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Culture or Habit? Media Broadcast form and Content as well as its Influence on Personality and Participation in Culture

The development of information society has brought a series of changes within social structure and in people's consciousness. These transformations should be studied not just from the technology development perspective, its place in society and the role it plays from the individual's perspective, the effect it has on globalization and the growing importance of Web structures. In this article discussed will be the speed of its functioning in information society. As we know, the development of broadcast means has resulted in a general media acceleration. The focus here will be on the consequences it brings for culture. The great speed of information broadcasts, through its influence on content and form, changes the way man functions within culture. In the age of information society, some aspects of culture (mostly entertainment) are interpreted and internalized by individuals in a completely different way than in the past. This is due to processes pointed out by Neil Postman and Jeremy Rifkin. The typologies they created and which will be discussed below correspond to one which will be proposed by the author.

Communication technologies, broadcast form and content

Let's begin our discussion with a short presentation of Neil Postman's and other scientists' corresponding theories. Postman bases his theory on a hypothesis earlier proposed by McLuhan – “the transmitter is the broadcast”. If we take this into account, we can talk about *specific medium's epistemology* or ways of presenting, analysis and interpretation of events and its discourse. “The introduction of a new medium influences discourse structure through new uses of the intellect, through favouring specific intelligence and wisdom definitions and through expectations of certain content, in other words, through the creation of new forms of specifying the truth”¹. We can, therefore, say that some mass media, due to their specificity, can be considered more true or more privileged than others. Postman states, “We live in a culture which is shaped by television, not the written word. Surely, there are readers still and many books are published but the use of the printed word is not the same as it was in the past; even in schools, traditionally the last bastion of the printed word. We cannot be fooled to think that print and television co-exist since if they did, they would be of equal status. This is not so. Print is presently a fragmentary epistemology and it will remain this way. It is supported by the computer, daily press and magazines edited in a way to resemble TV screens”². Fragmentary epistemology is considered old, out of fashion, inconvenient, at the same time, unattractive and in regression. Without doubt, Postman openly criticises the present, popular technology. In his works, such as *Building a bridge to the 18th century*, *Technopol: the surrender of culture to technology*³ or *Amusing ourselves to death*, he points out the advantages of the printed word in the development of culture and thought, as well as the moral decay that has spread as result of the first the telegraph invention other media which enable communication at the speed of light.

¹ N. Postman, *Zabawić się na śmierć. Dyskurs publiczny w epoce show-businessu*, Warszawa 2005, p. 50.

² Ibidem, p. 51.

³ N. Postman, *Technopol. Triumf techniki nad kulturą*, Warszawa 1995; idem, *W stronę XVIII stulecia. Jak przeszłość może doskonalić naszą przyszłość*, Warszawa 2000.

The fast speed of communication has resulted in numerous changes, predominantly, from now on technically anything could be communicated. News is cheap and generally available. In the past the speed of communication could be compared to that of the steam locomotive or the stagecoach. Transmitter, such as paper, was material, it had its weight, it took up space and time in preparation of the broadcast (printing time). In short, news was expensive and there could be no wasting of time. Content that was to be communicated had to be thought over well. In other words, the message had to take into account its significance and its usefulness to the target audience. Form and content needed to be reflected upon.

It was an era of the printed word. Even though the capabilities of old printing presses can not be compared to modern ones, books were extremely popular. Postman provides data which shows that one of the most popular export goods from the Old World to the United States were ... books. It was an extraordinary transported volume proving great demand and not just for the Bible, standard household equipment then, but also for fiction, political and philosophic works. People were of the opinion that if something was published, it was not accidental but important⁴.

If something was written, it means the author had something to say and it is worth to take the time and read it. Reading requires us to pay attention to it (we cannot read and do other things at the same time but whereas, if we listen to the radio, we can). To read we need peace and quiet which means it requires from us a certain amount of effort in order to comprehend. Postman said that up to mid XIX century culture was dominated by the printed word, the authors' intentions and the effort necessary to prepare and understand what was written. Language or discourse of the printed era was characterized by "transparent and straightforward style, wealth of quoted examples from proper sources, thorough analysis, complex theories explained lucidly enough in order to be understood by the masses, and energy in the formulation of generalities and proposing one's own arguments after a presentation from opponents"⁵.

In that era, authorities played a great role. According to Postman, in the printed word era it was normal, for example, for the common man to be familiar with Abraham Lincoln's theories as well as his opponents' arguments but have no clue as to what he looked like.

Postman points to the invention of the telegraph as revolutionary. The content communicated in the new fashion was not just limited in form but influenced was also its substantial value. The most imperative consequence of the speeding up of the message was its separation from the general context, something unimaginable in the print era. Postman rates information in terms of its usefulness. In his mind, the telegraph revolution has opened up a Pandora's box, the world has become flooded with information about everything and for everyone, information which we do not need, even though some of it may seem important. Generally, it is such trivial information, useless to us, that is broadcasted. Before the telegraph, for example, information about war would take several weeks to get around, now we have live transmission from the birth of rare turtle in Australia, The practical value of such information is practically none and the paradox is that in today's reality there is no criteria which would prevent this information from being present in the media sphere. Moreover, its presence proves that there is demand for such content. "Information after information is transmitted into our consciousness, the next pushing out the previous and everything happens at a speed which makes it impossible to evaluate such news, nor there is need for such evaluation"⁶.

⁴ Similarly, in Redlinski's *Konopielka*, Kaziuk Bartoszko as he teaches his son how to write on the snow, he says "you don't write just anything".

⁵ P. Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America. From the Revolution to the Civil War*, New York 1965. From: N. Postman, *Zabawić się na śmierć...*, p. 91.

⁶ N. Postman, *Zabawić się na śmierć...*, p. 61.

Within this perspective, it is worth to take note of the crossword puzzle phenomenon. Postman states that the birth and popularity of this form of entertainment took place within the same period of time as the popularization of the telegraph and photography. Crosswords are a good example of pieces of information taken out of context, scattered, without any connection between them, or in Postman's words – in *pseudo context*⁷. What kind of context can we talk about if the average length of information presented to us is 3.5 seconds long?

Krzysztof T. Toeplitz, in his work *Dokąd prowadzi nas media (Where are the media leading us)*, agrees with Postman. He also points to the telegraph and press photography playing a significant role. “A cut up world, geographically, separated from its historical roots, without a hierarchy of values, living only in the present, is the basis for modern discourse. Besides the telegraph, it is also press photography responsible for this state of affairs. It is pictures that are playing an increasingly imperative role in newspapers, gradually replacing the written word. This is clearly visible present day. In the past, up to the latter part of the XX century, newspapers and magazines were full of lengthy texts [...] which required time and reader's attention to process”⁸.

The psychologist, Jerzy Bobryk, comes to identical conclusions, “It is worth to take a look at the press today. Excluding advertising and classifieds, the majority of written texts could be printed on A4 paper. 95% of popular press articles include large headlines, sub-headlines and illustrations, with little text. Popular press impairs not just critical thinking but also the ability to read, people get used to reading only very short sentences and extremely simple in structure and content texts”⁹.

Another, characteristic to the epoch, trend is the standard of presenting information on radio and TV which starts with the words, “and now”¹⁰. According to Postman, such a phrase, means that what we have just heard or seen will be in no way connected to what we will hear next. This phrase signifies the fact that the world is a web of speeded up mass media without any order or meaning and cannot be treated seriously. There is no news, no murder, earthquake, political blunder, number of goals scored or weather forecast of enough importance that it could not be followed by the words “and now”¹¹. This phrase is an ideal example of how out of context information broadcasted has become. It seems that there are no guidelines as to the choice of materials presented in the mass media these days (the only exception is a national mourning which alters the programme offer).

Due to the growing proliferation of mass media, the commercialisation and marketisation processes of the information sphere was only a question of time. If any and all information can be transmitted to anybody, it seems that broadcasts have to be made as attractive to recipients as possible. Broadcasters will do everything they can to have recipients choose their station or channel. This way, the most popular type of programme has become an entertainment one. Entertainment, according to Postman, has become the only *raison d'être* for radio and TV and wrong are those who claim that there are still any non-entertainment programmes. Everything needs to be entertaining¹². Broadcasters cannot afford to be beat by the competition so they offer entertainment. There is simply no space for more analytical or

⁷ Ibidem, 116.

