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Education to info-freedom. Introduction to the issue

Abstract:

The new media have become both constant elements of contemporary man's everyday life and signs of civilization progress. Therefore, they have to play more and more important role in the processes of learning, school education and extracurricular education, the role, which significantly exceeds the meaning of didactic help known in these processes so far. Education cannot ignore the most important changes which take place in the surroundings of every man. For a few decades there have been attempts to familiarize multimedia in various conceptions and forms of media education but they do not bring satisfying pedagogical results because expansion of multimedia still lasts and it is accompanied by the crises of tradition, science (especially the arts) and values. I support stubborn working on efficient models of media (or rather multimedia) education, which takes into account specific national cultures, multinational communities and religions, but in my article I concentrate only on the phenomenon of informational freedom, so called infofreedom, which is strongly connected with these new areas of pedagogy.

In my opinion the problem of freedom offered by mobile, personal and almost omnipresent new media, their producers and political decision makers goes beyond purely pedagogical aspects. It refers (even if does not now it will in the future) to thinking and behaviour of every man and that is why it should be treated as a starting point for reflection concerning their contemporary mental and material condition. In spite of the excess of information, which is felt by multimedia users, and a huge potential of activity, which is offered to them (so called consumers changing into prosumers) by so called "participatory culture", I accept Lawrence Lessig's critical assumption that in this case we do not deal with freedom changing into arbitrariness, it is rather „freedom through control". Such an attitude has significant consequences for the didactic and educational processes. I explain this apparent opposition by commenting heated quarrels of cyber-libertarians, announcing total freedom of the Internet, and cyber-paternalists, proving that in network communication there is more invigilation and control than before this electronic metamedium appeared.

I prove that the dominating direction of media education is indicated by communicational practice, which shows that the new media, more than traditional ones, limit freedom of an individual and they broaden the range and possibility of

authority influence (mainly political and economic) in every aspect of private and social life. That is why infofreedom should neither be apotheosized nor used to threaten young multimedia users, who first of all should be taught conscious, which means critical and useful, using of this freedom. They should be also brought up in the atmosphere of responsibility for their interactive behaviour in the network.

Keywords: *Media Education, Infofreedom, Cyber-libertarianism, Cyber-paternalism, Responsibility.*

The notion of „media education” has been commonly used in the majority of countries since the beginning of the 1970s. It refers to the tendency in education and upbringing which is concentrated on film and television. It complements knowledge about natural media (speech, nonverbal behaviour) and traditional technical media such as: paintbrush, chisel, papyrus, parchment, paper, Morse code, flag signals or print. The term was, and still is, reserved to education based on technical mass media, which are visual and since 1928 (the beginning of sound cinema) mainly audiovisual.

The beginning of the 1980s was the birth of the Internet, which is described as „network of networks” and is based on surfing hypertexts, interactivity and visualisation. Since then, media education has been experiencing real Renaissance, it has become the feature of civilization megatrend connected with the process of changing agricultural and industrial societies into information societies. The special feature of the megatrend is spreading of digital media. They are used by growing groups of people for daily routines, work, education, artistic activity, spending free time, all that is well described by the term of „techno-everyday-reality” (Żabicki, 2007, 207-214).

New technical media have radically changed and multiplied for the last 30 years and their borders have blurred in the process of convergence (Jenkins, 2006b). It broadened both the range of their daily use and the arsenal of interdisciplinary methods, which are used in the research concerning the media and in pedagogical practice. Education cannot ignore such a common phenomenon. It has to adopt it, which is very difficult. On the one hand media education is an attempt to answer the challenge of the contemporary times, but on the other hand it experiences all the time a real crisis of “identity” because multimedia allow their users to cross many limits of cognition and breach social rules (Jenkins, 2006a). They offer communication freedom which has never been available for people before.

