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**Author:** Andrzej Kiepas

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## The Medialisation of Communicative Rationality in the Culture of “Virtual Reality”

*Andrzej Kiepas*

**CONTACT:** *Professor Andrzej Kiepas, PhD, The Institute of Philosophy, The University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland,  
The Higher School of Labour Safety Management, Katowice, Poland, E-mail: [andrzej.kiepas@us.edu.pl](mailto:andrzej.kiepas@us.edu.pl)*

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### Abstract:

The present article discusses the impact that the development of the media has on the processes of communication and the cultural transformations this phenomenon brings. By referring to the media theory, the abandonment of the current mediality bases related to language and technology in the contemporary culture is pointed out. The consequences of the ongoing virtualisation of culture also refers to man, his subjectivity and identity, which, in various dimensions, has been accentuated by D. J. Bergen, G. Sartori or N. Carr.

Culture may be understood and studied in a variety of ways, which, in turn, affects the manner, in which relationships and relations between man and culture are perceived. The question about the subjectivity of man and his identity that rises nowadays, and that has been approached from various perspectives also refers to the issue of man vs. culture. More frequently than not, when speaking about culture, regardless of the manner, in which it is comprehended, certain features are indicated which encompass the idea that culture:

- is created collectively and its existence is maintained;
- contains symbolic forms of expression and various models;
- remains a determined and ordered whole, although, at the same time, it is subject to certain processes of transformation.

Various attributes are ascribed to culture, which attributes point to its functions and the role it plays for man. In this respect, one of the most fundamental meanings of culture is related to its role in the processes of communication, which, in particular, reveals itself in the contemporary culture. As D. McQuail stresses: “Communication is perhaps the most general and necessary attribute of culture, since culture could not develop, last or expand – it could not work without communication at all.” (McQuail, 2009, p. 126) Communication has always been an important attribute of culture, and thus, any change in the manner of communication leads to changes in culture. The modes of communication characteristic for a given culture form simultaneously a relatively stable basis which:

- determines the role of culture as a factor of man’s adaptation and of shaping his subjectivity;
- is a factor which influences the structuring of man’s identity.

Problems related to man’s identity as a subject are nowadays connected with the role of culture, which serves not only adaptation functions in this respect, but it also remains a factor of eradication. This is also related to the increasing role of communication processes in the contemporary culture. The dynamics of those processes results in the fact that certain cultural changes as well as challenges for man and his subjectivity appear. Communication processes and their transformations were dependant on the development of



the media whose influence on culture revealed itself through medialisation processes encompassing different fields and cultural areas. Culture has always remained under the influence of different factors of economic, political, and social nature, but also moral and aesthetic nature, which affected its transformations, and which determined the dynamics of own internal changes of different cultures. The media and communication processes have played a certain role here as well, which has gained a special meaning nowadays due to the depth and vastness of the ongoing changes.

In culture, the role of the media in relation to man is, *inter alia*, the subject of the theory of media, where also under the influence of the so-called "Canadian school"<sup>1</sup> the conviction was formed regarding the role of the media as factors for cultural changes, which, in addition, found its reflection in the working divisions into the oral culture (culture of speech), the written culture and the culture of images (electronic culture). According to D. Mersch there are three main theories of the media which have played the most significant role in history, namely:

- the aisthesis theory concerning cognition – the media as something that cognition (seeing, hearing) makes possible;
- the linguistic theory – language as the main medium of cultural communication;
- the theory of technology – a medium as a specific, technical means of communication (Mersch, 2010, p. 27 et seq.).

The theories of the media and discussions around the media and their cultural role pointed to certain specific qualities that seem to characterise the media. Along with abandoning the paradigm related to the cognitive perspective, a transition from presenting the media in terms of their materiality to functionality has taken place. This shift becomes important despite the fact that certain materiality can be seen behind language and technology. The medium remains in the middle between the subject and the object, and, at the same time, it remains something that enables the subject to arrive at and cognise the object. The very media remain hidden in the cognition process, as they disappear in the process of the object's appearance for the subject, and they appear along with the disappearance of this object. This hidden nature of the medium causes problems related to, for example, the difficulties in defining them. The media basically remain something indefinable, which, simultaneously, forces one to expand the research perspective and to resort to other categories in the description of the cultural communication processes. If we conclude that communication processes are the main attribute of culture, then, at the same time:

- the cultural bases of communication are related to certain media;
- communication occurs within the framework determined by the essence of the media;
- the essence of the media, that is, mediality, constitutes, at the same time, a priori of cultures.

