INTRODUCTION

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Media – Matrix of Our Time

'We are consequently very dependent on the media for a large part of our wider symbolic environment (the pictures in our heads), however much we may be able to shape our own personal version. It is the media which are likely to forge the elements which are held in common with others, since we now tend to share much the same media sources and media culture. Without some degree of shared perception of reality, whatever its origin, there cannot really be an organized social life' (McQuail 2007, p. 83).

I consider that the above quote fully conveys the situation we are facing in the contemporary world where 'man starts his weekday not as previously in prayer, but by switching on the radio, with the day's end being marked not by evening prayers but by the switching off of the television or radio' (Goban-Klas 2004, p. 294) or the computer as would be the case these days. His world is consequently saturated with the media and the vision of reality therein conveyed. And what is this reality? May one speak of reality or rather about one's own Matrix of the times we live in, in which the means of mass communication create/mould 'a virtual reality', which we subsequently perceive to be that in which we are to live?

Presumably Charles H. Cooley, in bringing into existence in 1909 the concepts of **communicating** (the emphasis placed on the creation of a community) and **media** (the emphasis placed on the agent-mediator) had no notion that they would be so fashionable at the present moment, so widespread, and that they would be notions arousing as much interest as controversy. However, even though communication has existed 'for always', these media were to appear relatively late. 'The media used by tribal societies were natural in kind, being based on man's biological equipment, were limited to direct forms of contact, face-to-face, requiring physical presence and proximity. While modern societies to a prevailing degree, although not exclusively, make use of technical media, ones surmounting barriers of time and space, and involved in the forging of indirect contact. The place of *Face to Face* is taken up by *Interface to Interface*, indirect communicating that is mediatised' (Goban-Klas 2004, p. 293).

Taking into consideration the above factors it becomes obvious as to why means of mass communication are 'at the centre of attention' and have even become

the subject of debate and legal actions (for example the Rywin affair in Poland), as well as why they have been labelled 'the fourth power'[1].

Here it is worth mentioning a thesis expounded by Kellner and dating from 1994 in the work *Media Culture* (Kellner 1995, quoted from: Jazon 2004), that the effect of the transformation of information society will be its change into a media society. This is a society in which contacts by means of media are the dominant form of social contact. The mass media and their means have become the daily environment within which man operates, his actual virtuality. The proportion of direct contacts to media contacts is obviously different for different people, and difficult to establish, though one may confidently state that the vast majority of interpersonal contacts and symbolic products are indirect in character – both in time and in space. Mediatised society is also a society in which each of its elements, phenomena and occurrences have to initially exist within the mass media for them to subsequently exist in reality itself, to have a significance or to exert an influence.

Here the central notion is the 'mediation' of contact with social reality. This covers several different processes. 'Firstly, it refers to the conveyance of news/information second hand (by means of a third party) in a situation in which we do not have direct access to its source. Secondly, it refers to the striving of individuals and institutions that desire contact with society for their own aims (here also for its alleged good). This is what politicians, educators, commentators aspire to. For mediation refers to the indirect means of formulating group consciousness, to those groups which the emitters do not belong. Social relations mediated by the mass media are distant, more impersonal and weaker than personal relations' (Goban-Klas 2000, p. 115). The initial versions of the conception 'reality mediation' differentiated the public sphere in which the shared ideas were created by the media as well as the private sphere in which people communicated face-to-face. At present this division has equally lost its *raison d'etat* as a result of the development of new technologies such as the Internet and telecommunications.

On all of these levels we have to clearly note a single and fundamental factor. This being the 'insertion' (the difference) between man and his environment and pseudo-environment. 'For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. To traverse the world men must have maps of the world. Their persistent difficulty is to secure maps on which their own need, or

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[1] In talking today about the press being the fourth power one accepts that it constitutes a supplementation to the legislative, judiciary and executive powers. However, its genesis is somewhat different. The concept had its origins in England with its creator being Edmund Burke, an 18th-century philosopher with political aspirations. It was he who was to have, on pointing out the parliamentary gallery awash with journalists, deemed them 'the fourth estate in the realm'. The three remaining being the clergy, nobility and merchants of the cities. These three estates had been distinguished within Europe for centuries. The Polish theologian Piotr Skarga had written about them. For Burke was speaking about journalists and not about a faceless, impersonal press and pointed out rather the distinctiveness of their role within the state rather than the scope of power wielded by them. Such an image of journalism is, in my opinion, closer to reality (cf. Pisarek 1995, p. 154).

someone else's need, has not sketched in the coast of Bohemia' (Lippmann 1965, p. 11). Lippmann first and foremost considers stereotypes to be these non-existing contours, in the shaping of which the means of mass communication has a sizeable part to play. Supposing, somewhat naively, the large degree of trust displayed by recipients to the media he writes: 'But the expert who is employed as the mediator among representatives, and as a mirror and measure of administration, has a very different control of the fact' (Lippmann 1965, p. 193). And so in fact the matter is in many cases, particularly in those where the recipient does not have any other rivalling sources for the information. However, where mass information concerns questions which are directly connected with the life and experience of the audience, the media's influence becomes limited. This was one of the causes of the social crisis in August 1980 in Poland. For then it occurred how the extremely enhanced and maintained media vision of conflict-free social structures was a vision of a fictional Bohemia, or equally of a contemporary Matrix, and how noticeably they differed from the daily reality that directly affected us. Hence the concept of medialization, which causes a reinterpretation of reality on the part of the media, making our life and environment exceptionally dynamic, fluid and unpredictable.

