DETERMINANTS OF HUMANISING EFFECT OF MODERN (ELECTRONIC) MEDIA

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Abstract

At the present time, we speak about the 'historical invasion' of electronic (mass) media into our human world that relates to the phenomenon of mediamorphosis. In our work, we raise the question of the humanising effect of (electronic) media in context of anthropological risks of mediamorphosis, as well as in the background of social and cultural expectations and ideas in relation to media and media reality. We will concentrate on the determinants or the assumptions of humanising effect of (electronic) media. We argue that the primary determinant is the 'ethos of media'. We trace two basic requirements: 1/ the development of electronic communication technologies in the humanistic and ethical perspective, 2/ the ethical modus of human agent in context of (electronic) media, or electronically mediated communication. We identify, in this context, the relevance of the paradigm of responsibility in the 'ethos of media' and its formation. Finally, we concentrate on two agents in 'service' for humanising effect of media – ethics and education. We speak about the importance of applied ethics (ethics of media, ethics of technology, ethics of information technology, etc.) and also ethical education, while still underlining the existing relationships and conjunctions.

Keywords: homo medialis, ethos of media, responsibility, ethics, education

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, we may literally speak of the 'historical invasion' of electronic (mass) media into the human world. We can see evidence for this in the phenomenon of rapid development and spread of mobile and Internet communication, or computerisation thanks to expansion of information technology and multimedia technology. They have a great impact on human and actual forming of contemporary society and culture – the so-called cyberculture.

B. Seilerová and V. Seiler [1] believe that we may well speak of electronic media as of episteme of our culture. A specific aspect of electronic media as episteme is the effect that we call 'mediamorphosis'. Mediamorphosis is, from the philosophical aspect (not in media-sophical 'Fiddler-like' understanding of mediamorphosis), always mediamorphosis of human subject

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and his/her (life, experience-based) world. As such, mediamorphosis has its foundation in the very nature of electronic media that determines the character of its influence on human, or his (experience-based) world. The resultant of mediamorphosis is that our human world, life and culture are controlled by the inner 'logic' or principles of media. "The logic of media becomes the logic of reality, everyday reality grows more and more liable to media laws" which results in the fact that the 'outer media' reality itself is characterized by media assignments [2].

In the following, our intention is to address the question of the humanising effect of media, or mediamorphosis. We will concentrate on the determinants of this effect. The humanistic perspective and attitude are rational and critical and basically, as G.H. Wright states, humanism always represents the emphasis on human merit and dignity, defence of human. However, it is not a historical constant, therefore every period of time needs to find its own answer for the question of humanism using its assumptions, especially in the time of massive changes – as Wright believes – when "the new meets the old" [3].

2. The question of the humanizing effect of (electronic) media in context of anthropological risks of mediamorphosis

As already stated, mediamorphosis is always the mediamorphosis of human subject and his/her (life, experience-based) world, reality. The process of mediamorphosis is directly linked to the human subject entering the electronic communication dimension. This entrance means the 'extending' of human communication, but also of the living space. The cyberspace becomes a part of human life, society and culture. Theoretically, we believe, it is possible to distinguish 'weak' and 'strong' version of mediamorphosis [4].

The 'weak' version of metamorphosis argues that the electronic media co-create, co-form modern human, the life-style and culture through their content or messages. Its 'strong' version takes into consideration the McLuhan's statement or warning that 'the medium itself' is a message [5], that it is more than merely 'tool or means' of communication [6] and that its influence is not determined by the content itself that it presents. It is about the fact that the electronic communication medium 'exists' thanks to 'what' and 'how' affects human and the (experience-based) world. We need to realise here that electronic medium works as a technical system has an anthropological and a technical feature. That is to say that electronic media, Tanitó reminds, do not have an ontic status, this is only made in their connection with the subject [7].

The question of humanising effect of media, or mediamorphosis and its determinants, presumes human understanding, understanding of its existence. This humanising effect may be interpreted in the context of question of human existence. In the history of Philosophy, we can find a number of interpretations and analysis of the question of human and its existence. Among them, M. Heidegger's analyses could be considered explicit. According to them, it is the sense of time and own mortality that makes a human. When understanding his

own mortality, human manages his life in a meaningful way. It is only this life, structured and arranged, that Heidegger calls authentic 'human' life. At the same time, Heidegger firmly points out that for authentic human life, or existence, co-existence with other people is of a constructive nature [8] and as G. Myerson states, it is in the structure of 'co-existence' community, that we see the humanly 'chat', which after all means communication. Then Heidegger sees human as a creature that speaks, communicates and understands communication as an element of existence with the others. This constitutes, as he understands it, the basic human activity in which people mutually exchange their experience with being [9]. In reality, this all leads to relevant 'understanding of being, existing' in the structure of 'co-existing' that establishes human existence as 'human'.