Mediality as cultural priori determines the framework, within which concrete communication processes take place. **The priori determines, at the same time, not only the modes of communication, but also, due to the fact that the media are something neutral, this has its impact on and significance for the "revealing" of the objects of communication, and for man as its subject.** As a consequence, the determined and characteristic for culture as the area of communication relations between the subject and the object are set by the cultural a priori precisely. Media are not neutral, and are not a neutral means in itself, although their hidden nature results in the temptation to present them as such. Meanwhile, it is the other way round, as they:

- determine the modes of communication;
- establish relations between the subject and the object, which also is not neutral for the contents of communication (Mersch, 2010, p. 16 et seq.).

In connection with the above-mentioned theories, two types of the cultural priori can be indicated, namely the priori of language and the priori of technology. In the first case, the essence of language forms framework for communication processes, whereas in the other – the framework is set by the technicality of the media. The latter found its reflection in the renown phrase "medium is message" (McLuhan, Fiore, 1967), according to which media are not neutral, which, in consequence, leads to a certain mix of technicality and culturality. This mix has been expressed in the famous book by N. Postman entitled "Technopoly" (Postman, 1995). The problems with defining and determining the media have resulted in the necessity to use other notions next to mediality, such as medialisation, which ought to be a better tool to describe the phenomena of

<sup>1</sup> The following belonged to it: J. Innis, M. McLuhan, E. Havelock, W. Ong.



cultural communication. The very notion of "medialisation" points to different functions of the media, which functions may reveal themselves in the communication processes in a concrete way. Mediality indicates the potential that is in the media, and it encompasses various possibilities which can reveal themselves while using them. Mediality is related to this fundamental function of the media, that is mediation, which has been described by pointing to appropriate metaphors enabling the performance of this function. We distinguish the following metaphors:

1. "window" – the media enable us to get to know the world, but, at the same time, they set boundaries for this knowing; they enable the mediation of appropriate relations and communication through the opening of one to the world and to others;
2. "mirror" – the media reflect the reality, and they are a place, in which the world is reflected;
3. "filter or selector" – reflection of the world in the media has its boundaries, and thus, in the process of mediation the media also create the reality in a certain way, e.g. via making good choices and eliminating contexts from concrete messages;
4. "road sign-guide-translator" – these metaphors are related to these functions of the media which concern the contents transmitted; the media complement, and sometimes even replace, certain social or cultural institutions in this respect;
5. "forum-platform" – a place where different subjects can meet and confront their thoughts, views, knowledge and ideas;
6. "disseminator" – the media are a place where different contents is spread;
7. "conversation partner" – the media are not only a place where certain contents or information is transmitted, but also they become a place – as a communication area – where certain relations and obligations are shaped, and where proper connections are made (Mc Quail, 2008, p. 98 et seq.).

Another metaphor may be added here, namely the "firework" metaphor touched upon by N. Postman: "All this altogether has given rise to a new world [...] I have named the "peekaboo world" where every once in awhile one and then another event appears within sight and disappears" (Postman, 1995, p. 87). That last metaphor is especially typical of the contemporary culture which remains under the significant influence of the development and spread of the new media.

All the metaphors point to different functions of the media in culture, and, as a result, also refer to their mediality. In the case of all these metaphors, one can also note that the media remain basically non-transparent. They are hidden behind certain functions, as well as behind the contents transmitted. Thus, the aforementioned phrase "medium is message" highlighted this hidden nature of the media which is frequently covered by the contents transmitted. By concentrating on them, we often cannot see the media as something that in practice defines and determines communication processes. The transmitted messages become less important in this context all the more since they are determined by the media to a relevant degree.

Realising the possibilities hidden in the media, that is, actualising mediality, leads, in consequence, to medialisation of different areas of cultural and social life of man. Medialisation determines the practical impact of the media on the communication processes, always occurring under specific social and cultural conditions. With reference to the above-presented theories of the media, certain types of medialisation, related to the two priori can be distinguished, namely:

- a) linguistic medialisation – is combined with the rationality of communicating, concerning those areas of culture which will be determined through the use of language in this respect;
- b) technical medialisation – realised through the dissemination of technical means and through the influence of technicality on communication processes and other areas of social and cultural life.

