How to Understand Identity in Anonymous Computer-Mediated Communication?

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In this paper I will discuss several problems concerning the question of identity in anonymous computer-mediated communication. Internet should enable the individual to discover new viewpoints of his/her own personality. The potential of virtual reality lies actually in the very process of redefinition of identity itself, which is very typical for this reality.

The first problem concerns the fact that virtual persons are still "the same" persons. As far as identity construction is concerned, meta-message "this is only a game" can have productively a very successful function. This meta-message – especially if we take into account the inherent anonymity of the user – enables the individual to articulate various hidden truths about himself, because he is aware that he "is only playing" a game on the screen. We must point out that inherent playfulness can enable and project very real feelings because individuals also show themselves without the "mask".

Keywords: IDENTITY, COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION, ANONYMITY, VIRTUAL REALITY, INTERNET RELAY CHAT, ON-LINE FORUMS

1. Introduction: Identity as a never-ending process of identification

The notion of identity and "crisis of identity" is at this moment in the centre of sociological, anthropological and ethnological researches. This interest is mainly stimulated through development of new communication technologies. New technologies (internet) trigger new possibilities of identity construction due to new and relatively unlimited possibilities of user interaction, on the level of understanding and perception of own individual identity as well as on the level of choosing the language praxis, developed by the users of certain communicational space.

The process of identification through which we project ourselves to the field of certain identities has become more open and more changeable and with it more problematic. This led to the formation of the so-called postmodern subject who is conceptualized as a subject without fixed, essential or permanent identity. The subject possesses different identities through time and there are different identities in disagreement inside of it, pulling each to different side so that the identification of the individual is constantly changing. If the individual feels that he possesses the same identity from birth until death this means that he constructed a large "supply" of narration about himself, because perfect and coherent identity is a fantasy (Hall, 1992:277).

Free planning and choice of identities on the other hand also looks very "consumer" orientated, which is perhaps "in the spirit of the time". Society nowadays can be characterized as consumer, media, informational, electronic, high-tech society. Postmodernism predicts the end of different dilemmas, the end of stability and with it connected uniqueness, the end of distinctness. This does not only mean the liberation of such dilemmas and "vulnerability" in connection with it, but it also means the liberation of any other feelings. As Frederic Jameson continues, this does not mean that cultural products of postmodern era are simply without feeling, but it means that these feelings are now simply free-floating, with a tendency that certain euphoria will dominate over them (Jameson, 1991:15–16).

2. Too much identity?

The consumer society is based on idea that constant transformation of identities (through consuming) brings pleasure and is meaningful. In contrast with previous production orientated capitalism, which emphasized given, and for that reason limited needs and demands, the main point of consumer capitalism is that it enables and emphasizes the produced and for that reason in principle unlimited needs and demands.

Experiences show that such constellation causes double uneasiness. On one hand there is "too much freedom". Too many things depend on me. We are forced to make decisions. The basis of this frustration is the need for the Master that can be formulated this way: I want somebody to determine the rules in the story and to take responsibility for the development of events. Exaggerated freedom can be very frustrating (Žižek, 1996:126–127). We have learnt from experience that too much freedom can cause certain uneasy feelings in the individual, because he is no longer at the "cross-roads" but at the "dead-end". If we use common sense or intuition we could suppose that when we have complete freedom (the question is what "complete freedom" is), we have "just the right" amount of freedom, but real, everyday life still shows an interesting paradox; too much freedom can be very tiring. The individuals do not experience this extra freedom as freedom any more. The situation here is similar to the situation as far as discursive construction of identity in virtual environment is concerned. There we are the masters of our own identity and this role is hard to cope with.

