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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Stamenković, G. (2015). The Man-Shell. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 57, 58-64. <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.57.58>

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The Man-Shell

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Keywords: media, democracy, man, shell, internet, information, cyberspace

ABSTRACT. The author tends to analyze the main characteristics of the media today and the consequences of relevant media activity to the society and the man. A special place in the article is reserved for the consideration of the phenomenon referred to as the man-shell, that is, the way of online life that is becoming more frequent in modern time, and as such, more and more recognized. A part of the article is dedicated to the imperative of “continuous present” the modern media forces upon us, that is, the consequences of imperative Now to man's identity and authenticity, as well as his willingness to get socially and politically engaged. The final part of the article considers renewed awareness, the process that could be one of the means of escape from the world of illusions the modern media successfully create and a path of return to the natural, primary reality.

1. DON'T CALL BACK

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The man-shell – who could be? In our opinion it is a man acquiring information online; buying and selling online, making all payments online; making restaurant reservations online; listening to music and reading books online; performing professional tasks online; communicating online; living online. Man-shell sees Internet as a supreme alchemist who managed to essentially transform the time and space and unite them into a new element of the same name. For the man-shell, the Internet is an *Ars Magna* master Ramon Llull¹ would be proud of. Of course, man-shell lives the life of “split screen”: the one on desktop computer, laptop or tablet device, the one on his phone, and the “older” one - television. It is a strange integration, a paradox in its essence: a “non-living” thing (media) produces “live” images that create a live feeling in the man-shell, the feeling of being present in reality and in his own life. The media (secondary) reality becomes the primary experience of the man-shell that then, analogous to its origin, asks to be expanded and enriched in the same initial and familiar space: the media space. The man-shell occasionally goes into the world and among people, but he tends to return to his shell as soon as possible, the shell where his real life starts again.

And yet, *eppur si muove*. The man-shell runs the secondary, media reality in which he recharges, through personal filters of experience and knowledge acquired in rare encounters with the real, primary reality, through a network of personal preferences, beliefs and attitudes. Thus he develops his own, tertiary reality, which is not above or below the primary reality, but beyond it. The relation between tertiary and secondary reality is the dynamics of two processes: merging and separation, that take their consecutive turns. The secondary (media), reality encourages formation of new attitudes of the man-shell and influences the intellectual, will and emotional function of those already formed that evolve, become firmed or weakened, and sometimes even radically re-interpreted. With patient and deliberate creation of secondary reality, even when results cannot be instantly visible and significant (that is, even when they fail to immediately effectively influence the man-shell), the media still cause slow, hard to see, but steady results. Subjective experiences, experience of a certain issue or object, as well as value judgements, become profiled with intentions

¹ Ramon Llull was a Majorcan writer and philosopher, logician and Franciscan tertiary, author of *Ars generalis ultima* or *Ars magna* (The Ultimate General Art) published in 1305.

of secondary reality, by becoming merged into a served, secondary model of experience or becoming directly confronted with it. But even in case of confrontation, we may indicate the influence of secondary reality as more dominant, given the fact that the man-shell “does not communicate”, “does not discuss”, “does not engage in dialogue” with secondary reality. The media (secondary) reality is delivered, served as a ready meal (do we know the cooks of ready meals we buy in stores, to tell them whether their dish is good or not?). Confrontation with the secondary reality is confrontation with a “still” image that is constantly smiling, so the inability to “discuss things” with it leaves the man-shell in a doubt that the “still” image could be right and that this reality, the one where the image comes from, could be the real one after all. “Beneath the social construction, that complicated marvel of a structure, there are excavations of all sorts. There is the religious mine, the philosophical mine, the economic mine, the revolutionary mine. Such and such a pick-axe with the idea, such a pick with ciphers. Such another with wrath. People hail and answer each other from one catacomb to another. Utopias travel about underground, in the pipes. There they branch out in every direction... Sometimes they enter into combat there... But nothing arrests nor interrupts the tension of all these energies toward the goal, and the vast, simultaneous activity, which goes and comes, mounts, descends, and mounts again in these obscurities, and which immense unknown swarming slowly transforms the top and the bottom and the inside and the outside. Society hardly even suspects this digging which leaves its surface intact and changes its bowels. There are as many different subterranean stages as there are varying works, as there are extractions. What emerges from these deep excavations? The future?”. (V. Hugo, 1862:125-6).²

The reality formed by the man-shell, that we refer to as tertiary, is not an autonomous reality, but such that could be compared to a ship, with its anchor (the media) docked in a port (media, secondary reality). In this description, primary reality would be a large, vast sea. The ship has the opportunity to navigate independently, but within a narrow space, no more than the strength and size of the anchor allow.