In the first case, medialisation concerns such types of communication, in which language forms the basis. One of the examples of that could be the theory of communicative action by J. Habermas (Habermas, 1980). The communicative rationality was understood as a means to overcome instrumental rationality that has dominated since the early modern times. The spread of communication and communicative rationality is a way towards emancipation and overcoming the repressive forms of this rationality. The communicative reason serves mediation functions towards different kinds of rationality; it also sets a place for them, determines their boundaries, and, finally, reflects upon the premises of communicative actions. The communicative rationality as understood by J. Habermas, has a certain understanding of language and acts of speech as forming the framework for cultural communications as its foundations (Habermas, 1997, p. 51 et seq.). At the



same time, language as a medium is connected with the a priori of culture, and from this perspective, the communicative reason may be understood as transcendental reason. In consequence, various critical remarks towards J. Habermas's idea have appeared, inter alia: "The primary weakness of Habermas's rationality in all of its forms lies in the fact that it constitutes itself in opposition to the world of life and in conflict with it. As a result, it destroys the source from which it springs" (Bukusiński, 1997, p. 199).

J. Habermas attempts, however, to see the role of reason in a slightly different way, including medialisation of cultural areas remaining under the influence of the communicative rationality dissemination. Medialisation is not only of an a priori nature, as, being simultaneously determined as a boundary factor, it determines the cultural boundaries for communication. Mediality is connected in this case with speech, whereas medialisation must refer to the rationality of communication. The rationality of communication reveals itself in specific situations, which is why for communication to be effective, it must – according to J. Habermas – be combined with three types of, necessary in this respect, unity (Habermas, 2004, p. 12 et seq.). Namely, it is about unity of values, intentions and unity of images of the world. "By communicating to something in an objective world, and accepting this self-reference to the world, they establish an interpersonal relation. With this performative attitude they attempt in common communicative experiments in the terrain of an intersubjectively shared world. They understand what the other says or has in mind. They learn owing to the information and objections of the counter-partner; they draw conclusions by interpreting his irony or silence, paradoxical forms of expression, allusions etc. The inability to understand certain unclear behaviour or termination of the communication is a communicative experience forcing one to reflect" (Habermas, 2004, p. 25-26). Here, one can clearly see speech and acts of speech as the fundamental archetype of communication processes which occur under specific conditions and depend on the factors which shape them, which, in this case, may justify the abandonment of understanding the communicative reason as transcendental reason. The role of language as a medium of communication is naturally also significant, and, in this respect, one may agree with J. Habermas that expanding the field of communicative rationality over the areas where instrumental rationality has dominated so far is important and, at the same time, is not neutral for very culture itself.

Medialisation realised through the dissemination of communicative rationality models has, however, its limits which are related to the possibilities of language as a tool for communication. Medialisation of culture takes place not only with reference to the bases of linguistic priori – in this respect technique plays a specific role. The role of the technical priori is expressed in the already-mentioned phrase "medium is message." In this case, technicality plays a role similar to the role of language, all the more since they constitute overlapping and strengthening one another types of the medialisation of culture. As a result, they remain dependant on one another to such an extent that it is impossible to separate them. The development of the "new media" poses, however, a new kind of problems and challenges.

The development of the new media, along with the digitalisation of the modes of communication and transmission – which leads to the convergence of various types of media – causes, in consequence, the dissemination of new kinds of medialisation which are connected with virtualisation. Virtualisation means a new type and degree of medialisation, which, at the same time, with reference to reflection upon the media, leads to an attempt at going beyond the above-presented and mutually combining types of medialisation through language and through technology (Zacher, 2013).

Virtualisation is understood in different ways, and the discussions around the differentiation between what is real and virtual have been quite frequent so far. Among the many different ways of understanding virtualisation, it is worth indicating the following three:

- mimetic virtualisation – virtual reality stems from imitating the real world (e.g. an e-book); it is a copy of reality, and its objects are similar to the ones in the real world, they have the same functions, although the effects of spreading such objects and expanding the virtual world do not have to be entirely analogous to the laws of the real world; "Assumedly, such copying is faithful, however, in reality its nature is that of selection and approximation, as it observes only those features of objects or processes that constitute their essence and basic functions [...]" (Pawłowski, 2013, p. 20);
- creating virtualisation – creation of new objects that do not appear in the real world, and which are only of digital nature, although their functions may be analogous to the functions of other objects in the real world; this type of virtualisation is dynamically developing, for example, through films or computer



games; this virtualisation assumes the form of J. Baudrillard's simulacra, that is, a copy without an original (Baudrillard, 2005);

- autonomous virtualisation – this one still remains a utopia, although it is thought to be possible, nonetheless it is emerged in and determined by the digital reality; "Nowadays, the idea of autonomous virtualisation is best reflected by the so-called "genetic algorithms" that can learn and find better and better solutions to problems, yet they lack other features of life (e.g. self-preservation instinct or self-satisfaction in terms of power)" (Pawłowski, 2013, p. 21).

