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Digital Soul: Media Intermediation of Emotions in the Internet Age

Abstract

The Internet age of media communication has been gradually and subtly changing the way in which we experience ourselves and the world we live in. Broadcasting our lives on the web also involves the everyday exteriorization of emotions onto the technical mediators of the third degree, as Jensen calls them (2006). Expressions of emotional experience is something we see every day on social networks, but they are also becoming an integral part of user content under the media text on web portals. These so-called intellectual technologies are acquiring some of the essential human characteristics such as rationality, memory, calculation, and translation, as well as emotionality and communication (Carr 2014, Turkle 2011).

Where do Emotions live when we transfer them into the virtual world and how do they become an integral part of media content? Where does one's soul live when transferred to one's virtual self? These are the questions we will try to answer in the first part of this paper.

We will analyse the virtual space, its possibilities and limitations. We will discuss the potential of online media to mediate emotional experiences. We will also seek to understand technology and devices as an alternative humanity, when people fail or refuse to act by themselves. We will try to find answers to questions about the consequences of such mediation, referring to the research of other scholars including Siva Vaidhyanathan, Sherry Turkle, Nicholas Carr, and others.

In the second part, we will discuss the subtle encroachment of the emotional upon the world of the media.

The last part of the paper will present some literary analyses of media intermediation that sporadically appear in works by world-renown writers (Rushdie, Hugo, Mehmedinović, Sábato, Spengler...) and the interaction of their understanding of the media with McLuhan's view of media intermediation and the extension/mutilation of senses.

Key words: *emotions, digital soul, media, media intermediation, internet age, virtual space.*

Virtuality – What is it?

"The avatar is our voodoo doll." This is a sentence from the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma* uttered by Tristan Harris, a former employee of Google's ethics department, co-founder of the Center for Human Technology, and an ardent advocate of questioning the ethics of social media and search engines.

The avatar is a suit we wear when we enter the space of virtuality, the "matrix". It is our new, extended humanity, our skin made of fibre-optic cables, and it receives its connections and stimuli from activating Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other notifications. Harris has compared their operation to the work of slot machines in Las Vegas. Like the sound of a slot machine, the sound of a notification causes an adrenaline rush. "It's not just a tool. It's an addictive technology," says the former Google employee. Siva Vaidhyanathan has likewise compared the operation of social networks, above all Facebook, with slot machines in his book on *Anti-Social Media*: "Like casinos, slot machines, and potato chips," this social network is "designed to keep you immersed, to disorient you just enough so you lose track of the duration and depth of your immersion in the experience, and to reward you just enough that you often return, even when you have more edifying, rewarding, or pleasurable options for your time and effort within your reach" (Vaidhyanathan 2018: 37). We, on the other hand, seem to have grown accustomed to social networks so much that we notice less and less how much we depend on them. Some of us who belong to the generation of digital immigrants as Prensky calls us (Prensky 2001) still wonder what the world is like outside the virtual. For the digital natives, an alternative world may no longer even be possible. And even if it is, the numerous social networks, applications, and tools do their best to make us think little or nothing about an alternative world. There is no room for imagination in a world where we are preoccupied with designing our own identity twenty-four hours a day. There is no time for the spirit, and it is the spirit that makes us human. "Spirit is the self," according to Søren Kierkegaard. "The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself" (1980: 13). Unfortunately, this thinking

about the relation has been replaced by its joint analysis with the help of statuses, photos, tags, and comments in social media. On this path, the relation that would and should be relating to itself has been obstructed by the imputed technical extensions of our hands, our mind, our spirit.

We tend to say that the modern world of online media is "virtual", a world of extended reality, of simulacra, a timeless and spaceless realm of free identities. Enchanted by the Internet, we rarely and only occasionally notice that we are missing something. And even if we notice this deprivation when it manifests itself in modern neuropsychiatric diagnoses, we are convinced that the problem is only and exclusively in ourselves. The fast-paced world of the Internet and networking leaves little time for analysis. We run away from analysis, we resist it with various anaesthetics, "a reaction that is also a defence against analysis" (Bourdieu 1998: 17).

When Bourdieu wrote in his book *On Television* about television as eyeglasses through which we look at the world, eyeglasses that we do not notice but that determine the range and quality of our field of vision, and when he understood television as a second-hand world, he probably had no idea that mediation could reach an even higher level or levels. Media based on the Internet technology, which Nicholas Carr calls "intellectual technologies", have taken a step further and deeper into the virtual, mediated, and extracorporeal realm. They, Carr believes, have increased our mental abilities, but they have also displaced them outside of us. He compares the online media to a "window onto the world, and onto ourselves" that "molds what we see and how we see it – and eventually, if we use it enough, it changes who we are, as individuals and as a society" (Carr 2010). Marshal McLuhan has argued in his book *Understanding Media* that speech separates the human mind from the universal unconscious. Online media, it seems to us, separate man as an individual from his personal unconscious, subconscious, and substantial. The involvement of psychoanalytic terminology in this discussion is not accidental, and we are not the first or the last to interlink these fields.

In his seminal work *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze has written about the virtual object and virtuality from a psychoanalytic and metaphysical perspective. Thereby he did not oppose the virtual to the real, but to the actual, implying that the virtual is also real. He literally claims that when he says, "the virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual" (Deleuze 1994: 208). The virtual is not something that is merely possible, since it already exists, it is in itself quite real, but is translated from the world of virtuality to the world of reality by the process of actualization, i.e. individuation, by the experience of an individual subject. That world of representations exists as a past that never passes, a past that coincides with the present. "Virtual objects belong essentially to the past," but it is "the pure past as it was defined above (...) the past as contemporaneous with its own present, as pre-existing the passing present and as that which causes the present to pass. Virtual objects are shreds of pure past. It is from the height of my contemplation of virtual centres that I am present at and preside over my passing present, along with the succession of real objects in which those centres are incorporated" (Deleuze 1994: 101-102). Evidently, we sense that the differences are being erased and that the real is constantly recurring in the worlds we call real and virtual, *offline* and *online*.

