-cover-up-on-chile-1973-coup-against-salvador-allendrelease-of-classified-cia-documents/5562605>.

20 million people, overthrown at least 36 governments, intervened in at least 84 foreign elections, attempted to assassinate over 50 foreign leaders, and bombed people in over 30 countries. The United States is responsible for the deaths of 5 million people in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and over 2 million people since 2003 in Iraq. Since 2001, the United States has systematically destroyed regions of the globe, bombing Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, and the Philippines. The United States has ‘special forces’ operating in two-thirds of the world’s countries and non-specialized forces in three-quarters of countries.”⁴³ The film also reveals the true story of the attempted overthrow of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 2002, a monumental event in modern politics that impressed the world with the determination of a leader from the “backyard of the United States” standing up to U.S. global policies.⁴⁴ After this event, people from the Caracas shanty towns organized and forced the resignation of Pedro Carmona Estanga, the head of Venezuela’s business federation “Fedecámaras,” which had led the protests that resulted in Chávez’s detention. After just two days in office, Carmona was forced to step down, and Chávez returned to his position. The film also explores the rise of populist governments across South America, led by indigenous leaders seeking to loosen the grip of Washington and ensure a fairer redistribution of the continent’s natural wealth. John Pilger explains this ongoing struggle of the people of Latin America: “[The film] speaks of the fight of people to free themselves from the modern form of slavery.” These people “describe the world not as American presidents want it to be seen – as useful or disposable – they describe the power of courage and humanity among people who possess nothing. They bring back noble words like democracy, freedom, liberation, justice, and in doing so, defend the most basic human rights of all of us, in a war that is being waged against all of us.”⁴⁵ The film “War on Democracy” won the One World Media Awards for Best Documentary Film in 2008.⁴⁶ The winning film, according to the award’s criteria, must meet several of the following six criteria: the impact of the film on public opinion, influence on a broader audience, inclusion of voices from the developing world, high levels of journalism and production standards, success in highlighting the impact of actions by the world’s wealthy on the lives of

43 James A. Lucas, “US Has Killed More Than 20 Million People in 37 ‘Victim Nations’ Since World War II”, Global Research, January 20, 2019. Available at: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/us-has-killed-more-than-20-million-people-in-37-victim-nations-since-world-war-ii/5492051>.

44 Zarković, Miodrag. “Hugo Chávez – The Paratrooper Who Scared America.” NSPM, Wednesday, March 6, 2013. Available at: <http://www.nspm.rs/politicki-leksikon/hugo-cavezpadobranac-koji-je-uplasio-ameriku.html>

45 John Pilger, “The War On Democracy”. Available at: <http://johnpilger.com/videos/thewar-on-democracy>.

46 Ibid.

the poor, and the degree to which the film draws attention to potential solutions. “War on Democracy” fulfilled all six.

MEDIA FABRICATION OF REALITY

In his documentary “The War You Don’t See”⁴⁷ which analyzes propaganda as a weapon in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, John Pilger revisits the topic of war reporting, a subject he explored in his 1983 documentary “The Search for Truth in Wartime”. The film offers compelling evidence that, in the meantime, real-world events have lost their substance and have become objects of promotional modeling – media propaganda that has turned into a powerful weapon for the mass destruction of reality. This phenomenon was seen by Paul Virilio as the most significant form of pollution we face: “The television image has become the privileged tool for the interoperability of physical reality on the one hand, and the media generator of reality on the other.”⁴⁸ Virilio’s term for this type of television-generated reality is “stereo-reality.”⁴⁹ The consequence of stereo-reality is the emergence of a cyber-mentality, which is characterized by synchronized emotions and the annihilation of the sense of reality. The primary lever of power has ceased to be a weapon for the mass destruction of people and has become a weapon for the mass destruction of reality – spreading a created reality that relies on producing panic as the backbone for destroying the sense of orientation, or, in other words, the perception of the world itself.

The monopolization of the media, the presence of intelligence services in the media, and under the conditions of the “war on terror” the imposed obligations for the media to act according to the dictates of the Pentagon and the U.S. and British Ministries of Defense, have led to the downfall of the journalism profession and the normalization of censorship, which Pilger regards as “the cruelest form of censorship.” This censorship is realized in the form of silence and the omission of all information that would present the war in its true light. The film “The War You Don’t See” begins with shocking footage from Iraq in 2007.⁵⁰ American soldiers in an Apache helicopter cold-bloodedly opened fire on a street in Baghdad, killing two Reuters journalists, along with Iraqi civilians. The victims were unarmed. One of the Apache crew members commented on the killings from a safe distance with the word “Wonderful!” This video, titled “Collateral Damage,” was provided to

47 John Pilger, “The War You Don’t See” (Uploaded Wednesday, June 5, 2013 at 12:05 PM EST). Available at: <https://vimeo.com/67739294>

48 Ref. Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, Polity, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA, 2007, pp. 39.

49 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 39.

50 John Pilger, “The War You Don’t See”. (Cf. *ibid.*)

WikiLeaks by Bradley Manning, who later changed gender and became Chelsea Manning.⁵¹

The central part of the film presents an analysis of the methodology by which the 2003 invasion of Iraq was presented to the world. This methodology is seen by Professor Stuart Ewen, a media historian, as the culmination of the spectacularization of war, the breaking down of symbols, and their operationalization through the media, as well as the consequent application of strategies first used by the actions of the “Committee on Public Information” (CPI) – which was the apparatus of American propaganda, mobilized in 1917 to package, advertise, and sell the war under the slogan “Make the World Safe for Democracy.”⁵²

Emotional manipulation, says Ewen, in the case of the Iraq War, proved to be the easiest way to achieve the interests of power – and in this sense, the most effective method was instilling fear into people’s bones. The “selling” of the war in Iraq depended on the success of the media in creating a series of illusions, such as the connection between Saddam Hussein and September 11, and it was necessary to permanently link the image of the destruction of the WTC with Saddam Hussein in people’s subconscious. The separation of symbols from their meaning allowed the detached parts to acquire their own meaning, causing facts to lose any argumentative power. After that, it became possible for George Bush and Tony Blair to “sell” the war. “The schematic plan for the invasion was the military doctrine of ‘shock & awe’, designed to paralyze the country and destroy food production, water supply, and infrastructure, and the effects were the same as when an atomic bomb was dropped on Japan.”⁵³ All operations were accompanied by mass deception through the media. The Pentagon launched a media-friendly campaign, and a new word entered the vocabulary: embedded (media attached to military forces during the conflict). The media reported based on agreements their outlets had made with the Ministry of Defence in London and the Pentagon and Washington.⁵⁴ John Stauber⁵⁵ and Sheldon Rampton⁵⁶, authors of *Weapon*

51 Ibid.

52 “Bernays and the media giant Walter Lippmann came to Woodrow Wilson in 1917 to seek his help in reversing the negative public sentiment about the war. These two behind-the-scenes wizards were essential to help the president turn the anti-war disposition of Americans into anti-German rage. To motivate Americans to enter World War I, Bernays devised the patriotic war slogan ‘Make the world safe for democracy’ – an irresistible patriotic mantra that America embraced...”