The fall of the already mentioned role of the Master in modern western societies exposes, according to Žižek, the subject to radical ambiguousness as far as his desire is concerned. This happens because media is constantly bombarding him with demands to choose, when they address him as a subject who is supposed to know what he really wants. We could read television commercial for advertising itself with this on our minds as well. It says: "Advertising – the right to choose." But on a more basic level the media robs the subject of a notion about what he wants and accordingly addresses completely adaptable subject that needs to be told what he wants (Žižek, 1996:130–131).[1]

The arousal of a desire as such, which is not given and fixed any more (this is very obvious in advertising and marketing), stimulated uncontrolled production of identities. When a desire was "let out of a bottle" the appearance of completely unpredictable needs and demands, or to say meanings and identities, increased. This of course does not mean that resistance against social representation and a priori determined individual has increased. It means that growth of different identities and

meanings has to a certain degree also caused the insecurity of the individual (Ang, 1996:177–180). Because of this newly created insecurity he searches for the solution in new positions and interpretations, in new fictional identities. We are faced with a vicious circle and if not that then at least with a sort of "emotional inflation" (Jones, 1997:12).

3. Identity in computer-mediated communication

The possibilities for the production of "new" desires undoubtedly lie hidden in the very nature of the internet medium itself. The anonymity of the individual increases the absence of classical social ties.

Anonymity thus has at least double effect; it reduces the level of social pressure on the individual. At the same time the level of aggressive or at least unpleasant communication is sometimes increasing with the "liberation" of the individual (Boudourides, 1995:3–4). But the very lack of social and visual connections is on the other hand the condition for the growth of user's own "imagination". The anonymity is supposed to be a part of the magic attraction in computer communication. As one of the participants said, she does not hide her identity because she would be afraid of contacts with other people, but because anonymity is part of the magic itself (Baym, 1998:55). Some other people claim that a huge turn has been made in the field of internet because the possibility of a satisfaction itself (sexual games are an example) functions as a real satisfaction. Some active participants in sexual games have stated that the essence and fascination of the game is not in meeting someone and actually doing something with him/her. A great fascination for them is the disclosure of their own fantasies with typing alone. In this sense the potential possibility itself already fulfills a satisfaction. The very idea, that you are able to do something but you do not do it gives you more satisfaction than the act itself. You never go "all the way", you just repeat a certain type of the game. You announce all the time but you never go through with it (Poster, 1998: 191–192).

Our next case is quite typical. A woman was exchanging a lot of intimate and sexually coloured *e-mails* with a colleague from a next-door department of a large corporation. Their dialogue was getting more and more explicit every day. Each time she saw an *e-mail* address of her partner on the screen, announcing a new message, she nearly had an orgasm. But in the everyday contacts in the corridors of the corporation everything remained the same. She said that she got really excited when she saw him, but he remained completely "normal". One day, when she had enough of this bizarre game, she pulled him to her office and asked him whether they are going to start dating in reality as well. She was surprised by his answer. He said: "I do not know what to say. Maybe yes, maybe not. Can't we just continue our *e-mail* romance?" (Chenault, 1997:4).

Was this man afraid of something? Was he perhaps afraid that real dates would spoil the image he created for himself? Maybe the point here is that he did not want to go "all the way". So he constantly produced lack of final realization. Namely, the lack itself, i.e. the lack of total realization was the main element of making him happy and fulfilling his desires. To bear in mind the claim that says that possibility to fulfill our needs plays the role of satisfaction, we could claim that the individual does not care so much for "true" love which he awaits. Uncomfortable feelings do not appear because the object, the reason of our desire, is always missing.

Bigger problem arises when we are in danger to loose the lack itself or to say "a desire of a desire". At that moment we would hit the "real" from which we escape into "reality"- with a help of indefinitely waiting for the right person, who we are constantly keeping "alive". Construction of an ideal love or love couple is possible when the whole image of a partner is missing. This way we can imagine the communities more idealistically, because the absence of elements of reality makes possible for the individual to imagine his own picture. This is where virtual communities become similar to nations and their process of imagining, where in the thoughts of each subject lives a portrait or an image of their community. The individuals can therefore imagine an ideal community right because of the lack of information. All of them can imagine a certain romantic community and by the content of it (all of them imagine a similar community) they can recognize themselves as belonging to the same imagined community. All communities that are bigger than original villages, where everybody knows everybody, are imagined (Anderson, 1998:15).

