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EXPERIENCE – MEMORY – IDENTITY. MEDIA EXPERIENCES AS THE FOUNDATIONS OF HYBRID IDENTITY

Abstract: The paper focuses on the nexus of experience – memory – identity, to discuss the ways in which mediatization and medialization of experiences transform the status, structures and roles of memory and to develop the concept of hybrid identity. The author analyses several theories dealing with this issue in order to demonstrate that despite developing some useful terms and concepts, and providing an outlook on recent social changes, they did not notice the consequences of the processes of transformation of contemporary culture from media culture to cyberculture based on interactive virtual practices.

Keywords: cyberculture, experience, hybrid identity, media, memory, prosthetic memory.

Andreas Kitzmann, Conny Mithander and John Sundholm, editors of the 2005 book *Memory Work. The Theory and Practice of Memory*¹, summing up the first stage of research of their team at the University of Karlstad and dealing with cultural memory, wrote in their introduction that memory may be perceived as a crucial issue of the 1990s. Following the linguistic turn that marked the 1960s and the cultural one that subsequently developed as part of the post-modernist reflection of the 1980s, the 1990s were the time of yet another transformation, involving the emergence of the broadly understood subject of memory². According to the editors of *Memory Work*, individual and collective, private and social, institutional, cultural, and communicative memory, relations between memory and history, the role of technology and the media in exteriorization, archiving and distribution of memory, became

¹ *Memory Work. The Theory and Practice of Memory*, ed. A. Kitzmann, C. Mithander, J. Sundholm, Peter Lang GmbH: Frankfurt am Main 2005.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

the main themes of contemporary humanistic and social reflection, adding new horizons to earlier research and developing new research programmes. This expansion was doubtlessly inspired by the monumental seven-volume work by Pierre Nora *Les lieux de mémoire*, published in French between 1984 and 1992, and in an abbreviated three-volume English version in 1996. Complemented by the publications of such researchers as Reinhart Koselleck, Jan Assmann, Richard Terdiman, James Young or Bernard Stiegler³, and by the many reprints of the previous works in this area, for instance those of Maurice Halbwachs, Nora's work outlined some extremely broad perspectives for further research and provided an immense research impetus, provoking numerous debates and controversies.

In this paper, despite the initial emphasis placed on the significance of the problem of memory in contemporary human studies and social research, I am not going to focus on any of the autonomous and central issues that compose the field of reflection specified above. It is not memory itself but its mediating function, i.e. its relations with media-shaped experience and the meaning of these processes in forming our identity which I am going to examine here. The nexus of experience – memory – identity will appear in this examination as a unique scheme or perhaps a script – a structure showing the place of each component in the general order and at the same time determining the methods of research. Incidentally, such relations may be also seen as one of the major reasons for the increased interest in the subject of memory described above. For it is not only memory as such, but its role in the research carried out in all related fields that makes it an important object of contemporary academic inquiry. I would describe the significance of this research into memory as slightly polemical towards Kitzmann, Mithander and Sundholm (although it could also be treated as a non-polemical correction) – as a derivative of the interest in the whole nexus. I have mentioned *Les lieux de mémoire* not because of the importance of the concepts formulated there, concerning the socio-cultural dimensions of memory, or because of the work's supposed impact of the revival and increase of interest in memory. I have done it primarily because of Nora's suggestion in this work of a clear distinction between individually shaped memory, founded on direct

³ R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, MIT Press: Cambridge 1985; J. Assmann, 'Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität', in: *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. J. Assmann, T. Hölscher, Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 1986, pp. 9-19; R. Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1993; J. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Yale University Press: New Haven 1993; B. Stiegler, *La technique et le temps*, vol. 1-3, Éditions Galilée: Paris 1994-2001.

experience, and external, mediated and objectified history (the kind he saw as represented by the work of Halbwachs). Juxtaposing memory and history seems misguided and that is how it is perceived by the majority of researchers. Yet the distinction hidden in this juxtaposition of two types of experience: direct and mediating experience, together with the opposition of the two types of memory that may be drawn from it, turns out to be a very influential concept, rich in consequences, emerging in contemporary research in numerous and differentiated incarnations. Usually, this concept becomes entangled, in one way or another, in the issue of representation.