As the unconscious, the virtual exists stored as a memory that the individual will actualize at some point. This memory, in Deleuze's opinion, is involuntary, a term borrowed from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. "This kind of memory comes to us unexpectedly, not through voluntary remembering," and Deleuze describes it as "passive synthesis, an involuntary memory that differs in nature from active synthesis" (Deleuze according to Bluemink 2020). This passive synthesis corresponds to the virtual, while the active one is a correlate of reality. The world of unconsciousness, or the world of imagination, the imagined or representation, is what the online world of modern media offers us. "The virtual is the condition for real experience, but it has no identity; identities of the subject and the object are products of processes that resolve, integrate, or actualize (the three terms are synonymous for Deleuze) a differential field. The Deleuzean virtual is thus not the condition of possibility of any rational experience, but the condition of genesis of real experience" (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*[223]). For Deleuze, the virtual is pre-individual, and we come to the real with individual acts of creation. The virtual is the new intrapersonal: prior to the corporeal world, it is in the world of virtual identities that we plan our next steps in behaviour – at work, in friendships, love and other relationships. We first relate to the world online and only then to the world in the realm of physical bodies. "What's on your mind?" Facebook asks us, and we respond even before we have become fully aware of our emotions and verbalized them into meaningful sentences. But the essential problem, in our opinion, is that there is little room for actualization and creation. The virtual constantly shifts us, as a mind filled with content, from one memory to another, from one situation to another, from experience to experience, mixing everything with everything and leaving us no free space for an individual act of pure thought and creation.

On the other hand, Deleuze also speaks of the virtual as an object of subconscious aspirations, a reality that complements our everyday experience, of the elusiveness of the virtual, its fluidity and fragmentation. "Deducted from the present real object, the virtual object differs from it in kind: not only does it lack something in relation to the real object from which it is subtracted, it lacks something in itself, since it is always half of itself, the other half being different as well as absent" (Deleuze 1994: 102). It may possess reality, but that reality is different from the reality of everyday experience. "What is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place*, as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in the library... For it can *literally* be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always in its place; it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from it" (Lacan according to Deleuze 1994: 102).

Deleuze also refers to this other, extended reality as the simulacrum, that is, the world of representations, which he describes in the following terms: "(1) the depth or *spatium* in which intensities are organised; (2) the disparate series these form, and the fields of individuation that they outline (individuating factors); (3) the 'dark precursor' which causes them to communicate; (4) the

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223 Daniel Smith and John Protevi (2008): "Gilles Deleuze," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/deleuze/ (last accessed on April 25, 2022).

linkages, internal resonances and forced movements which result; (5) the constitution of passive selves and larval subjects in the system, and the formation of pure spatio-temporal dynamisms; (6) the qualities and extensions, species and parts which form the double differenciation of the system and cover the preceding factors; (7) the centres of envelopment which nevertheless testify to the persistence of these factors in the developed world of qualities and extensities." It is the world, as Deleuze concludes, of an "informal chaos" that pervades and surrounds all the subjects that are part of it. These are "crowned anarchies" that are "substituted for the hierarchies of representation; nomadic distributions for the sedentary distributions of representation" (Deleuze 1994: 277-278). According to Carr, it is a world of cacophony in which everything is combined with everything else to attract our attention, and "we all know how distracting this cacophony of stimuli can be" (Carr 2010).

It is in such a world that the media operate today and that we have moved into, transferring to that world our interior, that is, our substance, our intrapersonal and interpersonal communication.

Media intermediation of the soul: Are networks an alternative to humanity?

This paper does not intend to paint the darkest scenarios regarding the interaction of modern technologies and man. To some extent, however, it does follow Freudianism as one of the theories on which the theories of mass society rely, because the author believes, in accordance with the opinion of other authors (Carr, Turkle, Keen, Vaidhyanathan) that social networks as digital media platforms appeal to man's irrational aspect, the Id rather than the Ego, and that in that struggle between the Id and the Superego, man's Ego necessarily suffers (Baran & Davis 2013).

But even though we do not endorse idealist beliefs, as Oswald Spengler calls them, describing them as those despising technology as "standing outside, or rather *beneath*, 'Culture'," we are much closer to their critique than to the position of materialists who believe that "the aim of mankind was held to consist in relieving the individual of as much of the work as possible and putting the burden on the machine" (Spengler 1976: 6-7). Neither conviction is the happiest of solutions when it comes to thinking about modern media technologies, but not asking any questions is definitely more dangerous that either of them. And that is, it seems, a quite widespread position today. Belief in progress through and due to technology, the connection of all with everyone, has networked the whole world, and there are only a few oases of questioning. Thinking about the soul and scepticism are increasingly becoming an incident and a precedent. But who has forbidden us to raise questions? Who has convinced us that our souls are not important? Maybe no one has; maybe it is the mere abundance of "nonsense" that has made it nonsensical to ask essential questions, if we can call them that. "Sense is defined as the condition of the true," Deleuze explains, "but since it is supposed that the condition must retain an extension larger than that which is conditioned, sense does not ground truth without also allowing the possibility of error. A false proposition remains no less a proposition endowed with sense." Therefore, it is not lies, completely false information, or fake news that is