In anonymous computer-mediated communication – for example on the *Internet Relay Chat* or in on-line forums – it is easier to picture a friend or a lover and they are also easily constructed until when we meet them in "real life". Our ideal friend or lover who is "just" as we desire him can only be anonymous. This is the condition for his existence as an ideal. Only by being anonymous is he suitable for the purpose of wrapping some fantasy around his virtual, physical, and mental picture.

In classical modernistic play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett we are faced with a similar structure of a story. All the action in the story is based on the fact that nothing happens and is structured around the anticipation of Godot's arrival when something is finally going to happen. We know already in advance that Godot is only a metaphor of Nothing, he can never come. The modernistic procedure – even if it allows us to see how Godot is only an effect of a structure, – with not showing him to us still leaves a certain possibility open for interpreting the matter from a perspective of an "absent Godot". This is from perspective that Godot is simply missing (Riha; Žižek, 1985:131–132).

Similar to the absence of Godot is also the relationship between internet friends and lovers. Sometimes people wish more to keep an ideal partnership alive than to confront the "hard" reality again. That's why sometimes – as one of the examples says – they do not tend to meet their internet partner "live". In this case the whole projection of fantasy, which exists in the heads of individuals, would fall apart. The individuals thus maybe do not wish to meet their internet lover in real life because they want the chosen person to retain a certain precise part determined at the moment when he or she took the part of a "lost partner". The individuals should never meet their own "Godot" because this would lead to the disappearance of Godot. If they do meet Godot than some other person would certainly take his place.

4. How we (finally) do things (only) with words

Internet is offering itself as a counter-balance to the apriori determinations of an individual. Mark Poster (1998) says that virtual reality makes the types of subjective experiences possible and that those experiences could "interrupt" or stop modern types of domination. The potential of virtual reality lies in the process itself, which is typical for virtual reality and through which the individuals could learn that they themselves are also constructed and that they can, in a certain computer-mediated environment,

reconstruct themselves and the world. So virtual reality then functions this way, or to say differently, her functioning as such (the changing of identities) can work towards denaturalization of assumptions about "natural" given identities (Cooper, 1997:103–104). As far as individuals, for example on the *Internet Relay Chat*, freely change their identities when they play different discursive identity games, they can soon find out that identity is a construction that was framed to them by others in the "real" world. In the world of virtual reality they can construct it by themselves, contrary to what happens in the "real" world.

Self-creation and self-presentation are supposed to be the new forms of constitution of identity. In everyday world we are namely used to search for identity within the limits our own environment. We believe that a really harmonic relationship is possible when the individual constructs its identity from it's "foundation". Anonymous CMC launched new thinking because here the individuals started to search for their identity in a different way. They tend to lean more and more towards manipulating with the internet environment itself, which they use as a tool to create their own identity. Internet is really that sort of a tool, because it does not involve the pre-existence of natural environment. The individuals themselves make the environment possible and that is by inventing it (Jones, 1997:32).

In communities like this identity, of course, plays an important role. In communication which is the primary activity the knowledge of identity of the co-speakers is essential for the understanding and "evaluation" of the interaction (Donath, 1999:1). But it is true that evaluation especially is risky or to say questionable, because the identity itself is questionable and especially "non-controlled", thus user's optional creation. If in real world a certain assumption involving equation: one body = one identity exists, we come across a certain problem in the internet space that could, accordingly to communicational theory terminology and especially from the point of view of radical semiotic perspective be named *no necessary correspondence*.

And because communication is written, the very perception of ourselves in the "eyes" of our co-speakers changes as well. In chat-rooms the conditions for identity determining of the co-speakers are changing because the type of communication has also changed. According to the fact that we deal with written text the list of possible points of view or identity "markers" is actually quite limited.

