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Lujza Nagy, Erika

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Mirties fenomenas ir nemirtingumo galimybė

Erika Lujza Nagy luiznad30@gmail.com

Institute of Philosophy Russian Academy of Sciences, Federación de Rusia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7684-8396>

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Abstract: This paper is about death and about immortality. It explores the experience and philosophical implications of death from different perspectives. Firstly, in the light of Mamardashvili's philosophy, it deals with the interconnection and interdependence of death and thinking. Secondly, through Jankélévitch's philosophy, it changes the perspective on the interdependence of death and thinking from the general to the personal perspective, when death becomes an intimate part of life. Further, thanks to Aries' research, the paper introduces historical details about what people brooded over death and how they expressed their thoughts in more explicit way. This makes it possible to look at the mediology of death as a philosophy that leads to reflection and critique of our contemporary attitude to death. On the one hand, the mediology of death motivates us to think about death – in this way it follows the philosophical tradition, on the other hand, it attempts to convince us for the first time of the immortality that can happen only in material form – and it is its novelty.

Keywords: mediology, death, Régis Debray, Merab Mamardashvili, Jankélévitch.

Summary: Šis darbas yra apie mirtį ir apie nemirtingumą. Jame skirtingais požiūriais nagrinėjamas mirties potyris ir jos filosofinės prasmės. Pirma, remiantis Mamardashvilio filosofija, darbe nagrinėjamas mirties ir mąstymo tarpusavio ryšys ir tarpusavio priklausomybė. Antra, perimant Jankélévitchiaus filosofijos perspektyvą, keičiamas požiūris į mirties ir mąstymo tarpusavio priklausomybę ir pereinama nuo visuotinio prie asmeninio požiūrio, kuomet mirtis tampa intymia gyvenimo dalimi. Trečioje straipsnio dalyje, remiantis Arieso tyrimu, pateikiamos istorinės detalės apie tai, ką žmonės galvoja apie mirtį ir kaip jie išreiškė mintis apie ją vis atviriau. Tokia interpretacijos linkmė leido pažvelgti į mirties mediologiją kaip į filosofiją, kuri skatina šiuolaikinio požiūrio į mirtį apmąstymus ir kritiką. Viena vertus, mirties mediologija mus motyvuoja mąstyti apie mirtį – taip ji remiasi filosofine tradicija, kita vertus, mirties mediologija stengiasi mus pirmą kartą įtikinti, kad egzistuoja nemirtingumas, kuris gali būti tik materialios formos, ir taip atsiskleidžia šios filosofijos naujumas.

Keywords: mediologija, mirtis, Régis Debray, Merabas Mamardashvilis, Jankélévitchius.

Introduction

It is always an awkward task to introduce ideas and concepts that are born by the philosopher. The philosophy of mediation is a synonym for mediology, and it cannot be the exception to the rule. The founder of this line of thought is a French philosopher Régis Debray, whose book *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France* (in English: The intellectual power in France) was published in 1979. The term mediology appeared firstly there. As a neologism, it is a combination of two words: *medium* from Latin

with the meaning of body in a process of transmission and *logos* from Greek that means explanation. The body of transmission links intelligible entity with all kind of actions: sensual, mundane, or political. Mediology is a philosophy: it is our astonishment when we look at abstract ideas that get material force and observe how the intangible gives birth to the material. Body is a device for connection between mundane life and eternity. Therefore, the basic conformation of mediology: an existence of soul is impossible without body.

Mediology develops a theory of transmission. The fundamental notion of this theory is a verbal noun that is formed from the verb “to transmit” (in French: transmettre). As a term, it is a loan word with the same meaning from the poet and philosopher, Paul Valéry’s oeuvre: “It is man’s greatest triumph over things, to have been able to carry the effects and fruits of eve’s labour (literally: results of labour from yesterday) until the next day. Mankind has only slowly risen on the heap of what lasts” (Debray et al 1998: 281-282)².

We do not want to disappear with our death without any traces, and therefore we transmit thoughts, beliefs, and our experience of life. Transmission forms culture as a duration, because of heritage that is saved by a medium, mediator, places of mediation (archives, museums, schools, libraries). Transmission is based on knowledge, strict hierarchy, education, mutual respect, and mutual effort. It is about conservation of ideas, about the traces, its salvage from annihilation and destruction in a changeable world:

A trace is not just something that remains from religion, knowledge or opinion, but it is one of the necessary conditions for their appearance and circulation. As each symbolic system is in itself a system of traces that is waiting for transmission through acceptance or creation of a system for precise writing. Trace supposes support, a tool, writing and reading technique, a semiotic regime, a method of indexation, control and conservation and a dissemination system (Debray et al 1998: 281)³.