Therefore, the role of the new media in transformation of our reality and in thinking about the character and the very essence of educational reforms, necessary for many other reasons, should be profoundly considered. The defence of traditional school and existing methods of education and upbringing weakens. Even the future of school, traditional course books, pedagogical programmes and methodologies is uncertain. It is mainly caused by social-political-economic upheavals, the crisis of many life guiding posts and values and the aforementioned radical expansion of the media, which dominate the life of children and parents, students and teachers at the beginning of the 21st century. They strongly influence all the components and aspects of didactic and educational societies. According to many researchers of the present, the media already influence the young generation in a stronger way than school or even family (Postman, 1995).

The sphere of media influence is commonly perceived as highly efficient and weakly controlled by teachers, in other words it is a strong rival for school education. That is why for example Karl Popper thinks that no society has future unless it diminishes omnipotence of the media, which allure with almost unlimited freedom and educate

people for violence. In his opinion, within the frames of political-economic-social structure there should be systems to impose responsibility on audiovisual culture for participation in “gigantic educational process”, and every society should make strategic decisions concerning mass media (Condry, Popper, 1996, 39). Although they will be efficient only if the attitude of people responsible for education towards the world of media will change. Another researcher of the issue – John Condry – without any doubts indicates the direction of action. He says: “We should stop expressing indignation over television [which today is already internet television – by T. M.] and act according to the knowledge we already possess. [...] School should teach children how to use television, both its programme and commercials” (Ibid, 22). Umberto Eco’s opinion is quite similar although he is sceptical about the present state and future possibilities of media education. He writes: “ Mass media do not have any long tradition so they are not obliged to be decent. I do not believe it can be fixed though. I do not believe particularly in any kind of censorship. Nevertheless, while television can be censored the Internet cannot. In my opinion education is much better idea. If schools started to teach how to watch television, how to analyse it in a critical way school must be reinvented! [! T. M.] It has to prepare for intelligent and critical use of the media. But today governing forces hardly deal with the issues”(Eco, 1996, 14).

In other words, essential problems of the whole contemporary education are caused, among others, by long-lasting and multilateral influence of the media upon participants of school and extracurricular education. They can be solved efficiently only when the knowledge concerning the media will be included into this communication by the means of school curriculum. In the surroundings of every school the meaning of the media will increase, the answer to the challenge, which is an avalanche of electronic media, can be only modern and stubborn media education, which takes into account inevitable globalisation processes, specific character of national cultures, religions and different types of societies.

The basic perspective in which the education should be situated and perceived is outline by the problem of freedom. It is mainly connected with loading, storing, processing, creating and transferring information. Using such freedom, called info-freedom (Miczka, 2012), is described by Henry Jenkins in such a way: “people take the media into their own hands”, provide more and more intensive dialogue with the mass media, create their own network communities, and new interpersonal relations, they learn to think, work and process the culture in new ways. In his opinion we do not talk about interactive media technologies any more. We talk about the “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006a). In this case it is not participation in a traditionally understood way, based on a very wide range of human activity in culture, communication and other spheres of reality.

When Jenkins writes “people take the media into their own hands” and thanks to that “participatory culture” is created, he announces the dusk of existing communicational homogenization and hierarchization of cultural participation and the birth of individualized communication which more and more often allows to personalize information transfers. Instead of the former communication

characterized by the phrase: “everybody reads”, we have communication which can be described by the words: “everybody participates”. Nevertheless, they do not have any choice: “everybody has to participate” to avoid civilization exclusion. In my opinion “Jenkins just like the majority of users of handy electronics, personal computers, especially smartphones – multifunctional follower of mobile phone and ephemeral “cloud” replacing computer hard disc, is fascinated with the unbridled nature of the Internet, offered by »participatory culture«. It is hard not to share the fascination when we think about changing the limits of human freedom and the range of human cognitive possibilities, but exaggerated optimism concerning our future life in cyber world is hardly justified when we realize what new ways of thinking and processing the culture and forms of work replace (of course for now) experience in communication or even in material and spiritual life” (Miczka, 2014, 4).

The starting point for outlining the bases of new media education is precise recognition of info-freedom and describing pedagogical attitude towards it.