our core problem. It is nonsense. "Non-sense would then be the characteristic of that it which can be neither true nor false," Deleuze writes. But if repeated often enough, it makes things senseless, deconstructs, "de-establishes", like "in newspaper competitions (where everyone is called upon to choose according to his or her taste, on condition that this taste coincides with that of everyone else" (Deleuze 1994: 153, 158). Today, this is called the filter cocoon, which is a world of closed cocoons in which a person surrounds himself or herself with like-minded people in the world of online media, where truth becomes what he or she wants to see as the truth (Susten, according to Vozab 2017: 5). Andrew Keen writes about this in his work *The Cult of the Amateur*, where he explains that in the online media, the sum of two and two can be five if we agree upon it (Keen 2007). And when nonsense is created, then it gets repeated endlessly, until this repetition turns into pathology. "In short, things repeat always by virtue of what they are not and do not have. We repeat because we do not hear" (Deleuze 2004: 340). And that is why it is important to interrupt this repetition with therapeutically important, unpleasant questions. Such as the question of the soul, which has become almost offensive in a culture of unprecedented progress. Spengler also brings us back to that question, connecting the seemingly unconnected – technology and the soul, or rather technology and its soul. "If, then, we would attach a significance to technics, we must start from the *soul*, and that alone. For the free-moving life of the animal is a struggle, and nothing but struggle, and it is the *tactics* of its living, its superiority or inferiority in face of 'the other' (whether that 'other' be animate or inanimate Nature), which decides the *history* of this life... (...) Every machine *serves* some one process and owes its existence to *thought about this process*. (...) They are all just *sides of one active, fighting, and charged life*" (Spengler 1976: 9, 10). A question that we have not yet asked, and to which we will not know the answer any time soon, is the question of the idea behind the network media technologies. What did we imagine while creating these weapons/tools? Let us hope that the modern robot "Sophia" is not the answer to this question. If we wanted to create a "superman", did we turn ourselves into a burden?

So, it would be important to ask about the goal. "But whither? For how long? *And what then?* It was a little ridiculous, this march on infinity, towards a goal which men did not seriously think about or clearly figure to themselves or, really, *dare* to envisage – *for a goal is an end*. No one does (or should be doing, author's remark) a thing without thinking of its direction and its *conclusion*. (...) Every truly creative human being knows and dreads the *emptiness* that follows upon the completion of a work" (Spengler 1976: 10). And we are still convinced of a happy ending. But happy for whom? We believe, for man the creator. Between the eye and the hand as his tools, as Spengler classifies them, man has chosen to focus on the hand and the weapon in it. So besides the "'thought of the eye' (...) we have now the 'thought of the hand.' From the former in the meantime has developed the thought that is theoretical, observant, contemplative – our 'reflection' and 'wisdom' – and now from the latter comes the practical, active thought, our 'cunning' and 'intelligence' proper." (Spengler 1976: 21-22). "The eye seeks out cause and effect, the hand works on the principle of means and end. The question of whether something is suitable or unsuitable – the criterion of the *doer* – has nothing to

do with that of true and false, the values of the *observer*. And an aim is a *fact*, while a connexion of cause and effect is a *truth*." Man's purposeful part does not deal with the questions of meaning or truth. Like nonsense, he is not interested in values and the soul. "What it must have been to man's soul, that first sight of ta fire evoked by himself!" (Spengler 1976: 22). We do not know if anyone else has considered this question.

Man is the only one, according to Spengler, who has managed to separate his tactics of living from the very act of living. Every living being has a tactics of living, he believes. But in animals and plants, it typically does not change. "The bee type, ever since it existed, has built its honeycombs exactly as it does now, and will continue to build them so till it is extinct," he writes. On the other hand, man is capable of more. "Technics in man's life (...) is learned and improved. Man has become the *creator* of his tactics of living" (1976: 17-18). So, in other words, we have chosen and built the life we live today by ourselves, there is no doubt about it. But the question that constantly hangs above us like the sword of Damocles is the potential of the technics we cultivate and upgrade for liberation/captivation. The possibility of man's liberation and the threat of his captivation by the technology he has developed are constantly intertwined. The mass media, which are among the most affected by human dealing with the technics of living and its progress, reflects this image of the sword above our heads. Free speech and hate speech, connecting with friends and enclosing ourselves in the circle of like-minded people, freedom to find jobs and abuse or exploitation of cheap labour, the right to self-expression and abuse of privacy – these are constantly in conflict. It is difficult to find the right measure...

Thoughts and emotions in the media intermediated world

"We're too busy being dazzled or disturbed by the programming to notice what's going on inside our heads." This is how Carr writes about the changes that occur in human behaviour, mind, and spirit while using online media. Literally taking McLuhan's thesis about the medium as a message, Carr argues that these media "supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought" (Carr 2010). He considers the Internet as a universal medium that has many advantages, but occupies us too much with the glare and mass of content it produces, so our brain gets used to interruptions, to non-linear thinking that constantly shifts from one subject of interest to another. It is, as Carr puts it, a "wayward brain." He compares it, a little nostalgically, with the way of thinking that he cultivated as a student while helping out in the faculty library. "Despite being surrounded by tens of thousands of books, I don't remember feeling the anxiety that's symptomatic of what we today call 'information overload.' There was something calming in the reticence of all those books, their willingness to wait years, decades even, for the right reader to come along and pull them from their appointed slots" (Carr 2010). On the other hand, the online media work differently on our minds. He considers them as "intellectual technologies," which "have the greatest and most lasting power over what and how we think. They are our most intimate tools, the ones we use for self-expression,