It creates and upholds duration. Philosophy of mediation interprets memory as a self-organized work, a complex uninterrupted data processing that is a selection. The selection of what has to be forgotten and what has to be remembered is developed by technical and institutional (family, nation, religion, etc.) devices.

Many people want immortality in some potential form. There are also others, who fight against their suicidal tendencies. On the other hand, generally, people completely forget about their mortality, because they are busy with problems of everyday life and hypnotized by patterns of satisfaction. Therefore the subject of this article is a description of mediology’s approach to mortality and immortality as a philosophy that takes into consideration all particularities of our era, precisely that death is a taboo subject.

The main text of the paper has two key points. The core of the first section is the question of *why we must think about death*. In this part I will discuss Merab Mamardashvili’s and Vladimir Jankélévitch’s ideas about death for the answer to a question. The first one provides for thinking

about death in general, the second one explains the necessity of thinking about our own death. They can be united by the fact that Mamardashvili confirmed that he was acquainted with Jankélévitch's philosophy and found it very close to his own one of his interviews.. It is also possible because he mentioned in his other interviews. the importance of the French thought for him, that it had a constructive impact on himself. The French cultural background formed his personality, and without this he would not have been able to create his major work on Proust or read lectures on Descartes from an absolutely new perspective. Jean Cathala, a French journalist and long-time friend of Mamardashvili once said about him: "A Georgian in everything, and at the same time an absolute cosmopolitan, in the ancient sense of the word ("My hometown is the world"), Merab, fluently spoke in many languages, was especially deeply penetrated by French culture" (Kruglikov 1994: 237). The question *What we think about death?* lies at the heart of the second section. At the beginning of this I will write about the image of death from a historical point of view. It is based on the detailed study of the French historian, Philippe Aries, whose work is significant for a better understanding of the approach towards death that is given by mediology. The reason of this is that mediology of death can be considered as an approach which deals with what's going on in people's mind about death in contemporaneity. Ideas of Aries and Debray can be united because they are concerned with death's return into reality. Mamardashvili's philosophy explains why thinking is impossible without death. Jankélévitch's thoughts describe the personal level of the connection between thinking and death. Thus, these two philosophers confirm the necessity of thinking about death at all levels: they provide arguments that are useful for mediology also as the basis when it reminds us of the necessity of thinking about death - thanks to them we can't afford to refuse the suggestion of mediology. Thanks to Aries the novelty of mediology of death can be noticed, because we become familiar with the tradition of cultural understanding of death and immortality.

Sometimes the reader may have difficulty with understanding the authorship of the ideas, if he wants to find an exact border. In order for him/her not to be confused about this, he/she should know that it is a part of philosophy. The aim of philosopher while he reads other philosophers is to comprehend their ideas. And as Merab Mamardashvili says: "If we understand someone else's consciousness, then it is ourselves" (1992a: 83)⁶.

Poems are used because they make ideas more comprehensible thanks to the direct contact with meaning, as it was noticed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "A novel, poem, picture or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation" (2005: 175). Thus a nexus of meanings is more clearly presented for the reader.

1. Death as a Philosophical Symbol and the Geometry of Adieu

*Death is a marriage; a black wedding
Whose links strengthen from year to year,
For there can be no divorce.
Joseph Brodsky (1976: 264)*

*Is it worth while? I don't think so. Not a
word.
Like two straight lines, crossing and parting
at a point,
We say goodbye. I don't think
We'll meet again, in Paradise or Hell.
These two versions of the afterlife
Are merely addendums on Euclid's map.
Joseph Brodsky (1976: 266)*

Is it worth while? I don't think so. Not a word. Like two straight lines, crossing and parting at a point, We say goodbye. I don't think We'll meet again, in Paradise or Hell. These two versions of the afterlife Are merely addendums on Euclid's map. *Joseph Brodsky (1976: 266)*

The book of Merab Mamardashvili, *Aesthetics of Thinking*, was published in 2001. This is the first paperback edition of his lectures on joy of thinking from the 1986/87 academic year when he taught at the Tbilisi University. As the author says, the title refers to one of Rilke's poems:

*How the hour bows down, it touches me,
throbs
metallic and lucid and bold:
my senses are trembling. I feel my own power
—
on the plastic day I lay hold (Rilke 1949:
11).*

Aesthetics as a part of the title has to remind the listener and the reader about the joy of art that is caused by perceptions when somebody becomes aware of something through the senses. What concerns thinking, this term defines it as a special condition of human being, when he suddenly has a “sense of irreversible fulfillment of meaning” (Mamardashvili 2001: 11). The joy of thinking and an aesthetic joy are not the same. At the heart of the first one, there is a fullness of spirit's tension, meanwhile, at the heart of the second one a release of excess creative energy, a satisfaction can be found. Someone's intention to think or desire to have a thought is not enough for thinking, because thought is involuntary and unexpected, especially if it is a *pure thought*. Contemplation by pure thought means that things are seen without psychological impurity. Psychological impurity is all intentions, for example, glorification, compensation or punishment. Thought is determined by being at the limit of human capabilities, in complete nostalgic estrangement from everybody (including myself) and everything (life, circumstances, etc.).