The expansion or development of the virtual world – the consequences of which we are not able to fully grasp – is, basically, the dissemination of G. Berkeley's world, that is, a world where only that what can be perceived exists. The problems and challenges related to the virtualisation of culture stem, inter alia, from the fact that they affect many different areas of individual life, both social and cultural one. The scope of medialisation through virtualisation is larger than as compared with the processes of culture medialisation. The dissemination of this kind of medialisation leads, in consequence, to the shaping of the contemporary culture as the "virtual reality" culture" (Castells, 2007). The culture of virtual reality means that "[t]he very reality (material/symbolic existence of people) is completely captured, fully emerged in the virtual system of images, in the world, in which, imagine that, the appearances not only are found on the screen, via which the experience is communicated, but they become the experience" (Castells, 2007, p. 378). The culture of "virtual reality" signifies not only the mix of the two worlds – the real and the virtual one – but, above all, the inability to separate them and to set the boundaries of each of them. The culture of virtual reality thus develops towards the crossing of the two above-mentioned priori – the linguistic and the technical one – which bestows the following features upon it:

- the medium remains hidden and neutral, which is connected with the shift towards the message itself; it is, inter alia, expressed in the phrase "message is message" (Castells, 2007, p. 323);
- the medium disappears and is replaced by a message whose nature is at the same time universally digital; this is connected with the multimedia nature of communication and with the spread of image message and its dominance in the cultural processes of communicating.

Today's culture of virtual reality is based on even earlier linguistic and technical foundations which determine its mediality. The development of the new media and the ongoing virtualisation process mean, however, changes that affect the mediality and culture medialisation processes connected therewith. The culture of virtual reality remains for the time being a culture lacking priori, which is also reflected in field of the theories of the media, where attempts at crossing both of the paradigms – the linguistic and technical one – are being made. This is connected with what D. Mersch defines as the negative theories of the media. "Thus – he writes – the outlines of the negative theory of the media are shaped. Its foundations are such negative practices as interventions, interruptions, obstacles and opposing configurations. They consist in the difference strategies. Owing to them one can get closer to mediality as a "non-affirmable notion" by means of an unsecured and open process of prismatic fractures which shows more and more different images and so far unknown dimensions" (Mersch, 2010, p. 224). As he further notes, "[t]he negative theory of the media thus collides with problems which, in essence, could be described in the following way: If the media exist because variety exists, if their position consists in the fact that they posit themselves in relation to something and enable the relation, if their task is to mediate, construct, picture or reveal [...] then the mediality of a medium remains closed forever, and we fall victim to the deed. However, the use of the media paradoxes at least enables one to partly chip at this spell and reflect upon the medium. By this reason, the art of the media theory has more to show than the theory of art media would have to say" (Mersch, 2010, p. 225). Along with the galloping virtualisation, an almost limitless sea of possibilities related to mediality opens, whereas the medialisation processes penetrate the deepest bases of culture.

The role of the media in culture changes along with it, which also refers to the role and significance of the culture medialisation processes. The mediality metaphors referred to above still remain important and up-to-date to a certain degree, all the more since not all the areas of culture have been subjected to the processes of virtualisation. Today's culture remains a set of the old and new models, although more and more signs of significant changes that may occur in the not-so-distant future begin to appear. The role of the media in culture expresses itself in creating, shaping and constructing specific relations which, at the same time, are of only relatively stable nature. Constructing leads to re-constructing, and, in practice, medialisation becomes