James Sandrolini, “Propaganda: The Art of War,” Chicago Media Watch Report (Fall 2002): 1. Available at: <https://readwritelibrary.org/series-title/propaganda-art-war>

53 John Pilger, “The War You Don’t See”, op. cit.

54 Ibid.

55 John Stauber, director of the Center for Media and Democracy.

56 Sheldon Rampton is an American editor of PR Watch and the author of several books that criticize the PR industry, as well as corporate and government propaganda.

of *Mass Deception* and *The Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq*⁵⁷, have precisely demonstrated that the media have become a medium for the distribution of propaganda, which is a combination of PR techniques and psychological operations directed by military services. In an interview given on the release of the book *The Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq*, John Stauber said: “If you look at the team that sold the war, you see that it was a perfectly consistent and coherent PR operation that involved seasoned masters of the trade, such as Ari Fleischer from the White House, Torie Clarke, former head of the Helen Nolton firm, who came from the Pentagon specifically for this occasion with a perfect PR scheme that actually laid the groundwork for media reporting during the invasion, which, of course, resulted in reports that supported the U.S.-British troop invasion, containing very few facts about what was actually happening during the attack. Tony Blair did his part. So, the operational scheme was as follows: after establishing the point of view, various firms were hired, such as, for example, rendering groups.”⁵⁸

When Saddam’s statue was toppled on April 9, 2003, billions of people watched the live broadcast within two hours. On the screens, everything looked as Dick Cheney had predicted: the Americans were welcomed as liberators. Iraqis toppled the enormous statue of Saddam (with the help of American tanks and military), dragged it through Firdos Square, and then broke it into small pieces. This truly represented a triumphant PR moment. The scene was filmed like a Hollywood production. All the journalists present were given instructions by the Pentagon.⁵⁹

The action footage, showing only a small portion of the area, was broadcast worldwide as evidence of a mass uprising of the Iraqi people, while footage from Reuters, which captured a wider area, showed the opposite: using a wide-angle lens to film Firdos Square, it revealed that the entire area was almost empty. There were only American Marines, international press, and a small group of Iraqis. At most, two hundred people were present. The Marines surrounded the square, securing it with tanks. U.S. mechanized vehicles had attached cables to the statue to separate it from its pedestal. The entire event, celebrated as the equivalent of the fall of the Berlin Wall, was, in reality, a carefully constructed media event, tailored for television cameras.⁶⁰

The news reports published by the media regarding this event conveyed that the American-British coalition was welcomed as liberators, that the war

57 John Stauber, Sheldon Rampton, *The Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq*, Tarcher/Penguin, New York, 2006.

58 Mike McCormick, John Stauber, *The Best War Ever* (Talking Stick TV, 5. 10. 2006). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qAEaSIubAs>.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

was justified, and the manipulated global audience was convinced that this confirmation came directly from the people of Iraq. After the success of this PR operation, almost all information became ironic falsifications, but a special place was reserved for the discovery of weapons of mass destruction.⁶¹

Corporate media and corporate news agencies have become the main promoters of wars. “After September 11, Fox’s staff wrapped themselves in the American flag, started banging the war drums, and completely uncritically embraced the most propagandistic slogans of the Bush administration, after which their ratings reached heights that no other media company could compete with. When other media outlets saw this, they said, ‘Hey, we want the audience too. Look at this success! Let’s follow that path.’ So, in 2001, 2002, and 2003, the effect of Fox took over the media. Most Americans get their information through television, so they internalize these forms of support, closing the loop and normalizing imperial wars as a natural disaster.”⁶²

The consequences are fatal for the Iraqi people. The number of Iraqi casualties is about 2.38 million⁶³, but their suffering was never shown on mainstream television. The *War You Don’t See* ends with a conversation between John Pilger and Julian Assange, who, in the film, evaluates the significance of his organization: “WikiLeaks provides ‘conscientious objectors’ within the ‘system of power’ a means to directly inform the public, which is the hallmark of journalism.”⁶⁴

John Pilger, who conducted a series of interviews with Assange, firmly defended the founder of WikiLeaks. In the article “The Assange Arrest is a Warning From History”,⁶⁵ published on April 13, 2019, shortly after Julian Assange’s arrest at the Ecuadorian embassy, Pilger warns of the totalitarian nature of this event, which serves as a dramatic warning from history. “The scene of Julian Assange being dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy in London is a symbol of our time. Power versus rights. Muscle versus law. Rudeness versus bravery... The fact that this disgrace occurred in the heart of London, in the land of the ‘Magna Carta’ should shame and anger all those who fear for the fate of ‘democratic’ societies. Assange is a political exile protected by international law and a recipient of asylum under strict agreements, to which Britain is a signatory. The United Nations made

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Nicolas J. S. Davies, “How Many Millions of People Have Been Killed in America’s Post-9/11 Wars? Part I, The Iraq Death Toll“, Global Research, May 15, 2019. Available at: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/how-many-millions-of-people-have-been-killed-in-americas-post-911-wars/5633242>.

64 John Pilger, “The War You Don’t See”. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/67739294>.

65 John Pilger, “The Assange Arrest is a Warning From History”, johnpilger.com, 13 April 2019. Available at: <http://johnpilger.com/articles/the-assange-arrest-is-a-warning-from-history>.

this clear in its legal decision of its working group on arbitrary detention. But to hell with that. Let the bullies step forward. Under the command of quasi-fascists from Trump's Washington, allied with Ecuador's president Lenin Moreno – that Latin American Judas and liar trying to cover up his corrupt regime – the British elite abandoned its last imperial myth – that of fairness and justice. So what if Assange, Manning, and others like them – if there are any – are silenced, and the 'right to know and to challenge the decisions of power' is denied?

In the seventies, I met Leni Riefenstahl, a close friend of Adolf Hitler, whose films helped mesmerize Germany with Nazism. She explained to me that the message of her films, the propaganda itself, did not depend on 'orders from the top,' but rather on what she called the 'submissive vacuum' of the public. [...] When people no longer ask serious questions, they are submissive and obedient. Anything can be done with them." This is a great warning from history. Phenomenologically, WikiLeaks represents the pinnacle of journalism and the power of the media to transmit true information, especially information that penetrates the very structure of power, the ways in which it operates and how global tyranny and totalitarian order are established, where states and people are deemed redundant. WikiLeaks has enabled, in the best possible way, the role of the 'whistleblower' and 'whistleblowers' to be placed in the service of humanity. All the mechanisms by which the order of power was protected from the truth – document secrecy over long periods of time, the takeover of media and institutions by global players freed from scruples and morals, intent on establishing their rule over the world in the form of techno-scientific totalitarianism, corporate fascism, total control, the occult basis of evil and malice that shapes the members of the global "elite" of power – this entire system has been illuminated by WikiLeaks' powerful spotlight, which has become the most important and significant source of information ever because it revealed documents. History no longer had to wait for corrupt historians to 'examine' and write it according to the dictate of power; it was shown every day on the WikiLeaks website. Academics serving global totalitarianism, politicians, Vatican powerbrokers, and the mechanisms they apply in their practice of acquiring never-satisfied needs for power, global financial institutions, the military-industrial complex, the pharma-mafia, and other structures of power have been given in WikiLeaks a very powerful mirror that shows humanity their true image. Like Dorian Gray, whose portrait in the final chapter of Oscar Wilde's novel takes on its true form, so the world's picture, carefully made up and styled in corporate media, in the mirror of WikiLeaks, without exception, showed its true, monstrous, and hideous nature. Like John Pilger, WikiLeaks and Assange have defeated the "deep state". They forced it to reveal its true face, and this is openly shown today in the time of Assange's arrest and prosecution, which falls under the tradition of legal practice attached to tyrannical regimes and systems in which those who commit crimes remain free, while those who expose the crimes are

persecuted. Assange's prosecution is a globally high-profile case that shows this very well. The centers of power are seeking revenge on Assange for revealing the true image of themselves, but they also want to create a paradigm where anyone who uncovers the truth in the way that WikiLeaks successfully did must undergo what Julian Assange is going through. This is a warning to all who dare to challenge the global establishment and a clear confirmation of the totalitarian nature of the global order. The attempt to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States is in line with the "elite" plans of the new global order to completely silence investigative journalism.

Imagine Tony Blair being dragged out of his multi-million-pound Georgian house on London's Connaught Square, handcuffed, to be deported to The Hague. According to Nuremberg standards, Blair's main crime is the death of a million Iraqis. Assange's crime is journalism: he called the greedy to account, exposing their lies and giving the truth to people around the world... Authentic journalism is the enemy of these outrages. Ten years ago, the British Ministry of Defence compiled a secret document considering the 'main threats' to public order, listing terrorists, Russian spies, and investigative journalism. The latter was marked as the greatest threat. The document reached WikiLeaks, which published it. "We had no choice," Assange told me. "It's very simple. People have the right to know, and the right to question and challenge power. That is true democracy."