Nostalgic estrangement is caused, on the one hand by the strong desire to establish oneself as a complete person, and on the other hand by remembrance of that way of being at the emotional level. Nothing empirical can be the starting point for authentic being. The estrangement explains the taken path for “birth-myself-in-thought” (Mamardashvili 2001: 42) as decisive to me.

Individual efforts and tradition of thinking have to be combined in order to think. In thinking the ‘I’ of the thinker is always present, but in a transcended form, when the existence as such can be seen instead of the content of a person. An object of thinking is not exactly an object in the usual sense as for example a chair or a table. The object of thinking is the thinking itself, the field of thought in which the movement of thought takes place. This is the power of self-penetration: thinking that observes itself. It is a miracle: «It [thinking] must already exist» (Mamardashvili 2001: 63). Thinking requires concentration in order to see structure, to be aware of proof, which is indivisible. Indivisible proof indicates an absence of an interval in thinking, in other terms a harmony of multiplicity of being.

Mamardashvili introduces a notion for uniting two sides of thinking (thinking as an action and thinking as a condition) in one word: *thoughtaction*⁷, at the source of which is human being as a person. *Thoughtaction* is a trial in terms of eternity, an experience that makes up the core of a person. It is a living knowledge that is exposed suddenly and rapidly disappears at the bottom of consciousness. An ability to find this living knowledge means a capacity to establish an identity with oneself, which is very difficult. This obtained identity is a content of the notion “person”. The core of a person is a serious point, a genesis of all ideas, a focus on eternity, which is possible solely in solitude: “Or, in other words I can say, that conscious beings are oriented beings” (Mamardashvili 2001: 374). A conscious form of being is achieved by someone when he looks at the essence of something that is generally replaced by a phenomenon. At the personal level it means that he penetrates into the essence of himself, and he refuses to pretend not to see the truth about himself. In this way, signs of fate are unraveled and truth can be admitted. A human being has an organ of thinking: this is a special sensitivity of mind. This sensitivity to clarity gives a complete presence of meaning that is accompanied by tension. The tension cannot be held up for a long time therefore it is necessary to fall into thinking every time anew. Thinking cannot be considered as a process, because there are no starting point and continuity.

Nescience always accompanies thinking. Thinking and nescience have mutual connection because thinking brings comprehension. Only thanks to comprehension we have an opportunity to achieve an authentic being, as a person. We lose this comprehension because we are not able to be in relation to an eternity for a long time. Therefore, we always have to make an effort to have this knowledge, to fill the gap of nescience in order for comprehension to be at the required level. If we do not do that, we will find ourselves in an empirically bad infinity. In Mamardashvili’s

philosophy, there is a difference between the two types of infinity. Infinity which is full only of truth is an eternity that can be an orientation. It means that we genuinely accept the being as it is with all circumstances and consequences of our actions and decisions. When we are capable of not pretending that something did or did not happen. The other type is an empirically bad infinity that is filled with intentions, desires, perceptions and requirements, which are addressed to being. An empirically bad infinity is a result of our emotional reaction to events of our life and history without thinking. When we don't want to really understand what precisely happens, because we don't want to be responsible for it. Then we choose nescience as an option, instead of being faced with the truth, the reality. It is absurd in itself. The nonacceptance of truth has unpredictable consequences because it is a violation of harmony. Generally, the being is in equilibrium. This balance is upset by us when we refuse to take on a responsibility. The violation of harmony holds us back therefore we live in an empirically bad infinity, in which the same things always repeat many times. We are not conscious and this nescience makes the authentic being impossible.

Thus, thinking is a miracle of chance encounter and a thought is a gift of knowledge. As Mamardashvili says if this encounter happens I will have to be in a certain condition - in the fullness of my intensity - in order for knowledge to become mine. Then there will be a contact with a vivid consciousness. Knowledge is not a content of anything, that can be shared, but comprehension as an action. The life path of a person will depend on his ability to accept the gift and not pass by. If he accepts it, he will be alive in life. If he passes by, he will live his life as a zombie, as a dead man. History, law, freedom also depend on it. Person as a notion has not got definition, because human being always may be different. And define something always means set a limit: "Person is a condition of form and a way of being. And only such subject, who is a person is expedient in the world since what is happening in the world can happen, happen in the fullness of the event at the point of meeting with such a person" (Mamardashvili 2001: 404). Death is a tragedy precisely because of a disappearance of a person, a special form of being that is irreplaceable. The loss of a person is replaceable by nothing.