⁸ K.T. Toeplitz, *Dokąd prowadzi nas media*, Warszawa 2006, p. 91.

⁹ J. Bobryk, *Świadomość człowieka w epoce mediów elektronicznych*, Warszawa 2004, p. 95.

¹⁰ This was also ridiculed by Monty Python sketches which often began with the words, “and now something completely of a different kind”.

¹¹ N. Postman, *Zabawić się na śmierć...*, p. 146.

¹² Legutko and Rodziewicz pointed to a differentiation between *hard* and *soft news*. Hard news is considered more important (international policy, economy, etc.), while soft news is trivial and its goal is to draw people's attention. According to them, we are increasingly subjected to more soft news or “infotainment”. Cf. P. Legutko, D. Rodziewicz, *Gra w media. Między informacją a deformacją*, Warszawa 2007, p. 62.

intellectually engaging programmes. “It is not just time constraints that are to blame for the fragmented language forms we hear. We no longer hear, ‘allow me to ponder this issue for a while’, ‘I don’t know’, ‘what do you mean by that?’ or ‘what was your source?’. This way of talking not just slows down the show but gives the impression of uncertainty and a feeling that this will never end. It shows man’s *thought process* and that is not what people wish to see. Thinking does not look good on television, directors have known this for a long time as there is not much to *watch*. Thinking is not a performance art”¹³.

Concluding Postman’s theories, we can say that, in order to describe the transformations that have taken place, he uses a typology in which he contrasts the print era and the telegraph era. The first is characterized by *triumph of rational thought, balanced discourse, argumentation and logic*, the other – by *separation from context, emotionality, fleetingness, less creativity and instead – reception and elasticity*. A transfer from one era to the next has resulted in the domination of the entertainment sphere.

Another typology is proposed by Jeremy Rifkin. In his work *Age of Access*, he focuses not so much on the changes in the media world but more so on the trends in economy. However, his conclusions to a large degree correspond to Postman’s. He talks about the economy being influenced by the web with a growing focus on customer attachment instead of on one time only sales. “In the new era, the web becomes the market and ownership is replaced by accessibility. Firms and consumers are starting to move away from a traditional market exchange of goods between sellers and buyers. This does not mean the end of ownership, on the contrary, it will continue to exist but all the more so rarely on the exchange market. [...] A goods exchange between sellers and buyers, the most imperative trait of the market as we know it, is being exchanged by relations depending on short term access of clients to servers existing on the web. Markets will continue to exist but their social role will diminish. [...] In the past, the market was buyers and sellers, presently we talk about users and providers”¹⁴.

What is imperative, now the key capital is not money or productive power but intellectual potential – creativity, elasticity, inventiveness. The most important good is not a concrete material artefact but service. The service character of economy is transforming it into an exchange of fragments of experiences, profits stemming from access to somebody else’s time and knowledge. There has been a redefinition of the essence of ownership. It is like using someone’s intellectual might, a legalized lease instead of traditional owning. The use of goods has become temporary in character which is understandable in the growing pace of changing trends and fashions.

The other issue which Rifkin discusses is that of the specificity of the consumer society, the *focus on acquiring new experiences*. Experience is considered part of culture. It brings with itself a series of consequences, of which the most serious one seems to be growing commercialisation into more and more spheres of culture. According to Rifkin, marketisation of culture should be focused on among the observed new market trends. “There is proof everywhere. *Industry of culture goods* [...] is developing at the fastest pace. Film, radio, television, music, tourism, shopping centres, entertainment centres, amusement parks, theme parks, fashion, cuisine, sport, games, gambling, recreation, virtual worlds, virtual reality, and cyberspace are first line in the age of access”¹⁵.

With the invention of film and photography came the entertainment industry with its first ‘experience packages’. There is data according to which employment in the experience sector is greater than in any other market sector and is growing twice as fast as the rest. Focus

¹³ N. Postman, *Zabawić się na śmierć...*, p. 134–135.

¹⁴ J. Rifkin, *Wiek dostępu. Nowa kultura kapitalizmu, w której płaci się za każdą chwilę życia*, Wrocław 2003, p. 8–9.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

on consumption of experiences leads to the birth of a new type of culture participant – the permanent tourist impersonating with his conduct the new slacker class¹⁶. This tourist is interested in experience more than ownership, he does not ask what else he could buy or possess but what else can he experience or try that he has not done before.

The *Age of Access* discusses Robert F. Lifton's theories on the mentality of people living at the turn of the XX and XXI century. Lifton names these people the "Proteus generation" who, according to him, are the descendants of slogans and catchphrases. They are focused on searching for information, they cannot focus on anything for a long time and are not inclined to reflection. On the other hand, they value spontaneity and unpredictability. They like to think of themselves as market players rather than regular employees. They "have grown up used to work based on freelance agreements. Their lives have become more temporary and mobile than their parents. They are more interested in therapy than ideology, they think in images, not words. It is more difficult for them to write sentences but they are better at processing electronic data. They are less analytical and more emotional"¹⁷. They have a need for constant new experiences and consumption of culture content which results in subjectivisation of reality. Rifkin, citing Lifton, states that this generation is hungry for new sensations and wants to try life in its numerous forms. Their world ceases to be objective and becomes a *spectacle*, in consequence the social surroundings are reduced to a such level that we can talk about a disappearance of customs, traditions and conventions¹⁸.

Rifkin compares two types of mentality, the modern and the post-modern and states that people of the first type were oriented on goals while the second – on entertainment. For post-modern man historical perspective is less significant and it is new adventures that he is interested in. "History has ceased to be used in order to understand the past and to predict the future, it has become reduced to loose, fragmentary stories which can be used as elements of modern social screenplays"¹⁹. They can be used not just to build an individual's social, cultural or historical consciousness but to create a culmination or *catharsis* – the only values which the post-modern society, focused on new experiences, adheres to. At this point, it is worth pondering how, throughout the centuries, individuals have shaped their egos. Presented below will be historical psychologists' theories, compared to those of evolutionary psychology. In the end, a more general thesis of acquisition and proliferation of culture ideals in information society era will be proposed.

Society and ego

It would seem that an integral structure of Homo sapiens' mind which is understanding himself is something which has been constant regardless the historical context. Self consciousness is a trait of our species, something we are equipped with (also activated by our social environment, but, without doubt, it is our inborn, mental software). Self awareness as a *cognitive ability* is somewhat different from its *creations* such as personality and the 'self' which are a kind of *result* of its activity²⁰. In short, it is without doubt that in every culture there are developed individuals capable of self-reflection, they are self aware, they can recognize themselves in the mirror, know their name, understand relations with other people, know their autobiography, etc. but what they think of themselves is largely determined by their culture.

¹⁶ See also D. MacCannel, *Turysta. Nowa teoria klasy próżniaczej*, Warszawa 2005.

¹⁷ J. Rifkin, *Wiek dostępu...*, p. 197.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 198.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 205.

²⁰ Cf. T. Kozłowski, *Kłamię, więc jestem. W poszukiwaniu źródeł samoświadomości*, Taszów 2007.

Igor Kon wrote an interesting work on this subject, *Self Discovery*,²¹. He analyses numerous historical sources (myths, legends, written accounts, art works) based on which he comes to a series of conclusion that man, over the centuries, has had entirely different opinions about himself. The basic issue here is understanding the concept of 'free will'. According to Kon, this is not such a simple matter. A notion that there is will, which is not determined by anything and on it depends the decision making process (plus responsibility) is a considerably new concept in the history of mankind. Understanding one's own self results in the creation of social structure character. Following, Kon discusses imperative, in this case, different kinds of social control.

