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## Mediatization of Corporeality and Biopolitics in Cyberculture

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the ways of biopolitical control based on the corporeality deep mediatization in cyberculture. It is argued that such mediatization is inevitable process because of all-pervading interaction between bodies, technologies, media, etc. Thus, people's corporeality includes in complex system of different mediatized lifeforms. The article concentrates on the two forms of the corporeality deep mediatization in cyberculture. The key features of these forms are pointed out and investigated. It is standed that specific of these forms makes people corporeality permeable for biopolitical control. The ways of mediatized biopolitical control and their dangerous are demonstrated. Besides, it is shown that the mediatized biopolitical control sometimes makes people to face with the choice between mediatization and death. The author proposes the question if the biopolitical control is inevitable due to the deep corporeality mediatization.

**Keywords:** biopolitics, deep mediatization, biopolitical control, extended cyborg, cyber culture, the body representation

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## Медиатизация телесности и биополитики в киберкультуре

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**Аннотация.** В статье анализируются способы биополитического контроля на основе глубокой медиации телесности в киберкультуре. Утверждается, что такая медиатизация является неизбежным процессом из-за всепроникающего взаимодействия между телами, технологиями, медиа и т.п. Таким образом, телесность людей входит в сложную систему различных медиатизированных форм жизни. Рассматриваются две формы глубокой медиатизации телесности в киберкультуре. Выявлены и исследованы ключевые особенности этих форм. Утверждается, что специфика этих форм делает человеческую телесность доступной для биополитического контроля. Продемонстрированы способы медиатизированного биополитического контроля и их опасность. Кроме того, показано, что медиатизированный биополитический контроль иногда ставит людей перед выбором между медиатизацией и смертью. Автор ставит вопрос: неизбежен ли биополитический контроль в связи с глубокой медиатизацией телесности?

**Ключевые слова:** биополитика, глубокая медиатизация, телесность, биополитический контроль, расширенный киборг, киберкультура, репрезентация тела

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### Introduction

The idea of biopolitical control over the vital level of human existence (birth, death, reproduction, body functions) had been proposed before computer technologies and media reality rooted in everyday life. But nowadays media and ICT technologies shape everyday life and it means that ways of biopolitical control are

changing and its scope is expanding along with the expansion and / or deepening of the mediatization. It is necessary to understand the role of the corporeality deep mediatization in the contemporary forms of the biopolitical control. It is critically important because new mediatized forms of biopolitical control make some people to face with radical choice: mediatization or death.

### **The theoretical background**

The philosophical concept of biopolitics goes back to the several M. Foucault's texts, which demonstrate how purely vital phenomena are included in the area of political control. G. Agamben partially transforms M. Foucault's approach in such a way that it can be used to analyze the mediatized forms of biopolitics. P. Preciado applies biopolitical ideas to describe measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, the problem of biopolitics is considered by M. Hardt and A. Negri, R. Esposito, K. Mills and others.

J. Thompson suggested the original definition of mediatization. S. Hjarward and F. Krotz emphasized the significant influence of mediatization on social and cultural phenomena. However, this research is mostly grounded on the idea of the deep mediatization presented by A. Hepp and N. Couldry. There are also several articles and books devoted to the mediatization of the body / corporeality, including mediatization in the context of biopolitical control.

The phenomenology and ontology of corporeality go back to the phenomenological theories of E. Husserl, M. Merleau-Ponty and J.-L. Nancy. S. Gallagher is one of the researchers who investigate different aspects of corporeality.

It is necessary to find the special ontology to "build a bridge" between the immaterial structures of media reality, cyber technologies and the biological materiality of the bodies. This ontology based on the actor-network theory connecting semiotic systems and material objects, new materialism, agential realism and the assemblages theory.

The theoretical basis of the cyberculture studies is the M. Dery's book "Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century. Female bodies and corporeality representation in cyberculture artefacts" is explored in the feminist discourse.

The idea of a body and corporeality extended cyborgization relates to A. Clarke's book "Natural Born Cyborgs" and Clark's and D. Chalmers' extended mind concept. In addition, this approach to the cyborgization was influenced by the ideas of D. Haraway and cyberfeminism in general, concerning breaking biological/technical, nature/culture, mind/body oppositions.

