

THE MEDIA AS *MACHINERY OF PERSUASION*

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Abstract

The process of informing through the media, as well as direct face-to-face communication, is inevitably also a process of persuasion and imposing opinions. This act itself is natural, but experience tells us that rational logical argumentation does not bring an advantage in the exchange of opinions under a strong emotional charge. This phenomenon is not new, as even in ancient Greece the younger sophists failed Protagoras when they replaced the search for truth with the art of persuasion that will make weak claims stronger. Thus, oratory became eristic, the art of arguing with the aim of refuting someone else's opinion. Skilled polemicists do not look for the truth, but for arguments that support their point of view. The development of technology and media forms have perfected this process and have euphemistically renamed the lie itself as the 'post-truth', which is useful and thereby justified. Kant's observation about poetry as a creative imagination, and rhetoric as an insidious skill that turns people into 'machinery of persuasion' is used by the modern media for the creation of informative-entertaining content to achieve commercial and ideological goals. The all-powerful media machines abolish the objective perception of events and lead modern society into a decay that many civilizations have already experienced. *Deus ex machina* has become an omnipresent *Deus ex media* that solves nothing, but turns everything into a process of endless entertainment, a spectacle in which reason is enslaved by passions.

Key words: media manipulation, eristic process of persuasion, people as machinery of persuasion, endless commercial-ideological entertainment, media god of spectacle.

МЕДИЈИ КАО МАШИНЕ НАГОВАРАЊА

Апстракт

Процес информисања путем медија и у директној комуникацији лицем у лице је неминовно и процес убеђивања и наметања ставова. Сам тај чин је природан, али искуство нам говори да рационална логичка аргументација не доноси превагу у размени мишљења под јаким емоционалним набојем. Ова појава није нова јер су још у античкој Грчкој млађи софисти изневерили Протагору када су

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трагање за истином заменили вештином убеђивања која ће слабе тврдње учинити јачим. Тиме је беседништво постало еристика, вештина спорења са циљем да се побије туђе мишљење. Вешти полемичари не трагају за истином, већ за аргументима који подржавају њихова гледишта. Развој технологије и медијских форми усавршио је овај процес и, не марећи за логику и морал, и саму лаж еуфемистички преименовао у „постистину“, корисну и тиме оправдану. Кантово запажање о песништву као стваралачкој имагинацији и беседништву као подмуклој вештини која људе претвара у „машине наговарања“ савремени медији користе за информативно-забавне садржаје ради постизања комерцијалних и идеолошких циљева. Свемоћне медијске машине укидају објективно сагледавање догађаја и воде савремено друштво у суноврат, какав су већ доживеле многе цивилизације. *Deus ex machina* је постао свеprisутни *Deus ex media* који ништа не решава, али све претвара у процес бескрајне забаве, спектакл у коме разум робује страстима.

Кључне речи: медијска манипулација, еристички процес убеђивања, људи као машине наговарања, бескрајна комерцијално-идеолошка забава, медијски бог спектакла.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to discern any philosophical and ethical foundation in contemporary media, except for the ideological pragmatism driven by the logic of unscrupulous capital. This equally applies to traditional media – press, radio and television, and the Internet: web portals and social networks. Despite the optimistic belief that the emergence of newspapers would contribute to a more objective informing of the wider strata of the citizenry, and encourage public opinion to critically reflect on events and take positions on matters of general interest, it soon became evident that the press was a tool in the hands of publishers. The one who ‘handles’ the information does so in their own interest and easily manipulates the readers, who then orally pass on the adopted views, firmly convinced that it is their own opinion. This is how media manipulation becomes possible, because the hypnotized do not know that they are in a state of altered consciousness, and passionately advocate ideas that they bought cheaply and gradually became ‘pulp fiction’ heroes of an ideologically coloured reality.