One of the reasons surely lies in the fact that conversation in chat-rooms established a certain common "jargon" which is highly coded and specialized (abbreviations, so called emoticons, e.g. smileys that have the following image ☺). Users can learn this "language" quite easily and at the same time is the textual character of communication itself very fixed (compare with what Sherry Turkle (1995:184) claimed: *all they see are your words*), so that markers of identity do not really exist.

We must, of course, at this point undoubtedly stress that we can not "pull the legs" of our co-speakers. Even the text itself that the users send to their co-speakers, expresses certain clear indicators that call user's attention to some external textual characteristics of the sender. The text that the user transmits to others contains certain information about the sender's identity. Among this "auxiliary detectors" we can enumerate the level of literacy, lexical choice or vocabulary, syntax and stylistics. The receiver can certainly create an additional information about somebody who uses expressions known mainly in academic community. The sender can even mislead the receiver with deliberate word choice because the receiver could this way imagine radically different picture only on the basis of some words that the sender "accidentally" used.

Construction of on-line identity is quite a free choice. The participants of computer-mediated communication can take part in the interaction with other participants whenever they want. They can talk and do other things at the same time, they can be dressed in pyjamas or naked. The president of the state, doorkeeper, or trainer of a swimming club can participate. Nobody is going to ask them whether they are competent co-speakers, because nobody can check this at "first sight". Nobody can check whether certain suitable and urgent "adequate circumstances" for the conversation exist. When the user joins a certain chat-room he must "take into account" that all persons are equally competent and that he must believe their "conversation" without doubt, because there are no other identity indicators. Because more precise indicators, on the basis of which we would determine identities of the co-speakers, do not exist this means also that as John L. Austin would say, utterance circumstances are actually always adequate.

We would like to enlighten the construction of on-line identity also through the concept of performative. Austin defined performatives in his book *How to Do Things with Words* as utterances that

A. do not "describe" or "report" or "ascertain" anything at all, are not "real" or "unreal" and

B. to utter a sentence is to complete a certain act or part of an act that we would normally not describe as (or as "only") to say something.

As an example Austin offers different statements; we are going to use one already "worn out" statement: "I name this ship Queen Elizabeth" uttered at the time when they break a bottle on ship's prow (Austin, 1990:17). In this particular case it means that to utter a sentence means to perform the action. That means: *to say = to do*.

Usually the utterance of such words carries the whole action because to perform the utterance is at the same time also the aim of the utterance. But there must be some conditions fulfilled for a successful performative. At the ship's naming it is essential that words are uttered by an authorized person because only this person can bring "to life" this potential performative utterance. Austin says that words must always be uttered in adequate circumstances and also that the speaker or somebody else must very often carry out some other "physical" or "mental" work or even utter some further words. Besides uttering the words of the so called performative the circumstances must also be adequate. The order for general mobilization can be ordered by the president of the state only (Austin, 1990).

Now we can ask ourselves how "risky" is such "talk" in computer-mediated communication. According to the very character of technology which we use to communicate and to present ourselves, it seems that the circumstances are always adequate. The participants in anonymous CMC hardly doubt the co-speaker's words because they are in no situation to discuss whether somebody is competent enough to write something or whether he fulfilled all the conditions to utter a certain statement. The user of internet chat-rooms is thus "always already" competent and always already are the circumstances, in which he types, adequate. But we are actually not interested in this classical "law's" point of view. We are interested in the consequences of the absence of

different classical identity determiners. One of the basic postulates in the internet world is "axiom" *all they see are your words*. This means that any typing of the text on the internet is always successful or we could say that for virtual identity construction we can write an equation: to write something about yourself = to present your identity. Once we construct our identity (we type it) the co-speakers can not explain it in many ways. This, of course, does not mean that everybody thinks the same and "see" other people in the same way, but it means that due to the absence of other contextual parameters the co-speakers can not establish different interpretations but they can measure the identity only on a scale of bigger or smaller degree of trust. They have to believe, more or less, to the written words. But this does not anyhow diminishes the success of performative construction of individual's identity.