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“WE TOOK UP ATTITUDES”: STAR TREK AND CONFLICT TREK

Abstract: In this article, the relationship between mass media and social conflicts is thematized in the way of evaluating how one particular kind of media handles current tensions, but also how it affects them by such handling. It is about visual media, namely, television and film, but not in their “journalistic” aspect, rather it is about one genre that achieved a lot of popularity on TV and film: science fiction. We observe the “dialectic” of conflicting social realities influencing the Star Trek franchise, but also, conversely, how the Star Trek franchise, being a fantastic (re)adaptation of our world, had a feedback effect on this, real world from which we dreamed it up.

Keywords: mass media, conflict, “Star Trek”, science fiction, popular culture, social reality, political engagement

It has long been a notorious thing to say that the media not only transmit events, report on them, but also create them. It has also been observed that this border is getting thinner and thinner, more unclear, that the very choice and interpretation of events represent a narrative that only then actually constitutes these events; that there is no neutral transmission of something external, because the transmission itself is a separate ontological entity (which perhaps only then gives significance and meaning to the event). We do not need to insist that the media must have a special kind of independence. There is no need for an Orson Welles to cause general panic by creating a war of the worlds with practically nothing. Today it is enough to take a piece of reality and elaborate it in a particular manner.

Our choice of example is not by accident. Our topic being media and conflicts, public media and social conflicts, we decided to test that topic by seeing how one media describes the tensions but at the same time, by describing them, influences them. The matter will be the more challenging because we opt for the visual media: movies, and TV. The genre, however, will not be journalistic, it will be rather more creative, in pop-culture, though, and therefore the more demanding – science fiction. So, with films and the branches of Star Trek, we will try to demonstrate

the „dialectics“ of how a conflict-laden social reality influences its „fantastic“ (re) adaptations and how, vice versa, imaginations of a different world influence this world, in which we do the imagining.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE OTHER WORLD

Among the surprisingly numerous theorists who have chosen Star Trek as a theme or at least an illustration for their ideas, there is an undivided agreeing that at the Star Trek's center there have always been contemporary social and cultural issues, and that Star Trek used a futuristic context to comment on those. It is also certain that a good part of the popularity of "Star Trek" it owes not to its displacement into the future, to its non-contemporariness, but rather to the future-reshaped actuality, i.e. that their attraction is to a good extent in that they deal with the vital issues of contemporary society: "Though those stories take place in space and in a futuristic setting, like most science fiction, they reflect the human situation here and now"¹. Disagreement, but not great, begins about the question whether the discussion of current human problems is really characteristic for all science fiction, or somehow exceptional in science fiction, found in Star Trek only².

Perhaps, in the end, it is not decided by what the author meant, but rather by the consumer perception, and by the effect produced on the public. In that respect, there is no doubt that "Star Trek", immediately after the beginning of its now half-century life, was perceived as a critical "forum" for commenting on numerous political and social themes: primarily the Vietnam war, the Cold War rivalry, and the imperialist foreign policy of the United States. The program was, simply, recognized as such, by its audience, and most of the audience saw this as value, although a few saw it as a limitation, too. Maybe such reception was not entirely valid, or maybe it was forced by the times in which it happened, but we cannot be much wrong if we say that there was something special in the general setting of this (Star Trek) "project", and in the contextual determinants in which it was created and perceived; something, which somehow motivated and obliged the project to get (to a certain degree) entangled in political discourse, to go for a more or less direct political engagement – from which, in all probability, the Star Trek did not want to distance itself; did not hesitate to express it as (in)directly as possible.

1 Williamson, R. A., "Outer Space as Frontier: Lessons for Today", *Western Folklore*, IV, 1987, str. 267; Roberts, R., *Sexual Generations: Star Trek: The Next Generation" and Gender*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1999, str. 144.

2 See: Conley, R., „Day-To-Day Fare Can Help People Cope With Life“, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=hrwqAAAAIABJ&sjid=iWYEA AAAIABJ&pg=6159,556852,01.03.2007>; Johnson-Smith, J., *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate and Beyond*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2004, str. 79.

The legendary creator of "Star Trek", Gene Roddenberry, after all, himself stated: "[C]reating a new world with a new rules, I could take a stand on sex, religion, Vietnam, politics, and ICBMs. Indeed, we have taken positions in Star Trek: we sent a message and luckily everyone got it over the net."³ Although he didn't pitch it at all that way to the distribution network when he offered the Star Trek for broadcasting, Roddenberry intended to make a "progressive" political program that would reflect the counterculture youth movement of the sixties of the 20th century: in the most ambitious version, he wanted "Star Trek" to represent the image of society towards which the humanity would have to evolve if it learns the lessons from the past and ends violence; or, at the very least, to send an anti-war message, primarily in the description of the "United Federation of Planets" as a social ideal which is believed to be painted according to an optimistic view of the United Nations.

Since controversial matters could not be discussed directly and "realistically" in the media, the "format" of a science fiction series provided a way to bypass that barrier⁴. The most obvious example is the representation of aliens who in various lines of "Star Trek" openly represent national stereotypes. And, so, in the "Original Series" ("Star Trek: The Original Series" 1966–1969) the Klingons represented allegorically The Soviet Union; and the Romulans, a species with an oriental admixture (isolated from the Federation and in some sort of alliance with the Klingons) represented the People's Republic of China, or, North Korea or, most likely, some mixture of them.⁵ But, as in international politics, things change over time in science fiction, too. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc and Russia's return to capitalism, reversed is the fate of not only authentic Cold War opponents, but also the fate of Klingons, a species with a warrior code and a society devoted

3 Johnson-Smith, J., *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate and Beyond*, str. 57.

4 Shatner, W., Kreski, C., *Star Trek Memories*, Harper Collins, New York, 1993, str. 326.

5 Not just the Klingons and Romulans, as metaphors for a militantly competitive superpower – but also every recognizable Otherness is, in one way or another, incorporated into the honorable intentions of the Federation, while other (regular) aliens are mostly antagonists who, with their meanness, underline the virtue of the Enterprise crew. The Ferengi are capitalists to the core, with a quasi-religious litany of "Rules of acquisition". Since capitalism has no place in the egalitarian society of the Federation, they are despised in almost every their appearance. Romulans live according to military nomenclature in a fascist society with the terrifying Tal Shira secret service. Grim, Stalinist, reptilian Cardassians are cynical military occupiers of the planet Bejor and crave absolute power. And even when it comes to the Vulcan allies, who constantly present themselves as logical and enigmatic, they are increasingly reminded over time of their more complex past and "humane" history of resistance to acceptance of soulless logic (Johnson-Smith 2004: 86). But, in short, in the mainstream, "[t]he barely integrated Federation fights in the 'Star Trek' the neo-fascist Romulans and somewhat-Russo-Mongoloid Klingons" (O'Brien, G., „Race in Space“, *BOMB*, II, str. 60, 61).

to myths and heroism. In the 1991 film *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country* a catastrophic explosion on the Klingon moon Praxis forced their High Council to request – and of course be generously given – a peace treaty and then an alliance with the Federation⁶.

In any case, "The Original Series" touched an enviable number of dominant social taboos. To the extent that it violated them, the series really can be considered subversive, "advanced" and - utopian. That extent was not negligible. Almost all open social issues that shook the United States of America in the 1960s - racism, nationalism, sexism, global war, and so on – at the same time permeated the entire original "Star Trek" series. The spaceship *Enterprise*, located in the future, served as an inspiring training ground for examining those topics, but also as a convenient, "only science fiction" ruse to conceal the amount of controversies: the content of the episodes was often a "Trojan horse" which tests the limits of censorship restrictions – otherwise regular occurrences of the 1960s.⁷

THIS WORLD STRIKES BACK

On the other hand, can there be a competitive, irreconcilable, entirely opposing hypothesis about the social role of the Star Trek: that, contrary to the understanding and perhaps the intention of the author, in itself the "text" does not contain any universal humanistic utopia, but merely the American mythology transposed into the future; and that the Star Trek, moreover, became and remained extremely attractive only thanks to its "ability to confront and express, in a mythical way, some of the main problems of American culture"?⁸

Or, on the same track, but explained much more sharply and more precisely, could they be accused of playing a crypto-positivist and anesthetic role – all in the effort to establish (in the times of crisis) a falsely turbulent American culture that will challenge its own roots due to the horrors the American imperialism has created in the Third World. According to this interpretation of Star Trek, they

6 Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country“, http://en.memory-alpha.org/wiki/Star_Trek_VI:_The_Undiscovered_Country, 12.03.2011., compare: Roberts, A., *Science Fiction*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, str. 130, 132. i Cantor, P. A., „Shakespeare in the Original Klingon: Star Trek and the End of History“, *Perspectives on Political Science*, III, 2000.

