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Hybrid News for Hybrid Times

Abstract

Hybrid genres include infotainment, infomercial, arguetainment, communication stampede, spin, and media spectacle. In altered social circumstances, the usual elements of existence as a society, citizen, and public are transformed into the market, consumerist and commercial. Conventional information education becomes ad hoc commercial education. Instead of genuine media content that seeks a media audience that resonates with it, there is advertising (entertainment) through private media intended for consumers. In a construed reality, media corporation owners are not interested in the citizen, but in profit. The consequences include social spectacularization, the illusion of de-ideologization, celebrity culture, and the fact that we are generally becoming shallow. The pandemic has further intensified these trends, which in the horizons of media philosophy may be primarily considered as a Neronian intensification of fear on a global scale.

Key words: *genre, ethics of responsibility, truth, interpretation, fear.*

It was already while writing my master's thesis that I started questioning the possibility of establishing a journalistic episteme as a valid episteme about the world and man. I also wondered whether the mass media could help the emancipation of the world and *contribute to the greatest aggregate happiness* as John Stuart Mill formulated it. Or whether they could contribute to the ethics of responsibility, which Hans Jonas has referred to as responsibility towards posterity and the future... The media and happiness, the media that make people happy... That kind of naivety can perhaps be forgiven when one is writing one's master's thesis and has at least twenty years less life and experience behind one than I have now.

But, after the Scylla and Charybdis that we go through in our doctorates, written books, essays, and analyses, after hundreds and hundreds of books read, and thousands and thousands of kilometres of various roads and travels, such naivety in a researcher can hardly be forgiven. Because, when asked whether the mass media still bring happiness to most people, one should rather answer sceptically that the modern mass media might actually do the opposite, not bringing happiness or even pleasure,²⁵⁵ and that they do not care responsibly about the posterity... While criticizing the mass media back then, I was referring to Gadamer's position as he said: "We must learn to respect the other and the different. We must learn to lose in the game that starts in the early childhood, when we are two years old or maybe even younger... (Gadamer, 1999: 20) And this means that our responsibility in thought and action must be a priority, even if such principles of thought and action might lead us to "lose in the game of life," and we must incorporate them differently into our concepts or the rules of living, even if we do not like them. Some of them have been completely erased from our modern human civilization and culture, such as the rule that wherever there is light, there is also a shadow.²⁵⁶ As both physics and chemistry have proven that energy is not destroyed, but only changes its form, it is useful to recall Goethe's view that all laws of life and the world seek to come closer to a moral world order, as that will make it easier to achieve harmony as a basis of true peace. "Just as foul-smelling fertilizer is needed to grow a fragrant rose, or as a dazzling lotus grows from the Indian marshland" (Dahlke, 81). It could be also said that everything has its truth, and that problems are solved by overcoming them... It is difficult in a mediatized society, in mediated interpersonal relations, to understand the simple rule of the "world of life": that what really bothers us must have something to do with our own shadow, our dark side that is like Nero's dark side, otherwise it would not affect us that much...

255 Sead Alić has suggested an intriguing distinction between the notions of happiness and pleasure in his book *Bog u nacionalnom dresu* [God in the national jersey] (Varaždin and Koprivnica: Sveučilište Sjever, 2021).

256 In his seminal book on the *Laws of Destiny*, Ruediger Dahlke has stated that "the reality operates and does not care for the laws created by people," and this returns as a boomerang to those who are not able to include in the set of their thoughts and actions those laws that they do not like, *that is the shadow*, and consequently the so-called social Darwinism as the "survival of the fittest," which as an unworthy strategy contradicts all religions and development opportunities, has created the mental foundation of brutal capitalism from which we all suffer..." See Ruediger Dahlke, *Zakoni sudbine* (Belgrade: Izdavač Laguna, 2015), 25-40.

In polyvalent times such as ours, ethics is essential. Necessary and desirable. Like air and water, like earth and immunity. In our time, the media are increasingly becoming centres of the “ideology of demagoguery,” accepting *modern premeditation as a principle*. In addition to deontological professional imperatives, we also need the public role of intellectuals and journalists. That is, journalists as intellectuals who will, as Edward Said has argued, not become centres of dominant discourse, appointed to create silent consents and acceptance, to stifle, make senseless, and break down resistance or challenge whenever false universal values reach them (Said, 2011: 18).