Even though every constitution of identity in virtual space is successfully performed this does not assure that receivers will take it seriously. Because identity is often not formed convincingly enough on the basis of text this could mean a drastic reduction of communication efficiency. In this case virtual community and communication would become a sort of hide-room for fruitless games. But we think that users of this anonymous on-line communities build certain strategies to avoid this "anarchic" situation. Users to a certain extent believe to their co-speakers but at the same time they keep the attitude of outer distance because they are aware of the meta-message "this is just a game". This situation is somehow similar to the situation of disclosure of libidinous and other secret desires. When the individuals pretend that they are "macho" they keep the attitude of outer distance exactly on the basis of meta-message "it is just a game". They use similar strategy when they meet other participants. They believe each other's words because exactly this belief in the co-speaker keeps the "seriousness" of the situation and enables the communication itself. But at the same time they keep "to themselves" the attitude of outer distance with the mentioned meta-message. This meta-message is a sort of a "safety valve" that has two functions. On one hand it enables people to believe to each other and this makes the communication possible (this is the essence of virtual communities), but on the other hand it gives them "emotional credit" or some sort of safety that defends them from disappointment. Anonymous computer-mediated communication consequently contains inherent playfulness.

5. On-line identity as a "true" identity: more real than reality?
Some people say that there is always "night" in virtual world. Because the communication based on text is predominating the individuals can not see each other. Basic characteristics such as age and sex are also invisible. Anonymity and dynamics and also the very character of a media as a "playground" have strong behaviour influence. This enables the individual to behave in a way very different than their image presentation in everyday world, so they can express beforehand covered aspects of their personality in a similar way as in a masquerade. In virtual chat-rooms people can become exactly "what they want to be" or exactly "how they want other people to see them".

What makes communicating with new technologies different from face-to-face communication is not only the despatialization of communication and the loss of contextualization cues, but also the different sets of mutual monitoring possibilities which these technologies make available, the different ways in which they allow us to be present to one another and to be aware of other peoples' presence. (Jones, 2002:8). Rodney H. Jones has problem of context in computer-mediatted communication put in the following way:

"If I am having a face to face converstion with you about your uncle's cancer, for instance, although I may be able to think about a lot of other things and even engage in a number of side involvements like smoking or eating, I would not be able to listen to music on my walkman, read a magazine, write a letter or engage in a totally unrelated conversation with someone unknown to you and at the same time sustain the appropriate display of involvement warranted by the situation. New communication technologies, on the other hand, allow users to display "primary involvement" along a number of attentional tracks at once and not risk offending anybody" (Jones, 2002:15–16). One of the main ways new communication technologies alter context is by creating a new kind of interactional accessibility involving new ways of being present and monitoring others' presence (Jones, 2002:17).

In anonymous CMC "we are and we are not" at the same time and this ambiguousness is one of the attractions of this environment. That is why this ambiguousness determines our attitude towards our screen images. On one hand we keep the attitude of outer distance so to say a game with false images in the sense "I know I am not like this (brave, seductive,…) but it is nice to forget our real image every now and then and to put on a more satisfying mask. This way you can get relaxed better and get rid of the burden to be the way that you are and to have to live with this and to be responsible for it". On the other hand we also "are" in anonymous CMC what we are not or we not dare to be in real life. On-line person that people create can be "more me" than my "real life" person (my "official" image) as far as it makes those aspects of myself visible that I would never have dared admitting in real life. The fact itself that we percept our virtual image purely as a game enables us to get rid of the usual obstacles that prevent us from realizing our "dark part" in "real" world and to freely show all our libidinous potentials. The charm of anonymity is also and above all in the following: We can carry out the "masquerade" in virtual world without actually doing it and this way we avoid the feeling of anxiety connected with the action in the real world. We can do it because we know that we are actually not doing it for real. Obstacles and shame are this way pushed aside. We can articulate hidden truth about our drives at the exact time when we realize that we are "only playing a game" on the screen. In this situation we are encountered with the logic of acceptance through concealment because we accept our fantasies as far as we "know that they are only a game in virtual reality" (Žižek, 1996:115–116).