7 The text was routinely checked and censored by NBC's Broadcast Standards Department staff, liberally flagging objections and requests to drop or change certain sequences. Among the more benign examples are: "Page 4: Please delete McCoy's expletive 'Good Lord'; "page 43: Pay attention to the embrace; avoid kissing with open mouth" (according to: Müller, P., *Star Trek: The American Dream Continued? The Crisis of the American Dream in the 1960s and its Reflection in a Contemporary TV Series*, University Thesis, Oldenburg, str. 63, 139) etc.

8 Wagner, J., Lundeen, J., *Deep Space and Sacred Time*, CT: Praeger, Westport, 1998, str. 4.

used the future to thematize and criticize American social problems – from a safe distance: in this way they shifted the attention of the audience from the real dilemmas of the present, and allowed them “to dream of American heritage”.⁹

According to the autohistorization of the creators of Star Trek, as well as academic discussions that followed, they (the creators) are not without a fault in the matter, despite or precisely because of the intended effects of their creation. Very inspirational today are the interpretations that the creators of Star Trek had sincere noble intentions, and should not be blamed now that their intentions failed; or (a criticism more far-reaching) that, in their very conceptual foundations, there was a certain constitutive error or oversight. So it will be found that it is more appropriate to talk about a kind of expansion of that national legend that is thematized on the foreign policy of the United States¹⁰; or, to discuss “the neat copying of the configuration of Cold War international politics” in Star Trek; and – despite to their “progressive humanism” – to detect in them a “simple the reactionary nostalgia of an incessant desire to model or force the world to a pattern suitable only for Americans”¹¹.

Even if there was no malicious intent, there was a possibility to read the existence of a significant unintended coincidence, a delayed use that cannot be just an abuse; in short, one retrospective indictment could be raised from which there is no defense. According to this, Star Trek objectively served the purpose of justifying American foreign policy aspirations, because the Star Trek’s performance over time became “pro-regime” – even if at the time of the first broadcast it was not so: this TV show anticipated future problems, and offered answers so suitable to the incoming American administrations that we cannot see it as purely accidental. With “The Original Series” in mind, Lagon writes that “Star Trek contains metaphors that were not meant to comment on the foreign policy of the United States at the time of the first broadcast, but were suitable for confronting the United States with new problems in the global context some twenty-five years later”¹². In those years, the nineties, it was necessary to find reasons for interventions in the Third World. Starfleet meddling in the internal affairs of others planets – of course, always with a good alibi, even with a moral obligation to react to a human(itarian) call – conveniently reflected the American

9 Goulding, J., *Empire, Aliens, And Conquest: A Critique of American Ideology in Star Trek and Other Science Fiction Adventures*, OT: Sisyphus Press, Toronto, 1985, str. 39.

10 Worland, R., „From the New Frontier to the Final Frontier: *Star Trek* from Kennedy to Gorbachev”, *Film & History*, I-II, 1994..

11 Worland, R., „Captain Kirk Cold Warrior”, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, III, 1998, 112., uporediti: Schüller, M., *Star Trek – The Americanization of Space*, GRIN Verlag, Norderstedt, 2001.

12 Lagon, M. P., „‘We Owe It to Them to Interfere’: *Star Trek* and U.S. Statecraft in the 1960s and the 1990s”, *Extrapolation*, III, 1993, str. 262.

post-Cold War foreign policy of asymmetrical attitudes towards underdeveloped and developing countries.

Thus, Star Trek proves to be a typical example of the thesis that elements of popular culture are best received when they present what the audience wants to see, and that the popular myths that develop from those manifestations are able to unite societies on a very conservative and conserving basis¹³. True, the original 1960s crew gave Star Trek a chance to comment on issues like racism, civil rights, and the Cold War – but not because the setting (itself) was subversive, but rather because it was engaged in a way the creators didn't want it to be, or didn't have in mind: the passive way, by merely reflecting those problems¹⁴. At the same time, far from being ideologically neutral and only raising questions, Star Trek clearly took specific points of view, and, by the way of their thematization, took on unequivocal advocacies. To that extent, the Star Trek could really be read as a "structured ideological text that reflects the common interests of production stakeholders"¹⁵. Admittedly, that ideology, since it was built by a multitude of writers, actors and other participants from various television series, feature films and novellas under the joint title of Star Trek, is rather a multifaceted and multi sided thing, not what a monolithic "preferred reading" might suggest¹⁶. However, precisely as such, it turns out to be convenient to the target group for which it was – benevolently or calculatingly, all the same; but, not by chance – intended. Namely, when the Star Trek was in the preparatory stages, Roddenberry requested the institutional support of the elite SF fan community, for his new series¹⁷ – acting nobly, or, not at all naively; in a manner heartfelt, daring and risky, or, calculated, strategic and cunning; again it doesn't matter – promising at the same time the promotion of that (consumer) subculture that would, by its values of egalitarianism and tolerance, rationalist faith in science and technology, and secular humanist philosophy¹⁸, offer refuge to the alienated persons, and, would appeal to social utopians.

13 Slotkin, R., *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, Atheneum, New York, 1992, str. 356, 626.

Nye, R., „The Popular Arts and the Popular Audience“, u: *Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life*, CA: Publisher's Inc/Del Mar, CA: Publisher's Inc, 1977, str. 26.

14 Geraghty, L., „'Carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives': Reality and Star Trek's Multiple Histories“, *European Journal of American Culture*, III, 2000, str. 166.

15 Kozinets, R., „Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption“, *Journal of Consumer Research*, I, 2001, str. 84.

16 Goulding, J., *Empire, Aliens, And Conquest: A Critique of American Ideology in Star Trek and Other Science Fiction Adventures*.

Hall, S., „Encoding/Decoding“, u: *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, London: Hutchinson, 1980.

17 See: Tulloch, J., Jenkins, H., *Science Fiction Audiences*.

18 Alexander, D., *Star Trek Creator*, ROC, New York, 1994.; Whitfield, S. P. E., Roddenberry, G., *The Making of Star Trek*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1968.

Finally, the idea of a United Federation of Planets as a collection of different worlds and cultures that respect, tolerate and celebrate their differences, could represent an idealized version of not (only) the United Nations, which is the most direct association, but precisely the United States of America itself. It indicates a critical or not, but certainly a more local orientation and determination of the Star Trek than it usually is portrayed as. And then, consequently, and even more pronouncedly than in the image of the goal, the very means of its achievement become questionable. Namely, despite the image of a military officer which, at least since the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, in the United States was ambiguous to say the least, the Star Trek, like some other science fiction series of the era, used military capabilities as a basis for their (space) research: "although they advocate a non-militaristic point of view, they clearly rely on naval tradition"¹⁹.

LEGACY OF THE WORLD BETWEEN

And this is where interpretation becomes a matter of accentuation. Namely, you could also say the opposite: that the Enterprise was indeed a military spaceship, but remained on a peaceful "mission of exploring strange new worlds and searching for a new life and new civilizations", as announced and proclaimed by the opening credits of the Original Series and the Next Generation ²⁰; and, the captains often make a "protest of conscience", they re-examine and then turn a deaf ear to Starfleet orders that they deem inappropriate for one reason or another²¹. Likewise, it is true that the Original Series primarily addressed the American audience, but the message it sent through the TV program was a criticism of the foreign policy of the United States, in the sincere desire that they begin to play a constructive role in the world. The emphasis is on this: the views of the creators of the series (often) contradicted the policy of the government, but with the intention of improving the country's international image which was at that time undermined by interventions abroad, and further undermined by denying, instead of respecting and promoting, the rights of other countries to the democratic self-determination; also by prominent (instead of zero) reliance on nuclear weapons in the national security policy; and also by non-selective use of force, instead of refraining from any use of force. Therefore we could say that the

19 Barrett, M., Duncan, B., *Star Trek: The Human Factor*, Polity Press, London, 2001, str. 117.

Johnson-Smith, J., *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate and Beyond*, str. 9.