As far as technology is concerned, both total manipulation and total communication are possible on earth. Hermeneutically, both truth and lies become social constructs, a matter of consensus or persuasiveness of interpretation, therefore again a hermeneutical problem. From Nietzsche to the present day, *the problem of truth has been the problem of interpretation* and in the mass media it is all about information: whether as a professional, encoded message it brings the truth or lies in its cognitive-informative core, i.e. whether these cognitive-informative elements successfully impose their interpretation, which has always been and remains an expression of power. In order to rule easier and more economically, the social constellation of truth must be transformed into a social constellation of lies. (Fejzić, 2004: 65)

Spreading fear – ruling the world

In his essay on the “Balance between Aesthetic and Ethical,” speaking of Nero after he burned half of Rome, Kierkegaard wrote: “His glance is so flashing that it alarms, for behind the eyes the soul lies like a gloomy darkness. This is called the imperial look and the whole world quakes before it, and yet his innermost being is anxiety... Only when the world quakes before him does he calm down, for then there is no one who dares to seize him. That is the reason for the anxiety about people that Nero has in common with every such personality. He is as if possessed, inwardly unfree... He, the emperor of Rome, can be afraid of the look of the lowliest slave. He catches such a look; his eyes dispatch the person who dares to look at him that way... He burns up half of Rome, but his agony is the same. After a while, such things do not give him pleasure any more. There is a still greater pleasure; he will make people anxious. He is a riddle to himself, and anxiety is his nature; now he will be a riddle to everybody and rejoice over their anxiety... He does not want to impress; he wants to cause anxiety.” (Kierkegaard, 1987: 186-187)

Today, in a more mature phase of thinking, I am aware of how important it is to spread fear – it means ruling the world. With the health-related news from corporate scientists and the frightening photographs, videos, statements, and dark forebodings, the Neronian editors, managers, producers, and journalists do not want to impress, but rather, as Kierkegaard observed, spread and instil fear and cause panic. Be it fear of infection, viruses, mutations, Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Mu, Omicron, fear of breathing, of mechanical respiration, oxygen from machines, fear of dirt, fear of isolated and even more of non-isolated viruses, fear of another person, fear of closeness, contact,

touch, of burning half of Rome or half of the Planet, it doesn't matter, as the fear of the look is perhaps the most horrible. As they approach Nero's throne and see him smile, ordinary women and men fall dead from fear, and smiling becomes their death sentence. This finally makes Nero happy. And fear makes us obedient and subject to some of our *modern Neros*.²⁵⁷ They smile when the rest of the herd of civilization is terrified... The Emperor of Rome holds in his hand the lives of people terrified to death. Anyone who can help with that is welcome. Especially messengers, especially journalists!

One day, when everything is over, it will be said that we had overdone it a little... and more medical treatments will be introduced.

Why modern Neros are always possible, Kierkegaard wonders, and states that there will always be such chances in time. For, according to him, Nero has melancholy as his weakness. For us today, melancholy is a mild trait, not at all dangerous, but Kierkegaard reminds us that it was a mortal sin according to the early church teaching. *Melancholy is a trait of a man who has himself to blame for it*. For example, an old lustful man longs to satisfy his passions. But when he grows old and his soul matures while his powers wane, his spirit cannot rise and he has no strength, so he reaches for pleasures. Constant pleasures. The spirit tries to break out and rise, but it has no strength and is therefore disillusioned. It is deceived and overwhelmed by *rage*, which, like Nero's, grows into that frightening instinct like a gloomy darkness. Thus, melancholy is a condition that cannot be explained. If one asks a melancholic man what is the matter with him and why he is melancholic, he will say: I don't know, I can't explain. And there is the infinity of melancholy. Because, as soon as it is disclosed, it is also removed. It disappears. That is why melancholy is a sin "instar omnium." (Kierkegaard, 1987: 189) And that is why all immediacy is happiness. *All directness is happiness*. Understanding the world of immediacy is happiness. An immediator cannot understand unhappiness, he can only sense it. If Kierkegaard could have glimpse of our world, if he only knew how much indirectness and mediation is present in this constant online world, in these uninterrupted virtualities and fierce technosphere, how much space, free space for melancholy there is... He would realize exactly how accurately he had located the great sorrow of the soul of the modern world.

Sophocles would say that nothing great enters a man's life without being damned. Yet we seldom apply and try out this thought, because fear blocks us. People who live well have one small advantage – they have their own lifestyle. *And they do not give away their happiness*. Which we naively think of while working on our master's and graduate theses. Therefore, they need good media, those media that will bring a bit of pleasure to every person, every group, and the whole world, every day. Because happiness or pleasure are the things or factors that protect immunity. Turn to yourself,

257 During this conference and the preparation of the Proceedings for the magazine *In Medias Res*, Netflix aired the Korean series *Squid Games*, that used the example of a hazard game of life and death, mostly among poor adults, to show the worthlessness of human life, the shamelessness of playing the game to the point of murder, and the cynical creators of that inflammable environment in which several hundred people commit suicide to earn large sums of money promised to them. In the background, the creators of the game are smiling and enjoying themselves...

to your inner self, with your own serotonin and dopamine that arise within us and not in the mass media. Not on the global media screen. Happiness is in strengthening our humility against the media proclamation of glamor and vanity. And, of course, of the obligatory progress. If we fast for a day, we will realize how little we need to live, and not as much as the mass media suggest, since the very circumstances of life give us support. Escaping fear and renunciation are hard for us, although they are what makes us happy.