The most basic type of control is through *fear* though this type of control cannot be called social. Fear is for oneself and in order to feel it no norms are necessary. The emotion of fear is biological, instinctive and is an imperative regulator of social functioning among many species. Influence is exerted with threat and the result is direct. In societies ruled by terror, people do what they do in fear of what could happen if they didn't. The aim is less important than avoiding punishment, a very egotistic tendency with little social component.

A level higher in Kon's hierarchy is *embarrassment* which, in his mind, is a feeling somewhat more subtle and on a "higher level of self awareness". It is particular feeling which can be felt only within specific social context, that is we feel embarrassment only in front of people we know. Punishing is the awareness that others may think about us one way or another and often it is a more uncomfortable feeling than physical pain. Nevertheless, it is a tool of control which is a reaction to effect and not the cause.

The most effective form of social control is guilt. It is at this point that we can talk about a shaping of the conscience. It means that man can control himself not to do something before he considers all the 'pros' and 'cons'. He takes into account the moral aspect of his intentions and attempts to predict the future or the consequences of his actions. As a result of having a conscience man can feel shame not just in front of others but himself. It means that he has become an internally steered being.

Over the centuries, dominant were various types of social control means which gives us insight into how people perceived themselves. There is also a hypothesis that consciousness was born with Christianity, with its sacrament of conciliation which includes examination of the conscience. When Christian man had to ask himself questions, it was probably for the first time in the history of mankind on such a scale. Roy F. Baumeister²², the social psychologist came to similar conclusions. In his mind, the notion of 'self' as we know it in modern day has began to shape itself around the XV-XVI century with Reformation and the expansion of Protestant doctrine. Before then, man saw himself as part of a community he belonged to (hence it was rare for artists to sign their works before the Renaissance). For example, the Ancient *gnothi seauton* (get to know oneself) is not only an order to look into oneself, the meaning of life, etc. The Ancient Greeks understood this adage as an order to focus on what man could do for the community in which he lives. Uselessness was without sense to existence and became a reason for shame.

In the Middle Ages man was enslaved by his community. People also thought about salvation in mass categories. They were under the impression that all people are taken to heaven from which the damned are expelled down to hell. It was during Reformation that people have started asking questions such as, what has the Creator got for me?, or what will be my faith beyond? It is at this time that first portraits, self portraits and autobiographies are created. Also, people started to pay attention to the image of the rulers. Previously, the ruler was not defined by any particular or concrete characteristics. The only way he was recognized

²¹ I.P. Kon, *Odkrycie „ja”*, Warszawa 1987.

²² R.F. Baumeister, *How the Self Became a Problem: A Psychological Review of Historical Research*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1987, nr 52, p.163–176.

or differentiated from others was by his insignia or the fact that he was portrayed taller than the others. He existed thanks to his attributes, regardless whose son he was or from what dynasty. It was in the Renaissance that portraits became an art.

In the following centuries, people continued to explore their self awareness. Rifkin points to the changes in European man's mentality together with the onset of the bourgeoisie class. "In this era man started to pay attention to himself. The notion of 'self' developed slowly but gradually in the Western world but for the bourgeoisie it became an obsession. There were mirrors everywhere. Self control and auto reflection became of everyone's concern and the subject of entertainment. Phrases such as faith in oneself, self love, pity for oneself, dignity, character, ego and consciousness began to be used regarding personal development and as a subject of social conversations"²³.

The height of self control took place in Victorian times when people were obsessed with developing desired character traits and there was much stress on proper upbringing ('discovery' of childhood). It was considered virtuous not to stand out, hence, people wore clothes looking very much alike. If we consider Kon, Baumeister and other researchers (Marden, Lowe, etc.) Rifkin cites, we can come to the conclusion that at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries, we notice the first signs of *character* 'erosion' in favour of building *personality*. There is less focus on *individual character traits* in favour of the *image* in the eyes of others. The term 'ego' now focused not on self control, conscience and self reflection but on professional qualifications, cultural level, personal charm, good relations with society, all that defines us from other people's point of view. Of more importance were now attractiveness, creativity, effectiveness, expression and individuality but most of all – elasticity. The ability to adapt to constantly changing conditions seems to define, according to Wood and Zurcher, the *post modern personality*²⁴.

Distinctive features of modern society are its temporary nature, commercialisation, superficiality and an appearances game. The resulting new type of culture participant is an individual who has to constantly undergo change, be fashionable, create his image and build personality. These transformations coincided with a revolution in social communication and distribution of goods. They began at a time when the telegraph and photography made up the media sphere. At his time, it can be said that owning goods for the material value started to be replaced by the possibility to have access to desired services.

Conclusions:

Firstly, if we are dealing with a mental transformation of Western society, as Postman and Rifkin discussed, we should also expect that the market will adapt to it as quickly as possible. We can also delineate the kinds of rules that regulate a market targeted at post modern mentality. In this article, it will be the media marker that will be further analysed.

Secondly, if changing is the way we perceive reality, with less focus on rational thought, context and history and more on new experiences, catharsis, emotions and the present, then the mechanisms of culture ideals, norms and values are changing as well. Tradition is going out of style while temporary nature of events is becoming more popular. Does it mean that what surrounds us presently is culture as it was understood in the XVIII or XIX century? Can we talk about an internalisation of norms since norms, authorities and tradition are considered something strange to modern man?

The new processes of acquisition and cognition are entirely different from those in Postman's print era or Rifkin's ownership era. In the past people spent time pondering

²³ J. Rifkin, *Wiek dostępu...*, p. 210. See also: *Europejskie marzenie. Jak europejska wizja przyszłości zaćmiewa American dream*, Warszawa 2005, p. 162.

²⁴ M.R. Wood, L.A. Zurcher, *The Development of a Post Modern Self: A Computer-Assisted Comparative Analysis of Personal Documents*, Westport, CT 1988.

culture, presently there is a new way of acquiring knowledge which requires much less consciousness and resembles behavioural drilling.

Designed culture, entertaining form and content

Every culture determines functioning within it. It shapes our ego which is key in our social functioning²⁵. Ego specificity within a given culture can be derived from its symbols, forms and content. Specificity of information age man can be determined from an analysis of his ways of social communication, the communicated content, its source, attractiveness criteria and goals. The following part of the article will discuss modern man's dominant forms of entertainment in order to make conclusions on post modern man's mentality.

In modern day, culture is linked to two main factors; one - the media and communication means, the other – economy and the law of supply and demand. If we really are dealing with an ever-changing environment, are there still any rules regulating the created content? I think so.

To analyse media content in terms of entertainment useful will be evolutionary psychology²⁶. I will attempt to find the tendencies from which the entertainment market cannot free itself from. Besides the media and market factors which shape the culture sphere, added should also be a bio-evolutionary component built into our brains.

Evolutionary paradigm portrays man as one of the species which has appeared on the planet as a result of natural selection. It encompasses a series of sub divisions such as biology, anthropology, psychology and, recently, evolution sociology. The take that evolution scientists represent can be compared to an “anthropologist from Mars” take, in with a representative from a different civilisation sees our species as a fragment of one of its kind cosmic fauna²⁷. The species possesses certain behaviour, tendencies, habits and cultural activity. Anthropologist from Mars does not ask himself questions like why man creates culture or why he behaves a certain way but what *benefits to adaptation* have particular behaviour strategies given him. Culture is seen as a result of the functioning of certain mental processes shaped a certain way during natural selection. Evolutionists also study human language but they do not ask how it obtained its final form but how it was possible in the first place to create a language. What mental mechanisms are behind this process and how did they influence the survival of people? How is it possible that man created culture? What cognitive processes played a key role? Why did we acquire these abilities in the first place? Were there any adaptation problems that resulted in us acquiring these abilities? Such questions regard environmental reasons for this way of human construction. Man adapted a certain way to increase his chances of survival and reproduction (or as evolutionists call it – *inclusive fitness* or entire adaptation value)²⁸.

Let's try to also look, through this prism, at the entertainment aspect. *Homo sapiens* is definitely a species which likes to have fun. Our liking of jokes and engagement in situations ‘for fun’ has always been part of our nature²⁹. The question is, what was it that made us be so fond of entertainment and how was it profitable for man? The fact is, it couldn't just be pleasure which man derived from it since play takes time, effort and energy, all that could be

²⁵ This takes place within the framework of our bio-psychological make up.