In this way, the process of exchanging information becomes a process of persuasion and imposing opinions, no different from that in direct face-to-face communication. In our age, it is merely a technologically perfected art of persuasion the younger sophists have applied, abandoning the pursuit of truth advocated by Protagoras, according to Plato the “teacher of virtues” and the “first sophist” (Plato, 2023, 328c). Instead, it became important to make weaker claims stronger, and rhetoric was transformed into eristic, the art of arguing with the aim of belittling and ridiculing other people’s views. That is completely opposite to free discussions on various topics, which Immanuel Kant considered ‘play of the mind’, i.e. a change of different ideas within the power of judgment, where all interlocutors are on the gain, as there are no winners and losers.

The famous philosopher emphasized that in doing so, thoughts arise that do not carry any practical interest, but serve to revive the soul, similar to when we admire works of art, in the process of aesthetic disinterested appreciation. That is quite different from rhetoric:

I must confess that a beautiful poem has always given me a pure enjoyment, whereas reading the best speech of a Roman popular speaker or a contemporary speaker in parliament or in the pulpit has always been mixed with the disagreeable feeling of disapproval of a deceitful art, which understands how to move people, like machines, to a judgment in important matters which must lose all weight for them in calm reflection.

(Kant, 1975 p. 210)

Contemporary mass media and social networks extensively employ this rhetorical skill, *eristic*¹, as a technique of argumentation with the aim of refuting others' opinions, regardless of the truthfulness of the arguments or even the information itself, euphemistically renaming lie as the 'post-truth'², justifying it as useful within the world of utilitarian functionality. The editorial team of the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*³ declared 'post-truth' as the word of the year for 2016, providing an explanation of the broader meaning of the prefix 'post-', which no longer solely refers to the time after a certain situation or event (e.g., post-war), but in the term 'post-truth' it takes on the meaning of "belonging to a time in which a concept has become irrelevant." A year before the student uprising in France and around the world, Guy Debord (1967) hinted at this, analysing people's alienation from reality in the society of the spectacle: "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood" (Debord, 2006, p. 7).

Kant's critique of the misuse of rhetoric to persuade listeners to uncritically accept others' views, widely applied in contemporary public

¹ In the unfinished work *Eritische Dialektik*, Arthur Schopenhauer defines it as 'negative dialectic', the art of conducting an argument so that with the help of tricks in argumentation we gain an advantage and always be and remain right, regardless of the truth;

² Post-truth, the word of the year in 2016 according to the linguists working on the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, which, according to the data of this institution, was first used by Steve Tešić, an American writer of Serbian origin, in the magazine *Nation*, writing about the war Gulf War: "We, as free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some kind of post-truth world". That word has been used before, but in the sense of the subsequent discovery of the truth, while Tešić uses it in the sense of 'that the truth has become irrelevant', which justifies the lie.

<https://www.blic.rs/kultura/vesti/stiv-tesic-prvi-je-upotrebio-rec-post-istina/rhkb2v5>

Accessed on August 7, 2023;

³ Oxford Learner's Dictionary <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>;

relations and the media, is very close to the analysis of the public undertaken by Soren Kierkegaard in the essay "The Present Age" (1846). Berkeley Professor of Philosophy Hubert L. Dreyfus compares this essay to the state of publicly expressed opinion at the turn of the second and third millennium, imagining the response of the Danish philosopher to social media in the age of the Internet. Kierkegaard believed that his age was characterized by the nihilistic equalization of all status and value differences, because the public emerges as an all-knowing arbiter. He says that "[i]n order that everything should be reduced to the same level, it is first of all necessary to produce a phantom, its spirit a monstrous abstraction... and that phantom is the Public" (Dreyfus, 1998, pp. 96-97). But the real villain behind the Public, Kierkegaard claims, is the Press. It demoralizes people in the attempt to think critically, which threatens the ethical dimension of man and creates a society devoid of a sense of responsibility. Kierkegaard feared that "Europe will come to a standstill at the Press and remain at a standstill as a reminder that the human race has invented something which eventually overpowered it" and he adds: "Even if my life had no other significance, well, I am satisfied with having discovered the absolutely demoralizing existence of the daily press" (Dreyfus, 1998, p. 97).