We encounter such a set of concepts in John B. Thompson's book *The Media and Modernity*⁴. He introduces the notion of *lived experience*, identifying it with *Erlebnis* in Dilthey's terminology⁵, so as to contrast it with *mediated experience*, which has completely different character. The former kind of experience is characterised by Thompson as 'immediate, continuous and, to some extent, pre-reflexive'.⁶ Furthermore, it is experience that is gained in the practical contexts of everyday life, in face-to-face interactions. Mediated experience, however, in the view of Thompson, is made accessible to the subject through media. Within Thompson's theory this means that they originate in mediated interactions and in indirect quasi-interactions⁷.

Thompson's characterization of the polarised types of experience shows that he does not relate directly to the issue of language mediation. Both the lived and the mediated experience (the latter presumably considered by Thompson as 'not lived') could appear in both forms: as language-mediated and as primary, non-linguistic experience. Other elements of Thompson's argument allow us to conclude that he regards every type of experience as a linguistically-conditioned phenomenon.

⁴ J.B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media*, Polity Press: Cambridge – Oxford 1995.

⁵ Thompson's reference to Dilthey does not mean his adoption of Dilthey's ideas, including his life philosophy. It is only the way in which Thompson defines the concept of *lived experience*, by emphasising its pre-reflective character, individualism and being deep-rooted in life that brings it closer to Dilthey. It seems, however, that he only reaches to those elements in the theories of the German philosopher that allow him to consolidate his concept of identity, as a reflective design of a project built on the foundations of a stream of experiences in the context of social relations. Besides the references to Dilthey, one may also note certain connections with Gadamer's concepts.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

⁷ See Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, pp. 82-87 for types of interactions.

Mediated experience has a number of properties that distinguish it from lived experience. The experience rooted in media quasi-interactions stands out immensely here and it is precisely on its differences with the lived experience that Thompson concentrates⁸, thus declining to analyse all other kinds. Let us then follow some of his reasoning and have a look at the theses that he puts forward.

Firstly, he argues that the events to which access is granted through media, are usually spatially (and presumably temporally) removed from the sphere of everyday life. As a result of this distance, the experiencing individuals have no influence over them. These events do not directly participate in the life of an individual, and neither are they so perceived. Certain casual connections with the experiences of an individual may occur, but they are repeatedly mediated and because of that, immensely stretched, dispersed and – as a result – not perceived.

Secondly, mediated experience is always re-contextualised: it appears in the environment different from the one in which it normally takes place (and where it may have the status of lived experience). This leads to constant contextual collisions, the confrontations of various worlds. In contemporary reality, de-contextualisation of experiences resulting from their mediation also frequently triggers off the processes of mutual interaction between the global perspective and numerous local perspectives. These processes lead to the emergence of multiple glocal structures. This leads to the constant collision of contexts, and confrontation of various worlds. The consequences of these collisions and influences may take various forms and cause different effects, depending on the circumstances; their broad spectre extends from the pleasant experience of being different to the dramatic experience of a shock.

Thirdly, media experience plays a special role in the process of shaping identity. Its reference structure for the priorities adopted in this process differs from that of the lived experience. Media experience is used there in a significantly different way and with quite different consequences. Yet it could seem⁹ that lived experience plays a central role in the process of constructing individual identity, whereas media experience has only an auxiliary and supporting function. However, today such judgement cannot be sustained, as we cannot, generally, give the media experience a marginal role

⁸ Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-232. In the further part, I shall return to the consequences of limitations in the range of media experience suggested by Thompson and having impact on the shape of final conclusions that this researcher proposes.

⁹ At least that's what the researchers into that issue generally claim.

within every individual identity project. It plays different functions in different individual cases, sometimes even central ones. We should also note that the privileged position given to lived experience by many researchers seems to grow out of its former exclusiveness in the domain of experience. In reality, however, as claimed by Thompson, currently the relations between the lived and mediated experience involve different hierarchies in the process of the reflective shaping of individual identities. What is more, media experience plays an increasingly serious role in these processes, occasionally leading to paradoxical combinations of reflectivity and dependence within the constructed self¹⁰ or, as Ulrich Beck puts it, to a conflict between individualisation and institutionalization¹¹. In extreme cases, uncompromising domination of media experience leads to the absorption of the self into some indirect form of quasi-interaction¹².