In 1985 when Neil Postman focused on the issues in his book: *Amusing Ourselves to Death. Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, he juxtaposed two most prominent dystopias of the 20th century. The majority of the researchers accepted his negative definition of freedom offered by show business, but stayed reserved as far as his conclusions were concerned. According to Postman, the visions presented by Aldous Huxley in 1932 in *Brave New World* and by George Orwell in 1949 in 1984 come true in contemporary culture. Orwell was afraid of the consequences of the influence of the mass media on social life, the emerging of totalitarian informational autarchy, because in his opinion media are mainly used to steer and manipulate consciousness of individuals and communities. As we know, his novel with its threatening leitmotiv: “Big Brother is watching you”, became inspiration for creating a popular television reality-show *Big Brother* in the Netherlands, which was broadcast and continued in many countries. Huxley predicted that new technologies in culture will lead to emerging of closed and self-efficient circulation of information, which will be used to broadcast infantilized and stereotype contents and they in turn will trivialize the majority of cultural human needs and minimize them quickly. According to him new inventions allow to concretize three dangerous utopian ideas: commonness (based on the rule “everybody is for everybody”), identity (of preferences, opinions and appearances) and stability (achieved through constant control and fighting with behaviours which breach the rules). Postman agreed with both writers but his ideas were closer to Orwell’s.

In 1988 Zygmunt Bauman in his sociological work devoted to freedom, indicated the vision which was the most adequate for the latest culture, undergoing intensive transformation. It was the literary depiction created almost 500 years ago by François Rabelais – the vision of Abbey of Thélème, presented in the last fragments of the first volume of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. He wrote: “consumption society starts where Gargantua and Pantagruel ends, The strict rules of Rabelais’ abbey have been dignified to the level of refined system rules. Society organized around

consumption freedom can be perceived as thoroughly worked out version of Thélème” (Bauman, 1988, 109). As it is known, Thélémities were restricted by only one “strict” rule: “Do What Thou Wilt” and “their whole life was governed not by laws, statuses and rules but by their own will and their own wishes” (Rabelais, 2010, 122).

Early Renaissance vision of freedom actually found many supporters at the end of the 1990s. Thanks to the fact that the Internet became mass medium, on the fundamentals of freedom culture of the first network societies the myth of so called “independence of cyber space” appeared and became common.

The Internet was not used commercially till the mid-1990s. It offered its users paid services but they could not make any purchases. The most important forms of internauts’ activities were then: e-mail communication and participating in online chats, discussion groups and games, so called MUDs. The Internet was perceived as the place where no rules governing the real world are binding. Network communication guaranteed anonymity and social relationships were built as informal system of standards based on believed values. It was a perfect space which organization and rules were supposed to challenge actual reality dominated by oppressive authorities and corporations. Users and researchers who shared the opinion and promulgated such a vision of network communication created social movement and research direction which is often called cyberlibertarianism. It is mainly represented by journalists, artists and active multimedia users. Representatives of the world of science stay reserved or even reluctant to the movement.

Julian Dibbell, a journalist and one of the most famous cyberlibertarians, in 1993 described so called emancipation potential of cyberspace. He proved that thanks to the Internet the access to information and knowledge, which guarantees man almost unlimited total freedom and progress of human civilization, is possible. In his opinion in the new completely independent virtual world man gets rid of the country supervision and limits of physical world and freely shapes their identity (Dibbell, 1993, 36-42).

John Perry Barlow, a columnist of Wire magazine, situates the cyberworld closely to the Abbey of Thélème. He literally compared it to “the Wild West” convincing everybody to fight against potential colonisations, which are according to him planned by contemporary countries. That is why Barlow together with a group of activists started the movement called Electronic Frontier Foundation which was supposed to prevent conflicts on the border of reality and virtuality. This group acted according to the rules written in the published work – A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace (1996). It urged multimedia users to build and defend the world which will be better and more honest than all democracies that have existed so far (Braniecki’s Wiki).

In the spirit of ideology of cyberlibertarianism scientific works concerning the law, which should be binding in the Internet communication, started to appear. For

example David R. Johnson and David Post were convinced that it is necessary to create such “cyber law” which takes into account more and more clear concretizations of freedom ideas in the virtual world and its influence upon the real world (Johnson, Post, 1996, 123-139). The authors who thought in a similar way were and still are strongly impressed by activities of the Internet societies (communities) which do not base their activity on previous models of hierarchy (domination of privileged groups) but on conceptions of heterarchy (authority of diversified group) or even panarchy (authority possessed by all participants). They do not try to hide their aim – the state of anarchy (no authority at all).