²⁶ Cf. D.M. Buss, *Psychologia ewolucyjna. Jak wytłumaczyć społeczne zachowanie człowieka? Najnowsze koncepcje*, Gdańsk 2001; *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, ed. by J.H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, J. Tooby, New York 1992.

²⁷ For more see: T. Szlendak, *Co się stało z socjobiologią?*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2003, nr 1, p. 3–26.

²⁸ Cf. W.D. Hamilton, *The Genetical Evolution of Social Behaviour I, II*, “Journal of Theoretical Biology” 1964, nr 7, p. 1–52.

²⁹ Cf. G.P. Murdock, *The Common Denominator of Cultures*, [in:] *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, ed. R. Linton, New York 1946; E.O. Wilson, *Konsiliencja. Jedność wiedzy*, Warszawa 2002.

used to find food, partner or to procreate. Moreover, man having fun is an easier target to his predator or enemy.

The answer seems to be the very nature of our species³⁰. It seems that laughter, fun and entertainment play an imperative role in up-keeping group ties and establishing friendly relations between individuals. This was key a factor for survival in hunter/gather societies³¹. It is also worth taking a look at the nature of the joke and, more specifically, its punch line. Wonil E. Jung, evolution psychologist, states that every punch line can be brought down to a simple formula – a falsification of someone's beliefs (usually it is the main character of the story or listener beliefs as is the case regarding absurd jokes). Jung points to mental abilities being key in understanding a joke³². There is the explosive character of laughter as a response to the joke. He asks, can this phenomenon have evolutionary basis? According to Jung, these types of situations help us get to know other people. Common laughter for the same reason is a manifestation of a shared system of values and a good perspective for cooperation. Lack of understanding creates anxiety and uncertainty, it may also suggest that cooperation may not be successful. Jung's theory can be considered inventive, however, it is just one perspective.

Psychologist Steven Pinker states that entertainment and humour, aside from cementing interpersonal relations, are a kind of "cheesecake for the brain"³³. This metaphor can be explained the following way. Although pre-historic man was not used to digesting cheesecake as it did not exist 300 000 years ago, he has no problems processing it. Moreover, such treats are especially enticing as they include, in mega doses, what the hunter-gather man needed – fats, carbohydrates and protein. Entertainment or art, according to Pinker, is cheesecake for our minds since it contains particularly attractive content, extremely interesting and attention grabbing. "We like strawberry cake not because our taste evolved to like it. We get authentic pleasure from the taste of ripe fruit, cream feeling in our mouth as a result of consumed fats, nuts or cool water. Cake gives us a combination sensual sensations, unlike anything in the natural world, it is a mega dose of pleasant stimuli. Pornography is another pleasure technique. I am wondering if art is the third"³⁴. It is possible to look at the phenomenon of entertainment the same way, a mega dose of combined ingredients.

Media, in free market economy, in order to remain attractive, have to follow rules of the game. They must make their offer as appealing as possible and to do that they take from the specificity of social life for hunter-gatherer groups. Key adaptation issues for man in his natural environment are: avoiding predators and other threats, finding food and water, finding a fertile partner, reproduction, bringing up offspring, ability to enter into coalitions, ability to 'read' the minds of others in order to predict their moves and successfully manipulate to better one's position within the group, etc.³⁵ If we look at the media offer, we will find that it presents content in tune with the above listed issues. Film, theatre, literary and academic works very often discuss relationships, sex or achieving certain social status.

³⁰ Cf. R.D. Alexander, *Ostracism and Indirect Reciprocity: The Reproductive Significance of Humor*, "Ethology and Sociobiology" 1986, nr 7, p. 253–270; R. Provine, *Laughter*, "American Scientist" 1996, nr 1/2, p. 38–45; T. Kozłowski, *Rozumienie dowcipów a rozumienie kultury. Poczucie humoru a uczestnictwo we wspólnocie kulturowej*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2007, nr 1.

³¹ Cf. M. Ridley, *O pochodzeniu cnoty*, Poznań 2000.

³² Cf. W.E. Jung, *The Inner Eye Theory of Laughter: Mindreader Signals Cooperator Value*, "Evolutionary Psychology" 2003, nr 1; T. Kozłowski, *Rozumienie dowcipów...*

³³ Cf. P. Pinker, *Jak działa umysł*, Warszawa 2002.

³⁴ P. Pinker, *Jak działa...*, p. 567.

³⁵ Zob. też P. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*, Cambridge, MA–London 1999.

Evolutionist Daniel Nettle³⁶ went a step further, when analysing Shakespeare's works he came to the conclusion that most of his tragedies are about the main character striving to achieve desired social status, while comedies are about the twists and turns of love. His conclusions, from an evolution point of view, are also exemplary, in case of tragedies – they end in complete failure and regarding comedies – great success. In tragedies, the plot ends in death (elimination of an individual from a gene pool), while comedies end with the classic 'and they lived happily ever after' (meaning procreation or full biological success).

It can be said that the plots are centred around issues which, from the perspective of procreation success, are imperative (career, love, betrayal, envy, illness, family feud, war, aggression, poverty, imprisonment, oppression, fight with forces of nature, wild animals, foreigners, etc.)

Technically, the plot can be about anything. It is the stories of the main characters which are key. It is conflict, which in evolution terms can be named the problem which must be solved in order for the individual to realize his ambitions (of social character – ie. more power, domination within the group, or reproductive – partner, saving a close person from danger, escaping from dire straits, etc.) In game shows, for example, simulated are scenarios of competition (within group or inter group) and fight for resources. Competition and confrontation, or direct fight between two opponents, almost always result in drawing people's attention³⁷.

Moreover, another trick that media use to increase audience figures is the beauty canon. They successively lower the age of TV presenters and hosts (not to mention actors), they must be beautiful and sexy, and using evolution psychology, to present an optimal image in the eyes of viewers looking for candidates to procreate³⁸. The perfect entertainment will include content such as described above and be presented in a condensed amount of time to deliver an explosive package meeting the needs for such signals.

From evolutionary psychology perspective, entertainment can be interpreted two ways, one – as an element which initiates and cements interpersonal ties, the other – as super stimulus or "cheesecake for the brain" stimulating our mental mechanisms. However, there remains a question why presently the majority of entertainment has lost its unifying value and focuses on isolation and self stimulation.

In the age of information society, interactive media all the more focus on entertainment and auto simulation is beginning to play an imperative role in an individual's life. This alters the quality of entertainment but also ways in which it is viewed and understood. Light entertainment is easy to interpret, does not require deeper reflection and, therefore, draws people in faster. With time, probably, entertainment will not require any kind of thought, it will become a habit carried out without any reflection or discussion. It is worth noting that this kind of entertainment will be entirely subjected to evolution standards, which will make it even more difficult to resist.

Lately, broadcasted were several options constructed according to psycho-evolutionary rules of plot building. These are TV shows: *Desperate housewives*, *Lost* and *Prison break*. The last one is a show which takes place in a prison and its entire action revolves around escaping from it. The main character purposely gets locked up in order to help escape his brother, unjustly sentenced to death (in evolutionary terms - care for one's dear person, threat to life). In order to realize his plan, he has to enter into alliances with other inmates, villains. Screenplay authors were ingenious in their plot creation – every one the

³⁶ D. Nettle, *The Wheel of Fire and the Mating Game: Explaining the Origins of Tragedy and Comedy*, "Journal of Cultural and Evolutionary Psychology" 2005, nr 3, p. 39–56.

³⁷ For more see: T. Szlendak, T. Kozłowski, *Naga małpa przed telewizorem. Popkultura w świetle psychologii ewolucyjnej*, Warszawa 2008.