for shaping personal and public identity, and for cultivating relationships with others" (Carr 2010). According to him, they have imposed their own "intellectual ethics" on the world, same as all other intellectual technologies, such as clocks or maps. In other words, the very existence of these media, even if one excludes their content, has changed in a way our perception and understanding of the world around us. "The intellectual ethic," Carr believes, "is the message that a medium or other tool transmits into the minds and culture of its users" (Carr 2010). Stig Hjarvard calls this intellectual ethic "media logic," which implies "an institutional and technological modus operandi of the media" (Hjarvard 2008: 113). Thereby he primarily refers to the content of media exchange, explaining that "the media are able universally, across all fields, to form the categories that everyone uses to interpret the world. (…) the media have an essentially ideological power to describe society in a way that seems the only 'natural' way to comprehend it" (Couldry according to Hjarvard, 2008: 128). And the very "calling an algorithmically defined online configuration 'social' has been one of the smartest semantic moves in the history of media institutions," as Couldry and Van Dijck observe (2015: 3). Using the term "social" to describe "computational connectivity has been a peculiar example of reversification – a process in which words come to have a meaning that is opposite to, or at least very different from, their original sense" (2015, 4). The "social" in this sense actually refers to the techno-economic power that is achieved through connections, likes, and shares, which are, in fact, units of attention, a commodity that is best sold in the online media and which is referred to by the euphemism "social connections." All our data are quantified, and the said authors consider our personal data, such as health information, to be the most problematic. Numerous applications allow us to monitor our health, exchange data on the effectiveness of treatment of our chronic diseases, data on our training and calorie intake, data that are transferred into the virtual domain, quantified, and used for economic purposes.

In her famous book *Alone Together*, psychologist Sherry Turkle has discussed our reliance on technology in areas such as emotions, family ties, and immanently human or humane tasks such as caring for the elderly and children. She has traced the genesis of robots from the earliest and simplest toys such as Furbies and Tamagotchis to modern robots like the abovementioned Sophia. Referring to the fact that children and the elderly tend to develop certain emotions towards toy robots, she justifiably asks: "If a robot makes you love it, is it alive?" (Turkle 2010: 26). Turkle argues that "digital connections and the sociable robot may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship" and that, as "we distribute ourselves, we may abandon ourselves" (Turkle 2010: 1, 12). Her question is similar to ours: "Does virtual intimacy degrade our experience of the other kind and, indeed, of all encounters, of any kind?" (Turkle 2010: 12) So, the question remains: what is lost by accepting the benefits that each new medium and technology bring us?

For Turkle, technology is like a "phantom limb" that we feel regardless of whether it is there or not. So it happens that we imagine we have heard our phone vibrate, that some other sound seems like a notification from social networks, or that we panic when we realize that we have forgotten our smartphone at home. And do we even need to mention the places where we do not

have access to the Internet and the way such situations cause anxiety? Turkle also reflects on the ethical consequences of increasingly relying on technology in everyday activities. She recalls several psychological experiments in which people were called upon to injure robots in some way, after which their emotional reactions were analysed. In 2000, toymaker Hasbro introduced the robot doll "My Real Baby," which screamed if you touched it so as to cause pain, and calmed down if you stroked it and gave it a pacifier." Turkle and a group of researchers presented the doll to children in an institution. Some of them tortured it, while others protected it. Regardless of which of the children did what, Turkle has concluded that "sociable robots have taught us that we do not shirk from harming realistic simulations of life. This is, of course, how we now train people for war. First, we learn to kill the virtual. Then, desensitized, we are sent to kill the real" (Turkle 2011: 47).

The conclusion may seem exaggerated, but tackles problems such as virtual violence, insults and hate speech, deleting and "blocking" people, and ridiculing the sick and weak. The author has also observed the way in which not only children, but also the elderly to whom robots have been given for therapeutic purposes (such as pet robots for people in nursing homes), relate to these technological creatures. The connection is certainly established, but in Turkle's opinion, it does not say much about the robots themselves or what they can offer us. Instead, these robots, as well as social networks, tell us more about what we actually lack. "Now the 'work' envisaged for machines is the work of caring" (Turkle 2011: 108). Just like robots, other technological inventions and media are, unfortunately, "rarely challenged. All eyes focus on technical virtuosity and the possibilities for efficient implementation" (Turkle 2011: 104). In her research as well as summarizing the results of other scholars, Turkle has precisely traced the direction of changes that occur in our emotional being through such mediations, which are increasing day by day. "The emotional charge on cyberspace is high," she concludes, and "we are all cyborgs now" (Turkle 2011: 153, 152). "Networked, we are together, but so lessened are our expectations of each other that we can feel utterly alone. And there is the risk that we come to see others as objects to be accessed – and only for the parts we find useful, comforting, or amusing." In fact, "being alone can start to seem like a precondition for being together because it is easier to communicate if you can focus, without interruption, on your screen" (Turkle 2011: 154, 155).

Literature has long understood it, or: Will this kill that?

What philosophers and communication scientists are debating today found its place in literature a long time ago. And although there is less and less space in the media sphere for thinking or perhaps criticizing our modern toys, in literature there are still free oases of criticism. In this paper, we would like to mention several authors who have addressed the issue of some of our contemporary media. We believe that interaction between philosophy, communication sciences, media philosophy, and literature could create room for initiating discussions on the media-technological networking of all with everyone. Various authors from around the globe and from our country have critically written

on technology and its role in human life. From Hugo and Sábato to Rushdie and Mehmedinović, each of them has at least in some segment addressed the changes in man, his understanding of himself and the world he lives in within the context of modern media and media technologies. The medium of photography appears most often as a motif, but it is not uncommon for other media that McLuhan has written about to appear in such analyses.

> "The archdeacon gazed at the gigantic edifice for some time in silence, then extending his right hand, with a sigh, towards the printed book which lay open on the table, and his left towards Notre-Dame, and turning a sad glance from the book to the church, – 'Alas,' he said, 'this will kill that.'"

