CULTURE IN THE NETWORK SOCIETY:
IDENTITY INDUSTRY

Summary

A vision that springs from the collective mind, fulfilling our darkest dreams, has connected individuals in a network, turning the world into a global living organism, distinguished by its pulsating life of multi-media communication and disharmonious values that forces us to obey its laws, just as we expect to domesticate it. The noosphere that manages our lives, according to Teilhard de Chardin's prophecies, has already materialized. A new religion that worships media has become the basis of the existence of all social tribes and all imagined communities living in the networked structures.

The world has always been tied by networks, while social and cultural life – made up of intersecting individual and collective lines. Nevertheless, today the long-knitted local networks are being dismantled and new ones are being woven, setting up a new communicational and perhaps even a total Network around the world, which roots in the whole structure of our existence. Weaving liberation and play with power and control, this network provides a vibrant promise of a new space, perspective and potential future, imposing continuously its own rules and attitudes. Networking as a living organism, as a real efficacy activates socio-cultural processes that stimulate the identity industry and the cloning of ideas, perceived as the only possibility of progress and success.

Carrying out a long-term research program "The Development of Lithuanian Culture at the turn of 20th and 21st Centuries: Identities and Memories" at the Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute, one of the tasks was to highlight the changing trajectories of the present that draw the contours of contemporary society, culture and identity. In pursuit of this goal intention the book was edited, trying to look more closely at the networking processes from different angles. For that purpose, the cooperation with French, Polish, and American researchers was established, who helped to highlight significant latent and sudden technological transformations that have a power of enchantment, fascination, and that purposefully shape our social life, imagination and culture.

In the first part of the book the French theorists explore civilizational shifts and intense changes, nodal points and thresholds. Éric Sadin analyzes the ties that are centered on the Silicon Valley and the myth of San Francisco, which stimulates a blindly believe in technological innovations and inventions, determining the processes of self-colonization. By inviting to create a new type of network, the philosopher and writer pictorially describes the threats posed by technical economies, revealing the signs of de-civilisation and the new cartography of power. Professor of sociology at the Sorbonne Michel Maffesoli examines the interplay between progress and archaisms, the spread of primitivism and mysticism in cyber-culture, which is characterized by the play of emotions, feelings, pleasures, and the outbreak of imagination, phantasmagorias, fantasies. By describing social networks and virtual worlds as the media of sociality, he defines cyberspace as a matrix that meets ever-increasing needs for interfaces.

The Polish intellectual and cultural anthropologist Andrzej Mencwel discusses the phenomenon of internet that has established itself in scientific and everyday life, losing touch with the original version and becoming a generic name. Internet as a medium for the first time in the history of mankind has exceeded the boundaries of time and space, covering a whole diapason of culture and the whole reality. It is not surprising that this medium, surrounded by the aura of fulfilled utopia, has its own worshipers and unmaskers. Joining to the latter group, the professor uncovers the derivative forms of internet communication, whose innovativeness is rooted in the profoundness of cultural history. The antithesis and intersection of culture and creativity in the age of global mediation is analyzed by Rita Repšienė. The cultural researcher overviews the contemporary cultural context and highlights the complicated guidelines of contemporary culture policy and culture studies that are connected to different networks, to variety of projects as well as discusses our horizons of loss, discovery and expectations.

Cultural researcher and sociolinguist Nicole Dołowy-Rybinska considers the themes of linguistic communication and linguistic destiny, emphasizing that despite the dominance of transcultural perspective and internet various minority groups and linguistic communities engaged in ethnic activities are creating their own networks. A specialist of cultural communication Aida Savicka focuses on the field of social psychology: identity transformations in the virtual space, in those communicational "sites" that support significant social relationships and that become more and more important places for identity formation – the real workshops of identity. Network

communication, bodiless interaction, incorporeal regime, multiplicity and flexibility of identities are those essential keywords that describe personal and social transformations.

Odeta Žukauskienė explores the power of images in networking culture. With the breakthrough of global visibility the practices of sharing images spreads widening the horizons of seeing, visibility and narcissistic expression. Cyber-culture as the emergence of visual technology and cultural industry, as well as constantly expanding network of viewers and observers' raises a lot of actual questions the author is trying to find answers to. The significance of network is described by architectural theorist Kazys Varnelis, emphasizing that the network penetrates all cultural areas, where capital and market appears to represent a pure value. Consequently, the effects of reality, stencil straightforwardness, simulations, and remakes dominate in the network culture. Therefore, the subject of the network culture is a construct or product created in the network of relationships and in the medium of various micro-publics.

The book ends with the reflections by famous media theorist Alexander R. Galloway, who personifies communication networks, identifying different network models with mythological heroes and their networked strategies. On the other hand, he explores the structure of network in the perspective of new materialism, revealing the complex organisation forms as well as mechanisms of power and control.

The book brings new insights in the research of network society and culture, expanding the horizons of philosophy, media theory, communication and cultural studies. It also motivates to look for new ways of understanding the concepts of network and identity in order to transform the colonizing model of communication and create positive social change.