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century this kind of “wishful” thinking of cyberlibertarians was supported by scientific reports based on wide-ranging, interdisciplinary research concerning contemporary technology. One of the most famous reports is the book by Jacques Attali *A Brief History of the Future* in which the author characterized four megatrends shaping our daily life (2006). The first megatrend was called Things that think and it referred to the expansion of artificial human environment. These are the media which move together with their users and can be located everywhere. The second megatrend was the imperative – “search”. John Battelle introduced it like that: “in the nearest future searching will leave its cradle – the World Wide Web, spreading freely in every kind of appliances. [...] searching will be built-in in every existing digital appliance. Telephone, car, television set, hi-fi, the most trivial object containing silicon chip and having the possibility of connecting – everything will allow to search the network” (Battelle, 2005, 187). This megatrend is still hardly noticeable in places where the range of digitalization is small but today among 2 billions of interanauts there is an increasing group which starts to plan business decisions, contacts or even the first dates with logging into web portals.

The third megatrend mentioned is connected with development of visionics, omnipresence of so called “the vision machines”. So far smart cameras have visualized in micro and macro scale everything around us and what we imagine. What is not monitored or screened is treated as unknown. Their expansion slowly but consequently creates a specific inversion in culture: it is easier to notice technology than the man who uses it. The last technological megatrend is called by Attali “communitation” (communication + commutation). He meant the end of communication as it has been understood so far, which means transforming the process of transferring in a way which leads to bio-electronic hybridization of man, to the situation in which medium will not be transfer anymore, because transfer will absorb the relay. This megatrend is in its early stage but even today evokes great fascination among supporters of propagating of the freedom ideas.

In the last two decades an opposition against cyberlibertarianism – cyberpaternalists became active. They created their own theories concerning regulation of cyberspace. The big break in the unconvincing criticism of apologists of freedom culture was made by Lawrence Lessig – a law professor. In his book *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (1999) he postulated creating “cyber law” as a separate discipline because the Internet generated completely new social phenomena

and challenges for the binding law. According to Lessig, cyberlibertarians' fascination with info-freedom understood as "network randomness" is based on false assumptions referring to, among others, anonymity in network and the fact that multimedia is independent of the country. The Internet do not have one and constant "nature" but various kinds of in-betweens are vital in the process of accessing to the Internet. What is more the idea of concretization of the idea of pluralism in cyberspace is closely connected with profound hiding of controlling mechanisms which results in shattering or even destroying the aforementioned myth of "independent cyberspace".

The reaction to cyberpaternalists' offensive was revision of some libertarian assumptions and a successful attempt to start at the end of the first decade of the 21st century so called school of neo-cyberlibertarianism, which supports active and radical actions defending absolute independence of cyberspace. Still the majority of multimedia users today realize, as L. Lessig (2004), Yochai Benkler (2006), Cass Sunstein (2007) and Jonathan Zittrain (2008) prove, that while using mobiles, bank cards or the Internet they are controlled even more than before but this control is not directly experienced. This situation is well illustrated by the words: the bigger amount of visible freedom, the bigger amount of invisible control. They also realize that intellectual property and copyrights still exist and in the new economy of producing information anarchy cannot dominate. It is high time to start precise work concerning new rules describing individual and social right of internauts.

Contemporary researchers, who focus on Google Browser and the phenomenon called Web 2.0, provide a lot of knowledge concerning the uncertain character of "the myth of independence". They also signalize the further problems with info-freedom, which are connected with the emerging of Web 3.0 - the Internet processing data in three dimensions, its websites will be able to identify internauts' intentions on the basis of the context of transferred data. Research on "googling" indicates that browsers are not independent and objective appliances or sources of access to all the information. Lev Manovich says that research results are always strongly influenced by commercial factors of functioning of network (2008).

