Chaslav D. Koprivitsa

THE CONCEPT OF ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY
In this paper, we illuminate the basic features of the concept of engagement, which has only become possible in the secular world, with the emergence of the modern individual deprived of any stable, eternal order or hierarchy of values. Still, engagement is not only individual but also collective, as the lack of certainty about the truth affects not only the community and society but also motivates them to follow the same paradigm as the individual – themselves at stake, without knowing where it could possibly lead, but with the intention to produce some tangible and stable socio-cosmic structures that could alleviate man's uncertainty and thus insecurity. The necessity of engagement stems from the circumstance that man lives in a context saturated with meanings that call him out in advance and influence him. Therefore, engagement means actually acting back to the being-exposed to meanings and structures that have already affected man and his situation. One section of the text deals with an understanding of engagement in the contemporary, "postmodern" era.

Introduction

The real basis for the coinage of the term, which first emerged in social discourse and then, in theory, is the daily use of the corresponding word in French and afterwards in other languages. The word begins to crystallize as a concept parallel to the emergence of theoretical thoughts on engagement, which did not exist before the XIX, although it peaked in the XX century. Engagement, as an *epochally typical paradigm of existence* (private and public, as well as individual and collective) comes to the focus of attention only in late secularity, when man, as being deprived of "eternally" valid cosmic order by the course of history itself, was confronted with the task to rearrange social reality, independently, solely relying upon himself, and to find (out) a new, widely acceptable hierarchy of values, which should determine an individual and collective way of life.

Until that moment, one could in his orientation rely upon generally well-known, but not necessarily reflected cosmo-social markers. Of course, in earlier times too, one could not know all that was important for him to be acquainted with. Yet, when we put aside the for centuries unchallenged rule of the Christian world picture, in which an *autonomous knowledge* could not be

Chaslav D. Koprivitsa: Professor, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade; caslav.koprivica@fpn.bg.ac.rs.

the leading epistemic paradigm, in antiquity it was believed that theory is basically capable to deal with life practice. Thus, theory and practice form a functional circle: practice "raises" *real* questions, to which theory gives her answers – with a reliance on the emerging practice of (life) theory. In a relatively well-ordered and norm-dependent world picture, there was room for a paradigm of the practical mind – as an expression of confidence in the possibility that human practice can be regulated by *ratio*.

By overcoming the previously self-contained world picture, the independent search for truth and the normative becomes not only a possibility but also, in a way, a necessity – both for individual and for the collectivities. Karl Marx was among the first to feel and announce that the modern era not only provides an opportunity for active action to achieve certain social goals but that history has entered a stage in which the future largely depends on active social engagement. The background of Marx's famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach is that the truth – about man, social reality, history – is known as a product of (Marxian) *thought of liberation* and that then it is all about shifting it into reality. This announced not only that humanity entered into the *era of ideologies* but also, at the same time, the future time's *necessity of engagement.*

However, the concept of engagement could not be simply reduced to engagement *for* an ideology. It turned out that the confidence of Marx and the others in the ability to ascertain, if not the ultimate, then at least the epoch-relative truths – was premature. Opening up the space for the paradigm of (social) engagement did not in itself mean that in a post-theocentric world picture one could easily reach reliable truth-certainties. Moreover, the then-man experienced a shortage of reliable truths and safe instructions for daily action:

> Therefore, to engage in some direction, for some subject, means to commence acting, not necessarily knowing where one is going to, not even knowing whether that which is to be done good or not, whether its goals will be achieved or not. That is why we can often engage, as the saying goes, as if "head through the wall". (Makowiak 2005)

Thus, "[u]rgency of engagement" – both individual and collective – "the absence of a calculation of consequences, goes hand in hand with its unpredictability, with the accepted unpredictability ..." (*ibid.*) In one of the most brilliant philosophical dialogues of the XX century, the author, using dramaturgical mimicry puts the following words to one of his heroes' mouth: "The French are supposed to be the most logical thinker in the world, but I think only you Russians, Ivan, are crazy enough to act on the basis of a cogent chain of reasoning, *no matter where it leads.*" (Suits 1978: 69; our emphasize). Here, however, this is not about any specific "national character", but rather of the modern human's situation, regardless of personal and/ or national, civilizational mentality. The man simply found himself in the middle of epochal structure which stands for the tendency of *suspension of phronesis.*