³⁸ See D.M. Buss, *Psychologia ewolucyjna...*

main characters has got their own plan, in part in tune with the rest of the group and in part – completely different. This guarantees non-stop tension and keeps the viewer in a state of permanent uncertainty, are they still co-operating and or? Such creation of interaction dynamics is a challenge, it is an endless source of data to which our brain, specialising in interpersonal relations analysis, will react vigorously. There are constant changes of coalitions and confrontations of conflicting strategies which are very attractive stimuli to our brain. This way, even in a series comprising of several dozen episodes there is a *continuous culmination point with non-stop confrontation of key interests and strategies*³⁹.

It is without doubt that the main characters care not just about saving themselves but also about the good of people dear to them, in this case those outside of prison, who are also in grave danger due to their involvement in the matter. What guarantees viewers' undying attention are: continuous tension, colourful personalities (characterized by exceptional intelligence, wit, craftiness, personal charm, courage, sex appeal, etc., all making them very attractive to viewers), constant struggle for life and aggression mixed with fear. Not to mention that every episode ends with a cliff hanger – a situation seemingly without possibility to get out of. Resulting, the viewer has to ask himself the question 'what now?' and to find out – watch the following episode.

The above mentioned tactics using evolutionary 'tricks' had extraordinary results. I do not possess any factual numerical data, however, I have heard from several dozen people that they have become addicted to the show and could simply not stop watching it, "I watched the whole series within two days", "I spent 56 hours watching the show", or "this show is unbelievable", etc. Popularity of this kind of programme leads to further consequences. Advertisers will look to invest in similar types of shows which means there will be more of them produced. And it will not end on television, other than media branches will want to take advantage as well. The entertainment aspect is infiltrating everything.

Like taming?

It is a fact that entertainment has become an axiom of culture, one that follows psycho-evolutionary regulations. It has also changed political discourse, a sphere which, in democratic countries, should be treated seriously. Unfortunately, it seems that all the more so it is image that is ruling politics. From a politician we expect to be a leader. In the multimedia era a good politician should not only possess knowledge and experience be also be attractive, tall, wealthy, have a strong personality, dominate and fight with his opponents but at the same time defend the weak and be able to charm. These traits we can find in evolution psychology textbooks as typical of an ideal leader (man wish to enter into coalitions with him) and sexual partner (women wish to have children with him). If one possesses these characteristics, he is more likely to get people's votes. This leads to the diminishing importance of political debate which should be more relevant to voters.

Postman discusses what political debates were like in the past. "The first of seven famous debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas took place on August 21, 1858 in Ottow, Illinois. Douglas was the first to speak for one hour. Lincoln's reply was then one and a half hour long, then Douglas's response again for half an hour. And this was a much shorter debate than what the candidates were used to. The two candidates met before several times and their meetings were always much longer and more tiresome. For example, on October 16, 1854 in Pretoria, Illinois Douglas first spoke for three hours. When it was Lincoln's turn, he pointed out that he will need at least the same amount of time plus

³⁹ T. Szlendak, T. Kozłowski, *Naga malpa...*

Douglas' response and proposed for everyone to take a break, go home, eat and come back for four more hours. The audience agreed and so it happened as Lincoln proposed"⁴⁰.

Following, Postman describes the type of audience that came to listen to such debates. For the most part, it was regular people and not like we are used to – other politicians, journalists or commentators. Public debates were an element of town fairs which attracted people from nearby farms, etc. and they made up the audience. What is more, the participants were very much interested in what was discussed and they took an active part in the debate with their support. The question is – would the same be possible these days? Would media be able to offer us a seven hour debate with eloquent speeches and supported by factual argumentation? Would an average recipient be able to hold his attention for that long? Would any marketing specialist decide to have such a long debate for any reason?

These days were not used to such lengthy deliberations with multiple compound sentences, metaphors and generally the art of argumentation. In the past there was definitely more focus on ordering facts, ideas, logic and coherence in political and other types of discussion.

The invention of the telegraph and photography have moved discussion to the background. With time, the media as well as recipients' attention have become focused, instead of on deliberations, more on impetuosity, quick attention grabbing form, conciseness and emotionality. As mentioned earlier, before the onset of photography people were much more likely to be familiar with a candidate's programme than their physical characteristics.

Photography, and later, television have reversed this trend. A memorable milestone was the television debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy which was the first to promote the idea of image and its influence of voters' decisions. Older, shorter and less attractive Nixon lost to calm, smiling and handsome Kennedy although these traits technically had nothing to do with the future of America. This debate did not last seven hours long either. The question arises then – how meaningful is political discourse these days? Can we still talk about the influence words or argumentation if whole teams of image and public relations specialists are behind it?

But that is not all. According to John Gleick, the main reason for diminishing importance of political discourse and the level of public debate is the lack of time. Gleick points out the fact that all spheres of our life have gained tremendous speed within the last century. This is especially true when it comes to media. Air time is expensive and every second counts. Gleick states that we can no longer find on television moments when there is no content broadcasted. Wasting precious air time is a sin which no broadcaster can afford to commit⁴¹. It is hard for us to imagine that before 1989 it was common for Polish television to transmit nothing but a clock (for up to several minutes!) counting down to the next programme (sometimes it was a picture of flowers with music in the background). As Gleick notices, media wars and time constraints have created entirely new standards, as he calls it, "sound bites" or packages of information easy and quick to consume, with content condensed to the maximum all in a form which requires no effort from the recipient to process.

"Sound bites" are becoming dominant and it is visible in politics as well, especially regarding the most important political events – particularly presidential election debates. The candidates now get one or two minutes for their speeches and replies which, in comparison to the past, may seem ridiculously short. The questions they are asked are very general, they are questioned on key issues and their proposed solutions to specific situations. It is no wonder that their speeches become demagogic, they are forced to use slogans and follow political marketing specialists' advice regarding behaviour. For experts in the field or even more attentive viewers it is clear that their every word is carefully chosen and planned out in order

⁴⁰ N. Postman, *Zabawić się...*, p. 74.

⁴¹ Cf. J. Gleick, *Szybciej! Przyspieszenie niemal wszystkiego*, Poznań 2003.

to build a desired image instead of focusing on factual argumentation. The situation is made worse by media which, in free market economy, have to fight for viewers using all possible means. Viewer attention is grabbed using tricks from evolutionary psychology, that is the confrontation rule. These days politics cannot be boring or static. There is no place for couch discussions anymore. If the broadcaster wishes to convince advertisers, he needs to provide the audience, to get it – he needs to offer people games.

In Poland, the end of the description era in the media sphere took place in the early 1990s with the onset of private broadcasters and free competition. Teresa Bogucka in her work, *Triumfujące profanum*, talks about the downfall of Polish TV journalism post 1989⁴². Media revolution which took place then is somewhat similar to what Rifkin and Postman discussed. Here, it did not happen over decades but within several years. Before 1989 there was no competition and standards were different than in the West. Discussion and presentations, it can be said, were a lot more comprehensive and not so out of context. They can be compared to those which took place back in the print era. Free market economy post 1989 and the onset of independent broadcasters have changed these standards. Of course, it did not happen overnight but year after year the changes became more apparent.

A good example of this was the “100 pytań do...” (“100 questions to...”) programme whose formula is practically inexistent today. The guest was usually a famous politician, journalist or artist who had a long time to answer people’s questions and present his views. There was lots of time for argumentations and discussion. There were also experts invited who were asked to comment at the end. In the late 1990s, the last of this type of programme was “Nocne rozmowy”, aired only once a month and not in prime time, where original social, ethical and philosophic issues were discussed by experts, authorities and other guests. Also the audience could take part. Presently such programmes are no longer produced, neither on public nor private TV. Paradoxically, the one programme that can be compared to the old formula is father Rydzyk’s “Rozmowy niedokończone”, a several hours long programme with discussion on a given subject and the possibility to phone-in.

These days even political programmes have an entertainment focus. More and more so the subject of journalist shows is a dispute, conflict or quarrel between politicians. Both sides present their side of the argument and in the end constructive conclusions are drawn. Programmes such as “Co z tą Polską”, “Forum”, “Kawa na ławę”, etc. resemble a ring where politicians meet and fight. The host, instead of playing the role of a competent discussion moderator, is more like an MC who throws out new topics for discussion and incites politicians to exchange ‘blows’.