It is necessary to say that as long as communication in community is the basic element of human activity, vital activity that is bound with experience of being or 'understanding it', then each and every obstacle or threat that puts this activity in danger means jeopardy to authentic humanity. In the context of analyses of M. Heidegger, we may – in connection with the phenomenon of metamorphosis – notice a couple of risks of 'dehumanisation'. We therefore distinguish, based on Heidegger's theoretical scope and results: a) risks relating to change of sense of time, and b) risks relating to changes in structure of 'co-existence', or communication. We do not have enough room to speak about these risks in more detail (the author did so in a different work, see [4]). Therefore we only briefly state that is it undisputedly required to see them as related and linked to each other, as well as mutually dependent to each other.

It is obvious that the already mentioned anthropological risks bring doubts and raise a question to humanising effect of electronic media, or mediamorphosis, from the point of view of the Heidegger's theory. It is possible to say that the common denominator is 'info-technicism'. As Ľ. Štekauerová remarks, 'info-technicism' represents one of the greatest challenges of our time and situation. The source of info-technicism lies in information technologies, or technologies of electronic media. For a human's life, 'info-technicism' means exposition to de-personalising pressure of techno-sphere, which leads to 'techno-morphinism' of his thinking, acting, values … [10]. In this respect, it is actually also applying the technocrat attitude in various scopes of human life, especially when we speak about humanistic oriented spheres of human activity (for example education), since a question of human worthiness and dignity arises here – in context of electronic media, which is not irrelevant in the point of humanistic perspective.

It is true that without techno-sphere, there would be no actual info-sphere: It is not therefore possible to think about one without the other, e.g. info-sphere without techno-sphere. According to the already mentioned author, it is information technologies that create, in their actual, the most advanced degree of development, the so-called (virtual) 'hyper-reality' and in close connection with it generate and maintain nearly uncontrollable mania for information usage in the lifestyle of modern man [10]. In this context, it is also needed to see, as if from the opposite side, that human is exposed to technical proliferation of

information, and consequent over-saturation that relates to the phenomenon commonly named as 'information overload' or 'information glut' or 'information smog'. The quiet expansion of info-sphere draws also certain deficit or loss of 'understanding' that is a vital component of human life. This, from the humanistic perspective, especially from the Heidegger's position, is certainly not irrelevant.

A statement is workable now, that the possible scepticism towards humanising effect of media, or mediamorphosis in society, is set deeper and stems generally from fear of 'dehumanisation' in relation to the influence of 'system techno-sphere' on human. To certain extent, it is the opposite of traditional and common social and cultural expectations and concepts of relation to technology as such. The humanising effect is anticipated, otherwise technology would be useless for human.

3. The humanising effect of (electronic) media in context of cultural and social expectations

The question of humanising effect of electronic media, or mediamorphosis, opens for us also in the aspect of the very cultural and social concepts. Since the beginning, electronic media, as qualitatively new phenomenon of human creativity, has been linked to the original cultural and social concepts and expectations regarding science and technology. Even though these do change with history, technical achievements have basically always been accepted as sign of accomplishment of science that should push humankind ahead, and ensure welfare for all. Traditionally, this is where humanising effect of science and its technical products is founded.

It is necessary to say that it is thanks to scientific knowledge and its usage in technologies that human has undisputedly achieved so much. Paradoxically however, we may prove that along with scientific achievements and development of technology, there is also an excessive rise of unwanted side-effects that may destroy the original merit. This may lead to incorrigible damage done to humans and their environment, fact which is now completely obvious [11, 12]. We cannot avoid the fact that electronic media and information technologies, too, have positive, but also negative impact. A number of new problems of ethical nature have already emerged, side-by-side with progress of multimedia technologies and human entering virtual reality. The impacts are specific and difficult to foresee [13].

Actual social risks and dangers which carry a fair degree of importance in the axiological and ethical perspective, question the humanising effect of science and technology in society. This is also true when it comes to the examination of electronic media and information technologies. In this respect, we may state, together with H. Jenkins, that serious technophobia spreads not only through traditional humanism, but also through some of the modern theories and critical practice of traditional schools of thought. Modern information technology is understood to be inhuman and fiendish, a destroyer of the more organic pre-

technological cultures. It is regarded to be also a tool of control, social regulation and authority. Critical pessimism emphasises the danger of information overload: too much information can mean loss of authority, just as much as lack of information. Unfortunately, rather than offering a number of models of real change, it offers just a few and merely blames digital media [14].