That nihilism of the media, which we would today call relativism, according to Kierkegaard leads to the fact that "[a]t any moment reflection is capable of explaining everything quite differently and allowing one some way of escape..." (Dreyfus, 1998, p. 101). Kierkegaard expresses his indignation at the 'phantom of the public' after the affair with the newspaper *The Corsair*, ironically suggesting the motto for the Press: "Here men are demoralized in the shortest possible time on the largest possible scale, at the cheapest possible price" (Dreyfus, 1998, p. 101).

Based on these attitudes, we can assume that in the age of the Internet, Kierkegaard would be horrified by the fact that the power to disseminate opinions behind which no one stands has greatly increased for both the media and individuals, because the possibility of anonymity on social networks is far greater than it used to be in the age of the press. His belief that such a system 'makes Christianity impossible' would likely now lead to the view that instead of a democratic society, we have obtained a hi-tech synthesis of the worst features of newspapers and coffeehouses, in which, along with the press, Jürgen Habermas locates the beginnings of the public sphere in the mid-eighteenth century (1962), attributing to them a completely opposite, positive influence on the development of free thought and democracy. In short, what Kierkegaard said about the press would apply even more today to the Internet: "It is frightful that someone who is no one... can set any error into circulation with no thought of responsibility and with the aid of this dreadful disproportioned means of communication" (Dreyfus, 1998, p. 102).

The essential objection that Kierkegaard directs towards the public and the press is that their abstract reasoning about everything is completely detached from any action. The very reflection of countless ‘thinkers’ is not based on any practical activity, so it does not obligate them to anything. In the age of the Internet, freedom becomes even more irresponsible:

However, the problem is that fake news and hate speech are often spread and shared on social media. Regulating harmful speech in online spaces requires drawing the line between legitimate free speech and hate speech. Freedom of speech is protected by major international human rights treaties and by the constitutions of most countries around the world.

(Vučković, Lučić, 2023, p. 202)

Separation from political power gives the public the freedom of endless critical commentary, which makes action impossible. The ethical dimension does not exist, so there is no responsibility for the written word. Such communication by the media that have permeated our world has made freedom of speech itself banal. Communication channels are overloaded with images that dizzyingly change and repeat, words lose their meaning, and McLuhan’s *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968) has media-transformed the petit bourgeois “generated by the increasing bureaucratization of the state” into a “new, technological peasantry” that in the “society of the spectacle” (Debord, 1967, p. 47) does not see danger but a substitute for lost meaning.

MEDIA PRODUCTION OF IMAGES IN A WORLD OF ISOLATED INDIVIDUALS

The revolutionary theses presented by Marshall McLuhan about “understanding media as extensions of man” (1964) and the primacy of media form over media content, expressed in the slogan “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1971, p. 41), as well as about the transformation of the planet into a ‘global village’ were realized in a paradoxical manner: we live in a world that recognizes nothing but the latest news – “screens are dynamic icons” (Manovich, 2015, p. 136), and the spectacle is the peak of the consumer ideology that dictates various information to us, presenting them as indisputable facts, often as axioms. The technology that is changing us is not neutral; since we have begun virtually travelling through the windows of monitors we have never felt at home anywhere, because we are constantly immersed in the media world. The mobile phone is like the rabbit hole through which Alice fell into Wonderland, except we are denied an exit, because we dream while awake, and the ‘carnivalization of the world’ (Bakhtin, 1965) is realized as a loss of free-

dom, because man has become a mere media pendant. The dilemma ‘to have or to be’ (Fromm, 1976) has been erased, the only thing that matters now is ‘looking good’ (Debord, 1967), because in a dominantly visual world only image is truly important. This is also confirmed by surveys of social network preferences among students in Niš:

The social media landscape has undergone changes recently, and these changes are a reflection of user interests that are more drawn to short video formats. When TikTok became one of the most popular platforms in 2016, the social media landscape underwent a change as a result of the ability to communicate a variety of content through extremely short video materials. TikTok is a network whose app is downloaded by a lot more users on a monthly basis compared to other networks like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, which have more users overall.