When a storm starts, the ship is stricken by waves and starts to sway and tumble until it breaks away from the anchor and starts sailing on its own. Yet still, if the anchor is large and strong enough, it might not break and be left behind, but only move from the sea bottom, and sail along, tied to the ship. Until the ship is once again anchored or disappears in the endless blue sea. Still, life is unpredictable, but it always predictably offers another opportunity. And it would be for the man-shell to step out from his shell, throw away the anchor and leave the ship. The man-media is a former man-shell who decided to react: he threw away the anchor, left the ship and now swims on his own. In search for a renewed awareness.

1.2. THE RENEWED AWARENESS

It seems to understand and analyze the man as a product of primarily external circumstances. Human potentials, subjectivity of man, his ability to think and reflect, create and influence, is, in our opinion, placed aside. If a man is explained exclusively through things and circumstances outside of him, then his destiny is to be a thing himself, to turn into an object. “And this is nothing but the death of a man, because he cannot be distinguished from the world of things, he loses his identity. The science of man does not study the man – it denies him, for wanting to explain the man with something he is not”. (Đ. Šušnjić, 1979:217)³ If an individual were affected only by external circumstances and conditions, everyone would behave the same, and this is certainly not the case. Not everything is caused by circumstances, something depends on ourselves, though circumstances still determine and individual more strongly than he determines the circumstances. Objective science cannot be reduced only to *objective*, the knowledge of *objects* (things), but also the knowledge of *subject (active)* characteristics of man’s activities that remained beyond the reach of

² Victor Hugo: *Les Misérables*, 1862. Acknowledgements to Đuro Šušnjić who underlined this citation in his book *Ribari ljudskih duša (The Fishermen of Human Souls)*, Čigoja štampa, Belgrade. pp. 125-6

³ Đuro Šušnjić, *Ribari ljudskih duša (The Fishermen of Human Souls)*, 1979, the new edition, Belgrade, Čigoja Štampa, 2011, pp. 217

such methods, “that do not make them less objective or less human”.(Ibid. :219)⁴ *Marx believed that a man can never be fully defined, because one cannot know all of his abilities.*⁵ The man continuously creates himself, he develops and has a history. The man is the one who defines, therefore he cannot be defined because a final definition of a man would mean putting an end to his development. “Isn't death exactly the thing all knowledge is possible to base on?” (M. Foucault, 1966: 232).⁶

We believe that in spite of circumstances, and because of them, the man can and knows how to react, therefore changing the circumstances and creating an environment that suits his needs and his identity. It is a complex process that is not always bound for success, nor failure. Even though these types of works should explain some issues and problems, but not evaluate and rank them, we dare to notice that school division to scientific disciplines and the request of positive science to hold strictly to the explanation of facts the way they are, represent a certain lack of humanism, which is in our opinion the key value position that should serve as a stand for criticism of all types of materializations (turning into things) offered by modern time in multitude and “in all colours and flags” (author’s note).

The natural, primary reality is not created by us and we cannot compare it with our ideas and goals (ideals). It is a reverse process where we compare our perceptions of reality with the reality itself. We already stressed that the modern mass media are blocking our view of the real, constructing a secondary, media reality that has long lost all similarity with the primary reality. And since the man is responsible for the social reality he creates in line with his ideas and ideals, the existence of secondary, media reality represents a situation that can be described, paraphrasing Karl Marx, as a situation where reality should be ashamed before the ideal. The man, united with other people, can create a social reality that will be in accordance with his ideas and goals.