In Mamardashvili's philosophy thinking is strongly connected with death. Without death, there is no thinking and there is no chance of an authentic being because only an acceptance of death leads us to live courageously. When we choose this way of life that means we are ready to be responsible for our life because we can accept ourselves and other people as they are.

Death cannot be known. It is a symbol that illuminates life. Death as a symbol is a part of a special category of symbols. In their book *Symbol and Consciousness. Metaphysical Essay on Consciousness, Symbolism and Language*⁸ Mamardashvili and Piatigorsky discuss three categories of symbols: the first is rooted in consciousness, it is a part of the structure of consciousness, the second is associated with the psyche and the third is called the role of symbols in philosophy. If symbol is a part of the

structure of consciousness, it means that it is numerously repeated in times and space, and during this repetition they remain the same. An individual interpretation and reaction to symbols organizes the second category, which is associated with psyche. Philosophical symbols form a special category, because these are not things in reality, these are not objects that can be touched. We need philosophical symbols to start doing philosophy. Death is one of these philosophical symbols that initiates us into life. Thanks to it a human being has to make decisions and go through his life-experience. It is not a punishment. When people are aware that they will die, suddenly they become free to do whatever they want. They feel relieved to live without fears. They are brave enough to deal with problems in their own way, no matter what conventions are accepted by others. An opinion of others has no effect anymore. They take a risk that others misunderstand them. However, the longing for an authentic being is stronger than their fears. Therefore death must be accepted as a thought on our own death in order to live our life consciously, courageously, and freely, as a person. *Memento mori*.

An acceptance of death as a thought on our own death is what Vladimir Jankélévitch called “taking death seriously” (Jankélévitch 1999: 19). He defines this notion as a capability of looking at being as such and non-being simultaneously. Then we change from a perspective on death as an abstract idea to real, precise, and maximally accessible knowledge of death. In this way, death is an event that is precisely located. We do not know anything about its details, but we know that the combination of time and place is waiting for us. In this way, we talk about death as universal law, and then there is no thinking at all because we talk about nothing. We can notice that death has double-face: one side – death as a natural phenomenon and the second – death as somebody’s *last future* (Jankélévitch 1999: 21), not a change. The source of real knowledge of death is an acceptance of a fact that it will happen to me. It is “not reasoning, but an instantaneous intuitive comprehension” (Jankélévitch 1999: 25). Why do I need this knowledge? This knowledge makes me be mature. It is not an external change, but a change of combination of chords in my inner world. It is an inner transformation. Thanks to it someone decides to improvise his life. He is motivated not by ready-made, universal knowledge, but by personally experienced knowledge.

We experience this instantaneous intuitive comprehension when we lose a loved one individual⁹. A part of us also dies at that moment: “*the inconsolable mourns the irreplaceable*” (Jankélévitch 1999: 31). Then the inconsolable human being remains alone with death and comprehends it as a harbinger of the finale of his own life¹⁰. The distance between the subject and the object becomes minimum therefore sympathetic cognition happens. The death of the significant other initiates us into meditation on our own death that leads us to be brave enough to be who we really are: we realize that we have nothing, except our life. The death of the significant other relieves us of fear of the world, because we see that life goes on for everybody else, meanwhile we are face-to-face with the catastrophe, the end of our own world in a way. When we

fully comprehend this, the choice of the authentic being prevails over everything else. This knowledge about eternity makes us be responsible for being, that is full of harmony. When someone chooses to achieve an authentic being he feels a sense of balance and this is the experience of being authentic at the personal level. The authentic being at personal level holds up the harmony of being, that is the universal form of balance.

Jankélévitch tried in his work to reveal metaphysics of death through a notion of “quod of death”. “Quod” is an adverb in Latin language that means “in relation to something”. Behind this notion there is a question: Can human being know what death is? Death itself is neither a transition, nor an absence, nor even any other form of existence. Death is an absolute silent silence, a complete nihilization, destruction of life and at the same time a compulsion to create. Nihilization from the Latin word nihil means nothing, non-existence, and the human being is predestined to die. He is moriturus (Jankélévitch 1999: 91). It is a complete cessation of any kind of form at all. The acquired form of someone’s existence is saved by memory because death itself is the loss of form.