And fourthly, finally, the development of media communication technologies transforms the patterns of contacts between people, significantly alters the web of dependencies between individuals and as a result, it also alters their collective identities, their lived sense of belonging to a group. In the opinion of many researchers, mediated experience weakens or even undermines the importance and position of the community rooted in spatial closeness (or it reveals its fictional character that stems from the faulty recognition of the actual sources of that closeness). It is replaced with the relationships based on totally different forms of connection. Thompson emphasizes that effect of the impact of media experience by talking about a de-spaced community. Recalling the research of Barry Wellman¹³, Manuel Castells refers here to more specifically defined social bonds, such as families of choice or net individualism¹⁴.

Thompson is reluctant to adopt the conceptions that are all too popular among the researchers dealing with the problem of identity in the context of media, according to whom mediated experience leads to the loss of coherence by the Self, to its total confusion, blurring, dispersion or even absorption by the world of media. While acknowledging possible occurrence of such

¹⁰ See Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

¹¹ Compare U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications, London 1992; Chapter Five in particular: *Individualization, Institutionalization and Standardization: Life Situations and Biographical Patterns*.

¹² See Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹³ B. Wellman, 'Physical place and cyberspace: the rise of networked individualism', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, No. 1, 2001.

¹⁴ M. Castells, *Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2001.

processes in individual cases, Thompson firmly rejects the thesis that suggests their inevitability. From the perspective of the researchers looking at modernity in the manner made 'archetypical' (as Thompson points out) by Jean Baudrillard, the Self undergoes alienation: "in this era of media saturation, multiple moving images become the Self"¹⁵. Thompson himself is of the opinion, contrary to the stand characterised above, that even if the Self does undergo transformation in the environment conditioned by media and the conditions of its formation are significantly altered, we may only talk about the dynamization of the Self, about its being opened by media messages to influences from distant places and to new forms of experiences. Identity perceived as a reflexively organised symbolic project is no longer formed only in its relationship with its direct environment. The experience conditioned by the media is systematically included into the frame of this project, which – as I have mentioned above – transforms both its characteristics and parameters and the possibility of its formation by individuals.

The structure of the experience itself is also significantly altered. Even though the lived experience seems – as Thompson claimed in 1995 – to invariably dominate in the structure of people's experiences, life in the media-shaped world increasingly favours mediated experience that complements the lived experience and often even replaces it, thus slowly shaping a new structure of reality where media experience becomes the basic factor in the process of constructing individual and collective identities.

Thompson's reflections concerning media experience, despite his reasonable avoidance of catastrophic visions of disabled or dispersed media identity, remaining under unlimited exterior control, arouse certain doubts and lead us to form several stipulations.

Looking at the construction of media communication that functions in his theory as the basis of media experience, we see that Thompson clearly treated it as a representation of an event that takes place in another dimension (or space-time). This led him to conclude that the subject of this experience is totally unable to interfere in the structure of the experienced events as they happen, because these events are not present in his or her direct environment. He added yet another dimension to the opposition between the lived and the media experience by contrasting an object/event that is present in the space of the subject of the lived experience with the experience whose object is only of representative nature (mediated experience). It must be noted, however,

¹⁵ Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

that the thesis of the representational character of media experience necessarily involves preliminary limitation of his field of consideration solely to media-conditioned, indirect quasi-interactions without mediated interactions. If Thompson's remarks may be considered reasonable when they refer to quasi-interactions¹⁶, e.g. the experience of television (in particular that connected with paleo-television¹⁷), they cannot be applied to the sphere of mediated interaction, e.g. to the experience grounded in telephone conversations. The mediated experience of interaction, due to its performative nature, is in many ways closer to lived experience than to the media experience founded on quasi-interaction. I would say that the world of mediated experience conditioned by indirect interactions is located between the lived experience and the experience of media quasi-interactions, without identifying itself with neither of them. The decision to exclude media experience grounded in indirect interaction from the field of research turned out to be wrong, producing a situation in which the conclusions derived from a partial analysis function as the description of the total impact of the media on the sphere of experience. As a result of this decision made by Thompson, the experience grounded in quasi-interaction, somewhat neglected even by himself, began to represent all media experience.