Admittedly recipients have access to many alternative sources of information, but how does one choose from this throng that 'correct' one? An additional complication is caused by the fact that the contemporary media do not inform but commentate, do not explain yet signalise with their news, while not helping the 'man in the street' to reach for the truth. Therefore, usually it is easier for us to 'take a shortcut' and be convinced by that vision of the world which is proposed by the mass media themselves.

Hence: mediatisation, mediation and medialization are complementary concepts; for contemporary man becomes acquainted with social life to a large degree through means of mass communication, they create the images of the world, they represent for him those spheres of life which he is unable to reach out to personally – for they are the intermediary though they also demarcate the interpretative framework as well as the reinterpretative ones for events and phenomena close and known. All of this confirms the fact that the mass media play at present an enormous role in the matter of the transfer, presentation and interpretation of reality. There remains merely the question of whose and what is the vision and whether mass means of communication through the imposition of their own image of the world do not cause with the same the maintaining of a consensus within society, or whether the opposite is the case and they bring about increased discrepancies and conflicts?

These and other questions are addressed by the texts included within the current issue of *Studia Sociologica* entitled *Society – Media – Communication*. The entirety is commenced with an article by Marta Juza, in which she advances a thesis about the creation of information-communicative centres in the Internet, which act as intermediaries in contacts amongst users, storing the information gathered by them as well as helping them to dissipate and search it out. At the same time they are something of the order of a symbolic authority within contemporary medialized society. The next pair of authors: Magdalena Karolak and Anjum Razzaque analyse the factors that influence the effectiveness of virtual societies, referring to theories from the social sciences and strategies for the management of knowledge. The aim of their article is a description of the newest methodological currents in research

into information technology systems, the management and administration of virtual societies as well as a review of the subject literature showing the advantages and possibilities of using virtual communities of practitioners.

The subsequent texts deal with the question of media influence, a matter of constant debate amongst media experts. The article by Valerii Krasheninnikov and Maria Abramova addresses the design of media reality; something that is an expanse creating the perception, consciousness and activeness of contemporary man. Here the authors' main interest is in the role of new educational technologies within the media expanse. While in the next article Maria Abramova analyses the influence of media sources of information on the process of young people's socio-cultural adaptation to society. The conclusion drawn from the analysis is that in the contemporary media there is no room for a positive media effect within this sphere. For the media create simple semantic structures but do not form individuals who think reflectively. This is, for among other reasons, the consequence of the treatment of the media and those individuals therein appearing as (media) experts marking out for us the framework of thinking about reality.

Bożena Sobczak's text brings us into contact with the question of the creation of experts and authorities for the needs of entertainment; something that has of late become the focus of many television and Internet shows illustrated by the author on the basis of the *Super Nanny* and *Perfect Housewife* television series. The presenters of which have become for many Poles the proverbial oracle and a model worthy of imitation.

In turn Taras Luty writes about the influence of the mass media on changes in identity in Ukraine. The author analyses the main stages of Ukrainian identity within the context of popular culture. The main aim of his text is to define the influence of mass communication on the problem of identity and its transformation. It is presented in the article accounts of identity and mass and elite culture.

Then we offer the text of Teresa Zbyrad, in which she concentrates on the subject of the media exclusion of the poor, showing the reasons for this phenomenon and the manifestations of media deformation of this social category. The next article by Darya Pogontseva also deals with discrimination in the media, though this time in relation to physical outward appearance. Here are mentioned the theoretical and empirical aspects of discrimination based on appearance, which in the majority of cases has its origins in media reports.

Marit Nybelius also writes about the enormous power of the media, drawing our attention to the question of the links between means of information transfer and sport, while at the same time stating that the main emphasis is usually placed on the media; on what way sport is presented from various perspectives – for example from the perspective of sex. The text deals with concepts and gives information about the hitherto state of research into the connections between the media and sport, as well as also pointing to the effects of a neglect in academic research within this area.

The issue is concluded by Aleksandr Czumikow's text that is an attempt to classify the objects of influence in the new media, and subsequently the methods which they employ with the aim of manipulating the recipients of Internet transfers, closing the present volume with the handle of 'media mono-thematicism'. It follows to emphasise that of great value within the texts is the fact that they present this media

reality from the viewpoint of various nations, something that allows for a full reflective picture of the media, communication and contemporary society.

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