This situation leads to a vicious circle – the producer who wants to have high audience figures invites guests who are considered popular and controversial. These are people known for their eloquence and particular expressiveness in defeating their political opponents. Conversations between such people become exchanges of emotional arguments and populist slogans instead of substantial discussion. They rather resemble election campaign speeches. A good example of what can happen was a TVN24 programme to which invited were Stefan Niesiołowski, Joanna Senyszyn and Jacek Kurski, three controversial deputies or their ‘party bull terriers’. Presence of three such personalities turned out to be destructive to the programme. The discussion quickly came to a halt as the politicians began exchanging accusations and in the end nothing constructive was proposed for the issues discussed.

As a result another vicious circle is created. Since popularity is gained by being expressive, politicians will strive to be controversial instigators with sharp language and original views. This leads to further destruction of political debate but is more in tune with viewers’ expectations. Television and information programmes especially, narrow down political discourse to a minimal number of sentences as expressive as possible. This is usually

⁴² T. Bogucka, *Triumfujące profanum. Telewizja po przelomie 1989*, Warszawa 2002.

how press conferences, deputies' speeches, the Prime Minister's expose or other important events are presented – instead of well supported arguments just short, often taken out of context sentences, metaphors, distinctive phrases, taunts or mistakes made. Political language, via the media, is becoming a field for the exchange of slogans and catchwords instead of rational arguments. This kind of debate is completely opposite the type Postman described in the print era. Today's debate is in tune with the entertainment focus – uses confrontation, is like a duel, or an emotional quarrel instead of rational discussion. It can also be described in evolutionary categories with status and power being key words. The audience in the studio is often also divided, facilitating viewers identification with a particular stance and emphasizing the programme's conflict character. Again, it includes an exchange of slogans and catchwords with an easy to understand message, a programme much more popular than a serious, lengthy debate.

Viewers and potential voters are not used to rules which in the print era were considered fundamental in discussion and coming to concrete solutions. They are less interested in coherence and sense and more in the show's attractiveness, attention grabbing format and its entertainment aspect.

Umberto Eco is deeply concerned by the mental evolution of western society as well as the level and scope of populism present in Italian media. "What is the sense of telling viewers about a magazine such as the 'Economist' if they are not familiar with the majority of Italian press and don't know the different newspapers' orientation. When people buy press, they do not differentiate which is left and which is right wing and make their choice based on the attractiveness of the cover page. They are indifferent to any accusations and are not troubled by the regime. They value success and becoming wealthy quick and easy. They are a product of media, TV and press. They are interested in models, mother embracing sons after coming back from emigration to Australia, couples applauded by their neighbours for talking about relationship problems in front of the camera, in sacrum becoming a show, they have faith in scratch card winnings, they are not interested in statistics such as the decreasing rate of violence, but they are concerned about reports of bestial murders which make them think that if it happened once, it can happen to anyone"⁴³. Eco is fearful of the catastrophe which can fall upon democratic society, which is *enslaved by entertainment* and does not care about the state of its country (or anything other than entertainment). He, similarly to Postman, is of the opinion that the threat which awaits us is not Orwell's *1984* vision but Huxley's *Brave New World* where people were not enslaved by Big Brother, his regulations and orders but by pleasure. It seems that these days media have a capability to create optimal pleasure which will increasingly enslave its recipients.

The TV offer can also be interpreted according Rifkin; that is producers do not just aim to sell a product to their viewers but plan to have them hooked permanently. This is particularly true regarding cyclical TV shows like soap operas which reveals the paradoxical character of such fascinations. All these shows are based on the same premise – everyday lives of ordinary people, including their family and co-workers. What they show is absolutely commonplace, without unusual twists of action, it is situations and problems we are all familiar with – children's school trouble, typical family issues, love, betrayals, divorce, etc. Theoretically, such content is not very interesting but it is extraordinarily absorbing to *homo sapiens* who responds vigorously to presentations of regular social relations. Of course, provided that he gets to know the main characters, on the contrary, for those who are not familiar with the plot, it cannot be interesting.

⁴³ U. Eco, *Rakiem. Gorąca wojna i populizm mediów*, Warszawa 2006, p. 137.

In my opinion, however, there is something else that is even more intriguing. Previously⁴⁴, I pointed out the basic difference there is in plot building between a literary work and a TV show. For example, it is impossible to start reading the *Karamazov Brothers* on page 300 without knowing the plot, while you can start watching a soap opera in the 1000th episode without any bigger problems. Action and relationships between characters become transparent after just several minutes of viewing. Doesn't this prove the hypothesis that such shows do not present us with real plot but instead pseudo events without any message? This still does not change the fact that viewers easily become addicted to this type of offer. If one misses an episode for some reason, he feels anxious and he will do his best to re-arrange his daily commitments so that it does not happen again⁴⁵. Viewers derive pleasure from watching such shows, it is like a treat to them. These shows often go on for several years at a time (record long was the British soap opera "Coronation Street" aired non-stop since 1960). From an 'anthropologist from Mars' perspective, it may seem like a ritual or an example of taming or self-taming. All that makes it all the more difficult to break this cycle, the ritual becomes part of our lives. It is also the way the show is constructed which makes it difficult to stop watching. Every episode ends with a cliff hanger, the action is cut off at the most exciting moment which makes people continue watching to find out what happens next⁴⁶. This trick is very successful in making viewers addicted.

Also TV stations broadcast their programmes in such a way as to provide viewers with a continuous stream of pleasant stimuli. For example, stations no longer broadcast full credits at the end of a film, they often appear on one side of the screen while the other is used to show the upcoming previews. When there is a commercial break, during it there are also previews with what will be shown 'in just a moment'. It is in the broadcasters' interest to demotivate viewers, make them sit and not change the channel. That is why they spend a lot of time advertising what will be aired the following. The viewer is treated like a subject, he is not to decide what he will want to watch. Advertisers who broadcast their commercials only seemingly buy airtime, what they are really buying is viewers' attention. TV stations do not sell their own time but the viewers' time. It is both in the interest of the broadcaster and advertiser to come up with programmes which will make viewers stick to that particular channel or even not engage in any other activity whatsoever. It is no wonder then that they are more and more effective at this.

The question is, how far does this practise go in other spheres of culture, beside media. If consumer society specificity is based on the fact that every sphere of culture is subjected to commercialisation and potential consumption, it can be said that entire culture can be entertainment based and becomes the subject of marketing tricks. There is no more focus on rational thought but on *habit and the customers' attachment*. Attachment is created as a result of applying a few simple rules of ideal consumption which are: unlimited access, immediacy and triviality⁴⁷. These rules, according to Rifkin, are also followed by film, television, tourism, entertainment centres, fashion, cuisine, sport, recreation, etc. If this culture experience is a good which can be shared, in the creation of which engaged are marketing and neurosciences, due to which the offered product is all the more attractive, can we still talk about people consciously participating in culture? If the answer is not affirmative, it seems that MacCannel's metaphor of man the tourist requires some supplementation. It suggests that man is an active subject who makes sovereign decisions as to which experiences, places and sensations he wishes to undertake. In the metaphor he becomes something of a casual connoisseur experiencing only what is of interest to him. It would seem that, in view of our

⁴⁴ T. Kozłowski, *Wszchedziecinada, kalejdoskop i przewidywalna niepowtarzalność*, „Odra” 2007, nr 9.

⁴⁵ Cf. M. Haława, *Życie codzienne przed telewizorem. Z badań terenowych*, Warszawa 2006.

⁴⁶ K. Łuszczek, *Nowoczesna telewizja, czyli bliskie spotkania z kulturą masową*, Tychy 2004, p. 37–41.

⁴⁷ T. Kozłowski, *Wszchedziecinada...*

earlier discussion, he ceases to be as sovereign as it would appear. This is because the culture industry offers him only those products which are profitable, for which there is still demand. This is the result of specific mental structures developed in the evolution process. It means that some content will be more popular than other and if we research the functioning of these structures, we will be able to decide which content will be desirable.