I cannot accept Thompson's claim of the representational nature of media experience when this experience is created by interactive digital media. This type of experience also undermines Thompson's theory by assuming the existence of structures that do not have the status of representations. At this point Thompson's theory evidences a basic flaw: such experience, and the type of interaction corresponding to it, is simply absent from his analysis. And yet today, as Lev Manovich quite reasonably points out, screens are not always just trays with performances, they are also instruments of action, interfaces that enable us to conduct various operations¹⁸.

Moreover, the list of objects of media experience disregarded by Thompson also includes digital simulacra that do not offer the subjects a possibility of interaction, but – as in the previous case – neither do they refer them to other

¹⁶ However, also in this respect, Thompson's concept comes up against criticism; see, e.g. the media equation theory formed by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass that is referred to further.

¹⁷ See F. Casseti, R. Odin, 'De la paléo- a la néo-télévison. Approche sémio-pragmatique', *Communications*, No. 51, 1990.

¹⁸ See L. Manovich, *Towards an Archaeology of the Computer Screen*, in: *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable? The Screen Arts in the Digital Age*, eds. T. Elsaesser, K. Hoffman, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 1998.

locations than those established by themselves, which suggests they are experienced as quasi-autonomous entities and must be analysed as phenomena of presentational rather than representational nature, and so present within the space of the experiencing subject.

The worlds in which those experienced events occur gain the status of visited worlds, tele-present as in the case of forms of virtual reality, or become extensions of the world of the experiencing subject, as in the case of mixed reality, most often experienced as expanded reality. In both cases we are faced with the kind of experience which Thompson's thesis claiming the absence of the object from the direct environment of the experiencing subject does not provide for. On the contrary, we should rather conclude that in both cases the objects of media experience is present in the world of the experiencing subject. What may differentiate those cases, however, is the status of the object's activity: interactive forms are susceptible to the influence of the experiencing subject, whereas the simulacra, even though they do not refer to another space-time, remain part of the expanded world and are not subject to any influence¹⁹.

Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass also reject the concept of media experience as inevitably connected with representational structure²⁰. They claim that there is no reason to contrast media experience with other forms of human experience. They argue that people's interactions with computers, television and the new media are social and natural by definition, just like the interactions in real life. Their conception of media equation postulates that the receivers identify each media broadcast with reality. Such a stand inevitably leads to another conclusion: that the concept of identifying the media with reality also undermines the assumption that words and images are symbolic representations of actually absent objects. In Reeves and Nass's approach, no media experience has any grounds in the representational structure.

I must however reject the media equation theory, even though its objection to the conviction of the representational nature of media experience is close to

¹⁹ Unless just the possibility of removing the subject from the field of experience is understood as influencing the simulacric subject. Turning off the TV has no influence on the events that are presented on its screen, whereas turning off a computer while it generates audio-visual forms in real time may, under certain circumstances, be treated as an activity influencing the course of event being experienced.

²⁰ B. Reeves, C. Nass, *Media Equation. How People Treat Computers, Television, and New Media Like Real People and Places*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996.

me, for the reasons analogical to the critique of this theory presented by Mark Poster. Acknowledging the value of Reeves and Nass's conception, he also points out its limitations and shows the inaptness of equating mediated life with the real one. Poster claims that "the new media and people create relations different to those that bind people with natural objects and mechanical machines, and to relationships between people"²¹. Sherry Turkle takes a similar stand in this matter²². I would like to add here that the forms of the relations between people and media are often (although not always) different from the forms of inter-human relations; this world is also internally differentiated, and this variety does not allow us to make too many generalisations concerning all the phenomena involved here. This restriction also concerns the relations determining the status of the experiences conditioned by the media that cannot be framed by one general form of interpretation.