Subsequently, info-freedom, although very obtrusive and intriguing, is another illusion to which man yields. Man always stubbornly fights for its independence, but as philosophers warn, they do not usually know what to do with the independence. That is why, before one starts to fight to increase personal and social freedom, it is worth remembering what are experiences on this field. They were expressed by Zygmunt Bauman in the words concluding his description of contemporary ambiguity. He reminded then: "Freedom is just as crippled as before although others of its organs are amputated. In postmodern practice freedom is mainly reduced to consumption choice" (1995, 315).

Of course today this reflection has to be deepened because info-freedom is not only connected with consumption any more. The character of info-freedom and life problems of contemporary man connected with it, is quite precisely illustrated by the following Manuel Castells' findings. He writes: "The source of authority today is

mainly the possibility to create and diffuse culture codes and information contents. Governing communication networks becomes the starting point that allows to change one's own aims and values into binding rules of human behaviour. The process, just like the previous processes in the history, is not deprived of contradictions. The Internet is not the tool of freedom or a weapon which guarantees the domination of one side. [...] Freedom is not given. Freedom is constant battle. It is the ability of constant defining of the borders of one's independence and using democratic methods in every social or technical context. [...]

That is why the matter of social control over the Internet is probably the most fundamental political matter of the age of information" (2003, 186-187). In the context of such a conclusion, info-freedom becomes a problem which will be certainly solved for a long time and in a heated atmosphere, because apart from many new and changing elements, which in this case should be taken into account, the priority still is: whether freedom means the lack of strong influence of authority in public space or quite the contrary, thanks to the active presence of authority in the space of social-political life freedom of every individual is protected? Neither old philosophers nor philosophers of culture, who focus on mass culture, cannot answer the question.

Pedagogues will not answer the question in a satisfactory way either. Still without any doubts both teachers and students at school, just like parents and their children outside school, together have to make an attempt of educational adopting of such info-freedom. It means first of all consciously critical approach of all multimedia users to communicational freedom. Subsequently the category of responsibility gains a unique meaning. The question: who is an internaut, should be answered with the following information: they are a responsible creature and the area of their responsible activity today is spreading *terraininternetica*. In this area one can navigate, record, copy, modify, paste, retweet, share, blog, mail, text, play, tweet on twitter, "update status"...

Info-activism is overactivity in which still not everything is possible, and decisions and actions should be morally estimated. Facing the aforementioned changes, which take place in life of contemporary people, the way responsibility and its demands are understood must change. Responsibility for oneself and other people responsibility for interlocutors, players, people hiding behind their avatars and virtual identities.

In my opinion the integral person is the most important person who "not only tries to acquire suitable abilities necessary to know how to move in the contemporary world, but has not stopped judging the world" (Kłos, 2005, 352). A person who has both technical abilities and abilities to judge technology and their attitude towards it.

I have already written in another dissertation about the conception of integral person as a subject of education and school upbringing (Miczka, 2013, 334-338). In this place I would like just to emphasize that a man in network faces numerous new

experiences which encourage disintegration of their mind and personality. Still they can always become an integrated person again when they take an effort to develop at the same time both their pro-technological attitude to reality and mature intelligent using of one's individual freedom, choosing thinking and suitable moral activity, based on certain values.

Education for info-freedom understood like that has just started. It created many possibilities to make postulates come true. They were formulated at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s by Gregory Bateson – a creator of cybernetic theory of correct learning and behaviour (1973). He treated previous models of education as “primeval learning” which is strongly ideological and steered. That is why he supported developing of “learning of the second degree” which just meant “learning how to learn”, he suggested decreasing of curriculum knowledge and obligatory books list and paying attention to learning fast things which are perceived as useful. According to Bateson, in modern education “learning of the third degree” is and will be the most important. It is the ability which allows to realize fast to what degree knowledge is inadequate or redundant and in what way the mastered patterns and one's own plasticity of thinking and acting can be used to organize new sensible entities of knowledge. This artistry must be mastered by today pedagogy. It is not devaluation of education and upbringing but a change of traditional notion of learning and decent behaviour. In other words it is necessary to create such didactic and educational strategies which we do not possess yet.

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