(Stamenković, Mitrović, 2023, p. 19)

Culture as the meaning of an insufficiently meaningful world is suppressed, it survives only if it is reshaped by the media:

Representations of media culture show who has power and who does not, who is allowed to use force and violence, and who is not. They dramatize and legitimize the power of the existing powers, and show the weaker ones that if they do not conform to the existing state, they are threatened with isolation or death.

(Kellner, 2004, p. 6)

A little more than half a century since Guy Debord published the prophetic work *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), humanity is, paradoxically, in a dead end bounded by media images, and “the total reality of today’s social existence prevents people from experiencing reality directly” (Debord, 2006, p. 52). The production of images must not stop, because that would mean that even the mediated contact with reality is cut, and since it is impossible to preserve authorship in the abundance of scenes endlessly multiplied by new technology, the prediction of the French situationists is realized as an inevitability: “Plagiarism is necessary. Progress depends on it” (Debord, 2006, p. 53). People are becoming ever more alike, because how they should look, what they should like, eat and think, so that the individual also becomes a plagiarism, and cloning happens at the level of a programmed psyche that perceives diversity as undesirable or even dangerous.

Progress is only an illusion, as is the media reality that has abolished ontological questions about truth. Media spectacularization has led to the prevalence of a totalizing ‘optical mind’ both in individuals and globally at the level of humanity, strongly supporting the “end of great stories” anticipated in Lyotard’s work *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). An individual is isolated and lost in the abyss of media images (*Mise en*

abyme)⁴, not understanding even the individual meaning of the scene in front of him, and especially not comprehending the entirety of the meaning of the kaleidoscope in which his complete existence is buried.

Fortunately, there are still philosophers, poets and other critical thinkers and creative creators who do not accept such a state of affairs and dare to ask questions. One of the questions is why big stories have been abolished, since by the constant work of the media – ‘machinery of persuasion’, we ourselves have been turned into machines and forced to accept to live one such ideological story about the victory of postmodernity:

Let’s take the phrase that ‘the end of great stories has come’. Strategy is crucial. Firstly, that end applies only to possible *alternative stories*. The dominant, ruling ones don’t even need to be told, the established structure squeezes them out by itself. [...] The prohibition of ‘great stories’ is therefore suspiciously close to the prohibition of thought itself.

(Močnik, 1999, p. 32)

The technological expansion of the media does not improve communication, but makes the individual isolated. The relationship between people is mediated by images that have materialized into a spectacle as the main product of our society. It is not just decor, but an inversion of life that we now perceive only as media fragments, “the very heart of the unreality of this society” (Debord, 2006, p. 6). Dialogue has given way to chatter, endless entertainment that equates life with leisure time, and all activity is scorned.

Although a vast number of media outlets in the world create an illusion of an anarchic freedom that is impossible to both monitor and control, within all of this we can discern a global media strategy that does not care about the truth, as it does not search for it, but rather for images that will sell well:

What is being published, however, is of a completely different nature: here, in fact, we are talking about visualized media messages that, in principle, lose their connection with the logos (meaning), as their narrative structure melts into an optical, i.e. digital code of contemporary media.

(Vuksanović, 2011, p. 18)

⁴ In Western art history **mise en abyme** is a formal technique of placing a copy of an image within itself, often in a way that suggests an infinitely recurring sequence. In film theory and literary theory, it refers to the technique of inserting a story within a story. The term is derived from heraldry literally means ‘placed into abyss’. It was first appropriated for modern criticism by the French author Andre Gide;