Perhaps one of the first steps on this path can be the renewed awareness. What do we mean by this term? On the example of hologram, we will try to explain the essence of the process we call the renewed awareness. Hologram can be defined as a non-existing three-dimensional world, limited by the size of holographic plate a hologram is recorded on. Changing the angle of looking, the recorded object can be observed from all sides. In order to create a hologram, the object that is being photographed first needs to be exposed to laser beams. When light beams of another laser are directed towards the same object, the second light beams will reflect from the light of the first laser. Then the resulting sample of interference (the space where lights from both lasers intersect) is recorded by a camera. When the photo film is developed, it shows only a swirl of intersected light and dark lines. However, when the film is once again exposed to laser beams, a three-dimensional image of the original object will appear.⁷

The three-dimensionality of object is not the only thing worth mentioning when discussing holograms. If a hologram of one object is split in half and exposed to laser beams, each half will contain the image of the entire object. Even if we would split these halves as well, each of the four given parts would have the original image of the object. Unlike regular photography, each part of the hologram contains information about the whole. Hologram reality is the reality we live, thanks to modern mass media and powerful information technology. A modern man is placed into a hologram. All information about us is contained in our identification cards, passports, bank cards. In media reality, in all of its parts, we notice the same unity – the secondary reality, the other reality, created through media activity. The primary reality remains beyond our reach. In a hologram universe, we cannot even look at time and space as fundamental principles. The concept of object location in time and space is simply not functional, because in a hologram, all is in one and one is in all. Doesn't this remind you of the modern social reality we live or survive, all depending upon the individual and their ability to reach the natural, primary reality.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 219

⁵ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *Rani radovi (Early works)*, Zagreb, Kultura, 1953. pp. 237

⁶ Michel Foucault: *Les mots et les choses - une archéologie des sciences humaines (The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences)*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, pp. 232

⁷ <http://www.holography.ru/holoflash.htm>

In order to reconstruct an image from a hologram, the procedure taken to record a hologram should be repeated. When a recorded hologram is exposed to the same referent beam, falling at it at the same angle when it was recorded, the light passes through the hologram, partially without refractions, as a zero-mode wave, and partially refracting, creating secondary waves. One beam gives a real image and the other a virtual one. Both received images are three-dimensional, the real image can be recorded with photographic procedure, and the virtual cannot. The image obtained through reproduction of hologram is identical to the real object, and depending on the angle of observation, one can see the objects positioned one behind other.

The renewed awareness is a process the man should initiate in order to return to primary reality and his primary identity. In the same manner we receive the realistic image of an object when we illuminate the hologram with the same light and at the same angle as we did in its creation, the man should act similarly in the process of renewing awareness. Therefore, using the same light and angle the media are using to construct the secondary reality (hologram reality in this case) would be the procedure of returning to the primary reality. The media laser is their position in the society and the power they have. If a man succeeds in turning the media producing functions into media publishing accurate, complete, reliable and timely information, that is, if he manages to return the media into the field of their basic, today entirely neglected function, he would be on the right path to re-illuminate the hologram and receive a real image. If the man then succeeds to transfer the power media have into the society – the power whose source is in economic and political power, as well as the nature of modern information technology – he will make another step towards the primary reality, the renewed awareness. Of course, this step can only be taken in unity (which we neglected), in solidarity with the Others (who we have forgotten), in a political system ensuring and guaranteeing human freedom and rights (bringing in focus the key issue – what are the opportunities of freedom in democracy, and how large are they).

However, the number of required steps to make does not end here. There is a need to let loose of general sublimation into a punctual Now, imposed as a model of life and thought by the modern lifestyle, shaped by the media and dictated by profit interests.

1.3. SUBLIMATION INTO NOW

Why is Now, the state of “continuous present” as stated by Jameson⁸, an obstacle in the procedure of renewing awareness? How come there are so many passionate supporters of Now, this “uninhabitable, and at any moment variable time spot?”, (G. Anders, 1996:66).⁹ Isn't temporality, in Heidegger's words, as a simultaneity of past, present and future, a historical, fundamental structure of human existence? Where is this Now in time continuum? Some “abstract point”, non-dimensional border between what was and what will be? Punctum temporalis, a moment full with encounter and overlapping of all times as a “fire of simultaneity?”. (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1945:35)¹⁰ Or Now is also lasting, but not straight-line and focused, and certainly not unidirectional event and progress? “Even if we visually imagine it as a point of intersection, the borders of present are elusive and elastic, determined with the duration of explicitly or implicitly intended section of experience, action or event. Experiential (psychological) present however, driven by the uniqueness of experience-unity, always partially reaches into the past (as persistence) and into the future (as anticipation). (V. Filipović, 1983:291)¹¹