This is how Victor Hugo wrote in 1831 in his novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* about the new reality presented to the church officials with the appearance of the press. This sentence resonates across time and accompanies various technological revolutions and new inventions. There have always been concerns that the press will destroy the medium of architecture, writing the medium of memory, radio broadcasting the medium of writing and printing, television the medium of voice, and the Internet medium all of the above. But only a few have been brave enough to ask what will happen to the soul of all these media, or the soul of man himself, which is mediated and transmitted by these media to what is visible to the eye, and what McLuhan has identified in the media of clothing, games, dance, housing, means of transportation, tools, and weapons of all kinds.

As Hugo himself said, the archdeacon's sentence has a double meaning. It first expresses the priests' fear of the printing medium that came with Gutenberg's invention. Today, the fear that robots and Internet services will take over our business has crept into our bones. In fact, we have lived too long and too intensely in this world without even noticing that we ourselves are actually – half-robots. The fear that the archdeacon feels is interesting, but from our media point of view not so much as the other meaning of this thought that the writer reveals to us.

> "It was a presentiment that human thought, in changing its form, was about to change its mode of expression; that the dominant idea of each generation would no longer be written with the same matter, and in the same manner; that the book of stone, so solid and so durable, was about to make way for the book of paper, more solid and still more durable. In this connection the archdeacon's vague formula had a second sense. It meant, 'Printing will kill architecture.'" (Hugo 1831).

Here the writer, philosophically, as a true connoisseur of the nature of the media, notices that one medium gets replaced by another, but that this change does not mean only a superficial change in the form of exchange and relations, a change in the communication mode, but that it fundamentally changes the very content of what is being exchanged. Media technology itself is not neutral. Here, the words of Victor Hugo reassert a thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, who once wrote in a letter to his friend, "You are right. Our writing equipment takes part in the forming of our thoughts" (Carr 2010).

Hugo further comments on the medium of architecture, explaining that initially it was only an alphabet, that each stone was a hieroglyph, and that the completed buildings were sentences, thoughts, signs that needed to be understood in order to understand the man who created them. "At last they made books. (...) The generating idea, the word, was not only at the foundation of all these edifices, but also in the form," he writes. Even the places where the buildings were growing said something about the thought built into them: these places were the context, the meta-information about the key message transmitted by the constructed buildings. As time changed, "the face of architecture is changed also. Like civilization, it has turned a page, and the new spirit of the time finds her ready to write at its dictation" (Hugo 1831).

Before Gutenberg's invention, in Hugo's opinion, architecture was the main medium for writing down human thoughts. In the fifteenth century, thought found a new:

> "... mode of perpetuating itself, not only more durable and more resisting than architecture, but still more simple and easy. Architecture is dethroned. Gutenberg's letters of lead are about to supersede Orpheus's letters of stone. The book is about to kill the edifice. The invention of printing is the greatest event in history. It is the mother of revolution. It is the mode of expression of humanity which is totally renewed; it is human thought stripping off one form and donning another; it is the complete and definitive change of skin of that symbolical serpent which since the days of Adam has represented intelligence" (Hugo 1831).

That is how Hugo thought about the press. For him, architecture was obviously a rigid form of human thought, firmer, stronger, and more penetrating, but still limited by time and space. The printed word was perceived as freer. Metaphorically, he wrote that the human mind shed its skin like a snake, taking off the stone one and putting on one made of paper. Today, that skin is an invisible network of signals, fibre-optic cables, virtual worlds...

> "It is volatile, irresistible, indestructible. It is mingled with the air. In the days of architecture it made a mountain of itself, and took powerful possession of a century and a place. Now it converts itself into a flock of birds, scatters itself to the four winds, and occupies all points of air and space at once" (Hugo 1831).

As a new medium, the press grows and develops on the ruins of the old. Here the writer senses a metamorphosis – a new medium will emerge from the old. "Meanwhile what becomes of printing? All the life which is leaving architecture comes to it. In proportion as architecture ebbs, printing swells and grows. That capital of forces which human thought had been expending in edifices, it henceforth expends in books." The writer celebrates the victory of the press, but he also pays homage to architecture, concluding that "the human race has two books, two registers, two testaments: masonry and printing; the Bible of stone and the Bible of paper. (...) This book, written by architecture, must be admired and perused incessantly; but the grandeur of the edifice which printing erects in its turn must not be denied" (Hugo 1831). Today we might have the third great book, a virtual book written by millions of people around the world, all those network users. At

times, it even seems that the same thoughts are literally repeated about each new medium. Thus, Hugo has the following to say about the press:

> "The press, that giant machine, which incessantly pumps all the intellectual sap of society, belches forth without pause fresh materials for its work. The whole human race is on the scaffoldings. Each mind is a mason. The humblest fills his hole, or places his stone. (…) Assuredly, it is a construction which increases and piles up in endless spirals; there also are confusion of tongues, incessant activity, indefatigable labor, eager competition of all humanity, refuge promised to intelligence, a new Flood against an overflow of barbarians. It is the second tower of Babel of the human race" (Hugo 1831).

In his collection of essays titled *The Resistance* (2000), Ernesto Sábato has critically addressed the medium of television. This medium has gradually expelled honest and genuine conversation from households, Sábato believes, and "table talk, including the discussions or angers, already seem replaced by the hypnotic vision" (Sábato 2013). In the first essay of this book, Sábato writes: "Television tantalizes us, we remain almost captivated by it. This effect between magical and malevolent is due, I think, to the excess of its light that overcomes us with its intensity. I cannot but remember that same effect it produces on insects, and even on the large animals. And then, it is not only difficult to leave it, but we also lose the everyday capacity to look and see." And indeed, this is how people spend their days away from their own lives. They look at smartphones, computers, television, all those mighty screens that surround us, living entirely beside themselves and the moment. Sherry Turkle has explained this in a similar way, saying that "if you're spending three, four, or five hours a day in an online game or virtual world (a time commitment that is not unusual), there's got to be someplace you're not. And that someplace you're not is often with your family and friends – sitting around, playing Scrabble face-to-face, taking a walk, watching a movie together in the old-fashioned way" (Turkle 2011: 12). Sábato goes on:

> "It is urgent to reconnect with the common spaces that prevent us from being a massified multitude isolatedly watching television. What is paradoxical is that through that screen we seem to be connected with the entire world, when in truth it removes the possibility of humanly cohabiting, and what is equally serious, predisposes us to apathy" (Sábato 2013).