The same can be said of another feature of media experience postulated by Thompson, i.e. the inevitable re-contextualisation of a medially represented event. In Thompson's theory, the concept of re-contextualisation is also grounded in the assumption that media experience is of a representational nature, and it must be rejected together with this assumption. If one would nevertheless wish to preserve the postulate that re-contextualisation is a component of media experience, one would have to seek other justifications for this concept.

On the other hand, the third and fourth property of media experience as suggested by Thompson, i.e. the new frames of shaping individual and collective identity, raise no doubt when we talk about them in conclusions, but provoke discussion and suggest corrections where we are discussing their sources and motivation.

By failing to supplement the conclusions resulting from the analysis of experience based on indirect media quasi-interaction with those stemming from the structure of the experience grounded in mediated interaction, and by overlooking the emergence of new forms of media interaction resulting from the advances in digital technologies, Thompson constructed a theory that cannot be fully accepted, despite including numerous very accurate claims. It is lacking due to his mistaken identification of media experience with mediated experience. These two phenomena are not identical. Not every

²¹ M. Poster, *The Culture of Underdetermination*, in: *Idem, What's the Matter with the Internet*, The University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2001, p. 12.

²² See S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Simon and Schuster: New York 1995.

media experience is indirect, i.e. an experience whose object is located in a different space or space-time than the one containing the experiencing subject. I believe that the kind of hybrid identity quite appropriately diagnosed by Thompson, grounded in the complex of mediated experiences that are bound together and – I should say provisionally – media-lived, results in this case not so much from the spatial or spatio-temporal distance between objects, but is primarily rooted in the ontological variety of access modes, constantly re-contextualised by the experiencing subject.

Some of the mediated experiences are, however, contrary to Thompson's claims, truly present in the environment of the experiencing subject. As noted by Allucquere Rosanne Stone, cyberspace is full of direct meetings, of face-to-face contacts. We must only think over and redefine both concepts: those of a meeting and of direct (face-to-face) presence²³. Another kind of hybrid generated by media, besides the ontological one, is obviously the cultural dimension connected with the global nature of their activities. From this perspective, the analyzed media may be defined as a trans-cultural interface, a generator of cultural hybridization.

The variety of media experiences, obviously underrated by Thompson, is made very clear in the definition of the post-biological world put forward by Roy Ascott. According to him, the post-biological world is a reality in which the experienced objects are mediated, transformed or created by media technologies²⁴. It is obvious that the different aspects of the post-biological world involve different kinds of experience. Thompson's diagnosis seems right only in reference to experiencing technological events that are merely mediated. As regards the experience of technologically modified events, Thompson's theory, should it be implemented, would have to be significantly refined. In the case of technology creating the experienced events, Thompson's theory reveals its incompatibility with the conception of the post-biological world. It diverges from it even more if this world is considered in its full complexity, including both the variety of sources and forms of media experiences, and their mutual influence and entanglement in the nexus of relations in the complex of experiences that is no less varied, and in which the media do not partake.

²³ A.R. Stone, *Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundry Stories About Virtual Cultures*, in: *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. D. Bell, B.M. Kennedy, Routledge: London & New York 2000, p. 506.

²⁴ R. Ascott, 'Digital museum. Telematic culture and artificial life', *Art Magazine*, No. 2-3, 1995; see also J. Scott, 'The Body as Interface', in: *Reframing Consciousness: Art, Mind and Technology*, ed. R. Ascott, Intellect Books: Exeter 2001.

Media experience entangles us inevitably in a game in which the notions of representation, traces, and presence, as well as their numerous derivatives, play equally important roles. Any attempt to analyse the whole of this area while excluding any of them would lead to simplification and false generalisations.

Meanwhile, however, many conceptions taking up the issue of memory grounded in media experiences, memory endowing us, as a consequence, with media – conditioned identity structures, invariably remain under the influence of the assumption of the representational nature of media experience.