20 Sarantakes, N. E., „Cold War, Pop Culture and the Image of U. S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, IV, 2005, str. 78.

21 Challans, T., „The Enterprise of Military Ethics: Jean-Luc Picard as Starfleet's Conscience“, u: *Star Trek and Philosophy: The Wrath of Kant*, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 2008.

original Star Trek television series "intended not only to shape the values of the American public, but also to redirect the foreign policy of the United States"²².

In search of a measured, balanced view of Star Trek's political engagement, we should admit that Star Trek had a certain amount of autonomy; we are not running away from the fact that Star Trek was situated as it was, but also we are not reducing Star Trek entirely to its political circumstances. Because, if we adopt conspiratorial interpretations according to which the Star Trek was only a tool of American politics, and nothing else; or, merely a cleverly packaged consumer product for the market, it would imply that we have first accepted the pan-historical social determinism, with inevitable super-determinants that shape each and every decision about everything – we would have to adopt the pan explanatory reductionist geographical and temporal contextualization. Such an approach culminates in the belief that subsequent interpretation, without other previous knowledge and despite the very diverse topics located in the future, always can accurately reconstruct the historical moment in which each episode and each character was produced. Thus, the appearance of Star Trek during the war in Vietnam would have to be taken as a sufficient reason for the claim that Vietnam war is Star Trek's entire subtext, and that the episodes that oppose the Vietnam War reflect only a change of opinion of the reshaped consciousness of the American public²³.

The war in Vietnam was an indispensable benchmark for judging engagement, in those years. It is certain that Star Trek opposed the war, both in intention and in reception, and that that was quite brave – because of very sharp divisions that the issue caused in the mid- and late sixties of the 20th century, and also because of the drop in ratings that the treatment of such "unpleasant" topic necessarily produces, especially if one takes into account the unofficial, "alternative" point of view the Star Trek wanted to promote. On the other hand, the anti-war movement itself was already, if not yet a commercially lucrative "mainstream," certainly "a spacious house with many rooms": some opponents of the United States' involvement in that conflict were pacifists who believed that all war is wrong; others were foreign policy "realists" who did not believe that a profitable victory in Vietnam was possible; still others were simply afraid that they or their children would be drafted and sent to fight. When numerous persons associated with Star Trek, including Roddenberry himself, signed a petition that was published as an advertisement (and as a proclamation) in one science fiction magazine²⁴ – "We

22 Sarantakes, N. E., „Cold War, Pop Culture and the Image of U. S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series”, str. 74.

23 Franklin, H. B., „*Star Trek* in the Vietnam Era“, *Science-Fiction Studies*, I, 1994.

24 And here is (the most) recent sample of such engagement. At the end of September 2016, before the presidential elections in the United States, on the Facebook group *Trek against Trump*, more than one hundred actors, writers and directors of Star Trek signed a

oppose the participation of the United States of America in the war in Vietnam" – apparently their motivation for such an act was their sincere belief that the United States was squandering its moral capital in Southeast Asia. "Visual" dealing with the Vietnam war itself in the regular television program, or even in the Star Trek episodes that do that in the least indirect way, like "A private Little War" (1968), was possible only as an allusion and only because the setting was futuristic²⁵.

Allegories, however, are inevitably exposed to different interpretations, between which it is then difficult to determine which one can be considered authentic or clearly pointing to the original, fruitful or far-reaching, and which, on the other hand, is simply wrong and distorted. That makes the question of engagement of Star Trek additionally ambiguous. Even when it comes to the episode "A Private Little War", quite a number of interpreters saw in it only an unconvincing affirmation of the politics of Johnson's administration, a possible "support for the Vietnam War", and only one "ambiguous statement – war is peace"²⁶. In the end, the only thing that remained certain about that episode was the "Vietnamese" allegory itself, and all other diverse and more or less (un)hidden elements of the story were sufficiently ambiguous or so inextricably confused that they made subsequent comments unsubstantiated or all equally provable – if the viewers invoked only the program itself and then approached the inevitably sensitive reconstruction and „reading into“, surmising what the intentions of the authors may have been.²⁷

A theme, more general than the then-current war, had a more general representation in Star Trek, not just in some individual episodes. The culmination of the criticism of American foreign policy regarding the Cold War, allegorically presented through the conflict between the Federation and the Klingons, culminated in a far-reaching formulation which, throughout the entire franchise, will continue to be the backbone of all plots concerning the social and moral aspects of Star Trek. That is the famous "Prime Directive", the regulation of the United Federation of Planets, specifying that "no member of Starfleet is allowed to interfere with the natural development of any society".²⁸ Its usual, though not the only, interpretation is that it, at least in intention, instructs the representatives

letter which says, among other things, this: "There has never been a presidential candidate so completely opposed to the ideals of the Star Trek universe as Donald Trump".

25 Sarantakes, N. E., „Cold War, Pop Culture and the Image of U. S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, str. 89.

26 Worland, R., „Captain Kirk Cold Warrior", *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, III, 1998, 115.

27 See: Sarantakes, N. E., „Cold War, Pop Culture and the Image of U. S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series", str. 95.

28 "Prime Directive", *Star Trek: Insurrection*, http://insurrection.startrek.com/html/main_flash.html, 11. 11. 1998.

of the Federation to refrain from interfering in the "natural" development of other societies, especially less developed ones, which in principle meant societies lacking the space technology. Although during its implementation it chronically encountered its limitations, deviations, and paradoxes of feasibility, that principle was basically anti-colonial in character and a barely disguised acknowledgment or reference to the limits of any power, including American power²⁹.

The truth is, however, that the matter did not stay, and probably could not have stayed on that simple lesson. In the beginning, undoubtedly in opposition to the impulse for the United States of America to reconstruct the world in its own image – very differently expressed in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations – the "First Directive" nevertheless, over time, became a problematic and contradictory element in the narratives of the series, and was either applied or not respected in many radically different and contradictory ways. Apart from that inconsistency, which necessarily stems from the collective work, over long periods of time, of the various authors of individual Star Trek episodes, these contradictions also stemmed from a fundamental belief or prejudice of their creators, which was smuggled through, or tested the aporias of tolerance and what today would be called "multiculturalism"³⁰. Namely, despite the fact that every culture was considered potentially and intrinsically valuable, one thing was missing, not recognized or not admitted, or only occasionally discreetly hinted at: the possibility that the general course of social development might be different from the one that was assumed to be the only desirable one; all societies, although along more or less winding roads, were heading towards their own maturity, but it was manifested only as a democratic, industrial, urban and materially prosperous civilization that strikingly resembled the United States of America in the second half of the twentieth century. A certain retreat or re-centering and rearticulation regarding the critical edge and internal limits of the "good intentions" of this sci-fi (sub)cultural product was inevitable from there: "Star Trek was different, but not completely different. The writers, producers and directors of the program demonstrated, through allegories, that American principles are different from the values of other countries that sought power, and that those values should allow the United States to promote democracy and show tolerance for the values of other cultures and peoples"³¹.

And then it is necessary to take into account also the other half of the formulation, so as to prevent the possibility of a certain ethnocentric and uncritical understanding. From the finding that the Original Series of Star Trek,

29 See: „Errand of Mercy“, *Star Trek*, CA: Paramount Studios videotape, Hollywood, 1967. Shatner, W., Kreski, C., *Star Trek Memories*, Harper Collins, New York, 1993, str. 32.