He also believes that:

> "One becomes lethargic in front of the screen, and while finding nothing of what one seeks, they stay there anyway, incapable of rising and doing something good. It takes away the desire to work on some artisanry, read a book, fix something in the house while listening to music or drinking maté. Or going to the bar with some friend, or conversing with your own. It is a tedium, a boredom to which we accustom ourselves 'for lack of something better.' Being monotonously seated before the television anesthesizes the senses, makes the mind slow-witted, harms the soul" (Sábato 2013).

Sábato argues that "man is accustomed to passively accepting a constant sensory intrusion. And this passive attitude ends being a mental servitude, a true enslavement" (Sábato 2013), which Turkle simply calls "disorientation" (Turkle 2011).

Sábato has abandoned science to devote himself entirely to literature, and he dares to ask the question about the destiny of the soul. Criticizing modern medicine for mistakenly viewing the human body as separate from his soul, he writes in another essay:

> "Man is not a simple physical object, deprived of a soul, nor even a simple animal: they are an animal that not only has a soul but also a spirit, and the first of the animals to have modified its own environment as a work of culture. As such, he is an equilibrium – unstable – between his own energy and his physical and cultural medium. (...) It is not surprising that modern sicknesses like cancer be essentially due to the imbalance which technology and modern society have produced between man and his environment. Is cancer not perhaps a certain type of unmeasured and vertiginous growth?" (Sábato 2013)

He also recalls the rebellion of textile workers, which is often referred to as the "Luddite movement" in debates about the consequences of global networking:

> "We cannot forget that before sowing, fishing, the gathering of the fruits, the elaboration of artisanry, like work as a blacksmith or in a dressmaking shop, or in country establishments, persons gathered and were incorporated in the totality of their personalities. It was the intuition of the beginning of this rupture which brought the 18th-century workers to rebel against the machines, to wish to set them on fire. Today men tend to massively cohere in order to comply with the growing and absolute functionality the system requires hour by hour. But between the life of the great cities, which passes over like a tornado over the desert sands, and the custom of watching television, where one accepts whatever happens and does not feel responsible, liberty is in danger" (Sábato 2013).

We can achieve liberty without starting the machines. Only we should not be the machines ourselves. We should not serve them instead of them serving us.

In this essay, Sábato again writes about information, arguing that "the human being spins in the wind without finding where to base themself, whether in the sky or in the earth, while she is choking on an avalanche of information that cannot be controlled and from which she receives no nourishment whatsoever." Nicholas Carr has described the same phenomenon of changes that the human mind experiences in the following way:

> "It's that the Net delivers precisely the kind of sensory and cognitive stimuli – repetitive, intensive, interactive, addictive – that have been shown to result in strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions. With the exception of alphabets and number systems, the Net may well be the single most powerful mind-altering technology that has ever come into general use" (Carr 2010).

Sábato, on the other hand, repeats and answers in the affirmative Rilke's question "Is it possible that despite inventions and progress, despite culture, religion and knowledge of the universe, one has remained on the surface of life?" He adds the following question: "What has man put in place of God? They have not been liberated from cults and altars. The altar remains, yet now it is not the place for sacrifice and abnegation, but instead that of well-being, the cult to oneself, of the reverence for the great gods of the screen." The metaphor "gods of the screen" fits incredibly well into today's networked world. Today it is information, or rather pseudo-information as modern revelation, and the screen, the big screen as the technical god of a man who has lost the god in himself.

The essay "Resistance" begins with the statement that "the vertigo is the worst." Fear is characteristic of it, "man acquiring the behavior of an automaton, being no longer responsible, no longer free, not recognizing others." That mass vertigo and mass production dehumanize man. "Man cannot sustain humanity at this velocity, will be annihilated if he lives as a robot" (Sábato 2013).

> "Now nothing moves at man's pace, for who among us walks slowly? Yet the vertigo is not only outside, we have assimilated it in a mind that never stops emitting images, as if it could 'zap', and perhaps the acceleration will have reached the heart that already throbs urgently for everything to happen fast and not remain" (Sábato 2013).

> "Defend, as occupied peoples have done heroically, the tradition that tells of what is sacred in man. Not to let the grace be wasted of the small moments of liberty that we can enjoy: a table shared with people we like, some creatures to whom we give shelter, a stroll among the trees, the gratitude of a hug. A fearless act like jumping from a flaming house. Those are not rational deeds, but it is not important for them to be so, being saved by the results. The world is powerless against a man who sings while in misery" (Sábato 2013).

Salman Rushdie, unlike Sábato and Hugo, focuses his attention on the medium of photography, which he understands with supreme precision and depth.

> "But I remember only silence, the silence of great horror. The silence, to be more exact, of photography, because that was my profession, so naturally it was what I turned to at the moment the earthquake began. All my thoughts were of the little squares of film passing through my old cameras, Voigtländer Leica Pentax, of the forms and colours being registered therein by the accidents of movement and event, and of course by the skill or lack of it with which I managed to point the lens in the right or wrong direction at the wrong or right time" (Rushdie 2020).

