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MASS MEDIA IN JANUSZ KORCZAK'S LIFE. INSPIRATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK TODAY

In 2012 it has been seventy years since Janusz Korczak died. Although many years have elapsed, Korczak's words and deeds teach us the lesson how to understand and love children. The power of Korczak's presence in today's reality lies in the fact, as A. Levina wrote, that "Korczak's life was the demonstration of his faithfulness to the principles he would live by, and that he became a moral paragon, the symbol of authentic interest in the fate of most defenceless and disadvantaged human beings – children"¹. The question which thus arises: how to recognise this presence in today's sphere of life made up of modern information and communication technology? It is especially important if the fact that media sphere brings about both dangers and possibilities for man and the family is taken into consideration. The Pope's Message for the 38th the World Communications Day: "The Media and the Family – A Risk and a Richness" is devoted to this issue. "Thanks to the unprecedented expansion of the communications market in recent decades, many families throughout the world, even those of quite modest means, now have access in their own homes to immense and varied media resources. As a result, they enjoy virtually unlimited opportunities for information, education, cultural expansion, and even spiritual growth – opportunities that far exceed those available to most families in earlier times. Yet these same media also have the capacity to do grave harm to families by presenting an

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¹ Quoted after: J. T a r n o w s k i, *Janusz Korczak Today*, Warsaw 1990, p. 96.

inadequate or even deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality” (nr 2)².

1. MARSHALL McLUHAN AND JANUSZ KORCZAK

Communication lays the basis for the development of the person, the family and society. The history of human kind is the history of communication. “Technologies [...] entirely change the way people use their five senses, the way they react to various phenomena, and this way they change their life form and the shape of the society”³. These are the words of a famous Canadian media expert, Marshall McLuhan who lived 1911 to 1980, used to characterize the power of contemporary information and communication techniques. His technological determinism assumed the idea that the technological inventions inevitably lead to the cultural change: we shape our tools, our tools shape us in turn.

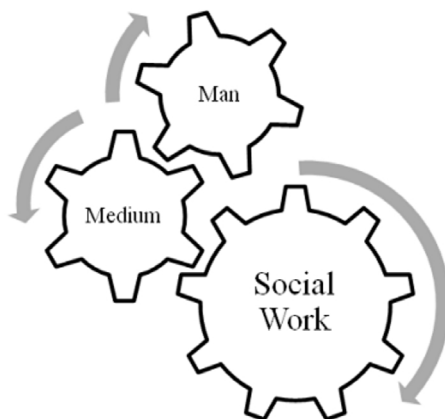


Figure 1. McLuhan's Technological determinism: *The Medium is the Message*

² See J. Ję c z e ń, *Family in Mass Media World*, [in:] R. P o d p o r a (Ed.), *Człowiek – kultura – rodzina a Internet*, Lublin: Gaudium 2007, s. 131.

³ T. W o l f, *Suppose he is what he Sounds Like [...]*, [in:] G. S t e a r n (Ed.), *McLuhan: Hot & Cool*, New York 1967, p. 19.

The communication channels constitute the basis of the cultural change⁴. He claimed that the means is also the message⁵. He believed that the medium itself changes people more than the sum of all the messages transmitted by the medium (*the medium is the message not the medium is the message*)⁶. These McLuhan's observations can be referred to the changes which are the consequence of the new technologies, taking place in the social work sphere (Figure 1).

Janusz Korczak skilfully apprehended this truth at the end of the previous century. Janusz Korczak (1878-1942) – a doctor, an educator, a writer, a journalist, a great friend of children, including those who would spend their lives in the street (he could be called the pioneer of today's streetworking). *Children of the Streets* (1901) was one his first literary works. The presentation portrays Janusz Korczak as the person who grasped the significance of mass media in shaping a person as an individual as well as a part of a community. I use the word *a person* to be in line with Korczak's well known motto – a child is a complete and whole person. To Korczak a child was the demonstration of God's mystery. This made Korczak constantly request to assure children's right to dignity, the right equal to the right adults enjoy. With regards to this context Korczak writes: "there is something in a child – it feels and tests – it hurts, craves, self-realises, loves, trusts, hates – it believes, doubts, takes in and rejects. This speck is able to embrace it all with its thought: the stars and the ocean, mountains and abysses. And what else is the contents of the soul if not the universe devoid of its dimensions? This is the contradiction in a human being; created from the ashes God descended upon to live in"⁷.

Janusz Korczak's mass media activity:

- From 1899 to 1901 published in the "Czytelnia dla Wszystkich" (*A Reading Room for All*) journal;
- In February 1900 he started his cooperation with the weekly satirical magazine "Kolce" (*Thorns*);
- From 1904 to 1905 he was a columnist for the "Głos" (*Voice*) magazine being responsible for the "Na mównicy" (*At the Lectern*) column;

⁴ See E. G r i f f i n, *Podstawy komunikacji społecznej*, Gdańsk: GWP 2002, p. 344.