30 Cantor, P. A., „Shakespeare in the Original Klingon: Star Trek and the End of History“, str. 162.

31 Sarantakes, N. E., „Cold War, Pop Culture and the Image of U. S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series“, str. 82.

which became a phenomenon of popular culture because, among other things, it contained allegories about the Cold War and, in principle, portrayed the USA in a positive light by describing it as a progressive force in international relations, the conclusion does not follow at all, that its authors were "patriotic naïves". The criticism, that the Star Trek is more or less simply promoting the foreign policy of the United States, does not look plausible, because the Star Trek is too often and too directly critical of that policy; the documents related to Star Trek show only that their protagonists were something like, at best, "constitutional patriots": committed to the view that the United States of America should be a constructive force in international politics, not only, or perhaps not even primarily, for the benefit of other nations, but (also) for the sake of USA themselves. In an apparently sincere belief that the relations of the United States with the rest of the world can and should be based on justice and morality, the writers, directors, producers and other creative forces of the series offered an appropriate critique of its foreign policy. They, more or less openly or in a smuggling manner, and more or less consciously or implicitly, advocated a specific but by no means monosyllabic (ideological and political) point of view, and, using allegories, staged it through the entire series. That view could be summed up in a two-part but inseparable formula: the US of A must continue to play a central role on the international stage, and must limit the influence of Soviet communism, but it must also be worthy of that role; it must see that in foreign policy power is important, but is not the only important thing – and in this, the USA must differ from their opponent, the other major actor of the Cold War³².

THE CIRCULATION OF WORLDS

This reconstruction seems both factually credible and sufficiently inspiring for further research. It confirms the influence of the Cold War and the Vietnam War on popular culture, but also suggests that the frustrations and ferocity that characterized the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s were the product not so much of a competition between radically different visions of the future of American society, but rather of competing views as to how the United States can best remain faithful to its own democratic values. Science fiction, especially as expressed in visual media, was an excellent testing ground for comparing the persuasiveness and limitations of these rival viewpoints.

The conclusion of Jutta Weldes, which she gives in her work, is similar in this respect³³. From the analysis of (science-)fictional descriptions of international

32 Ibid., str. 101, 102.

33 Weldes, J., „Introduction“, u: *To Seek Out New Worlds: Exploring Links between Science Fiction and World Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, str. 5,6. Uporediti: Enloe, C., „Margins, Silences and Bottom Rungs: How to Overcome the Under-estimation

relations, we can see that Star Trek is primarily an anti-traditionalist critique: a critique of the "power-centeredness" of traditional international relations, and a distraction from traditional high politics. This framework is in its manifestations – and in the real contradictions between the world of our real life today, and, the thought experiments of science fiction – proved too narrow to capture other important, perhaps more important, elements of world politics. With the entire Star Trek franchise now in mind, it seems far more productive to use the Enterprise's encounters with alien civilizations to ask "lower" but larger questions about politics itself, in general. The precondition is, of course, to discard the already outdated label of "low culture" from science fiction, and to discover a genre rich in political themes, with which, after all, it corresponds fruitfully in its best works: "there is an endless cycle of meaning from world politics to science fiction, from science fiction to world politics – and back again"³⁴.

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PROJECTED FUTURE OR HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD THANKS TO, OR IN SPITE OF THE MEDIA

Abstract: The film *Long Shot*, in Serbia translated as *Zavedi me ako možeš*, had its premiere in spring 2019 in cinemas all over the world. It has been marketed exclusively as a good romantic comedy, while its political setting has not been mentioned at all. However, in the Anglo-Saxon world, critics have been in disagreement: There are those, e.g., from BBC, claiming that politics, climatic changes and the media are all present in the story, but unimportant for the film, and others like a critic of the *LA Times*, who claims that this film maintains a strong link with political and media reality. In the film, Charlotte Field (Charlize Theron), a very successful but initially lonely politician, achieves her political goals and triumphs in the world of unscrupulous and controlled media. Along the way she, of course, finds her soulmate and resolves her existential problem in a traditional, but updated fashion. This paper primarily focuses on the highly subtle and seemingly trivial way in which the viewer is escorted through the film offering answers to one of the two issues crucial to the survival of mankind, which, we must admit, is not in the least unimportant or frivolous.

Keywords: film *Long Shot*, politics, media, climatic changes, romantic comedy

WHAT KIND OF FUTURE IS AWAITING US?

It is a notoriously difficult and thankless task to foresee the upcoming fate of Homo sapiens, i.e., the complex formations of society that are going to inhabit this planet. However, this has always been sparking the imagination of scientists, writers, philosophers and even those who would certainly not put pondering the purpose and meaning of human existence at the top of their list of interests. Last century's two World Wars have caught the majority of contemporaries by surprise, especially the first one. After decades of peace in Europe, leading politicians and governing classes were deemed wise enough to avoid a catastrophic scenario which would not only cause exorbitant damage to the general public, but also endanger their own dominant and profitable position in social hierarchy. However, two catastrophic wars devastated Europe and a large section of the world before new weapons were promoted in August 1945, holding the power to destroy people and the environment. A high price was paid for the mistakes: millions of dead or maimed people, destroyed economic infrastructure, not to mention wasted

time and lost opportunities. Against all odds, humankind has survived. The dead remained irreversibly dead, but the world recovered relatively quickly and the modernization that had started a few centuries earlier continued with great intensity, devouring an ever-larger section of our planet.

What does this century bring along for mankind? There is a vast variety of predictions, but the main task is – survive and avoid a catastrophic scenario leading to a situation that can be fixed only with great difficulty or never at all. You'll set back your big plans for a technologically developed and just society when you realize that they might lead to catastrophic consequences, with no prospect of a future, whether bright or not. There is relatively strong consensus amongst those pondering these problems, i.e., mainly amongst thinkers, scientists and politicians: the two greatest dangers for human society in the foreseeable future, apart from unpredictable natural disasters, are a) a holocaust caused by wreckfully efficient nuclear and other weapons being improved constantly and b) unpredictable climate changes primarily caused by global warming, the result of the seemingly unstoppable industrial development of humanity. This observation has even been explicitly mentioned at the beginning of the film *The American President* (1995), which will be examined later. People are still greedy for possessing new, better, more beautiful, and more perfect objects to satisfy their almost unlimited thirst for new, stronger, and more sophisticated satisfactions. Subsequently, one of the crucial questions in the upcoming centuries will be: Is there a way to satisfy this longing without evoking dramatic climate changes?

Of the two named lethal threats, global warming is much easier to doubt and deny than the absolute undesirability of a nuclear war. In the forefront of those denying this danger are industrial and associated lobbies, which would be at a great loss if the global society would take at least to some degree coordinated and targeted action against global warming and thus avoid unpredictable, potentially devastating consequences of such a course of events. By now, such joint action has already become undeniably indispensable. Besides fossil fuel and industrial lobbies, there are scientists we cannot commonly accuse of blindly obeying their wealthy masters. Their motives can be different, from the genuine belief that climate warming is merely a fashionable myth to intentional opposition for the sake of demonstrating that one has a contrary opinion and is absolutely entitled to have it, thereby pointing out and proving the benefit of one's own activities for the social community. The scope of this paper, of course, does not allow for contribution to the scientific discussion on the reasonable justification of positive and negative arguments concerning global warming at all. For us, it is enough to detect the existence of the problem, establishing that it might be of huge significance for the future of mankind and that, as such, it has made its way to the top of contemporary global political movements.

Among all relevant global factors, Western Europe is the one committing most to comprehensive urgent action for preventing global warming effects. The

USA, China, Russia and the potentially upcoming industrial power India, are the important global factors that somehow need to be convinced of the necessity for a much more intensive, concentrated, coordinated global effort. In the USA, still a key global power, things are much more complicated than in the EU. The USA is still far from the consensus that would be necessary for instigating more determined global action. This seems to be fatal, as without the USA taking the lead in coordinated efforts, there will never be decisive action. The present American President Donald Trump opposes the limitation and reduction of global warming even stronger and more resolute than any of his predecessors, among them George W. Bush, also a Republican, not to mention Bill Clinton or Barack Obama. The world is or at least seems to be facing a deadlock here.

Under such circumstances, the premiere of a Hollywood romantic comedy took place on March 9, 2019, namely, the film *Long Shot*, directed by Jonathan A. Levine, starring Charlize Theron and Seth Rogen. The screenplay was written by Dan Sterling and Liz Hannah. In the film, Charlotte Field, U.S. Secretary of State, chases the dream of any ambitious American politician, namely, of becoming president of the United States one day. When her boss decides to try his luck in Hollywood instead of running for a second term, she deems this a good opportunity for realizing her political ambitions. But Charlotte Field does not strive for a presidential career merely to meet her ambitions. Her strong motive for getting into politics is to save the planet and environment from the fatal actions of mankind. The film displays this as her one and only reason for dealing with politics, which simplifies things and infallibly draws the viewer's attention to this one, clearly defined goal of her whole political engagement since high school.