If we wish to explain the mentioned ambiguity more conceptual we could introduce the distinction between imaginary and symbolic deceit.

At imaginary deceit I simply present the wrong image of myself while at symbolic deceit I present a real image of myself and expect that they are going to take it as a lie. The on-line person that we construct can offer an example of imaginary deceit as far as he shows his wrong image (e.g. a coward who plays a hero) and symbolic deceit as far as he shows the truth about himself

under cover of the game (with playfully accepting the role of an aggressive person we disclose our real aggression) (Žižek, 1996:117).[2]

Accordingly, it would be too easy if we would say that a coward seeks refuge escaping into a dream world of cybernetic space only to escape the dull and helpless real life. On the basis of actual virtual games and especially according to the way games unwind and the content of it we could ask ourselves whether the games we play in virtual space are more serious than we think? We can, in this particular games, articulate aggressive and perverse gist of our personality that we can not express, because of social and ethic restriction, in real relationships with other people (Žižek, 2000:7).

The question is of course, whether in that case, what we perform in cyberspace dreaming is in a way "more real than reality", i.e. closer to the gist of our own personality than the role we play in relationships with real partners (Žižek, 2000:7). We can be more "genuine" and "authentic" on the *Internet Relay Chat* contacting with a co-player than in real life. Because we know that virtual reality is "only a game" we can dare to play whatever we do not dare admit in "real" mutual contacts.

6. Conclusion

As far as meta-message "this is only a game" is concerned, we must point out that this "safety valve" can actually be quite a productive or "therapeutically" successful function which is specific for this environment. This meta-message – especially if we take into account the inherent anonymity of the user – enables the individual to articulate various hidden truths about himself, because he is aware that he "is only playing" a game on the screen. We must point out that inherent playfulness can enable and project very real feelings because individuals also show themselves without the "mask". The logic of acceptance through concealment makes this possible because they accept their real fantasies as far as they know they are "just a game", this means for the price of fetish "I know, but still".

Anonymity should then be one of the advantages. It enables "virtual liberation", but not in all respects. Mutual relationship should be more democratic or less discriminatory, as far as users physical image is concerned. And that is based on the fact that individuals are anonymous. But this very users admit that they themselves constantly imagine and picture each other, so they are trying to "fix" their co-speaker in their mental map. There is nothing wrong with this but it obviously proves the individual's "natural" need for establishing of certain relationships. Physical appearance that forces us to somehow imagine our co-speaker, obviously belongs among this mental relationships. Equality of computer-mediated communication should be – as some enthusiastic internet users claim – right in this equal "absence" of physical image, but this at the same time proves that the "basis" for this equality is exactly the physical image. Arguments of this sort prove that people's everyday real problems are just concealed. But they are still reproduced and preserved. And at the same time they confirm the conclusion that internet culture is just an extension of real culture and everyday relationships.

The fluidity of computer-mediated communication is supposed to force the individuals to a more liberal self-understanding. It supposedly enables them to think again and express the unknown aspects of their own individuality due to a relative absence of socially mediated representations. As certain researches prove we can refuse this idea of a virtual liberation to a certain level because virtual space has its limits and has been defined with values, prejudices, and other socio-psychological connotations and meanings that are taken from everyday life. The individuals are projecting their always- already constructed meanings and socially-mediated interpretations when trying to construct their virtual identities into virtual space. This space does not therefore stimulate people to a deeper understanding of themselves, i.e. that they themselves are the creators of their personality. Internet as a medium enables active creativity and presentation (construction) of virtual identity but these constructed identities are in several cases only simple extensions or "derivations" of ideologically mediated pre-virtual environment.