This article attempts to show how, according to evolution psychology, an even more attractive TV entertainment is created. In other words, culture content for which there is perfect demand can be produced and, hence, we can no longer believe that man in this 'culture supermarket' can make his own choices. It is more likely that within this type of culture, where man is surrounded by a kaleidoscope of stimuli, he will be lured by an offer more and more perfectly prepared, one that diminishes the level of his free will engagement.

It should be of no surprise that we will be more likely to be completely absorbed by something entirely different than what we had planned to do initially, and not just because of media (ie. shows like *Desperate Housewives* or *Prison Break*). Multiple possibilities are only seeming however. Can we honestly say that one soap opera is any different from another? What about entertainment shows such as "Taniec z gwiazdami", "Gwiazdy tańczą na lodzie", "Idol", "Po prostu tańcz", "Jak oni śpiewają", etc. – do they differ from each other substantially? Does a menu which includes 60 kinds of pizza make our choice easier or more difficult? Are these pizzas sufficiently different from one another that they all have to be included on the menu?

Would the 'anthropologist from Mars' looking at temples and holidays of consumption, or shopping centres and vacations, notice a multitude of options or one general and predictable trend? Are ways in which an average person chooses to spend his free time, ie. in the mountains, original or are they roughly the same as everyone else's? If we go to Morskie Oko, Kasprowy Wierch, Giewont or Krupówki, will we experience peace and quiet or will we find queues of other, but the same as us, tourists. Originality in spending free time requires more thought and effort in order not to repeat the same social habit. Originality is not in tune with ideal consumption rules, that is immediacy, unlimited access and triviality.

Post modern ego in light of evolutionary psychology

The above discussion, I hope, aids in presentation of man in information society era. Such characteristics were previously attempted (not just by Postman and Rifkin but also by other researchers and observers of social phenomena). Let's return, for a moment, to Kon's theories who stated that the ego which dominates in our culture is determined by the character of social control means. He pointed to fear, embarrassment and an internalisation of norms within the conscience. The question is – in the age of multimedia and entertainment can we still consider the conscience as the main organ of individual control? In order for conscience to function necessary is strong identification with a system of values dominant within society as well as a feeling of union or coexistence with others who also follow the same system of values.

Toeplitz, in his description of modern society cites Dwight MacDonald, "It is not possible for mass culture to be a good culture. For sure, culture can be made only by humans and for humans. However, when people start to de-organize themselves as a mass, they start to lose their human identity and quality. Mass is a great number of people unable to express themselves as humans since their mutual relation is neither a relationship of individuals nor a relationship of members of a community. They are not tied to each other but rather to something distant, abstract and inhuman – ie. a football game, a sale in a shopping centre, mass production system, party or country. Man is like a lone atom, just like millions of others, indistinguishable from the rest, together they make up a 'lonely crowd', as David Riesman

described American society⁴⁸. Specificity of mass culture is based on judgement, opinions and stances shaped not through direct interpersonal contacts but created and popularized via the mass media. If we take this further, we can say that *man in participation in mass culture does not need other people*, which from a sociological point of view is unprecedented

In this case, an individual does not have to adapt his behaviour to that of others and the concept of social norm becomes useless. Empathy also becomes meaningless when contact with another person is unnecessary or is limited to required interaction. What does become more imperative is not character but personality, not essence but superficiality. Entering into relationships which engage us entirely is not profitable in the age when speed and results are key. There is simply no time for it. Toeplitz, after Riesman, states that these days we are dealing with people who are steered from the outside, or who follow laws regulating functioning of modern society, “All stimuli, social and career come from the outside, they are market regulations which transform these rules into customary ideals, we obtain them from our environment”⁴⁹.

Psychologist Jerzy Bobryk goes even further in his criticism of modern mentality, he talks about “not just civilisation catastrophe but a lobotomy”⁵⁰. In his mind, presently drastically decreasing is knowledge of one’s traditions, historical heritage, its specificity and originality. This results in the inability to solve any moral feuds and creates incoherence in a system of values. Another result is the impoverishment of individual self consciousness. He states that presently it is more imperative for people to gather information than to process or understand the message that it carries. This, in turn, leads to people not able to differentiate between knowledge and information. What occurs is a “macdonaldisation of minds”. Consumer culture is like an offer from which the consumer can choose content that he likes. Generally, it is content which is filtered by mechanisms of commerce or one which will be liked by everyone. This way standards are lowered, dominant becomes what is easiest to process. “If we provide people with simplified, standard and ‘processed’ content or thoughts, together with mass production of intellectual goods without authors and individual responsibility for the product, the culture that develops creates specific psychological processes and new types of mentality”⁵¹. Our mentality is focused on consumption and not on communication.

Bobryk cites Bachtin’s theories according to whom dialogue is the essence of communication. When we finish a sentence, we signal that it is the other person’s turn to speak their mind or respond to what we had said, and so on. Communication aids us in realizing the limitations of our knowledge, defining meanings, it has a practical dimension, functional to both sides. In modern consumer culture, the function of dialogue is diminishing. Do entertainment content and forms of spending free time allow us a moment to think things through or maybe instead of creating cognitive dissonance they offer ordinary pleasure profitable to everyone? Criticism and rationality these days seem a lot less necessary in taking part in entertainment or culture. Let’s take the example of the Internet, the leading medium of information society. The opinion is that it is an interactive medium, it allows people to make conscious choices in searching for information. But is this really true? Bobryk cites the media expert Wiesław Godzic, “Internet activity is largely limited, often after a short series of information search methods, the user gets his results”⁵².

⁴⁸ D. MacDonald, *A Theory of Mass Culture*, [in:] *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds B. Rosenberg, D.M. White, New York 1964. From: K.T. Toeplitz, *Dokąd prowadzą...*, p. 143–144.

⁴⁹ K.T. Toeplitz, *Dokąd prowadzą...*, p. 146–147.

⁵⁰ J. Bobryk, *Świadomość człowieka...*, p. 30.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

⁵² W. Godzic, *Czy nowe media potrzebują nowej estetyki: humanista w Internecie*, [in:] *Piękno w sieci. Estetyka a nowe media*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Kraków 1999. From: J. Bobryk, *Świadomość człowieka...*, p. 105. Cf. also J. Bobryk, *Spadkobiercy Teuta. Ludzie i media*, Warszawa 2001, p. 58–59.

Really, we cannot compare using a search engine to looking through library archives as was common 10-15 years ago. The great speed of this device and Internet hyper textuality or the 'link' system allows us to reach our goal almost instantly but what we get is key words and phrases taken out of context. Links to other Internet sites are behind bolded text, words and phrases. We do not know the context and simply skip from one information to the next. Often it is not even words but icons or images. "Evolution of electronic media toward the multi media results in our civilisation being focused on image. Thinking in images is considered not necessarily rational, analytical or sophisticated. Psychological research on creative thought and problem solving [...] indicates strength of image thinking in the phase of creative generation of ideas and weakness in the phase of critical assessment"⁵³. The question is whether modern man can rationally assess the accessed information.

Let's characterize modern man's mentality at the onset of the third millennium. Firstly, it is a man who, to a large degree, is separated from tradition and historical context. He is less attached to the heritage of his culture. Secondly, he lives in a world which does not care about his inherent traits. "Speeding up of almost everything" which Gleick pointed out has resulted in too little time or possibility for interaction which takes him up entirely. At the same time, we can talk about an erosion of character in favour of personality and steering from the outside. The way the individual functions in social life is changing just as are his needs. There is less focus on dialogue (communication, empathy) and more on consumption. Entertainment is gradually ceasing to play a unifying role and its offer is increasingly geared toward self-stimulation. This type of pleasure leads to a macdonaldisation of the culture offer as well as the minds. People are systematically discouraged from spending their free time (or participating in culture) in an active way. Rational or critical thinking and auto-reflection are inconvenient and unnecessary. As a result, if a producer wants to be successful on the market (media or other type) his offer must draw people's attention in a new way (ie. the earlier mentioned TV shows basing on bio-psychological patterns, particularly successful and difficult to resist). Free market competition means that the consumption culture world will be entirely engaged in drawing our attention. We will be bombarded with an increasingly large amount of stimuli, information and data which we will not be able to process. As a result, we will stop processing or reflecting upon what we are presented with except for only the most outstanding stimulus.