It is wonderful to realize how many “things” we do not really need. And yet we are constantly purchasing and piling them up. Pure thoughts, pure emotions, pure happiness. At the time of the great syphilis epidemic, Nietzsche and Semerlein were the most severely infected among those 90% of them. And they talked about it. The order of nature does not stop, never, not even for a second, in the Heraclitan atmosphere of *Panta rei* – it brings us back to that flow of happiness as a beautiful flow, a natural flow. “All the ingenuity of the world must devise new pleasures for him, because only in the moment of pleasure does he find rest.” (Kierkegaard, 1987: 186).

The crowd is untruth, as Kierkegaard would say

There is an understanding that the truth is where the crowd is. But also that wherever there is untruth, there is a crowd... “Because the crowd is untruth.” (Kierkegaard, 1990: 56) For the crowd weakens the responsibility of the individual and in the crowd truth becomes insignificant for the individual. Because the crowd is abstract and has no hands. “But each individual has ordinarily two hands, and so when an individual lays his two hands upon Caius Marius they are the two hands of the individual, certainly not those of his neighbour, and still less those of the crowd which has no hands.” (Kierkegaard, 1990: 57). That, in turn, means that every individual fleeing for refuge into the crowd contributes his share of cowardice to the already existing cowardice of the crowd... in the mass media audience as a kind of crowd, the infodemia we are constantly mentioning and diagnosing similarly takes away the active hands from an individual, who manages things easier within the crowds, while alone he could hardly become or remain self-consistent. And think. And learn. And thus be moral, ethical.

Learning makes us happy. Searching, reading, analysing, synthesizing, connecting, our growth in general. One of the good lessons is learning not to be afraid. Not to fear a priori or a posteriori. But to live. Be happy. Every prick of a needle can weaken our immunity, even school medicine admits that and not just homeopathic and alternative. So the question remains – whom do the media serve more, the sick or the pharmaceutical companies? COVID-19 has again revealed our human helplessness. In a global crowd. And so it has always been. With the syphilis and the plague... If the mass media do not understand this, they might soon lose their stage of action, discrediting and disabling themselves. Hybrid knowledge, as well as hybrid seeds, can last a year or two. Afterwards, one must buy new seeds, but *from the same dealer*. Namely, seeds cannot be permanently extracted from hybrid seeds as has been the case with every natural seed for thousands of years. The mass

media lacks this natural seed, resistant to all changes, resistant to quarrels, manipulations, lies... Of the 100,000 drugs in pharmacy today, only about 2,000 are really necessary. That is how many East Germany had while it existed. The mass media do not deal daily or decently in their feuilletons, educational shows, articles, reports, or travelogues with the risk groups – the obese, diabetics, those with high blood pressure, smokers, alcoholics, or drug addicts – as unhealthy lifestyles. And that needs to be repeated every day. Through very different and beautiful, long forgotten journalistic forms or genres such as reports, travelogues, travel reports, group interviews, field reports, live reports, feuilletons, homages... Instead, the modern mass media often prevent or hinder healing by omitting such content and through the so-called “postings” as a new term and a hybrid genre borrowed from social networks, which no longer needs to correspond to any recognized and real journalistic genre as an actual skill in journalism, which European history of journalism knows in many journalistic types and subtypes.

The religious as a phenomenon of spectacle or heart

Here we will focus on Kierkegaard’s fascinating discussion of the religious in us, of the phenomenon of fear and when that fear can be overcome. I am referring to his famous discussion about Ibrahim and Ishak, Abraham and Isaac, a father and a son to be sacrificed by his father – a father who must kill his son. Probably the most terrible existing sacrifice for a human being. Kierkegaard says that Ibrahim or Abraham is greater than all in his helplessness, as this is where love of God means hatred of oneself. He has no lamentations. For he who believes in the impossible achieves it... Ibrahim (Abraham) and Sarah desire a child although they are old, and they get it. Miraculously. Today it is the greatest miracle of existence – to have an idea of God at all times. God sees the hidden and hears one’s tears. He forgets nothing. Faith is the age of truth. Because God is love... “To have loved gives a person’s being a harmony that is never entirely lost” (Kierkegaard, 1987: 176).