Taking into account that we have long been living in the ‘society of the spectacle’, it is not difficult to deduce that the media utilize everything that brings profit, not hesitating to monetize terrorist attacks worldwide, contributing with ideological propaganda to the instigation and prolongation of wars that they broadcast live, taking sides and rooting for their favourites, as they belong to the acclamation-proclaimed ‘free world’ and fit into a matrix identical to the genre formulas of the film and TV series industry. Since wars cannot last indefinitely, as after a certain time, the public becomes oversaturated and seeks new topics, in times of peace there are festival-type cultural events and even more popular sports, from the Olympic Games and world and continental championships to major tournaments in individual competitions like tennis or golf. Thanks to the media, expensive tickets, and betting under state protection, globalization has made football one of the most profitable sports:

The dialectic of the relationship between globalization, national identity, and xenophobia is dramatically illustrated in a public activity that encompasses all three elements: in football. That is because, thanks to global television, this universally popular sport has been turned into a capitalist industrial complex.

(Hobsbawm, 2008, p. 89)

Thus, the images ‘ate the truth’ in a media metareference to Thomas More’s famous sentence (1516) about ‘sheep that ate men’ during the development of the textile manufacturing in England. The perspective of rare seekers of truth seems like a split in the personality created by schizophrenia: is the truth one in the offline world and different in the media, or is it one and the same that is only reached by different paths? There is also the possibility that it exists in one of the worlds and does not exist in another, or perhaps it has been abolished in both, like the ‘great stories’ that postmodernity erased without regret. At best, everyone got crumbs of stories, and in line with that, crumbs of truth, valid only in a limited space and time, because in any other they are just lies, or rather post-truth. Moral values are treated similarly in our time, as a ballast of tradition that slows down progress, even though “the moral capital of the community is an essential resource for the maintenance of the social community against the forces of entropy” (Haidt, 2022, p. 359).

WHY IS THERE NO REBELLION OF REASON AGAINST THE MEDIA-OCCUPIED WORLD?

Establishing a diagnosis is the first step towards healing the individual and society, but in this case nothing is happening to change the world and free it from the shackles of ubiquitous media. On the contrary, they are multiplying and rapidly taking over more and more human func-

tions, and the vast majority no longer need to be persuaded to do something, as they eagerly await instructions. Instead of the command 'you must', which even at the subconscious level triggers resistance, the euphemism 'you can' is used, and everyone willingly accepts the 'freedom of choice' to log in and become one of the 'spiders' weaving the common internet web with everyone else. This would not be possible if human nature corresponded to Plato's vision of a rational being, but it seems that David Hume was closer to the truth when he concluded in 1739 that: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Hume, 1983, p. 355).

The confirmation of Hume's stance, which may sound like the extravagance of a philosopher, arrived in the late twentieth century from the field of neurology. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, working with patients who suffered brain damage in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) - the lower, middle part behind and above the nasal bone, noticed that their emotionality had almost completely disappeared. They did not feel anything when they were shown the most horrifying or the most joyful photos of people and events, even though they retained their moral reasoning and intelligence quotient. They knew what was good and bad, but when they had to make important decisions, either about their personal lives or the business they were involved in, they could not do it or made foolish choices. Therefore, they would quickly jeopardize both family life and employment, making their lives very difficult because they were dysfunctional. Damasio concluded "that intuitive feelings and bodily reactions are necessary for rational thinking and that one of the tasks of vmPFC is to integrate these intuitive feelings into one's conscious deliberations" (Damasio, according Haidt, 2022, p. 54), on which he wrote the book *Descartes' Error* (1994).

Perhaps these findings can help us better understand people's fascination with the media and their inability to break away from it and make more reasonable decisions. It seems that rationality separated from emotions does not exist, except in pathological cases that endanger the process of thinking, as well as the possibility of moral behaviour. For this second insight, credit goes to researchers in the field of moral psychology, whose research shows that morality is the foundation of human civilization, and its survival depends to the greatest extent on preserving the balance between the various capacities of a person: intellectual, emotional, volitional, intuitive and physical, but also spiritual and mental, which serve as a bridge between the rational and the passionate in every being. Friedrich Nietzsche had this in mind when he wrote about the necessity of uniting the "Apollonian and Dionysian in the culture of every nation, in the manner of Ancient Greece, so that culture is not merely a decorative but an integrative factor in society" (Nietzsche, 2001, pp. 51-52).