A funeral, with all of its components, is a need of people, who stay alive. They prolong the moment of death by traditions because they try to peek at it. People are confused in front of non-existence without traditions. They do not know what to do and they cannot do anything. Everyone is always equally far from death, because it is a void of nothingness. We can’t measure the distance between death and us. Maybe we become numb because of it. It is impossible to learn to die. This experience is unique and nothing is equal to it.

We must think about death. The importance of this rests on the fact that it is the ground for a conscious way of life, an inspiration for freedom. *Requies aeterna est la fin de tous* ¹¹.

2. “Non Omnis Moriar”¹² as a Message of Hope Against the Inane Facing Humanity

*The ribbon stirs in the wind, black,
gypsylike.
How strange for us to leave you in this
Place, under heaped flowers, in the grave,
Here, where people lie as they lived:
In their long darkness, between walls;
With only silence and the birds hinting at
the change.*
Joseph Brodsky (1976: 262)

*Goodbye, until our not-meeting in Paradise
or Hell.*
Joseph Brodsky (1976: 266)

Philippe Ariès, a French historian opted to choose death as a subject of his research. From the 1960s, he focused his attention on the connection between person’s self-identity and death. In 1977, his book *L’homme*

*devant la mort*¹³ was published by Éditions du Seuil. After his death, he was characterized as a “historian of tomorrow”¹⁴ (*in French: l'historien du dimanche*), because tomorrow is different from today thanks to thought, reflection. He was a “historian of tomorrow” because he pointed towards human freedom. In the mentioned book, he presented a classification that was based on the detailed analysis of various blocks of information, for example, archival and historical documents, tombstones, philosophical and literary works.

His classification has five parts: “tamed death”, “one’s own death”, “distant and near death”, “death of you”, “overturned death”. These are differentiated from each other by how death was described.

The early middle ages are the time of “tamed death” (*in French: la mort apprivoisée*). Death came as no surprise. It was not absurd. The shame of dying without witnesses and ceremonies was the basic feature of “tamed death”. It left an idea of existence after death out. Death was associated with something peaceful. People considered death as something amiable. It was always close to them. There were no borders between cemeteries and cities. They refused the ancient tradition, when somebody who had passed away, was buried outside of the city. It contrasts with antiquity that considered the cemetery as a place which purity is dubious. It did not cultivate the fear. Tombstones showed an exact burial place. On tombstones were indicated: name, marital and social status, profession, age, date of death, level of consanguinity with whom the tombstone had been ordered. Also, it was decorated with a bust or a portrait of a person, who had passed away. Tombstones (*monumentum, memoria*) kept and transmitted memories. It was a way to stay alive. Nameless burial was the worst that could happen, and generally, it was the fate of slaves. In the VIII century, a burial in church or around it appeared as a tradition. Thanks to Christianity, the cemetery began to be a sacred and public place. Burials which were separated from the cemetery made people have a fright. Therefore, if the traditional funeral was forbidden for someone with a place in the cemetery, his coffin would be placed between branches of the cemetery trees. Everyone who committed suicide was buried in this way. However, the main tradition of burial was not in the cemetery, but in church, under the floor, until the XVIII century, and an exact place was not indicated. Gravestones saved information about a person: monogram, date, professional instruments, symbols of death (skulls, skeletons, hour-glass). For a medieval man, the cemetery became a public place. People could live in the cemetery if they were in need of shelter. Also, all court decisions were announced in the cemetery, and someone could be imprisoned in the cemetery. It was possible to walk quietly there and to bake bread, and therefore at the beginning of the Modern Age, the cemetery became a market. The church attempted to take control over it, but the cemetery was also a place for dating and playing games. To sum up this information we can describe it as a harmonious and conscious relation to death. The image of man is integral – *homo totus*. He transfers the integrity of soul and body to the afterlife, where only peace and not punishment awaits him.