a process of an ongoing and unlimited production of impulses towards the creation of relation. The media priori vanishes and becomes dispersed along with the substitution of the media with message, which, at the same time, has certain effects which, inter alia, concern the role of culture as an adaptation factor of man. Culture has always played to role of an adaptation factor, as in the process of growing and socialising man became a specific individual and subject, nonetheless, an individual and subject pertaining to a relevant cultural order. Man as a cultural being acquired his identity through accepting and practicing relevant models and cultural norms. Culture as a relatively permanent set of such norms, models and values constituted a specific environment of man as an adaptation factor. One of the foundations, from which this role of culture stemmed was the differentiation between the subject and the object, between the subjective and the objective, the real and the virtual etc. The role, however, of these differentiations, even if they still possess any meanings, is not the same as it used to be, to be more precise, it is becoming more and more marginal, which finds its reflection in the processes of cultural communication. The meaning of the aforementioned metaphors of mediality is changing as well, as, for example, at the bases of the metaphors of "window" used to lay an idea of its two sides, whereas the window itself in the middle was something between the subject and the world. The metaphor of "mirror" used to have a similar meaning; the mirror was a place showing certain objects being a reflection of the real world. This role of the metaphors is changing along with the development of the virtual culture, although, of course, they partly retain their up-to-dateness. The role of the media in the contemporary culture points to other metaphors which also reflect the essence of mediality, such as, for example, the "firework" or the "fireworks display" metaphor which may indicate the role of the media that is connected with the fact that they are the means to shape relevant relations. Culture stops playing the role of man's adaptation factor, as, instead of being a set of principles, models and norms, it starts functioning as a set of diverse traces that are left in culture as a result of medialisation. Each such trace points to something human, yet, at the same time, it is deprived of any objective grounds which might bestow sense and importance upon it. The number of listeners, viewers, users is not any measure in this respect, which measure could confirm the cultural significance of those traces. It only indicates a number of people who have reacted to certain cultural traces. Most frequently than not, it seems that the need for this sort of confirmation is disappearing." Thus, – as M. Castells writes – the world of the multimedia will be inhabited by basically two different populations, namely the interacting and the interacted one, that is, those who are able to choose multi-direction course of communication, and those who are provided with a limited number of properly selected choices" (Castells, 2007, p. 376). This further has a connection with the problem of interactivity in the context of the development of the new media.

The culture of virtual reality does not form any objective basis for the shaping of identity of man as a subject. Culture as a set of traces may only show man various possibilities, which, at the same time, means entering the area of relation and an impulse for its creation. In other words, culture becomes a world of various "flows" (Castells, 2007, p. 423 et seq.). The shaping and structuring of man's identity in the virtual culture assumes a reflective character. The subjectivity and identity of man remains under the influence of a network of flows, and, along with it, it becomes unstable and fluid in nature. The participation in one network simultaneously means exclusion from the other ones, however, both the participation, and the exclusion remain beyond the evaluation from the point of view of such criteria as true-false, good-evil. There are, apart from that, relatively easy and simple possibilities of change in terms of membership to relevant relation networks, as they are dependant on the right and subjective decisions and choices. The choices are always of relative nature only, which, in turn, means that man is not sentenced to only one determined identity. He must find strength within himself in order to achieve a particular identity, which, nonetheless, does not mean that he remains self-sufficient in this respect. "Man is too non self-sufficient – as Ch. Delsol notes – to exist by himself; he must identify with culture in order to express his humanity" (Delsol, 2003, p. 78).

The culture of virtual reality creates specific conditions for the shaping of man's subjectivity. "The real subject will be the one who, while searching for the unfinished truth, will transform his very existence into a trace of this elusive search. An authentic subject is neither a fanatic nor a nihilist, but he is a witness." (Delsol, 2003, p. 115). As a witness, man defines his authentic subjectivity not through taking over and implementing a certain universal or culturally determined model, but through recognising and accepting the traces he has left in culture himself, as well as through the shaping of relation and mediation in the area of cultural traces. The structuring of thus understood authentic subjectivity of man is not only possible, but also necessary, which Ch. Taylor connects with specific conditions that must be met:



- the freedom of self-determination – authenticity does not mean combating differences, all the more since variety and separateness are not values, but they acquire meaning only in relevant contexts of meaning and with reference to relevant values;
- the existence of horizons – arriving at a relevant sense and meaning always takes place within a determined, axiological, and cultural horizon;
- making the subject responsible (Taylor, 2002, p. 71 et seq.).