We owe psychology the confirmation of some more of our insights, both intuitive and intellectual. The founder of experimental psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, formulated the doctrine of the primacy of affectivity in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He discovered in laboratory conditions that affect acts as a quick flash of feeling that can be positive or negative. He established that this affective reaction serves the function of preparing to approach something or to avoid it. It is too short to be considered an emotion, but it is integrated with perception so that a person is able to know whether they like or dislike something even before they know what it is. Users of social media react in exactly this way when they like something that they did not even get to look at or read carefully.

Following in the footsteps of Wundt, the social psychologist Robert Zajonc experimented in 1980 by asking respondents to rank arbitrary content such as Japanese pictograms, geometric shapes, and invented words of a non-existent language. They did it guided by a slight flicker of the 'like – dislike' affect, and Zajonc discovered that if a certain image is shown multiple times, people actually start to like it. It was happening even when the time for displaying the picture was so short that it was impossible to memorize and recognize it, but the brain was unconsciously marking familiar things as good. The experimenter named this phenomenon 'the mere exposure effect' and it is the fundamental principle of advertising.

Investigating how we form impressions of others, what the experiment conducted at Princeton by Alex Todorov in 2005 showed is that people were capable of making judgments about the competence of politicians even when their pictures were shown for only one-tenth of a second, which was sufficient to assess who will actually win the elections. This means that media manipulation is not all-powerful; the critical intuition in humans it has evolved just as in other animal species and serves as a defence against danger (Zajonc, according to Haidt, 2022, pp. 82-83).

This knowledge gives us hope that rebellion and change is possible and that the virtual world does not necessarily have to suffocate and assimilate reality, people and truth in order to turn it all together into a commercial-entertainment simulacrum. A little more than a decade ago, Stéphane Hessel, a ninety-three-year-old hero of the French Resistance, a diplomat and one of the drafters of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of the United Nations (1948), wrote and published a short book of only three printing plates under the title *Indigne vous!* (2010). It brought France and a large part of Europe to its feet, as the author clearly formulated where the indifference to our own lives, which we leave to politicians, the media and everyone who serves them, is leading us:

We are no longer dealing with a small, select elite whose actions we clearly understand. The world is vast and we feel that everything in it is interdependent. Everything is interconnected like never before. But in that world, many things are unacceptable. In order to see it,

you have to look with your eyes wide open, you have to search. I tell the young: just look and you will find. The worst possible outlook is indifference that says, "I can't do anything about it; I'll just get by." Behaving like that deprives you of one of the essential qualities of being human. The quality that is indispensable: the ability to rebel and, as a result, to act against something.

(Hessel, 2011, p. 19)

The dilemma remains as to why there are so many bad politicians when the intuition of the voters is so powerful? Perhaps the reason for this is that the choice is limited to the least bad, and it is also possible that, under the influence of the media, our first intuitive impression is shaken by propaganda images and slogans. Hume is right when it comes to reason in the service of passion, but it seems that Kant's assessment of rhetoric and the press as 'machinery of persuasion' is also accurate.

Returning to the old philosophers, we cannot but agree with Plato, who argued in his work *The Republic* that it is better to be moral than to appear so. At the very beginning, Glaucon, Plato's brother, demands from Socrates that he prove that justice itself, and not its reputation, leads to happiness. To make it clearer what kind of difference it is, Glaucon mentions the mythical golden ring of Gyges, which makes the man who wears it invisible, and asks Socrates how such a man would behave: Socrates manages to respond by drawing an analogy between justice in a man and justice in a city, arguing that in such a society, there is harmony among all social classes, whereas in an unjust one, the powerful exploit the weak, and there reigns a ruthless self-interest-driven chaos. The listeners agree with this picture of the city, and Socrates assures them that the same applies to a happy person ruled by reason. Such a person genuinely cares about true goodness, not just the appearance of virtue. This explanation is logical for Plato, Socrates' disciple who believed in the perfection of reason, our original nature bestowed upon us by the gods (Plato, 1993, 360b-c, 443-445, and 447d-e).