In our new, 'non-technophobic' humanistic perspective, we are aware of the fact that the source of the current critical and sceptical approach towards science and technology consists in the failure of scientific and technical rationality in confrontation with growing civilisation dangers and risks [11; 12, p. 21]. Yet, as J. Bystřický observes, science and technology, or in other words planetary techno-science, still are a vital agent for development of (globalized) society, though in a different context than in the history [15]. Deceleration of technological development is neither possible, nor desirable, still however, in the frame of this development, risk evaluation and assessment or implementation of preventive routines should be rendered more visible [16].

As long as we speak about the above mentioned assessment, in the new, non-technophobia humanistic perspective, everything that is useful and valuable for us, everything that satisfies our needs or everything that has a desirable quality that makes this entity beneficial and wanted still remains valuable. On the other hand, such value can also threaten human welfare. Such understanding of values is the expression of functionality of these in relation with human [17]. It is possible to see electronic media in this point of view, as something valuable for human, without giving way to noncritical optimism, as another extreme in relation with electronic media. We can well see them as something that can be, and should be aimed to be helpful for everyday life of human, both in 'form' and 'content'. We may expect their usability in everyday life, consequently increasing its quality. It seems to be important to enable electronic media meet the human needs. It is also important to enlarge room for human doing, allow alternative ways of acting and behaviour…

It is required to say that the evaluation of humanising effect of electronic media is inevitably bound with identifying social risks that relate to their formation and utilisation. Consequently, there should be also conducting the preventive mechanism in society, relating to them [16]. From the humanistic perspective, it is then important to seek such solutions that will be capable of maintaining of what is socially positive, but also eliminating the negative effects of development. And since "technologies, especially revolutionary technologies, generate a great deal of ethical problems" [18], it is apparent that in humanistic perspective, when assessing and identifying risks and looking for solutions and counter preventive mechanism, value and ethics-based aspects will be applied.

4. Humanising effect of (electronic) media and 'ethos of media' as its basic determinant

As D. Navrátilová notices, 'media-technical' feature is merely a human artefact. It is a human construction that has its anthropological (human) and

consequently also social and cultural dimension. In our humanistic tradition, the generally dominating element of value structure is oriented towards creative work and appraisal of transforming role of human thanks to which he created the living conditions. Yet products, such as works of human, artefacts, are controlled by principles and postulates of such relationship to these works, and these enable human control over these works, with adequate understanding and ability. Today we may be able to notice that human is no longer fully able, with his understanding and ability, to be in control of his own work [19]. It particularly reveals that technological advance, unfortunately, does not keep pace with moral progress, or that "technological possibilities do not correspond with moral improvement of human at all" [13, p. 254]. From the humanistic point of view however, limits of our ability to control elements of technical world are set by the limits of our morality in context of its forming and using.

Relevant are, from the humanistic perspective and for definition of these limits, motives and goals of using technical world or electronic media, but also their foreseeable effects are important. According to J. Hurych, the intention of every society should be that information technologies are to protect and encourage human values and not damage and impair them [20]. It is especially necessary to "preserve the matter that creates individuality and uniqueness of human" [13, p. 256], so that human does not become instrumental and functional component of system – a part that may easily be excluded as possibly dysfunctional and disintegrating part of working structure [19]. It is obvious that in humanistic perspective it is highlighting and preservation of human value and dignity in context of electronic media and technical world as such, that matters.

We will now and here state that the precondition of humanising effect of electronic media is in 'ethos of media'. As has already been stated above, electronic media alone do not have ontic status, they acquire it only in association with subject. Technologies used in media require active subject, its pro-active behaviour [7]. This subject is represented by 'homo medialis', or 'homo informaticus', the 'creator' and 'user' of electronic media. Being so, the 'ethos of media' is tied to this kind of subject. We may say that this 'ethos of media' determined by humanising effect of electronic media in society and culture, is based on two – mutually dependant – prerequisites. Firstly, it is the development of electronic communication technologies in humanistic and ethical perspective. Secondly, it is the ethical modus of the human agent in context of electronic media, or electronically mediated communication. It is here that we speak about 'homo medialis' as such, of the creator and recipient of electronic media.