⁵ See E. M c L u h a n, F. Z i n g o r e, *Essential McLuhan*, Toronto 1995, p. 151-161.

⁶ M. M c L u h a n, *Understanding Me. Lectures and Interviews*, Toronto: Anansi 2003, p. 76-97.

⁷ J. K o r c z a k, *Pisma wybrane*, t. I, Warszawa 1978, s. 84.

– From 1904 to 1905 his novel “Dziecko salonu” (*Child of the Drawing Room*) was published as a series at the “Głos”;

– In the same year (1905) Korczak started writing for the “Przegląd Społeczny” (*Social Review*);

– From March to May 1906 Korczak was publishing his “Feralny tydzień” (*A Fateful Day*), in February 1907 he created and published his series of short stories: “Szkola życia” (*A School of Life*);

– The greatest work of Korczak’s was the “Mały Przegląd” (*Little Review*) (9.10.1926-1.09.1939). It was the publication for children. It has also found its followers after many years. At the initiative of the Shalom Foundation the present-day children’s home inmates were given the chance to see how real journalists of an important magazine work; they prepared their texts which were later published as a newspaper by the Shalom Foundation (20.11.2007). The Korczak’s year associated contest has been announced – “The Little Review – Reactivation” is the attempt to revive Janusz Korczak’s idea (2012);

– The *Old Doctor on the Radio*. From 1934 to 36 the writer had his radio show in which he created the character of the Old Doctor – a fully fledged radio personality children truly adored. The programmes found the audience among children as well as whole families of different confessions. The Old Doctor created the air of trust and friendly, positive attitude towards children;

– Korczak returned to his radio programmes in 1938; the new broadcasts were designed for teenagers and adults. Korczak made his last radio appearance in September 1939 – this time he was addressing children trying to console them and to make them ready for what was yet to come.

Korczak’s most important mass media heritage is “The Little Review”. Not only does “The Little Review” give us the insight into the weekly magazine dedicated for Jewish orphans and published before the Second World War, but it is also a guideline for present day media for children. When I say children, I mean the lonely and aggrieved, the so-called children of the street for whom street workers provide their counselling as well as the children in danger of exclusion.

2. MASS MEDIA’S FUNCTIONS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

We can distinguish three roles Korczak’s mass media played both in the pasts – “Yesterday” as well as in the present day – “Today” (when inspired by Korczak’s media involvement):

- in communication;
- in identity formation;
- in education.

We can also outline the scope of the mass media impact:

- internal – which is applicable to:
 - the group which creates the mass media,
 - the group which uses the mass media,
 - the isolated group (a nationality or religious group, the group of the excluded, victims of violence),
- external – which is applicable to the group the message is targeted at.

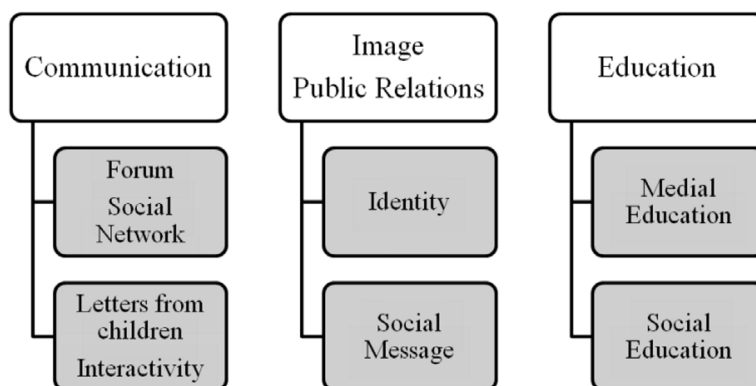


Figure 2. Mass Media's Functions

The mass media's initial role is communication; internal and external. "The Little Review" was a weekly magazine for children made by children and thus it created the forum for the young people to communicate and exchange their opinions. These opinions often concerned the children's Jewish origin which in the mid-war period was regarded a specific type of "social exclusion". The weekly journal was also a tool to communicate with the outside world; children would write their letters to the editor and were provided with answers.

Another role is the identity formation. In its internal sense the *Review* united the children of Korczak's, made it possible to present their social identity. It was the message conveyed to the public; we the children are like all other people, regardless our age, origin or religion.

And the third; educational role. We can speak about media education in the internal sense. Children learned how to use mass media. Owing to their engagement in the magazine creation they became acquainted with various spheres of life. In the external sense, these children educated other children.

These objectives of “The Little Review” may provide inspiration for today’s social workers, street workers as well as volunteers who give their aid to the children in need, the wronged, socially excluded, the children of the street.