These conditions are probably important in the case of shaping man's subjectivity, although it can be clearly seen that when speaking about authenticity, one does not have any universal or cultural model in mind. The culture of virtual reality, however, is connected with certain obstacles and difficulties which sometimes concern the cultural horizon precisely, in particular in its axiological dimension. Medialisation through virtualisation in the culture of virtual reality is not related to the shaping of axiological bases for structuring man's subjectivity, by which this subjectivity would acquire not only a subjective, but also an objective nature. Achieving an authentic subjectivity in the culture of real virtuality must be connected not only with meeting certain cultural conditions, but also man's possessing relevant competence. It is about combining the four basic types of competence:

1. instrumental competence – it decides the effectiveness of certain actions, and its basis is instrumental rationality that has dominated the modern tradition so far; this rationality focuses on the optimisation of means of action which serve to perform the goals set;
2. cognitive competence – it is related to the necessity to possess an appropriate knowledge as the basis for any action and decision-making;
3. axiological competence – by complementing the instrumental competence, it will focus on the evaluation of action goals and on the selection of such goals which, for axiological reasons, will be deemed as right;
4. reflective competence – related to the ability to reach consensus necessary in many axiologically conflicting situations; this type of competence is simultaneously the basis for structuring unity with respect to the entire order of the above-mentioned types of competence.

The role of these types of competence in the process of structuring and realising man's subjectivity in the culture of real virtuality is subjected to various kinds of limitations and influences related to the culture virtualisation processes. K. J. Gergen points to the contemporary changes in the manner of understanding man's subjectivity that appear along with the emergence of the perspective of the shaping of the new post-modern social and cultural order. (Gergen, 2009). He also claims that in the culture of the 20th century we dealt with the co-existence of two traditions referring to the manner of understanding man as a subject. In his opinion, the following played the most significant role:

- the romantic tradition – the romantic vision of the Self indicated that each person had the qualities of personal depth where their passions, desires, character traits and bases of their creativity could be found; this formed the grounds for creating any kind of social relationships as well as the grounds for setting individual goals in life and imposing meaning on it; "[...] the vocabulary of moral feelings, loyalty and internal pleasure comes to a large extent from the romantic notion of the Self. Although it reached its peak in the 19th century, this manner of perceiving still remains very vivid in today's world. It is a perspective that puts an emphasis on the invisible, or even sacred, forces rooted very deeply in a person, forces which impose meaning on life and our relationships with others." (Gergen, 2009, p. 48);
- the modern tradition – the main features of the Self were connected not with what lay inside, but with the ability to act rationally, to make decisions and capability of conscious intentions of man.

"In many respects, modernism is both more optimistic, and more democratic. The romantic individual remained a mystery forever – with its vital essence running away from reality and being impossible to capture. Contrary to that Self, the modernist Self is cognisable, present here and now, slightly hidden under the surface of its actions. [...] There is little likelihood that the modernist Self allowed the intense and emotional dramas to cloud its judgement; its actions are governed by its arguments, whereas its voice is clear and honest" (Gergen, 2009, p. 77). The changes that we are facing in the contemporary culture related, inter alia, to the development of the new media and virtualisation are the result of the development of the dissemination of the "social saturation technology" which took place in two phases. Phase one, of low saturation, is related to such technologies as cars, the radio, film, railways, the telephone, whereas of high saturation – to such technologies as television, computers, the Internet. The "saturation" mentioned here and dependant on the development





of relevant media is, in consequence, the result of the social emerging of man in a network of relationships, experiences and relations which are subject to intensification, above all, quantitative one, in the culture of real virtuality. As a result, a perspective of the post-modern social and cultural order appears where:

- a) both of the above traditions of understanding the Self – the romantic and the modernist one – lose their previous meaning;
- b) also the notion of the “authentic Self” or “being yourself” loses its meaning.

As a consequence, many mutually unrelated and incoherent models of the Self appear in today’s culture, and, as a result: “The Self as the holder of any real and identifiable qualities, such as rationality, emotions, inspiration and will is subject to dismantling” (Gergen, 2009, p. 35). The contemporary transformations, stemming from the development of high-saturation technologies, result in the fact that in the post-modern perspective:

- the relation potential increases – it is the result of the development and spread of various communication techniques, and, in connection with that – of expanding the contemporary man’s field of experiences;
- the multiplication of the Self takes place – the multiplication of relationships with others and expansion of the field giving the possibility to make oneself present, not only in the present, but also through preserving the past;
- the intensification of exchange takes place – its basis are, however, the relationships and relations which have no deeper roots, neotribalism nor any mediated form of communication that is not a face-to-face communication;
- the Self becomes more and more populated by knowledge and information coming from the media, nonetheless, this population is mainly of quantitative nature here, and does not lead to the shaping of such identity that will be of authentic character; the process of multiplication and of becoming a pastiche Self occurs;
- the disintegration of the rational order takes place – life in the contemporary society consists in the ability to accept contradictions and in a certain “multifrenia” syndrome, that is, in the split of an individual into many, frequently incoherent, autoinvestments (Gergen, 2009, p. 81 et seq.).