“One’s own death” (*in French: la mort de soi*) has its own limited period of time: XI-XVII centuries. The idea that there is life after death and the idea of dualism are the heritage from that period. Belief in dualism between human body and soul appeared, when body was considered as a cage for the immortal soul. The immortal soul had a mission: to save our individuality. People thought that an immortal soul had an ability to create something also without a body. Some other concepts around death also were developed in detail at that time, for example: the Last Judgment, Paradise, Hell, the book of Good and Bad Deeds. If somebody died suddenly, it was the worse form of passing away, because there were no ceremonies. Unexpected death (*mors improvisa*) frightened people. The bed was the symbol of death, and people wanted to die in their own bed. Death was portrayed as a half-decomposed corpse that danced with people, who were alive. A person had enough time to prepare himself for passing away. Physical aspects of mortality as pain started making people nervous. It was the reason for the strict social conventions of funerals. People stopped publicly expressing grief in a strong way as before. They did it in another way, through the dress of mourning. In the beginning, the dress of mourning could be of any color, only in XVI century black was announced as the only one. The funeral procession became a symbol of death in XIII century. It was a form of intercession in heaven, and therefore it consisted of priests, monks, beggars, and children. People had coffin from the XIV century. They decorated it by sculpture of the person, who had passed away in a horizontal position or by his death mask. They believed that it could save the secret of person. From XIII to XV century tombstones were not used, because the location of the body seemed like something not important. In XVI century tombstones returned back with information on its owner: epitaphs expressed feelings of relatives, date of death, symbols of mastered science and arts, moments of biography. Tombstone with sculpture in a horizontal position was a symbol of compromise between the tradition of tamed death and an individual desire not to lose an identity. Tombstones that were decorated by sculpture in a vertical position were a privilege of the rich because it was a symbol of salvation. Both of them were related to eternity, but in a different way: “Both here and there are eternity, but the emphasis is different: dynamism of salvation resists passivity of peaceful repose” (Aries 1992: 224). The types of tombstones described were inside churches, but the cemetery also had its own traditions. A cross as a tombstone appeared in the XVII century. When it became a symbol of death, it happened not just because of Christianity. The cross was also a symbol of hope for protection. In summary, death is a part of life. An image of man is bifurcated: body disappears and only an immortal soul remains for the future and saves individuality. Saints have to provide support for the soul. Therefore, people give instructions in detail for funeral in order to be supported by them.

The period of “distant and near death” (*in French: la mort longue et proche*) is XVII-XVIII centuries. Death is associated with a break with the human relations. Death became metaphysical: the task of meditating

on death is set for everyone. A person has to be always in condition as at *hora mortis nostrae* (in Latin: *our death hour*). People have to imagine their own death in order to avoid living without consciousness of life. There were two types of tombstones: in the form of a board with a name and date or a coffin in a crypt. In the XVIII century, a man realized that the nothingness of death is identical to nature. Death takes on sensuality. People feel anxious about death. The fear of death is already not an idea, but a part of reality. Therefore, it is better not to notice and not to talk about death. A notion of *homo totus* disappears, and the separated soul prevails over body.

“Death of you” (in French: *la mort de toi*) as an idea was formed in the XIX century. People thought that death is an abyss that is identical to God and nature. They were kept alive in nature after they had passed away. They wanted to be united in this abyss. The relationship between dead and alive people became intimate and sentimental. Therefore, the custom of visiting the graves of relatives was formed. And it is a starting point of the cult of memory. They were inspired by antiquity, so they made tombstones as pyramids, columns, or chapels, usually for families. Gravestone statues represented the coming together in heaven. At the same time, thoughts about death interfere with happy industrial life, and this confrontation makes the government of the city move cemeteries over the city’s frontiers. Thus an attitude to death is controversial.

The last part of Philippe Ariès’ classification is called “overturned death” (in French: *la mort inversée*) and it is about his present time. People live as if there is no death. They do not think about it. They use the hospital as a hiding place for the death because people notice that death is dirty and find this fact inappropriate. Death lost its public meaning, and therefore rituals for all occasions of life also lost their importance. Nowadays people do not know what to do when they feel the strongest emotional flows. Death is a defeat. It is a failure, a mistake that must be hidden. Therefore ideally a person should be ignorant. People make him to be ignorant because they cannot do anything with a person, who focuses his attention on his own death or an attempt to change the fact of his mortality that gets an exact time. Death as *mors repentina et improvisa* that means sudden and unforeseen death is the desirable way to die. Earlier, if a person did not have time to prepare himself for death it was a misfortune, damnation. Nowadays, it is a blessing.

Sudden and unforeseen death as a desirable way to die underlines two important things. The first one: we don’t want to think about death. The second one: we don’t prepare ourselves for death. Consequently, we don’t care about our body. And there is a link between P. Ariès’s thoughts and the mediology of death because Ariès describes facts and Debray also knows about them, but he does more. He shows that we don’t fully understand that a soul exists only through body and he explains how mediology can help to comprehend this viewpoint.