The fact that children use modern technologies to communicate with one another must be borne in mind⁸. They use mobile phones and the Internet to create groups (both in real as well as the virtual world); we can address these groups when we use the same type of media (the Internet, a mobile phone). These media shape children’s life, education, pastime activities, information. Regrettably, children’s Internet activity may lead to dangerous forms of behaviour; disclosure of their personal data, chats with potential assaults, exposure to pornography, on-line shopping, etc. The virtual world often seems to be ideal and unattainable; for children it may constitute such threats as suicides, prostitution, thefts, addictions. And among the whole array of social portals there are the services which instruct, e.g. how to commit suicide. 10 days ago (on 23rd November 2012) in Rome there was a funeral ceremony of a fifteen year old who had committed suicide. His death was caused by malicious jokes and alleged homosexuality information published on Facebook⁹. Today’s social portals, blogs and on-line chats are the equivalent of the on-line street life; here we can find children in danger, those who are the subjects of domestic abuse, addicts, those who look for the cosy and protective atmosphere of a family house.

Without the new media (the Internet, a mobile phone with the internet access) it is impossible to work with children and in children communities,

⁸ The research results published by the Eurobarometer show that as much as 75% of the children between the age of 6 and 17 in the EU and as much as 89% in Poland use the Internet. Young internet users in Poland constitute a much larger group than their parents (82%). A similar situation refers to the use of mobile phones: 63% of ten-year-olds in UE have a mobile phone (75% in Poland) and 11% with the Internet access (18% in Poland). Source: *Towards a safer use of the internet for children in the EU – a parents’ perspective*. Conducted by The Gallup Organization, Hungary upon the request of Directorate General Information Society and Media, Flash EB Series #248, 2008, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/eurobarometer/index_en.htm

⁹ <http://fakty.interia.pl/swiat/news/wysmiewany-na-facebooku-15-latek-odebral-sobie-zycie,1866846> (12.10.2012).

it is also impossible to establish contacts with them. In addition to regular street working, we can also speak about the necessity for on-line street-working.

Young people need the dialogue, and that is why there is the presence of numerous, so called *social software* they take part in. They want to be engaged in the information process, not only absorb the one-direction data transfer. Internet communicators, personal web pages, and the new concept media such as *Web 2.0* (popular interactive services as Wikipedia, YouTube, Blogger) are the symbols of their search for communication. One of the most interesting phenomena on today's web is blog – a computer diary (from the words Web and Logs)¹⁰. In 2006 there were 57 million active bloggers.

The new technologies utilised by children help them create their own, separate identity (e.g. the Y Generation), their own dialect and subcultures. The research conducted in the United States of America by Pew Centre's Internet and American Life and published in 2008 entitled *Networked Families* clearly indicate the existence of a new model of communication (*new connectedness*) based on the Internet and mobile phone experience. Other studies of the same research institute *Generations Online of 2009* show the generations become engaged into new technologies and new style of communication¹¹. The new generation with their new style of communication is referred to as *e-generation*, *Generation Y*, *Millennium Kids*, *Millennium Generation*, *Net Generation*, *Get Netters*, *Video Kids*. This *Y Generation* comprises children and the youth born after 1977¹².

In the case of the children of the street, the new media make up their home: both the virtual and the real one. Other media however (traditional ones such as the press, TV, radio) may acquaint the general public with this identity (image) of the excluded children. Being a child of the street is much

¹⁰ See A. L e n h a r t, M. M a d d e n, A. R. M a c g i l l, A. S m i t h, *Teens and Social Media. The Use of Social Media Gains a Greater Foothold in Teen Life as they Embrace the Conversational Nature of Interactive Online Media*, Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2007, p. I-IV. See also: J. J ę c z e ń, *Active Learning Serving Family*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 2(57)(2010), p. 215.

¹¹ Research carried out by Pew Centre's Internet and American Life can be found on www.pewinternet.org; See J. J ę c z e ń, *WiDi Technology in Family Life*, „Current Problems of Psychiatry” 11(4) (2010), p. 369.

¹² W. C w a l i n a, *Generacja Y – ponury mit czy obiecująca rzeczywistość*, [in:] T. Z a s ę p a (Ed.), *Internet. Fenomen społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, Częstochowa: St Pauls Edition 2001, p. 33.

more than just the problem of the very child. This is a social problem. The image of the excluded children presented in the mass media is often negative. However these children have their dignity. This dignity must be respected in communication. This dignity, whenever demonstrated in relations (in interpersonal communication and in the media) in an adult – a child configuration stands a chance to be preserved and conveyed onto such relation in other configurations: a child – and adult and a child – a child.