As long as the development of electronic communication technologies in humanistic and ethical perspective is dealt with, we start with the assumption that electronic media should mean a positive, human outcome of application of science. Science, as Piaček states, without humanising or culture-forming effect, is of no use: that is, authentic science combines with its culture-forming effect [21]. According to A. Kiepas and also D. Fobelová, demand for new information or information technologies evolving in humanistic perspective is becoming

clear and more urgent [12, p. 76, 98, 103; 22]. It is plausible to state that in this context, the humanising effect of electronic media is determined by ethics, or – let us say - it grows at the same time with moral sensitivity of scientists and engineers that are their creators or developers.

There is just a step's distance from the previous presumption to a next one, possible to say 'broader' presumption of ethical mode of human agent in context of electronic media, or electronically mediated communication. As a matter of fact, the second presumption also includes the first one. The quality of human not only as user, but also as creator is important. This quality determines the humanising effect in society and culture. This quality can be found in humanistic perspective in personality, or individual ethics, in which moral standards are important. The moral standards are the most important here, with value and principle of responsibility holding a special position.

A remark is possible, 'ethos of media' is "shaped in axiological and ethical level and in relation to responsibility" [12, p. 103]. What kind responsibility does it represent? Despite having the possibility to contemplate the (social) responsibility of media as social institutions [23], we must also contemplate the individual or personal responsibility. This is the basic anthropologic category of responsibility of thinking and doing. It needs to be understood as onto-ethical quality of 'home medialis'. 'Homo medialis', as creator and user of electronic media, understands, feels and accepts responsibility, and has its consciousness. The paradigm of responsibility should be adequate to present situation of network addiction. The paradigm of responsibility requires certain level of moral standards in individuals, with respect to the society. In this sense, individual moral standards and responsibility are also social moral standards and responsibility.

It can be said now that it is important today to accept the special responsibility of 'homo medialis' as creator and the ethically correct production and development of electronic media and information technologies. Along with this however, we also speak about acceptance of responsibility towards those who permit this production and those who are (directly or indirectly) affected. In this context, we will mention J. Langer's statement, that today's society are to accept the human applications of science and therefore it needs to work patiently on stronger moral standards (moral code, for example) of scientists. Still yet, not only for scientists… [24] Many real effects of science cannot be isolated from the actual usage of them, their utilisation by concrete subjects that should – as moral subjects – also bear their deal of moral responsibility for this usage. This applies also in connection with electronic media. The possibility for accessing the cyberspace should definitely be open for everybody, we agree with A. Kiepas and also D. Fobelová, and hand in hand with the necessity to take responsibility [12, 22].

As C. Diatka [25] states: "Human alone can be responsible and learns responsibility. He has not yet learnt to be responsible for other people, but he is beginning to understand that if he is to be responsible for himself, he must also learn to be responsible for everything that enables his existence …" It reveals

now that it is extremely difficult to accept responsibility in the time of network addiction and axiological uncertainty we deal with every day [12, p. 103]. As Fobelová observes, time has come to build ethics of individual responsibility of all the people in a way of influencing their individual culture towards cyberspace. Ethics of individual responsibility can be, according to the above-mentioned author, created and formed mainly through thoughtful and adequate system procedures of society (for example education), but also security or supervisory tools of institutions [22]. Isolation and self-forming are certainly needed and possible too, but hard – because electronic communication media, in a way, 'capture' a part of our 'privateness' which seems to be necessary for anthropological and ethical self-reflection and self-cultivation [4].

5. Ethics and education in service of humanising effect of (electronic) media

As a matter of fact, there are numerous authors that 'diagnose' modern culture and society from the electronic media's perspective that is related to process of informatization. As, for example H. Pravdová explains, the informatization is one of the processes that indeed have, and will have, a radical impact on important social and cultural changes. It is a significant social and cultural factor that induced the formation of a number of new phenomena [26]. It is undisputed that information technologies and electronic media are beneficial, but they also bring new problems with them, these bear an ethical dimension.

Along with what has just been said, we may state that, although a part of traditional (ethical) problems is a subject of modification and reassessment, the characteristic of our present time is to raise totally new ethical problems. Many new questions, especially of ethical nature, have emerged in the context of development of new media, or multi-medial technologies and human entering virtual reality [13]. New electronic media brought new existential experiences (for example virtual reality with simultaneous time, identities multiplication, new delights and similar) that become ethical problem, as they may lead to moral disintegration of modern human [27].

According to J. Hurych, all the new ethical problems will be even more acute in the future. That is the reason why the so-called information revolution requires serious discussion about ethical values and principles and also elaboration of new ethical standards for handling information technologies and information as such. Hurych believes it will be necessary to formulate new ethical standards and work out new principles that will deal with creation, distribution and usage of information [20]. As J.H. Moor states, we are today confronted with a vacuum in regulations, restrictions, rights … for new situation regarding information technologies and media [18]. However, individuals, just as institutions, need today a moral system, moral principles that could direct their decisions and behaviour in such new situations. It is not possible to rely only on independent legal system, because law does not and cannot compensate for ethics [20].