A detailed description of Ariès classification was necessary to understand what is new we have in proposing a mediology of death. He finished his classification with the XXth century. I think mediology of

death may be considered as a supplement to his classification because it is about the XXI century. Mediology as a philosophy makes an eternity a little bit more accessible than it is for a person¹⁵. It accepts the traditional attitude towards a person, who meditates on death. According to it, he is always unacceptable. He belongs to a special category of people: heroes, martyrs, victims. The novelty of mediology of death can be explained by its basic question: how our digital era changes our mind about death? We know that the digital era throws us into confusion because it destroys familiar patterns. It also has a great impact on collective opinion on death and mortality. Mediology of death shows us the digital version of “overturned death”. Traditional funeral masks are replaced by audiovisual ghosts that remain thanks to the computer. We all will have a personal zombie of ourselves that is created by social networks, for example, Facebook or Instagram. Our relatives inherit our Instagram account from us when we pass away. They can give a memorable status to it or can close it, but they have to provide an official death certificate¹⁶. An account that receives a memorable status has some particularities: nobody can use it, it has some special inscriptions (for example: Rest In Peace). All of its messages are saved, but these are available only to the audience, that was formed when the person had been alive. Nobody can subscribe to it, and it cannot be recommended to anyone by the system.

We are convinced that death is an old-fashioned concept. Our time offers different forms of immortality to us, for example: to clone human beings or to use an artificial limb. In fact, all of these just “hide from us our inability to feel and think about time, that we spent” (*Médium. La mort et après* 2019: 8).

People are under the illusion that scientific progress will find the way of achieving absolute immortality. Mediology of death leads them to change the perspective on immortality when it says that only memorable traces are able to confirm someone’s existence after his death. Memorable traces are able to create an image of us because these were some parts of us. At the same time, we should remember that this image is not similar to the real us. We notice through traces the materiality of death for the first time. Generally, we think that death is the end of our body, but we hope for the immortality of the soul. Consequently, we focus attention on rituals which are necessary for the peaceful rest of the soul. However, now, we are doubtful that the soul can survive us. Mediology gives us the memory of a body, without a soul, because we don’t know what happens to the soul. It shows that we can have only this. Finally, a memory of a person is not identical to the person, who he really was. It is just our impression that we got earlier, and traces always evoke only this impression. Nowadays, we look at death more often as a bureaucratic nightmare. We do not meditate on death in a serious way. We left behind us almost all rituals for death. We have lost the meaning of cremation as a ritual. Today, it is not about our humility in front of faith or god, as earlier. It is only about not being time-consuming. There is no time for pause. We suffer from a lack of time to be in mourning. Mediology interprets death as a material metamorphoses: instead of our body we get different

forms of traces – burials, photos, favourite books, and objects. According to mediology this is the reason for building museums, libraries, etc., because we need special places where traces can be saved. Also, it explains why we keep all properties of our family members, who passed away. People made gravestones because they wanted to remember. Gravestones can be understood in terms of mediology as the first form of mediated memory. It was the first attempt to create an external memory. Therefore, mediology consider gravestones as a first example of mnemotechnics in the history of mankind. Mnemotechnics is a technique that people use for memorizing. Tombstones fixed someone's existence on the earth between past and future. It showed that a person really had existed. Thanks to it person's physical duration was turned into metaphysical duration. And only this type of duration is able to talk to descendants. The infinity of void is divided into space and time by tombstones. Tombstone makes us feel an impulse. On reflection, we have knowledge of a distant person and we fully comprehend ourselves in this absence. Photos, mementoes, greetings cards, etc. have the same impact on us.

When we do not know how to get through an experience of death, when we have lost someone, we are between life and death. We are in the same condition as we have with ghostly limb: we see the presence of something that is absent in reality and we are not able to accept this contradiction. Mediology of death explains how we can overcome this. It breaks the silence, it interferes in our loneliness and emptiness. Philosophy of mediation recommends reconstruction of image by relatives of a person, who passed away. They should use traces, photographs, stories, and memories about him. However, they have to know that someone who is dead is also defenseless. He has a ghostly existence. Therefore, the philosophy of mediation warns us to remember distance. We should respect those who have passed on and this means accepting them as who they were in real life. They are not idols.

Mediology of death has its slogan: "Life does not go on!" It means that death always has an impact on life. Therefore, peaceful silence does not help with mourning. When we lose someone, we are left alone in despair, as the poet described it: "But each grave is – the limit of the earth" (Bethea 2009: 376). We are there, at the limit of the earth, but philosophy of mediation proposes the act of remembering instead of silence.

Conclusion

On the one hand, the philosophy of mediation gives a new perspective on death because it draws attention to new technologies that change our patterns of death, and on the other hand is strongly connected with everything that people have on their mind about death.