This is how the novel's main character experienced a natural disaster: through photography, that is, through a medium rather than through his own sense of sight. In Rushdie's novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, he often reflects on the medium of photography, in an inner monologue and transmitting the writer's own ideas. For Rushdie, a photograph is a "moral decision" as it steals moments. "In my stolen photographs – for the photographer must be a thief, he must steal instants

of other people's time to make his own tiny eternities – it was this intimacy I sought, the closeness of the living and the dead" (Rushdie 2020). In addition to photography, he also reflects on other media, and similarly to Sábato, he wonders about the sense of our accelerated life. Do we really need that much speed and to constantly focus on the new(s)? This is what the main character says about it:

> "I've been an event junkie, me. Action has been my stimulant. I always liked to stick my face right up against the hot sweaty surface of what was being done, with my eyes open, drinking, and the rest of my senses switched off. I never cared if it stank, or if its slimy touch made you want to throw up, or what it might do to your taste buds if you licked it, or even how loud it screamed. Just the way it looked. That's where for a long time I went for feeling, and truth. What Actually Happens: nothing to beat it, when you're pressed up against it, as long as you don't get your face torn off. No rush like it on earth" (Rushdie 2020).

He seems to se through our addiction to the news, as if he interacted with Harris from the beginning of our story, as if he understood the slot mechanism of the modern media world. In his descriptions of the city of Bombay, Rushdie also reaches McLuhan's heights of interpreting living space as an extension of our body. Through the city, he also interprets its inhabitants, their habits, preferences, lack or excess of taste, lack or excess of emotionality, openness or closedness. "Bombay belonged too completely to my parents, V.V. and Ameer. It was an extension of their bodies, and, after their deaths, of their souls" (Rushdie 2020). At one point in the novel, he also discusses the medium of television. In it, mediation has already reached the level where that which has been transferred to the virtual sphere, onto the television screen, completely loses its originality.

> "In the days before globalized mass communication (...) an event could occur, pass its peak and fade away before most people on earth were even aware of it. Now, however, the initial purity of what happens is almost instantly replaced by its televisualization. Once it's been on tv, people are no longer acting, but *performing*. Not simply grieving, but *performing grief*. Not creating a phenomenon out of their raw unmediated desires, but rushing to be part of a phenomenon they have seen on TV. This loop is now so tight that it's almost impossible to separate the sound from the echo, the event from the media response to it. From what Rémy insists on calling the *immediatization of history*" (Rushdie, 2020).

Perhaps in the 1990s, when he wrote this novel published in 1999, Rushdie already foresaw the scale of immediatization that the society would reach in the era of online media. Since social networks had not yet appeared by that time, perhaps the writer considered the television, still the most dominant medium of that period, as the most powerful mediator stealing all originality from the events. "The avatar is our voodoo doll," says Harris. Rushdie analyses the notion of the avatar from another perspective, the religious one. In Sanskrit, he says, "avatar" means "descent". "In Hinduism, it is the incarnation of a deity on earth in a human or animal form, especially any of the ten incarnations of Vishnu" (2019: 323). We find this explanation in Rushdie's novel *Midnight's*

Children, published in 1981. This avatar metaphor echoes the aforementioned metaphor of the screen as a deity. Contemplating all these literary interpretations of screens, media, and avatars, free from discipline and censorship, rich in free associations and the most profound subconscious fantasies, we cannot help but think and wonder: Did man see in technology his primordial dream of approaching divinity? Did he see in technology the means by which he would finally banish the divine and ascend the throne of the supreme ruler? What if this dream turns out to be a nightmare...

In his seminal work *Understanding Media*, McLuhan comments on the car being a medium, not just a means of transportation or a tool. He explains that the car has separated man from nature, created the asphalt, and made "taking a spin in the country" an activity that is planned rather than taking place spontaneously and naturally. Perhaps even more interesting is his understanding of air travel, which he believes has fundamentally changed the experience of travelling, as it now actually begins only when a person gets off an airplane. The Bosnian-Herzegovinian writer Semezdin Mehmedinović has come to the same conclusion using the methods of literature. "We are driving. The car is an instrument of time. An airplane cannot be that. In the car, on the road, you are reduced to your bare existence and the body is focused on the present," Mehmedinović writes. "An airplane is something else, flying from one place to another, it is a violent compression of time that completely abolishes our real experience of space" (2021: 64). An identical opinion, one might say, although the two authors have lived in different time periods and dealt with different areas in which they sought to interpret the world and know the truth. Mehmedinović has also addressed the medium of photography on several occasions. And while Rushdie believes that it "steals" moments, halts people in them and captures them together with their experiences, Mehmedinović thinks that photography has the power to "revive" (2021: 76). However, he also has a strong awareness of the mediation that this medium performs. And he understands the virtuality of the moments recorded by the photographic medium.

"Today, I came across several scenes of a young Colombian director named Ciro Guerra on the Internet," he writes and continues:

> "In one scene, a Western scientist shows a photograph of an almost completely extinct tribe to a shaman; this picturesque resident of the Amazons apparently sees a photograph for the first time in his life, and then looks with interest at himself in that picture, sees his necklace there, then stares at the same object on his chest and compares. When the scientist tries to take the photo back from his hands, he is surprised and says: 'What are you doing?' 'I'll keep it, it's mine.' 'But this is me,' says the confused shaman. And then the scientist corrects him: 'This is not you. It is a picture of you.'" (2021: 148).

We could perhaps continue this passage. This is not happiness, it is a picture of a smile, this is not love, it is a picture of people who look like they are in love, this is not success, it is a picture of what we would like to consider as success, this is not your essence, it is a form...