It is obvious now that ethics becomes (co-) determining factor in service of humanising effect of electronic media. Ethics is traditionally understood as a philosophical discipline that belongs to the sphere of contemplation and is identified as practical philosophy [22, p. 59], so (general) philosophical ethics should, we believe, respond as much as its own nature allows to problems connected with electronic media. Ethics of technology and information technologies, ethics of science and other applied ethics should definitely see their share in new cyberculture [22, p. 57, 67], while, we think, we should not forget especially ethics of communication, ethics of media and ethics of information. We cannot go deeper into analysis of specifications of these applied ethics one by one now; therefore we will only briefly recapitulate, together with Tanitó, that one of the common points of, for example newly breeding ethics of media and ethics of technology is the medium itself, as its technical and technological dimensions play an important role in media analysis. Risk and matching responsibility is one more common denominator of both of these ethics [7]. However, we may add that also of other above-mentioned ethics.

Besides ethics, another co-determining factor of electronic media can be seen in education since, as A. Kuzior explains, proper education can protect us against the negative influence of multimedia [16]. Education, as we believe, can have a positive impact on individual human's approach to electronic media, their cyberspace... In context of phenomenon of education, we especially mean 'media education' but also 'ethics education'.

As far as we speak about media education, we can see it as "scope of educational, propagandistic and practical activities that share the same objective – confront various groups of community with the role of media, with the real meaning of media products and the possible impact on individual human and the whole society" [28]. According to D. Petranová, the primary goal of media education is to gather competence in media use. From the aspect of social value, according to the above-mentioned author, it is actually a systematic effort to strengthen broader social awareness of media and media image of the world. Media education as such is an intentional process in which individual human should get and strengthen especially critical thinking, as the key competence, and also ability to solve problems that relate to human as consumer and producer of information [29].

We need to say that from the humanistic aspect, for critical thinking, rational decision-making in various areas of human life [30], values are relevant [31]. It is also possible to state that 'homo medialis' creates, develops and uses present electronic media in the context of various axiological and ethical orientations. Electronic media themselves are carriers of values. Here we realise that it is media education which is not axiologically and ethically neutral, or indifferent towards (ethical) good that can prepare individual human for life in context of media. And since it is ethical education that aims for moral and personal development in which and for which especially values are relevant, we believe that humanisation of electronic media can be helped by media education and ethical education in their surely successful connection, one with another. We

believe that this connection remains subject of theoretical and practical search and deserves particular attention.

6. Conclusions

It is obvious that forming of new post-modern social and cultural regulations that refer to specific (socio-cultural) phenomena of present day is important, thanks to the fast development and spreading of electronic media and information technologies. In this respect, we speak about the 'historical invasion' of electronic media into the life of modern man. As impact of this invasion, we identify the phenomenon of mediamorphosis and also its anthropological risks that share the same denominator – the so-called info-technicism. They question the humanising effect of electronic media in society and culture, which is otherwise socially and culturally expected and wanted.

What can be considered as determinants of successful humanising effect of modern (electronic) media? From our point of view, the basic determinant is the 'ethos of media', which is linked primarily to human as 'homo medialis' – creator and user of electronic media, or media reality. From humanistic consideration it is actually a condition of the desired humanising effect of electronic media in modern society and culture. There are two determining presumptions for this effect, presumptions that are also signs of it: 1/ the development of electronic communication technologies in humanistic and ethical perspective and 2/ the ethical modus of the human agent in context of electronic media, or electronically mediated communication. 'Ethos of media' as such is formed in axiological and ethical sphere and especially in attitude of responsibility [12, p. 103]. This responsibility is onto-ethical quality of 'homo medialis'. In the situation of network addiction, certain level of moral standards and responsibility of 'homo medialis' is required to be in respect of society.

Another relevant determinant in 'service' of humanising effect of media, as we believe, is ethics and education. It is required to emphasize the importance of general ethics, but also applied ethics (ethics of media, ethics of technology, ethics of information etc.), which may possibly contribute to solving new problems of ethical nature that have emerged in context of development of new media, or multimedia technology and human entering cyberspace of electronic media. Finally we need to mention education, specifically media education and ethical education. It reveals that their mutual cooperation and connection becomes an object of further theoretical and practical research.

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