The conception of post-memory put forward by Marianne Hirsch²⁵, the conception of tertiary memory by Bernard Stiegler²⁶, and the theory of prosthetic memory by Celia Lury²⁷ all refer to the technologically-conditioned experience – and consequently memory and identity – in terms of the links between the media experience and the events taking place (or having already taken place) elsewhere, thus perceiving the object of that experience as representational in nature. The cognitive usefulness and explanatory power of those claims are usually founded on their authors' limiting their field of research and consequently of the application of their conclusions and the theories constructed on their basis. However, when the authors do not fully outline their frameworks themselves, the necessity to do so passes onto their recipients.

The theory of prosthetic memory by Celia Lury seems to be a model example here (a similar concept was worked out by Alison Landsberg²⁸ and related conclusions concerning prosthetic structures may also be found in the third volume of Stiegler's work already mentioned here). Lury founds her proposal on a specific type of experience that she defines as photographic seeing. It is related to the experience described by Thompson; in this case, however, Lury gives priority to photography as its technological source. In her view, it is photography that introduces completely new quality into the human life: photography appeared to give a new shape to what we now understand as an

²⁵ M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass. 1997.

²⁶ See B. Stiegler, *op. cit.*

²⁷ C. Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity*, Routledge: London 1998.

²⁸ A. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York 2004; *Idem*, *Prosthetic Memory: Total Recall and Blade Runner*, in: *The Cybercultures Reader*, eds. D. Bell, B.M. Kennedy, Routledge, London and New York 2000.

individual and his or her relationship with awareness, memory and embodiment²⁹. In Lury's approach, photography is both a way of knowing and a mnemonic tool³⁰; it represents absent objects, and at the same time it is a form of mediation between awareness and techno-cultural context, able to transform them both³¹.

Lury points out that photography frames its objects, then freezes and records them³². These actions endow the photographed objects with other properties. Similarly to Thompson, Lury claims that these objects are freed from the determination of their matrix environment – that they undergo outcontextualization. The objects which are experienced in this way within the cognitive activities of a subject, provide the subject with memory whose character is analogical to their own (photography being both a technique of knowing and a mnemonic tool). Being context-free becomes an omnipresent principle of the social world. The spatial dimensions of memory undergo dispersion; they become unstable and blurred. Not only are memories disconnected from space, but they also become disembodied. As a result, the subject is also no longer anchored in the context, similarly to the objects of its mediated perceptions. According to Lury, because of photography, both subject and object undergo the process of indifferentiation that eradicates the traditional borders. Such distinctions as cause – result, interior – exterior, will – reflex, choice – coercion also become blurred³³.

In Lury's view, photography gains the status of prosthesis of the experience of seeing. Analogically prosthetic character is invested on the memory grounded in photographic seeing and identity built on the basis of prosthetic memory. All of these processes inevitably lead to the hybridization of identity that Lury believes is expressed through the aestheticization of the Self, aestheticization that follows the logic of fashion. She sees the hybrid, prosthetic identity as a product of never-ending process of evaluation and speculation, remodelling and renovation. Her notion of technologically supported experimental individualism³⁴ combines in one hybrid whole all of the processes of culture prosthetisation described above, also noticing (or so it seems), the side effect of the impact of cultural consumerism. In her search

²⁹ C. Lury, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

³¹ See J. Pence, 'Machine Memory: Image Technology and Identity', *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 3, No 21, May 1999, <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol3-1999/n21pence>.

³² C. Lury, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³³ J. Pence, *op. cit.*

³⁴ C. Lury, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

for answers to the question of what is happening to identity in the era of digital images, Lury sees its evolving shape not only as a result of self-determination, but also as a drive for self-possession. This evolution leads, according to her, to a new, post-pluralistic social order.

Barry King similarly regards the Self as a product of the media consumerist culture when he presents his concept of the modular Self³⁵. The medialisation of the world leads, in King's opinion, to two important consequences. Firstly, to the saturation of the social sphere with the media that privilege performative structures. Secondly, in a medialised society, it is impossible to draw a border between the real and the virtual, which in turn makes it impossible to perceive the linear causalism. It is thus replaced by metonymic demeanour (an element present in one discourse returns in the discourses belonging to other practices). Such a situation paves the way for modular order and the power of perfect images to create a media ecosystem.