However, being Secretary of State, Charlotte Field is very lonely. We do not see any private life besides work or friends whom she spends her spare time with (she practically does not have any). Neither does she have a family nor a partner, although we learn during the film that she does have a rudimentary and not too exciting private life here and there. Initially, the only thing going on besides her full commitment to work is flirting with the prime minister of Canada played by Alexander Skarsgård, who is, of course, entertaining, but, despite his good looks, in a way that is not attractive enough. Nevertheless, he comes from the same environment as Charlotte Field and is therefore acceptable as someone acknowledging and being acquainted with the limits imposed on private life by high-class politics in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Seth Rogen plays the counterpart in this romantic comedy – Fred Flarsky, an extremely left-wing journalist writing passionate and quite vulgar texts against the American political, economic, and media establishment for a journal facing financial problems. When the journal is acquired by a media mogul resembling Keith Rupert Murdoch regarding his professional and political goals, Flarsky quits in revolt when his editor suggests he should behave at least a little more “civilized” in order to comply with the new orientation of the journal. His friend Lance,

who owns a music business, comforts him and takes him to a reception, where he encounters Charlotte Field, whom he actually knows since her teenage days.

After this introduction, Charlotte learns that Flarsky is a journalist who lost his job and, regardless of his radical left-wing attitude, shares her basic political goals when it comes to fighting global warming. Therefore, she offers Flarsky to work for and collaborate with her on composing the speeches for her campaign to become president of the United States. He accepts and their professional collaboration starts, accompanied by the romantic plot, both culminating at the end of the film. Of course, the romantic plot in romantic comedies needs to be placed in a certain environment. In the film *Sleepless in Seattle*, 1993, the plot starts on the radio and then spreads from Seattle to New York. The setting of a film tends to be the workplace of the main characters, sometimes representing a completely ordinary, sometimes a highly specific environment, as it is the case in *Pretty Woman* and *Long Shot*. However, as we will attempt to show, the political setting in the latter is displayed so expressly and consistently that it surpasses the mere need for the scenery of a romantic plot. This detail is very important for us. Film critics in the Anglo-Saxon world were in great disagreement – ranging from those deeming the political background underlying the romantic plot completely unimportant to those deeming it relevant and worth mentioning.

Film distributors in Serbia seem to belong to the former group, as they translated the film title *Long Shot* as *Zavedi me ako možeš*¹. The English coinage cannot be easily translated, and the problem is not that distributors tend to translate film titles quite loosely to fit their commercial needs. With the title translated this way, the film completely loses its connection with the intended meaning of *Long Shot*. In English, this denotes the attempt of achieving something meaningful and ambitious with low chances of success. This is an obvious allusion to the political ambitions of the main characters, primarily Charlotte Field in her attempt to become president, but also the first concentrated effort of Fred Flarsky to take concrete and meaningful action for the world he is living in, which is his fervent wish. By this translation into Serbian, the film is reduced to its romantic plot, which it is promoted for on television as well – a few ticklish sex scenes, a few amorous glances and the complete omission of any political context. The distributors probably decided that issues dealing with environmental protection and American presidential campaigns would not attract the Serbian audience and might even chase it away.

The Anglo-Saxon press pointed out that there have been politically motivated romantic comedies before. *Pretty Woman*, 1990, for example, deals with the marginalized and vulnerable position of prostitutes in contemporary American society. However, this has been done unconvincingly. In this film, Vivian, played by Julia Roberts, is anything but a typical example of a sex worker from Hollywood

1 The literal translation would be *Seduce Me If You Can* (editors' note).

Boulevard. Drugs, of course, are never once mentioned in the film. Julia Roberts herself is glamorous – no matter whether she is wearing a prostitute’s outfit or the most expensive gown you can imagine (there is definitely no lack of those in the film). Her roommate is happy and content with her life like Vivian, she is humorous and has an appealing personality. Their humiliating position and exploitation are almost no issue at all in the film. Instead, the typical “from rags to riches” story keeps displaying unimaginably great amounts of money and, therefore, luxury as an exceedingly desirable status symbol from the beginning to the end of the film. Besides Julia Roberts, golden and gold-plated, sparkling, and expensive objects are the main actors of this film (we can ignore Richard Gere’s role here). Cars, diamond jewelry, an outstandingly and superfluously luxurious penthouse in a costly hotel, masses of expensive garments from a series of accordingly high-priced stores and finally a shamelessly positive display of privileges granted by money are continuously present in the film. Bearing all that in mind, saying that this film discusses problems concerning prostitutes’ social standing in American society is careless, to say the least.

Long Shot, on the other hand, is truly politically motivated. Except for the main characters’ love, the achievement of their political ideals is central to their life and work. Their romantic relationship is closely linked to the political background fostering it and both are intertwined to such an extent that they cannot be observed individually. Furthermore, no idealization of the American political life beyond recognition can be found. The film shows a sarcastic and critical distancing from politicians and their motives, which is why the discussion concerning the relevance of political aspects in the film seems reasonable.

This is overtly opposing the critics who found the film’s political element insignificant like a BBC critic. She states that, by the end, the film seems like “gleefully unambitious escapism” and that “politics, the media and climate change all figure in the story, but those topical issues are not important to it”. On the other hand, she inconsistently finds that the US president and the Canadian Prime Minister appear as an echo of the real thing.² Ultimately, politics might be unconvincing and superficial in this film, but by no means insignificant. Perhaps this might be what some of the critics wanted to express. Thus, our conclusion is that the film includes two important components which are intertwined to an extent making it impossible to understand one without taking the other into account. However, there are numerous possibilities in this regard.

A much more relevant film for comparison than *Pretty Woman* is *The American President*, 1995, by Rob Reiner. It is sometimes classified as romantic comedy – drama. *Long Shot* cannot be categorized as drama, it is a typical romantic comedy, while *The American President* is frequently dialogue-oriented and the characters appearing next to the love couple add elements evoking conflicts –

2 <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20190501-film-review-long-shot>

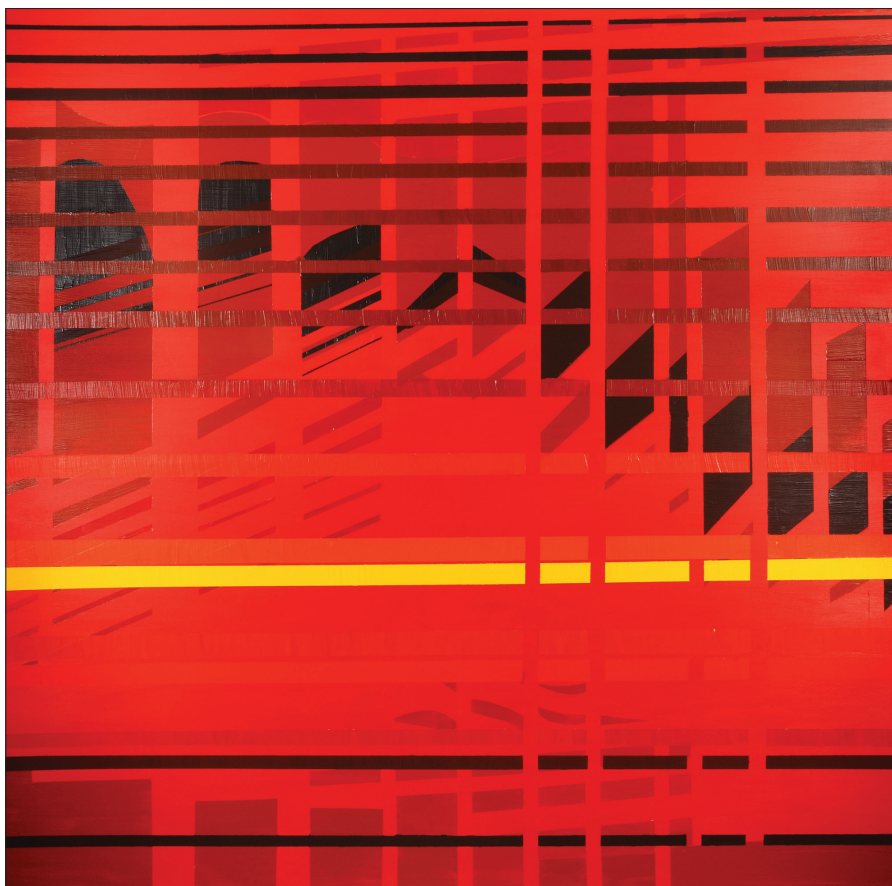
these elements reduce the comical and increase the discursive effect of the film. In both films political interests focus on issues concerning global warming and climatic changes. However, *The American President* deals almost as much with gun control, i.e., crime prevention in the USA while this is not even mentioned in *Long Shot*. This other film has a much stronger focus and might quite possibly be more effective. Effective how? If we assume that the goal of such films is the neutral description of a certain condition, so the viewer can independently choose his or her preferred solution to the problem and make value judgements forming the foundation for subsequent action, we are mistaken. These films describe what the viewer is supposed to ultimately accept as the objective state of affairs, while simultaneously attempting to make the viewer take up the favoured attitude concerning these issues. This is what we called the viewer's point of view concerning certain objects at another point.