Let's once again return to evolution psychology theories. These, in my view, can be particularly useful in an analysis of man functioning in consumer culture. The difference between man in the description era (more reflexive) and the multimedia era (less reflexive) to a large degree reflects the difference between the self-conscious organism and the conscious organism. Researchers agree that consciousness is knowing that the world exists, while self-consciousness is understanding that we perceive it ourselves⁵⁴. These are obvious consequences of cognitive nature. Evolution psychology asks us to look deeper and to find reasons, in the evolution sense, for what environmental problems have lead to the shaping of such characteristics, or what factors played a role in the development of these characteristics.

The answer is not easy but there are reasons to believe that roots of human self consciousness lie in the nature of social life, in the need to successfully cooperate with others, form alliances, be able to use lying or manipulation⁵⁵. Self consciousness allows us to develop

⁵³ J. Bobryk, *Świadomość człowieka...*, p. 111.

⁵⁴ See A.R. Damasio, *Tajemnica świadomości. Jak ciało i emocje współtworzą świadomość*, Poznań 2000; idem, *Błąd Kartezjusza. Emocje, rozum i ludzki mózg*, Poznań 2002; G.M. Edelman, *Przenikliwe powietrze, jasny ogień. O materii umysłu*, Warszawa 1998; D.R. Griffin, *Umysły zwierząt. Czy zwierzęta mają świadomości?*, Gdańsk 2004; E.M. Macphail, *Ewolucja świadomości*, Poznań 2002; M. Tomasello, *Kulturowe źródła ludzkiego poznawania*, Warszawa 2002.

⁵⁵ Cf. M. Tomasello, *Kulturowe...*; P. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness...*; T. Kozłowski, *Kłamię, więc jestem...*; T. Witkowski, *Inteligencja makiaweliczna. Rzecz o pochodzeniu natury ludzkiej*, Taszów 2005.

a different perspective, without a cohesive concept of own 'self' that enables us to play different roles including imitating or pretending which otherwise would not be possible. Consciousness of social norm is being aware of others' expectations of us. In other words, for true internalisation of norms and the construction of consciousness, as an imperative element of ego, necessary is self consciousness.

Developmental psychology states that up to around the age of 3–4 a child's self consciousness is at a relatively low level, including a low level of empathy⁵⁶. In order to research this subject better, between 2001–2004 I carried out observations of children in several of Torun kindergardens. The detailed results of this research are presented in a different article⁵⁷. Here, I would just like to present some of the conclusions. Behaviour of children between 3–4 is characterized by a low level of reflection. These children do not understand others' behaviour, they are not good at prediction, anticipation or manipulation. They rarely interact with others and prefer playing alone. Their behaviour seems taken out of context, irrelevant to the situation, incoherent, inadequate and inconsistent, an answer to a stimulus which drew one's attention. Children seemed as if they were not able to think critically, their actions were not focused and they could not hold their attention for any longer amount of time.

The three year olds (in contrast to older children) did not enter into relationships with others (have friends, foes or dear ones). They resembled a crowd of individuals not connected by any community relations. As a result, there was no internalisation of norms. Children did not understand what they could and could not do. They acted on a trial and error basis and had to be reminded continuously. It resembled behaviour conditioning (taming) rather than an internalisation of norms and values.

The situation was entirely different in older age groups, these children showed greater self reflection abilities. Present in this group was a distinct socio-metric structure, including pretending and imitating (role play) as well as manipulation (play with an element of surprise). This proves advanced culture abilities. Children have also started obeying regulations, that is understand what they could and could not do. Disciplining of this age group was also different from the previous. Younger children are disciplined by reminding or deprivation (taking away the toy) which in behaviour categories is considered a negative stimulus. Older children, in contrast, are sent away so that they can think over their behaviour and come to constructive conclusions. In this case, we are dealing with consciousness (impossible in case of three year olds).

Regarding the post modern ego, I believe it can be said that, *these days participation in consumer culture is possible without developing (or use) abilities that are shaped by six year olds*. What is evident is analogous behaviour of three year olds and adult participants of consumer culture. Both groups can function without reference to their culture and tradition. Both groups are characterised by low level of reflexiveness and rationality, three year are too young while in adults these characteristics are highly undesirable. Both groups are passive in their reaction to stimuli, they do not consciously steer their own behaviour nor are they active in search for specific stimuli. Their actions are without a finale but are rather cyclical instead. Three year olds can spend hours repeating their favourite activity, they are equally entertained by the story or event just as if they didn't know it before. Similarly, consumers are only seemingly active, continuously choosing products from supermarkets and the media, unconscious of the fact that these activities are without a specific goal (aside from pleasure, again similarly to three year olds). In supermarkets, we continually buy products, in media

⁵⁶ Cf. E.M. Macphail, *Ewolucja świadomości...*; P. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness...*; A. Gopnik, A.N. Meltzoff, P.K. Kuhl, *Naukowiec w kołysce. Czego o umyśle uczą nas małe dzieci*, Poznań 2004; P.I. Greenspan, L.B. Benderly, *Rozwój umysłu. Emocjonalne podstawy inteligencji*, Poznań 2000.

⁵⁷ T. Kozłowski, *Kłamię, więc jestem...*

we watch a cyclically repeated offer. All the more so, it is becoming more difficult to find something original on the TV screen, something that isn't one episode out of many. In case of these programmes, if we have seen one episode, it's like we seen them all, this is true of talk shows, game shows and soap operas. There is one more parallel between three year olds and modern consumers. Some of their social behaviours are not based on internalisation or thought but on habit. Both of these groups are in a way taught or become accustomed to certain ways of participation in culture. They do not think or ponder over why they do something, they just do it.

Conclusion

In order to describe the changes that have been taking place in the media and our economy over the last 150 years, let's sum up Postman and Rifkin's theories. They introduced terms such as description era vs. the show business era, ownership age vs. access age. What is imperative, in their observations they both focused on how these changes have influenced Western man's mentality. They talked about the birth of the post modern ego, less rational, focused on the now, fleetingness and sensations. Ego which, in comparison to that of the description era, is separated from tradition, without roots, habits or social norms. The modern mind is focused on the reception of new stimuli and entertainment which leads to culture commercialisation. Culture ceases to be a collection of norms and values and becomes an offer targeted at customers. The produced offer of the entertainment industry can be described in terms of evolution psychology with a focus on super stimuli of selected mental mechanisms. Knowledge of the functioning of these mechanisms makes producers extremely successful in their marketing tricks and can possibly lead to the making of the optimal offer – always interesting, attention grabbing and impossible to resist. Analysing TV entertainment, we can find numerous examples of using the rules of evolution psychology on the viewer mind. The question is – can we still talk about freedom of choice in this growing tendency to make broadcasts more and more attractive? Is the individual still a sovereign 'tourist' who decides what he wants to choose? Or has he grown accustomed to choosing certain products that he no longer thinks about whether there are other possibilities?

If any answer to the above questions is affirmative, it seems justified to introduce a typology including Rifkin and Postman's theories. The description era and ownership age comprise a *culture of thought* while the era of show business and access age are a *culture of habit*. In contrast to culture of thought, culture of habit is more focused on participation, predictability, stimuli and less on auto reflexiveness. The question is – what if media as a result of competition, which will be increasingly tougher, create a super stimulus? What will be the result of super entertainment? Similar experiments were once carried out on rats⁵⁸. Into their brains implemented were electrodes which hit their pleasure buttons. The rats were able to provide themselves with very mild electric shocks by hitting a kind of lever and, in turn, they felt intensive pleasure. The result was easy to predict. The rats would have quickly died, not eating or drinking, just endlessly hitting the lever if they researchers had not intervened. Should we be fearing the same if we are provided with an equally effective entertainment, what then?

⁵⁸ Cf. E. Pöppel, *Granice świadomości. O rzeczywistości i doznawaniu świata*, Warszawa 1989.