When mediology reminds us about the importance of thinking about death, the need of explanation appears there for us, because we don't understand the necessity of it. Mamardashvili explains death as a symbol without which thinking is impossible in general because this philosophical symbol relieves us of our psychological and emotional

content that replaces thinking in everyday life. If we accept the fact of our own death we live our life differently, because we are aware of everything that makes us responsible for being. Jankélévitch helps to cope with our own death. We are unable to think about the mediology of death if we don't go through these two philosophies – they describe thinking on death as something important. Thanks to them we understand the significance and the sense of mediological reminder. The work of Ariès allows us to see mediology of death in historical context. This context makes a contribution towards the understanding of the novelty of mediology of death and towards the understanding of the attitude towards death in our epoch.

The novelty of its approach to death is in its materiality. Death is a metamorphosis when we change from our body to another one that can be built by traces, for example, photographs, memories, or other objects that we loved during our life.

If we analyze mediology of death from a historical point of view, we notice that nowadays we have a “digital overturned death”. It focuses our attention on the new forms of immortality of our era that are created by social networks. Thanks to the examination of mediology of death we realize that traces are the only type of immortality that we have, that means immortality becomes material for the first time. This is the contribution of mediology of death to philosophy about death. This immortality is also very ambiguous because traces evoke somebody's memories of a person, and they show mostly one's viewpoint of him. Therefore traces mediate only a “part” of the soul if we can say so. It proves that we already know: each person is a mystery. Through traces that remain of others, we are mostly experienced in our own death, because

*Death is a bend in the road,
To die is to slip out of view.
If I listen, I hear your steps
Existing as I exist (Pessoa 2006: 319).*

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Notes

- 1 In Russian: «То, что мы называем жизнью, в нас выступает только тогда, когда мы, последовательно извлекая все последствия, вглядываемся в облик смерти. Без этого нет жизни – той, которую стоило бы жить» (translation – E. L. N.).
- 2 In French: «C'est le plus grand triomphe de l'homme sur les choses, que d'avoir su transporter jusqu'au lendemain les effets et les fruits du labeur de la veille. L'humanité ne s'est lentement élevée que sur le tas de ce qui dure».
- 3 In French: «La trace n'est pas seulement ce qui reste d'une croyance, d'un savoir ou d'une opinion, mais l'une des conditions nécessaires à leur émergence et leur propagation. Car tout système symbolique est en lui-même un système de traces, anticipant sa transmission par l'adoption ou la production d'un régime d'inscription spécifique. La trace suppose un support, un outil, une technique d'écriture et de lecture, un régime sémiotique, une méthode d'indexation, de contrôle et de conservation et un dispositif de diffusion».
- 4 An opportunity to know more is given by its record: "An interview with the philosopher Merab Mamardashvili", YouTube video, 7:10, from an interview recorded by Radio Svoboda on June 07, 1990, posted by "trismegistos12" November 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tn8LZBQfVY>
- 5 On this aspect for more details see: Mamardashvili 1992b and Mamardashvili 1989
- 6 In Russian: «Если мы поняли чужое сознание, то это мы сами».
- 7 This is a special expression of Mamardashvili (2001: 81)
- 8 Merab Mamardashvili met Alexander Piatigorsky in the late 1960s. They were friends during their whole life. Piatigorsky's emigration in 1973 changed nothing. Only death could separate them. This book was firstly published in 1984, in Jerusalem. I read the first Russian edition of this book (Mamardashvili, Piatigorsky 1997a).
- 9 Through the first personal singular pronoun (as *me*) I am not able to experience this feeling, because a human being, who thinks, has already disappeared. There is no time for reflection. I also cannot go through this as an onlooker for the third personal singular pronoun (as *he, she, it*), because of a huge distance, that makes me indifferent.
- 10 Rilke expressed this feeling in his poem *Death Experience* (Rilke et al 2015: 95-96). But when you went, there burst upon this scene a flash of something real. It broke in through that opening you left: green — truly green, true sun that shone, and forests that were true. And still we act, nervous, learning by rote the hardest lines, and finding, now and then, gestures. But your existence, so remote from our performance, in its wonder can be sometimes overwhelming, like our sense of real life sinking in; can be the cause, for just a little while, of rapture, since we stage our lives not thinking of applause.
- 11 A combination of Latin phrase that means in English "An eternal rest" and French phrase that means in English "is the end of all".
- 12 A Latin expression from Horace's ode "NON OMNIS MORIAR..." (Aldrich 1961)
- 13 I used the Russian translation (Aries 1992).
- 14 On this aspect for more details please see (Chaunu 1984).
- 15 For more information see Debray (2010).
- 16 For more information please see *Instagram; Help Centre; Privacy and Safety Center; Report Something; How do I report a deceased person's account on Instagram?*. Available at: <https://help.instagram.com/264154560391256> [Accessed 1 October 2020].