For the rhetorical situation presented in such films, it is always important to know whom the speaker is addressing and which goals he or she strives to achieve. It might be no coincidence that both films have been produced in the years preceding the elections for the second term of two US presidents (1995 for Bill Clinton and 2019 for Donald Trump). At this point, we must focus on *Long Shot* only, as the broader picture is much more complex. It is not clear, what the role of the film regarding the 2020 reelection campaign of Donald Trump might be.³ Charlotte Field's ambitions are overtly opposed to Trump's publicly expressed attitude. Her president, whose party is not specified, does not have any strong opinion on this issue, i.e., he takes the politically most profitable one. According to this and his closeness with Parker Wembley (resembling Rupert Murdoch), he might be a Republican, if we assume *Long Shot* to be clearly left-wing-oriented, for which numerous indications exist. In any case, it would be a great surprise if anything from Charlotte Field's agenda would soon become part of a US president's program. However, it would not be the first time that a Hollywood film has had a strange ability to forecast political events in the not so faraway future.

The American black comedy *Wag the Dog* (Barry Levinson, 1997) was premiered on January 9, 1998. Only 12 days later, on January 12, the Washington Post uncovered the sex scandal of then President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky, which in its unbelievable resemblance, is one of the important moments in the film. Things became even weirder when, just as anticipated in the film, Clinton's administration decided to bomb targets in Sudan and Afghanistan on August 20 of the same year, only three days after Bill Clinton's confession to inappropriate behaviour towards Miss Lewinsky. The situation was similarly repeated, when the decision of the US Congress concerning President Clinton's impeachment coincided with Clinton's bombing of Iraq in December that year.

3 The article was written in 2019 (editors' note).

Of course, it does not seem likely that *Long Shot* foresees the political future of the USA in such a precise way. Nevertheless, the issue of climate changes seems so unpostponable and threatening that the current attitude of the American administration in this respect seems impossible to persist in the long run. Who knows, maybe there will be positive surprises concerning the relation of global politicians to the environment and climate change after the 2020 elections.



Stop Light
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 200 cm
2010

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS

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He exhibited at the International Art Biennale in Beijing (2017) and at the China Art Museum in Shanghai (2017).

In 2014, he held a solo exhibition titled *"Phantasms on Wheels"* at the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, curated by Mišela Blanuša.

He is the recipient of the Student Drawing Award (1999), the Golden Palette Award (2001), and the White Angel Award (2001), as well as an honorary award from Centro-Periferia (an exhibition of eighteen selected young artists from around the world, FederCulture, 2007, Rome).

He received a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation (2011). In 2021, he won second prize in the competition *"Designing a sculptural-architectural conceptual solution for the public memorial to Diana Budisavljević in Belgrade"*, organized by the City of Belgrade – Secretariat for Culture.

In 2018, he was the artistic director of the Yoko Ono project *"One Day..."* in Novi Sad.

He is a member of the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (ULUS).

His works are part of the RADIX collection in Belgrade, the Museum of the City of Belgrade, the Borusan Collection in Istanbul, the Collection of the International Biennale in Beijing, and the Wiener Städtische Art Collection.

Nikola Božović (1975) explores the polished mise-en-scène of the post-industrial world where the assembly line, commodification, and design are reduced to highly stylized fragments. Using elements made from car headlights encased in smoothly enameled shells of vivid red, blue, or black, Božović prioritizes seeing (headlights) over movement (wheels). Unlike the Futurists who are interested in speed, or Julian Opie who explores the social anonymity of cars, Božović's work alludes to a different type of movement – social mobility.

The speed of vertical social ascent symbolizes commodified desire, while energy and dynamism are borrowed from design, which here serves not function, but aesthetics — acting as a fetishized collection of an urban collector.

Aleksandra Lazar, Art Historian, Belgrade

Considering the creative oeuvre of Nikola Kolja Božović, we come to the conclusion that the artist definitely resists being confined to a single artistic medium, moving freely and effortlessly between sculpture/objects, installations, and painting — focusing on shaping series rather than individual works. Rejecting the language of official art movements of 20th-century Yugoslav art history, his work speaks critically about the taboos and fascinations of a man living in the urban environment of contemporary society, building his own fictional world.

Mišela Blanuša, Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2022 – Solo exhibition “*Autonomous Forms of the New World*”, curator Jérôme Sans Museum of the City of Belgrade

2021 – Second prize in the competition “*Designing a sculptural-architectural conceptual solution for the public memorial to Diana Budisavljević in Belgrade*”, organized by the City of Belgrade – Secretariat for Culture

2020 – Solo exhibition “*Correlations*”, Olga Jevrić and Nikola Božović Legacy House, Belgrade

2018 – Beijing Art Biennale

2017 – “*Voyage*”, Exhibition of 9 artists, China Art Museum (Red Pavilion), Shanghai

2014 – Solo exhibition “*Phantasms on Wheels*”, Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, curator Mišela Blanuša

2013 – Group exhibition “*Prosthetic Bodies*”, curated by Jana Stojaković Progress Gallery, Belgrade

2013 – Group exhibition “*Civilization and Its Discontents*”, Ozon Gallery

2012 – Solo exhibition “*Transformers: Post-Pop Art Automotive Fetish*”, Zvono Gallery

2011 – Recipient of a grant from the **Pollock-Krasner Foundation**

2010 – Group exhibition “*Art Salon*”, curator Milena Marjanović, Progress Gallery, Belgrade

2010 – Solo exhibition “*Let’s Build a House for Robots!*”, Zvono Gallery, Belgrade

2007 – *Centro-periferia*, exhibition of eighteen selected young artists from around the world FederCulture, Rome, Italy

2007 – Solo exhibition “*Robot Invasion*”, Zvono Gallery, February

2004 – Solo exhibition “*BE STRONG*”, Cervantes Spanish Cultural Center Gallery

2003 – Solo exhibition “*BE STRONG 2*”, Zvono Gallery, Belgrade

2003 – Solo exhibition “*BE STRONG*”, Alkatraz Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia

2002 – Participated in the creation of the Publik calendar “*LIFE/Život*”, Belgrade

2001 – Solo exhibition “*THE GREAT LEADER*”, Zvono Gallery, Belgrade

1999 – Group HYPE (with Borislav Nanović and Igor Marsenić), Zvono Gallery, Belgrade

1999 – *Association* “*Art of Reality*”, Belgrade Gallery, Belgrade

Official website: www.nikolabozovic.com



Cromeosome 11
Oil and UV paint on aluminum
40 × 40 cm
2008

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Cover Artwork

Nikola Kolja Božović, **Cromeosome 20**
Oil and UV paint on aluminum
50 × 50 cm
2010

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