7. Implications for context dependant research on on-line identity

However, it would also be productive to develop critical tools for distinguishing several modes of computer-mediated communication in order to better understand motivations as well as communication praxises of the participants. Distinction between off-line and on-line communication are far more complex since the very context of each CMC environment (and obviously each off-line environment) are distinctive. And so different types of problems we are facing in the field of computer-mediated communication are distinctive. Let us consider just one problem. Among the many on-line communication phenomena currently attracting attention, of particular interest to scholars is "flaming"- hostile and aggressive interactions via text-based computer-mediated communication. There are several theories trying to explain possible causes for such behaviour. Current definitions of "flaming" use imprecise terms that fail to recognize multiple possible perspectives in this situated and context dependant nature of message interpretations. O'Sullivan and Flanagin (2001) propose a framework which takes into consideration a multiple perspective: the perspective of a sender, receiver and a third party in order to explain better possible aspects which cause problematic interaction. The multiple perspective is intended as a tool for approaching an array of problematic interaction, which include "flaming" as well as interaction imprecisely labeled as "flaming". Such context dependant interpretations of several particularities existing on-line would be a must for further investigations in the field of CMC.

Each computer mediated community establishes particular norms of interaction, as well as the sanctions for breaking them. The understanding of such standards demands taking into account technological and pragmatical characteristics of computer-mediated communication. Speech community possesses such rules of interaction. For such community the language use plays an important role in the process of demarcation from other communities. This very demarcation is also the fundamental mechanism of language identity construction.

Although the distinction between off-line and on-line is tempting and often misleads to the simplistic interpretations, focusing on predominant influence of technological characteristics of CMC on individual behaviour and patterns of communication, it is important to distinguish between different contexts of on-line communication. Marshall McLuhan is perhaps best known for his phrase: The Medium is the Message. For the sake of on-line investigations and further implications for research on online identity we would add: "The context is (also) a message (identity)."

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KAKO RAZUMJETI IDENTITET U ANONIMNOJ KOMPJUTERSKI POSREDOVANOJ KOMUNIKACIJI

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U članku se obrađuju različiti problemi koji se dodiru pitanja identiteta u anonimnoj kompjutorski posredovanoj komunikaciji. Internet bi morao omogućiti pojedincima i pojedinkama da otkriju nove aspekte svojega vlastitog identiteta. Potencijal virtualne realnosti nalazi se upravo u samom procesu redefiniranja samog identiteta; taj proces redefiniranja po nekim je teorijama tipičan element virtualne realnosti.

Prvi problem nalazi se u činjenici, da su virtualne osobe još uvijek "iste osobe". Što se tiče same konstrukcije identiteta, sama metaporuka "to je samo igra" može imati vrlo produktivnu funkciju. Ta metaporuka naime, i pogotovo ako uzmemo u obzir inherentnu anonimnost, koju imaju on-line osobe, omogućuje pojedincima i pojedinkama, da artikuliraju različite skrivene istine o njima samima, jer znaju da "samo igraju" igru na kompjutorskom ekranu. Moramo upozoriti da inherentna "igrarija" omogućuje da pojedinci i pojedinke sami sebe prezentiraju bez obične "maske" koju nose u svakidašnjem životu.

Ključne riječi: IDENTITET, KOMPJUTORSKI POSREDOVANA KOMUNIKACIJA, ANONIMNOST, VIRTUALNA STVARNOST, INTERNET RELAY CHAT, ON-LINE FORUMI

1 As a paradigmatic example of performative construction of desires and needs we can literary copy a part of a printed commercial for a new type of car where the diction itself proves the performative character of desire construction: "When you will sit in a comfortable seat, and beyond the elegant sport's wheel see in a German way arranged armatur, you'll hear only one echo in your head ... 'I MUST have this car.'"

2 Cf. Žižek 1996, 117. Žižek also has a good example from everyday life when we use both kinds of deceits with the purpose of achiving the same effect. "Because I am slightly too fat I have two strategies available of how to hide this fact. I can put on a shirt with vertical stripes which will make me look slimer or I can, on contrary, put on a shirt with horizontal stripes and count on this that people that I will meet will (wrongly) comprehend my fatness as an ilusion created by an unadequate suit: 'Look, this stupid shirt makes him fat although he is really not so fat.'"