### **Analyzes and results**

**Ontology of mediatized corporeality.** In the phenomenological tradition corporeality is the type of experience connecting with various aspects of body

functioning: spatial sensation, perception of objects in their relations to the body, self-perception of body states, affects, sexual attraction, etc. From this point of view, corporeality is the basis of agency, subjectivity, social and cognitive actions. In other words, body shapes the mind. The main components of corporeality are body image and body schema. “The body image consists of a complex set of intentional states and dispositions — perceptions, beliefs and attitudes — in which the intentional object is one’s own body” [1]. Body schema is mostly unconscious sensation of dimensions, dynamics and spatial position of the body allowing people to move and act. The body image and the body schema are quite closely interrelated, therefore, the mediatization of one of these components contributes to the mediatization of the other.

According to the corporeality ontology proposed by the new materialism, the body/corporeality is not some uniform passive substrate, shaped by various symbolic structures activities. Body is an active part of the world, which activities intrinsically entangled with the activities of the different kinds of another objects from physical things to symbolic structures. “Phenomena are produced through agential intra-actions of multiple apparatuses of bodily production. Agential intra-actions are specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve ‘humans’. Indeed, it is through such practices that the differential boundaries between ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’, ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ ” [2]. Thus, media structures form an assemblage network of interactions with bodies, which indicates the ontological inevitability of the deep mediatization of corporeality. “Deep mediatization is an advanced stage of the process in which all elements of our social world are inextricably related to digital media and their underlying infrastructure” [3]. At the same time, the corporeality mediatization can take various forms due to the type of culture.

**Forms of the corporeality mediatization in cyberculture.** Cyberculture is a type of culture, which artifacts are created by computer technologies. There are two key ways of the corporeality mediatization in cyberculture: through the representation of body and through the (extended) cyborgization of body. The representation of body influences the body image in the structure of corporeality and cyborgization influences the body schema.

The body mediatization through representation means that culture creates a set of visual images of bodies, which integrates into the self-perception and the body image of one’s own body. There are positive and negative body representations in movies with computer graphics, computer games, Social Medias etc. The positive body representation offering images of ideal bodies corresponding to the certain norms. Cyberculture has tools helping quickly transform the visual image of the body according to the norms and ideals (filters in Social Media, image editing, deep fakes). In material world plastic surgery can correct biological body to make them perfect as such ideal images.

Feminist phenomenologists contend that primarily female bodies and their images become the objects of repressive normalization to correspond to culturally inspired body standards. “The tacit and active women consent to the standards of

feminine self-presentation and, as a result, they are interested in regular work on the body with the help of fitness, dietary practices, make-up, etc. and such situation is often interpreted as a result of the pressure of mass culture — as the interiorization of male gaze” [4]. Even the bodypositive which is becoming a part of cyberculture and trying to represent diversity of real and imperfect bodies often demonstrates “non-standard” female bodies in just aesthetic and sexual contexts, while women’s body non-canonical manifestations are ignored.

Another way of representation of the body is a “negative” image of the body, when it is presented as an object of various destructive manipulations, it is infected or invaded. For example, such images of bodies can be found in the bodyhorror movies, where bodies are objectified and just looks like a sets of organs that could be reassembled in strange and unhuman configurations. A destructive objectification of corporeality correlate with the implicit dualistic metaphysics presented in various discourses and cultural forms. The body in such metaphysics becomes an object for manipulation and control by a higher instance (spiritual or political). The positive and the negative body representations instill the idea of body control.

The body mediatization through cyborgization is first of all the “extended” cyborgization, which means that it’s not necessary to integrate cybernetic elements into living flesh to become a cyborg. Extended cyborg is an assemblage of bodies, cognitive processes, devices, semiotic systems, forming unity of human and technical environment. For example mobile phone becomes a part of people’s personality and intersubjectivity: “Seen as such, a mobile phone, for example, is not an instrument of either isolation or solidarity — it is a device in which our solitude and togetherness is embodied, gets meaning and provides purpose” [5]. People interaction with computer techs environment makes them a hybrid of human and tech, because they used to share many they body and mind functions with the different devices. However, there is one perceptible tendency: “extended cyborgization” often suggests people tech components helping control body, for instance smart wristbands counting steps.

Representation and cyborgization influencing the body image and the body schema deeply mediatize corporeality. It seems that people get the great choice of cyber body practices and partly it is true, but there is another side of this situation: people’s corporeality become more and more permeable for the new forms of biopolitical control due to the controlling methods of the corporeality mediatization. People tend to perceive self-control over their bodies using devices as a normal part of their life, hence they open the gate for other actors who will assume this control too.