Following John B. Blair and Robert Kroes³⁶, King lists several characteristics of cultural modularity:

1. Each whole is only a sum of components. They may be combined in various ways, as they are functional equivalents allowing substitution, contribution and recombination.
2. Functional equivalence provides all cultural practices with equal value. New configurations are desired and searched for.
3. No specific combination is seen as integral for cultural organisation. Every order or content has only temporary value, as new configurations are not only desired but also inevitable.
4. The basic aim of every individual configuration is ephemeral coherence.
5. Modularity is a cultural reaction that accompanies the saturation of the public sphere with various forms of techno-disembodied presence, such as photography, electronic images or computer-graphic simulations. Their perfection evokes the desire for imitation. In this way modularity takes over the sphere of human behaviour and becomes a new form of self-organization.

In the light of King's claims, modularity of identity is presented as a process in which an individual attempts to exceed his or her own limitations by

³⁵ B. King, 'Being Virtual: Modularity as a Cultural Condition', *Afterimage*, September 2000.

³⁶ J.B. Blair, *Modular America*, Greenwood Press: New York 1988; R. Kroes, *If You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture*, University of Illinois Press: Urbana 1996.

following the scenarios of self-design that he or she encounters in the media – which can not only control the sphere of appearances, but also offer the protocols of the transformations.

Modularity as an ideological practice is, as King puts it, not falsifying but producing reality. In his view, particularly the development of the interactive media has made modularity a contemporary state of being. Its consequence is an inevitable and constantly deepening process of hybridization of all aspects of individual and collective identity.

The theories analysed here – the ones of medialisatation by John B. Thompson, of prosthetisation by Celia Lury, and of modularity by Barry King – share not only the idea that the development of media technology has greatly transformed the forms of experience, the structures of memory and the character of the identities grounded in them. They also share the conviction of their authors that all of these processes and phenomena involve media structures of representational nature. The hybrid character of the analysed phenomena diagnosed by these theories does not raise any doubt. However, the one-sidedness of the approach that reduces media objects to a form of representation leads to a gross underestimation of both the scale of the experience and its range, and the variety of the memory structures they condition. It also negatively influences the interpretation of the identities shaped in the dialogue with the media. These theories revolve around the media experiences typical for mass culture and the cultural media industry, which brings them closer to the critique of the consumerist society. The experiences most characteristic for recent cybercultures, connected with surfing the net, immersion in the virtual worlds of computer games, not to mention the interactive experiences offered by the art of the new media are considered to a much lesser degree. This lack makes the analysed theories rather inadequate for the research on the contemporary web community and its participation in cyberculture. However, the support from the conception of non-conditioning argued by Mark Poster and, most of all, the inspiration that can be found in the idea of post-biological world put forward by Roy Ascott, may open much more interesting perspectives to the theory of media experience, to the research into the forms of memory and the structures of hybrid identity.

**DOŚWIADCZENIE – PAMIĘĆ – TOŻSAMOŚĆ.
DOŚWIADCZENIA MEDIALNE JAKO FUNDAMENT HYBRYDYCZNEJ
TOŻSAMOŚCI
(streszczenie)**

Autor artykułu poddaje analizie splot doświadczenia, pamięci i tożsamości, by podjąć dyskusję na temat procesów, w ramach których mediatyzacja i medializacja doświadczeń przekształcają status, struktury i funkcje pamięci, oraz aby rozważyć koncepcję hybrydycznej tożsamości. Autor omawia szereg teorii podejmujących tę problematykę i wykazuje, że mimo iż wykształciły one niezbędne kategorie i koncepcje badawcze, jak również zbudowały interesujące wizje współczesnych społeczeństw, to nie zdołały uchwycić, a tym bardziej wykorzystać w swych rozważaniach procesów, które przekształcają współczesne kultury, przeprowadzając je ze stanu kultury medialnej do formy cyberkultury ufundowanej na interaktywnych praktykach wirtualnych.

Słowa kluczowe: cyberkultura, doświadczenie, hybrydyczność, tożsamość, media, pamięć.