Concluding remarks and questions

In this paper, we have raised several questions regarding the media intermediation of human emotions on the Internet. Ubiquitous, social networks and intermediaries of the third degree are increasingly mediating man's emotions, imposing themselves on the path between man and his own self. Thinking about oneself, contemplation, and creation are separated from the human spirit and end up with technical intermediaries that ask them, even before they ask themselves the same question: "What's on your mind?" We find the world outside the virtual to be less and less comprehensible, and we often talk about some new, virtual reality, unaware that it is already omnipresent and that we have migrated into it. The world of representations offered by the virtual has existed for a long time as a past that never passes, and as a past that coincides with the present. It is at the same time the object of our subconscious aspirations, a virtual realization of our Id and Superego in which the Ego finds it ever harder to manage and find its peace. The virtual self is fluid and fragmented, elusive and attractive, yet essentially lacking and unfulfilled.

In this paper, we have referred to the opinions of theorists who are more inclined to a pessimistic attitude when it comes to the way in which the online media have spread and crippled the world of our emotional experiences. We have communicated with the opinions of Carr, Turkle, Vaidhyanathan, Keen, Baran and Davis, McLuhan, and Spengler. From different perspectives, these authors have approached the issue of virtuality in a similar way, as a space in which nonsense replaces sense, which is, same as the truth in the online media, increasingly difficult to find. Isolated in his filter cocoon, in the circle of like-minded people, man has closed the paths of self-reflection and exposed himself to endless repetition of the same, multiplied, not thinking too often about the senselessness of the content he is viewing. In his technical extensions, man sees the expression of his superiority over other living beings, without noticing that the creature has apparently taken on the roles of the creator in the process.

Enthusiastic about his technical toys, man pays little attention to the way in which these "intellectual technologies" alter his way of thinking, his attitude towards the world, and ultimately his attitude towards himself. Thus, Nicholas Carr refers to the Internet as a universal medium that has many advantages, but occupies us too much with the glare and massiveness of the content it produces. Our brains get used to interruptions in the process, to non-linear thinking that constantly shifts from one subject to another. It is, as Carr puts it, a "wayward brain." For Sherry Turkle, technology is like a "phantom limb" that we feel regardless of whether it is there or not. All these authors call for thinking about and understanding these media.

In the second part of the paper, we have offered examples of critique and reflection in the field of literature. Various authors have, in their literary works, consciously or not, identified the impact of modern technology on our soul and our emotional world essentially and better than many of its apologists. Commenting on the appearance of printed books, Hugo wrote the prophetic "This will kill that," believing that the printed medium would gradually abolish architecture as art. He observed

how one medium was being replaced by another, which was not merely a superficial change in the form of exchange and relations, a change in the way of communication, but essentially changed the content of what was being exchanged. Ernesto Sábato has critically analysed the television medium, accusing it of separating us from each other, of drugging us and making us lethargic. According to him, a long stay in front of the television screen "anesthesizes the senses, makes the mind slow-witted, harms the soul" (Sábato 2013). He criticizes our slavish adoration of the "gods of the screen" and protests against the fragmentation of moments and experiences, of our inner worlds, caused by our constant staring at the television screen. Salman Rushdie has criticized the medium of photography as stealing moments from the living world. He has even identified the housing medium as an extension of our skins, discussing the mediatization and networking of the world in his novels. Finally, Semezdin Mehmedinović, a writer from Bosnia and Herzegovina, has warned, similarly to McLuhan, that the airplane as a means of transportation condenses time and space, but he sees photography as a way of "reviving" the moment. All these literary associations are highly interesting, as they present technology as acquiring abilities that are usually reserved for divinities – stealing moments, killing and reviving, condensing and creating…

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Digitalna duša: medijsko posredovanje emocija u mrežnom dobu

Sažetak

Mrežno doba medijskog posredovanja postepeno i suptilno mijenja način na koji doživljavamo sebe i svijet u kojem živimo. Emitiranje vlastitih života na mrežama uključuje i svakodnevno eksterioriziranje emocija na tehničke posrednike trećeg stepena kako ih naziva Jensen (prema Bogdanić 2013). Ispoljavanje emocionalnih doživljaja čitamo svakodnevno na društvenim mrežama, ali one postaju i sastavni dio korisničkih sadržaja ispod redovnih medijskih tekstova na web portalima. Ove, takozvane, intelektualne tehnologije, preuzimaju esencijalne ljudske osobine poput racionalnosti, memorije, računanja, prevođenja, ali i osobine poput emocionalnosti i komunikativnosti (Carr 2014, Turkle 2010).

Gdje žive emocije kada ih prenesemo u virtuelno i kako postaju sastavni dio medijskih sadržaj? Gdje živi čovjekova duša prenesena u njegov virtuelni self? – pitanja su na koja ćemo tražiti odgovore u prvom dijelu ovoga rada.

Analizirat ćemo virtuelni prostor, njegove mogućnosti i ograničenja. Diskutirat ćemo o potencijalu mrežnih medija za posredovanje emocionalnih doživljaja. Tragat ćemo i za razumijevanjem tehnologije i uređaja kao alternativne ljudskosti, onda kada zakaže ili ne želi djelovati čovjek sam. Pokušat ćemo naći odgovore na pitanja o posljedicama takvog posredovanja, referirajući se na istrživanja drugih autora poput Sive Vaidhyanathana, Shery Turkle, Nicholasa Carra i drugih.

Posljednji dio rada analizirat će književne analize medijskog posredovanja koje se sporadično pojavljuju u djelima svjetskih pisaca (Ruždi, Igo, Mehmedinović, Sabato, Spengler...) i interakciju njihovog razumijevanja medija s McLuhanovim viđenjem medijskog posredovanja i produžavanja/sakaćenja čula.

Ključne riječi: *emocija, digitalna duša, mediji, medijsko posredovanje, mrežno doba, virtuelni prostor.*