Thus, in the post-modern perspective, a relational Self develops, whereas the self-determining and authentic Self is losing its importance. A person becomes a displayed and differently revealed image, and, in consequence, the significance of the division into the objective (real, authentic) and the subjective (virtual, apparent) becomes gradually reduced. The Self becomes something manufactured instead of something that is private property, and the impulses for this manufacturing come from the outside, that is, from the cultural environment. Man as a subject may reveal himself only as a witness to the traces he leaves, even though the traces do not form any coherent system and remain the result of constant decisions and choices, as well as of the processes of relational questioning, as they are the outcome of participating in certain flow areas, in which particular individuals are pulled in. The saturated Self remains simultaneously under the influence of many, often incoherent, impulses coming from the cultural environment. Thus, pastiche forms of subjectivity are formed and developed, as well as impermanent social relationships connected with them.

The question about man as a rational being loses its weight in this context due to the fact that the culture of real virtuality does not form the bases for such rationality. Rationality loses its universal character along with the dispersion of the rational order, and, as a consequence, only subjective judgments decide what is rational or irrational (Gergen, 2009, p. 142 et seq.). Similar remarks one can find in the case of G. Sartori (Sartori, 2007). According to him, the homo videns is replacing the homo sapiens not only due to the development and spread of television, but also due to the Internet and the new media. Culture as an area of communication is subjected to the processes of medialisation related to virtualisation and dissemination of the image culture. The image culture (visual one) possesses numerous features similar to the above-mentioned speech culture. Here, we can point, inter alia, to such characteristics as concreteness, limitation to the present, subjectivity, the lack of any clear separation of the subject from the object, and an imitative nature. At the same time, the virtualisation of culture is related to the shaping of man as the homo videns. “Thus, to a large degree, the viewer becomes a seeing rather than a symbolic animal. What is imaginable by means of images means more to him than what is told in words. A significant shift in the development direction has taken place. Insofar as the ability to think in symbolic terms made the homo sapiens different from other animals, the ability to watch brings him closer to his primal nature, to the representatives of species, from which man originated” (Sartori, 2007, p. 17). The development of the new media disturbs the relationship between seeing and thinking, as the



virtualisation of cultural areas leads to the spread of the *mundus sensibilis*, and not to the development and spread of the *mundus intelligibilis* (Sartori, 2007, p. 27). As the *homo sapiens*, today's man remains in the crisis, in a situation where he has lost his rational and cognitive abilities (Sartori, 2007, p. 36 et seq.). He loses the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the truth and false, as the *homo sapiens* is being replaced by the *homo insipiens* (Sartori, 2007, p. 86 et seq.). The latter has always existed, and not in a lesser degree, nonetheless, presently in the era of the new media the possibilities of his power and influence have increased. "Man becomes reduced to a mere relation, to the status of the *homo communicans*, emersed in the constant current of media messages. The *homo communicans* it is, but what is the contents of the new communication? The void communicates with the void" (Sartori, 2007, p. 87).

Man's future as the *homo sapiens* remains open, although the processes of virtualisation of the contemporary culture pose certain threats and challenges in this respect which reveal themselves in his individual life in a variety of ways, as well as in the social and cultural dimension. Threats are perceived also by psychologists and are revealed in the contemporary research into the brain. "The net [...] increases the stress on the working memory because it not only directs our resources in another way, leaving out the ability to think at lower levels, but it also interferes with the consolidation of long-term memories and the development of the cognitive schemata [...]. The net constitutes the technology of forgetting" (Carr, 2013, p. 237; Spitzer, 2013).

In consequence, various threats and challenges affect the human nature which is not given to us as something constant and unchangeable, even in its biological form. The question about man still remains open and important, which is why it ought to be constantly undertaken, and in the answer to it we ought to seek that what is important and thus needs to be protected and cultivated.

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