Now: programmed or inevitable; accepted or rejected, real or unreal; limited with its own essence or perceived as lasting; understood or seen as default, in all cases Now is triumphant. Nothing in our needs, thoughts and lifestyles in present times is as present as Now. Whether it is an imperative externally imposed, outside of the man or his individual way of life and survival;

⁸ Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernizam u kasnom kapitalizmu (Postmodernism in late capitalism)*, Belgrade, Art Press, 1995

⁹ Günther Anders, “Die Welt als Phantom und Matrize”, 1990, edition in Serbian, Novi Sad, Prometej, 1996, pp. 66

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945, pp.35

¹¹ Vladimir Filipović: *Novija istorija zapada i odabrani tekstovi filozofa (Newer history of the West and selected philosophers' articles)*, Filozofska hrestomatija, Zagreb, 1983, pp. 291

whether it is an articulated need or vague urge; and whether it is a fact in variety of other facts we notice or our central life project; perhaps inevitable or invoked state, by all means Now becomes a supreme value on the scale of modern man's values, a hub that all other values and needs, all acts and refrains from acts are gathered around. Everything is shortened, compressed and accelerated to become Now.

Now, seen as “fire of simultaneity”, in the new age has all characteristics of sublimation. Now has become the spot of merging the past, present and future times into one state: the state of Now, with no clear, time-limited inter-states: something before Now and something after Now. All times are inclined towards Now and approach it to merge and identify with it. Now is omnipresent, and at the same time so variable, making doubt in its existence become a borderline distinguishing the thinkers from all other “observers” and “listeners” in this world.

The media, the spokesman for new great storytellers (owners of money), coupled with powerful technology, are promoting Now as the only model a contemporary man should live if he wishes to be successful, content and realized. Now is Good and Good is Now. This is not a word play, suitable for filling the space and time of this article, but a serious concept to standardize and fixate a certain (Now Good) view of the world and deprive alternative possibilities of thought and life of their value and legitimacy. This way the active, meaningful and creative engagement, requiring analysis, planning, effort and continuity (therefore time), becomes minimized and reduced to an exclusive caprice of the minority that cannot serve as a role model but is qualified as collateral damage of human species' unpredictability. “... I watch television a lot – it makes me so beautifully empty”. (H. Böll, 1966:158)¹²

The promotion and affirmation of the “most unreal, punctual Now” (G. Anders, 1996:64)¹³, as the only “really existing”, means relativization of lasting. As a result, both past and future time, as relatively important and relatively unimportant times, start vanishing from the perceptive and reflective field of an individual, in the same manner they disappear from individual value system and the value system of society as a whole. The removal of past and present, therefore memory and vision, weakens the man, because in the state of blur “between reality and the dream”¹⁴ he would hardly be able to understand and know, for sure, about himself and the others, and the reality itself. And when we do not entirely understand and know something, our potential for criticism remains deprived of oxygen. Without critical thought, we are reduced to a passive role of “observers and listeners” only capable to reproduce the observed, more or less skilfully, we lack the “combat” potential to change the observed and creative charge to create something new.

The enforced absence of the past and future in the concept of Now abolishes the idea of continuity and its value, therefore compromising the motivation for active and long-term engagement in the social sphere of the sphere of politics. Finally, when all layers of experience belonging to past time, are peeled off, our experience “in Now” inevitably becomes “mindless”. And “mindless”, in addition to being non-productive, does is not familiar with responsibility for itself or the others, and consequently for what may happen in the future.

In terms of authenticity as well, Now shows a tendency of devaluation and contraction. Authenticity takes time to be developed, then recognized and finally understood and acknowledged, and since this is a process and not a single act, the authenticity in Now fails to be realized. Either the authentic is late, or the ones who could mark it that way. Either way, in the social field déjà vu takes on the character and essence of the state. The authentic cannot find the space (nor time) for self-affirmation, since all social “spaces” are overcrowded with the same, standardized or copies. All around, there are imprints of the same, designed by the media and industrially produced “individual”. Authenticity is a disturbing factor in the world of copies, being doomed to wander, as a penitent sinner, from edge to edge of social scene, wishing to climb on it and almost always being pushed by the one already on scene, seeming so much alike everyone other. Even when it does