It would be difficult for a great philosopher to imagine our age in which some people do not need Gyges' ring of invisibility to behave unjustly and immorally, and to unscrupulously record and post such recordings on social networks and other media: "Reason is not fit to rule; it is designed to seek justification, not truth. [...] Glaucon was right: people care much more about appearance and reputation than about reality" (Haidt, 2022, p. 100).

William James, one of the founders of American psychology, advocated for a functionalist approach to the mind: "My thinking is first and last and always in the service of my actions" (James, 1950/1890, p. 333). The meeting point of these various perspectives on the human mind, morality, and behavior is Plato's determination of man as a 'political animal' - zoon politikon (*Greek ζῷον πολιτικόν*. Connecting philosophical in-

sights and psychological research, we can say that people are ‘intuitive politicians’, not scientists. A ‘scientific animal’ does not exist. We put much more effort into appearing right than actually being right.

This has been confirmed by the research of Phil Tetlock, who is one of the leading scientists studying responsibility within the field of moral psychology. He noticed that when the examinees are required to solve a problem and make a decision, if they are told that they will have to justify it in front of an audience, they think systematically and self-critically. If not obligated to justify, they make decisions more quickly, intuitively, while making mistakes due to laziness and irresponsibility. Tetlock observes in experiments the same thing that Kant arrived at through reasoning: “The purpose of conscious reasoning is largely persuasion, rather than revelation. In doing so, we strive to persuade ourselves as well, because we want to believe in the things we are preparing to tell others” (Lerner & Tetlock, 2003, p. 433, according to Haidt, 2022, p. 103).

CONCLUSION

In the theatre of ancient Greece, impossible situations would be resolved by *Deus ex machina*. In the twenty-first century, that machine is the media, but we are not sure whether God is present in it. Some will justifiably say that the same applies to reality outside the media, but the media God of the spectacle constantly imposes himself, so that he is constantly visible, Dionysian in promiscuity and Apollonian in wisdom, just rightly so that viewers can bear it without feeling bored. What bothers some who approach the media critically and try not to succumb to the ‘machinery of persuasion’ and to not allow themselves to become one such machine is whether there is something more behind the images or if they are just soap bubbles, which the French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard presents as “copies without an original” in the world of simulacra (2008, pp. 469-488).

Stanko Crnobrnja, a Serbian media theorist, television and film director, producer and screenwriter, uses the saying ‘The camera never lies’ to explain how viewers perceive media images: “The credibility of the ‘camera eye’ and its images are very often accepted as an indisputable truth, although the knowledge of semiotics dictates caution in interpretation or even a completely opposite understanding” (Crnobrnja, 2010, p. 31).

Users find it difficult to understand that the ‘objectivity’ of an image is just an illusion because visual media, as well as auditory, actively produce signs and are not ‘pure, immediate information’. Knowing about this does not deprive us of the danger that, in the world of perfected media managed by artificial intelligence or the financial-political oligarchy that abuses it like any other power, we may become ‘voluntary’ slaves of the new age. The great ideologies that wanted to liberate the world in or-

der to subjugate it have not disappeared yet; they have only managed to look better.

That is why one should keep in mind the testamentary words of Stefan Hessel, who, like Gandhi, advocated for peaceful rebellion:

It is high time that concern for morality, justice and sustainable balance prevails. We are threatened by great dangers that could bring an end to man's adventure on the planet, that could turn the Earth into a place where life is impossible. [...] Therefore, let's continue to call for a true and peaceful rebellion against the means of public information, which offer our youth only the perspective of mass consumption, contempt for the weak and culture, general amnesia and ruthless competition of all against all.