In 1981, Dean Koontz (Leigh Nicholas) published his novel *The Eyes of Darkness* about a disastrous epidemic caused by a lung virus, where school medicine is powerless and the virus is called “Wuhan-400”. Is it a coincidence? Or is there an intention? Premeditation? A part of the potential answer to why the “conspiracy theories” emerge is somewhere here, because they doubt the official truth, the media truth, and because people simply feel that they have been lied to for a long time...²⁵⁸

The religion of our time is science, and growth at all costs, but we do not need growth in this destructive way. Making peace between man and his immunity is very necessary. Less is more. We all got what we deserved. Both sides need to be involved, both the fear spreaders and the fear acceptors. The law of resonance as a general law around us. The mass media cannot frighten those

258 Tamiflu used to be recommended for swine flu, and pharmacists turned billions. Today it is known that the drug is harmful and did not really help. Only the Polish government prevented vaccination. The media never reported about it. Why? Even the US FDA removed it from the list of drugs and it was still on the market. In 2018, the common flu took 25,000 lives in Germany. The media did not report about that either... Again the question is whether they worked for the sick or for pharmaceutical corporations. Everything makes sense. Including the “COVID-19”.

who are not afraid. Young people from the group “Fridays for Future” and “Extinction Rebellion” are already greeting each other by saying “degrow”... We could have learned that from them as well. Because learning makes us happy. So better ever than never.

Kierkegaard teaches us that in the age of technosphere and mediation, immediacy is happiness, because there is no contradiction in immediacy. An immediator is essentially happy. Understanding the world of immediacy is happiness. An immediator cannot understand unhappiness, he can only sense it. (Kierkegaard, 1990: 24). The aesthetical has the motto *In vino veritas*. He who lives aesthetically cannot think more deeply about himself, as every moment of his life is crumbled into details. It is ethical when you are in yourself and existing, you have your peace, but if you have no duty outside of yourself... A person living religiously has chosen himself in his eternal importance. Only in despair does a person calm down. Finding the absolute is not calm, but despair... whoever believes is eternally young, remains in eternal youth. That is the value of the story of Ibrahim, Abraham, Sarah... because only what is hard delights noble persons. (Kierkegaard, 1990: 53) God is love. The idea of God transforms a man into another man. Life is a repetition, and its struggle is beautiful. And that is why life is beautiful. (Kierkegaard; 1990: 24)

The modern man lives in such a way that he knows no greater measure of life than pragmatic reason, and therefore his whole life is relativity. He works exclusively for relative purposes. With the absolute, it is something else. It means that giving your life for sacrifice is *reasonable insanity*. And where it seems to us that something has no purpose, that is where the absolute is hiding. And that is a torment for the reason. For God does not think. He creates. God does not exist, he is eternal. Man, on the other hand, thinks and exists, and existence creates a gap between thinking and being (Kierkegaard; 1990: 52). Only what is hard delights noble natures. No generation has learned from another how to love. No generation starts from another point but from the beginning. “No generation has a bigger task than the previous one.” (Kierkegaard, 1990: 53). Our time is reasonable and rational, and it persists in indifference. A passionate time will destroy and overturn everything. A passionless time is cunning – it leaves everything as it was, but cunningly and insidiously nullifies its meaning. A reasonable time suffocates and prevents – *it levels everything*. Levelling is a quiet, abstract mathematical occupation that does not attract any attention. “If levelling is to happen, then a phantom needs to be created first: his spirit is a huge abstraction, a *fata morgana*. This phantom is the public. It is only in a dispassionate, but reflective time that this phantom can develop through the press, when the latter itself becomes an abstraction... in such times, the press will take on the character of opinion... the public is a real levelling expert. Because if the levelling is approximate, it is done by someone or something, but the public is a huge nothing. The audience is everything and nothing. It is the most dangerous and most insignificant force... the public is less than a single insignificant real person. (Kierkegaard, 1990: 55) Hybrid genres, same as hybrid seeds, bring hybrid times and hybrid experiences. No content can be lasting, true, good, and ethical if it has no locus in profit. If someone resists it, they do it to their private, personal, or individual hazardous experience and consequences.

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Hibridne vijesti za hibridno vrijeme

Sažetak

U hibridne žanrove spadaju infoteitment, infomercial, arguteitment, komunikacijski stampedo, spin i medijski spektakl. U promijenjenim društvenim okolnostima uobičajeni elementi postojanja kao društvo, građanin i javno se preobražava u tržište, potrošača i komercijalno. Uobičajeno informativno obrazovanje se pretvara u ad hoc komercijalno obrazovanje. Umjesto istinskog medijskog sadržaja koji traži medijsku publiku koja rezonira pojavljuje se reklamerstvo (zabava) kroz privatne medije namijenjeno konzumentima. U konstruiranoj stvarnosti vlasnike medijskih korporacija ne zanima građanin već profit. Posljedice su društvena spektakularizacija privid dezideologizacije, celebrity kultura i naše sveopće postajanje politikima. Pandemija je ove trendove dodatno osnažila koji bi se u obzorjima filozofije medija mogli nazvati neronskim jačanjem straha na globalnom planu, prije svega.

Ključne riječi: žanr, etika odgovornosti, istina, interpretacija, strah.



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