¹² Heinrich Theodor Böll: *Mišljenje jednog klovna (The Opinion of a Clown)*, Prosveta, Belgrade, 1966, pp.158

¹³ Günther Anders, “Die Welt als Phantom und Matrize”, 1990, edition in Serbian, Novi Sad, Prometej, 1996, pp. 64

¹⁴ Laza Kostić (1841-1910), Serbian poet, philosopher and aesthetician: *Među javom i med' snom*, Kairos, Sremski Karlovci, 2009, pp. 7

manage to climb on the scene (the media and social scene), the authenticity is not alone, but is forced to dance along with the reproductions so true made that the natural marks of authenticity are perceived by the audience as false. Therefore, on the very scene, after all struggles to climb it, the authenticity becomes defeated and is left with nothing else than to leave the scene or go to prompter's room (also being a scene, but of a whole different kind).

It seems that only in advertising messages the authenticity is being called its full and real name, but for the purpose of selling the copies, so this unfortunate, ironical plot certainly does not go in favour to recognition of authenticity as a value, nor to the authenticity itself.

Compression, contraction, multiplication into smaller and smaller parts, reduction to one dimension (of space, time, interactions, human values, individual needs, social relations) leads to a logical finale: "we cannot see the wood for the trees". The parts are blocking our view, making the whole unreachable, by sight or by thought. It is needless to stress that the inability to encompass in thought the wholeness of things, phenomena, events and the world around us, creates empty space to be inhabited firstly by ignorance and delusions, and then to open the door to manipulation. But this is already an old, familiar story, told by new storytellers but, one must say, with the same old seduction strategy.

In Now, there is no time for perception. "Time is a required notion that makes up the foundation of all perceptions. In terms of notions in general, the time is the only one that cannot be destroyed, even though the notions can be separated from time. Time is therefore given a priori. The reality of all notions is possible only in time. These notions can be dismissed together, but only time (as a universal precondition of their possibility), cannot be destroyed ... The time has only one dimension: different times are not simultaneous but consecutive (the same as different spaces are not consecutive, but simultaneous". (I. Kant, 1787:4)¹⁵

It seems that Etienne, one of the characters in the story "The Case of Anett Müller" who often finds himself wondering what time is and what it could be, becoming more and more lonely. "Indeed, his obsession with time caused genuine astonishment of his friends. Or sometimes lack of understanding. These are sometimes the same thing. But either way, ever since his childhood, Etienne seriously, devoted as a true researcher, looked for answers to timeless questions: what does time consist of; what is the time to time; does time last or does it simply exist. When did time begin? When will it stop? And what will happen after?" (G. Stamenković, 2012:68)¹⁶

But certainly more important than the concern of a fictional character in one of numerous stories written in this world - more important for being real – is the concern caused by the question: if there is an intention for everything to be sublimated into Now, how will the species of humans exist if they are not omnipresent themselves? This is exactly the point. Being omnipresent – therefore being dispersed, divided, fragmented. This is the logic of profit and its adequate work time and leisure time. And this is the logic of rule. And remarkable technological capacities of modern time are the exclusive opportunity to apply this logic "in all its glory" to economic sphere, as well as all other social spheres.

In the context of virtual, phantasmagorical Now, we appear first as its human replica, then we become personified as "the users of Now" who "communicate" with "other users of Now", uniting our private and public (work) life, emotions and intellect, to finally become one: a protagonist-consumer of the overall Now media spectacle. All for money.

Paul Virilio warns that there is both endo and exo colonization. (P. Virilio, 2000).¹⁷ In our opinion, it is an auto-colonization. Endo and exo, we agree. However, even in Now, there is something that Now cannot deny. It is the freedom. The freedom cannot be postponed "until later", nor is important the freedom that used to be. The freedom belongs to Now more than the Now belongs to itself. The freedom is the means enabling man to confront the imperative of Now and everything this imperative means. Since, if it does not exist in Now, the freedom does not exist at all. The human kind has the move.

¹⁵ Imanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1788, pp. 4

¹⁶ Gordana Stamenković: *Slučaj Anett Müller (The case of Anett Müller)*, Belgrade, 2012, pp. 68

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