**Mediatization of biopolitics.** Biopolitics, according to Foucault’s definition, is “the political power control over life: it is, if you will, gaining power over a person as a living being, a kind of etatization of the biological, or at least some inclination towards such etatization” [6]. According to Foucault, biopolitical control arises when the state begins to view the population as a kind of collective body, which should reproduce and function stably. The state

operates with statistical data in the field of medicine and demography and tries to make population “normal” according to the certain average biological and medical norms. State is not interested in the health, reproductive abilities and life quality of each individual civil, it thinks about the statistics and the health of population.

According to Agamben’s biopolitical concept, there is the difference between two ancient Greek notions of life: “*zoe*, which meant the very fact of life, common to all living beings (whether animals, people or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the correct way or form of life for an individuals or a group” [7]. Gradually, the state begins to consider the preservation of “bare life” (life as a biological survival) by limiting rights, freedoms, political will, and indeed people subjectivity. The era of a permanent state of emergency is coming, and the visual metaphor of survived bodies without will and subjectivity is zombie: “figure of the zombie — the living dead, the mass of living corpses that are only bodies, that are only bare life” [8].

D. Lupton demonstrates the integration of two mediatization bases of the biopolitical control. According to her research, trying to solve the problem of overweight people the health care system (obviously a biopolitical system) consider not only rather contradictory medical and biometrical data concerning weight norm, but also culturally proposed images of normal bodies: “Medicine and health care exist in a cultural context in which certain long-established ideas about certain types of corporeality circulate” [9].

Technologies of the extended body cyborgization provide permanent everyday control over the body functions, especially with the help of self-tracking devices. The owners of self-tracking devices “often admit to researchers that they cannot start any activity (running, walking, exercising, eating, sleeping, working, having sex) without turning on the tracking option and generating data. Otherwise, it seems to them that they are wasting time” [10]. Thus, body experience is estimated from the point both of “norm” and “efficiency”, and this integrates individual life in the system of platform capitalism there people have to share they data with other actors by media systems and make their bodies permeable for the biopolitical control.

Such data driven mediatized biopolitical control is dangerous because it tends to reduce peoples’ corporeality and subjectivity to a certain set of predetermined parameters, hence: “it seeks to reduce all phenomena and means of accounting for phenomena to numbers, it simultaneously displaces other less easily quantifiable albeit insightful ways of expressing phenomena”. So “in the process, critics protest, an entire world of human, social and environmental complexity may get lost” [11]. From the other point of view, data driven approach could help people to take into account individual corporeality experience of each person, but in this case it is necessary to use other principals of getting and processing data which are not limited by “norm” and “control”.

Analyzing biocontrol during the COVID-19 pandemic P. Preciado points out that people can be included in a life protection system if they are ready to be

mediatized by the methods they do not choose, otherwise they will die. For example, now the Moscow government is going to introduce special QR codes to separate vaccinated people from unvaccinated ones and at the same time deprive the unvaccinated some social rights including several kinds of medical care (this is potentially deathful for them). Therefore, R. Esposito's immunization biopolitics concept contending that death is paradoxically used to preserve the bare life is consistent with Preciado's assertion: "A new utopia of an immune society and a new form of high-tech mass control over human bodies will be invented after this crisis" [12].

Now there is the problem: is the strengthening of biopolitical control inevitable together with the obviously inevitable the corporeality deep mediatization? Such theoretical approaches as cyberfeminism or xenofeminism contend that the deep corporeality mediatization as an alliance of humans, media and techs may open new possibilities to create different forms of life out of control: "if the phallogocentric codes work according to the command-control-information stencil, then resistance codes are written as new collectivities and hybrid identities using outsider and marginal experience" [13].

## Conclusion

And so, it can be argued that the corporeality deep mediatization is an inevitable process now, because people's bodies are included in the complex net interaction between people, cyber technologies and other material objects, media, semiotics systems etc. This mediatization effect changes both the body image and the body schema in the corporeality experience.

There are two main ways of the corporeality mediatization: the body representation mostly influencing on the body image and the extended cyborgization influencing the body schema. Both of these types of mediatization often shape people's corporeality in the frames of norm and control. And this fact make people's corporeality be permeable for the mediatized biopolitical control.

Mediatized biopolitical control periodically gives people the alternative: to be mediatized or to die. The question remains open whether biopolitical control is inevitable if the corporeality deep mediatization is an inevitable process.

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