Respect for children's dignity is the foundation for upbringing and education. Mass media and new communication technologies are the means for this education and upbringing process. The media and technologies as such are neither morally right nor wrong; these qualities are ascribed to them by people. Children should thus be brought up to this media understanding (media education). This requires parents, educators and social workers to be media competent first. This comes as necessary, owing to the fact that the new media have become an indispensable element of today's children education.

Not only do the mass media make up the life sphere of schools, education and fostering centres and of social welfare institutions; they also have their educational role for the general public. The media objective is to create a community of people¹³. This is exceptionally important when we talk about the children who are disadvantaged, excluded, pushed to the margins of life. Janusz Korczak used to reach out to such children in the past; his present day followers should utilise new technologies and modern mass media in order to do the same. Communication should be faithful to the etymology of the word – *communicare*, which means “communicate, join, make something common, inform, consult”, or the word *communio* – that is “community, feeling of togetherness”. Pastoral Instruction *Communio et progressio* on the means of Social Communications, in nr 11 reads: “communication is so-

¹³ Man's specific position in the process of communication stems from onto-existential fact that he is a person, and the process of communication, as suggested in The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et progressio* on the means of Social Communications nr 11, is a person's message, which leads to the community of people. In the last Message for the World Communications Day: “The Communications Media: At the Service of Understanding Among Peoples”, the Pope says, that the basic ethic rule is “a person and the community of people are the aim and the measurement of mass media implementation: the communication must function between two persons and serve the integral purpose of person's development” (nr 4). See Ję c z e Ń, *Family in Mass Media World*, p. 130-131.

nothing more than juts conveying ideas or feelings, this is most of all giving yourself with love”¹⁴.

3. SYNTHESIS OF CHILD

Korczak has left the wealth of his know-how heritage; the knowledge he attained as a doctor, educator, writer, a “father to his children”. He seems to have attempted to make a great synthesis of a child¹⁵. His attempts are rediscovered today and complemented with new expertise as well as the new experiences today’s children share. The mass media and information technologies are a fundamental factor with which to create these experiences and shape the new world. Driven by Korczak’s inspiration we are compelled to create such synthesis here and now, we are impelled to, as Korczak used to write, “lean how to understand and how to love a child”¹⁶.

John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* concludes that “we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another”¹⁷.

¹⁴ See J. Ję c z e ń, *Family in Mass Media World*, p. 138.

¹⁵ W. T h e i s s, *Pedagogika „mądrzej miłości” dziecka*, zob.: <http://www.deon.pl/inteligentne-zycie/wychowanie-dziecka/art,5,pedagogika-madrej-milosci-korczaka,strona,2.html> (24.11.2012).

¹⁶ J. K o r c z a k, *Works*, vol. 7: *How to Love a Child. A Child in the Family*, Warsaw: The Publishing House Latona 1993.

¹⁷ J o h n P a u l I I, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, Rom 1981, no 26.

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MASS MEDIA IN THE LIFE OF JANUSZ KORCZAK.
INSPIRATIONS FOR TODAY'S SOCIAL WORK

S u m m a r y

In 2012 seventy years passed from Janusz Korczak's death. Despite the time that passed his words and acts still teach how to understand and love a child. The power of this presence of Korczak in today's world should be used by all people responsible for the mass media and communication technologies. It is them that shape our interpersonal relations, them that co-create our identity, educate, integrate our families and the society. Korczak understood very well the effect of the media on the life of an individual, of a family and of the society, and he devoted a lot of time to literary and journalist work. At the basis of this work and his

involvement in the mass media there was “a wise love” for the child, that we keep discovering anew even after so many years.

Translated by Tadeusz Karłowicz

Key words: Janusz Korczak, mass media, communications, social work.

MASS MEDIA W ŻYCIU JANUSZA KORCZAKA. INSPIRACJE DLA PRACY SOCJALNEJ DZIŚ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W 2012 roku minęło siedemdziesiąt lat od śmierci Janusza Korczaka. Mimo upływu czasu, jego słowa i czyny ciągle nauczają, jak rozumieć i kochać dziecko. Siłę tej obecności Korczaka w dzisiejszej rzeczywistości winni wykorzystać wszyscy odpowiedzialni za mass media i technologie komunikacyjne. To one kształtują dziś nasze relacje interpersonalne, współkreują naszą tożsamość, edukują, integrują nasze rodziny i społeczeństwo. Wpływ mass mediów na życie jednostki, rodziny i społeczeństwa Korczak doskonale rozumiał, poświęcając dużo czasu na pracę literacką i dziennikarską związaną z tą problematyką. U podstaw tej pracy i zaangażowania w mass media stała „mądra miłość” do dziecka, którą odkrywamy po latach ciągle na nowo.

Słowa kluczowe: Janusz Korczak, mass media, komunikacja, praca socjalna.