(Hessel, 2011, pp. 25-27)

In the end, we should remember the paradox that is also confirmed in this case: 'Less is more!' Less media intrusion into our limited time on the planet means more true life. Existence precedes essence, but without it, existence is only a rapid succession of images that induce constant anxiety, because they depict scenes that are separated from the viewer and merge into the independent movement of a life surrogate. This leads to indifference or addiction similar to that exhibited by experimental rats, pressing the button to initiate electrical stimulation of their brain's reward centres and ceasing to eat until they die of starvation. People immersed in the spectacle also receive a regular dose of dopamine, and forget to live.

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МЕДИЈИ КАО МАШИНЕ НАГОВАРАЊА

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Резиме

Савремени медији не задовољавају се преношењем информација, већ настоје да попут вештих беседника, наметну своје ставове читаоцима, слушаоцима и гледаоцима. Медији не представљају стварност, већ је креирају. При томе циљају емоције корисника, користећи еристичку методу убеђивања која слабије тврдње треба да учини јачим, независно од истине и чињеница. Развој технологије довео је до трансформације традиционалних и настанка нових медија чија је дигитална свеприсутност, без просторних и временских ограничења, довела до преваге пост-истине, како се еуфемистички назива корисна и самим тим оправдана лаж.

Кантово запажање да штампа његовог доба примењује еристику претварајући се у „машине наговарања“ људи у време интернета и друштвених мрежа још је израженија појава. Идеолошки и комерцијални интереси не маре за објективно сагледавање догађаја, већ приказују бескрајне низове покретних слика које омогућавају манипулацију наративом и намећу забаву и спектакл као приоритет. Постмодернистичка фрагментација стварности доприноси доживљају публице да је уроњена у симулакрум, у коме је најважније добро изгледати, јер у визуелној култури снимати себе и друге значи постојати.

Иако се не назире излаз из света умреженог екранима којим управља свеприсутни *Deus ex media*, он ипак постоји, у стваралачкој имагинацији и „игри духа“ корисника који од пасивних посматрача могу да се преобразе у креаторе медијских садржаја и нових форми. Критички приступ и вредновање медијске продукције може да пробуди етичку димензију човека и обнови здраво друштво, одговорно за сваку изговорену, написану и објављену реч али и фотографију и видео-запис.

Померање јавности из реалног у виртуелне светове интернета довело је до губитка осећаја да је и то јавни простор, а правним регулисањем дигиталног универзума, демократија не би била угрожена, већ сачувана од говора мржње и сваке друге злоупотребе ширења лажних вести и слика. Развој медијске писмености и медијског образовања подразумева инсистирање на чињеницама, а култура као смисао недовољно смисленог света, иако медијски преобликована, не значи предају онима који имају политичку и економску моћ, већ упозорење и подстицај на побуну.

Критички мислиоци и креативни ствараоци данашњице не пристају да буду изгубљени у амбису медијских слика, већ постављају питања и нуде алтернативне приче, од којих је најважнија она да забрана великих прича и идеала води ка постепеној забрани мишљења. Повратак логосу је повратак смислу и моралним вредностима заједнице које су суштинске за одупирање силама ентропије и нихилистичке релативизације људске слободе избора.

Упркос потврди неуронауке да је филозоф Дејвид Хјум био у праву када је тврдио да је „разум у служби страсти“, то не значи да треба одустати од рационалног размишљања и живота. Моралност је темељ наше цивилизације, а култура интегративни фактор сваког друштва, а не пука декорација. Научна открића о могућностима манипулације дају људима и моћно оружје за одбрану од виртуелног света који не мора да асимилира стварност ако на то не пристанемо.

Опасност од равнодушности према сопственом животу може бити превладана ако се не препустимо политичарима и медијима, већ искористимо никада

већу међузависност људи у свету и преузмемо одговорност и моћ за доношење одлука о рату и миру, климатским променама и ресурсима енергије и хране за све на планети. Ако већ не постоји „научна животиња“, већ је човек *zoon politikon*, онда нема другог решења него да људи преузму контролу над друштвом и медијима, користећи их као средства за борбу против опасности које би могле да униште цивилизацију, а Земљу претворе у немогуће место за живот.