Therefore, in a preliminary approximation, it should be concluded, that engagement is an expression of the *necessity to act because of the lack of certainty*

or the preconditions for acquiring it. One must engage due to an acute absence of certainty; one acts not out of knowledge on reality and on the practically necessary, but precisely thanks to their absence. Still, such a way of acting can hardly eliminate the initial state of uncertainty. To be engaged means inevitability of acting out of uncertainty – *into uncertainty*. Under such circumstances, an engaging action could even be equated with a brave daring, which means a shift towards *life-practical decisionism*, because the engaged person is obviously not a sovereignly acting "subject". However, due to the fundamental lack of theoretical certainty prior to taking action, it is usually expected to achieve a certain harmony of speaking/writing and acting, since the integration of publicly stated intention of an act and its effect is nevertheless considered to be a *compensatory modality for truth-attaining* through practice, instead of through theory. But even so, the "truth" could be reached neither in this way.

Therefore, engagement, epistemologically speaking, must be "emerging knowledge that is only gained through action", ie. one form of *faire(-a)-savoir* (Makowiak 2005) The need to make a decision in a factual life situation and when things are not clear in advance is the reverse side of a lack of knowledge so that the *coercion necessity of decisionism* stems from uncertainty and finally from insecurity. Then knowledge, or what is, under the circumstances, possibly the closest to it, is sought to be obtained by "provoking" the environment through action so that the manifestation of the consequences of a particular provoking act is to lead to *factual truth*, which should be a prerequisite for (further) action.

In this sense, Sartre's theorem is crucial for discerning the relationship between theory and practice peculiar to our time: "the real world is revealed only by action" (Sartre 1988: 65). According to him, "[t]he prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of *secondary action* that we may call action by disclosure. [...] He knows what to reveal is to change and that one can only reveal by planning to change" (ibid: 37; our emphasis). The very last statement is a dubitable one. For him, it is impossible to take a not-interested attitude towards the truth, which excludes personal involvement, i.e. being-already-involved. The notion of "secondary action" is also noteworthy. It has an *experimental* character – to intentionally make reality to manifest itself, which needs to increase the degree of certainty necessary for acting *actually*. The secondary action precedes the primary one, the one by which an acting person actually wants to accomplish something. Secondary action, which is a form of engagement particularly important in illuminating its nature, means to act *for the sake of practical certainty*, which is a prerequisite for an action aiming to something. This kind of action is, therefore, a preliminary action, which should provide a basis for further "actual agency".[1]

---

1   Besides, engagement, as a modus operandi of *integrated search* – both for the true and practically expedient – is the inversion of the model underlying the pragmatic theory of meaning. If for the latter the meaning of some views is embodied by the practical patterns adhered to by the people who follow them, then by the "engaged notion of truth" the meaning is rendered based on action.

In the absence of a way to reach the truth, so to say "straightforwardly", and feeling at the same time need for it, even more strongly than ever before – because man does not live in a "raw" reality, but in the field of the established, recognized, considered as such and such, i.e. in a medium of language, therefore in the realm where it is all about truth[2] – he decides to take a radical step: *to put himself at stake*, in order to possibly come to some sort of provisional, *situational certainty*, or at least to diminish a present level of uncertainty. Engagement is therefore a sort of personal decisionism forced by epochal circumstances. "To engage means to pledge one's own person" (Makowiak 2005); and precisely this pledging, has in common two basic semantic-conceptual branches of this term: action, or (self)commitment by, mostly, although not exclusively, own or other's word, act, emotion, contract...

As the study of the historical etymology of the French word *engagement* indicates, it derives from *gage* (guarantee / pledge), which is "a material variant of [being-]hostage"[3]. If in the Middle Ages a material pledge was a substitute for self-pledging – for the sake of some debt or some another sort of guarantees, then in the modern condition, in an altered form, an immaterial form of (self) pledging is restituted – but no longer by pledging own body, but as practical pledging (of content, values, meaning ...) of one's own person. He is a hostage again, but not of someone else's, but a *"hostage" of absent truth*, which he must always try to, so to say, "redeem" – by provoking acts of engagement.

Thus, a modern man appears here in a threefold role: a. the one who pleads himself, b. who provokes to know, and c. who radically bears the consequences of own acting/provocation – by receiving back from the provoked reality a raw, factual – hitherto only embedded, but from now on "dis-embedded" truth. *Provocatio realitatis* becomes the leading practically-hermeneutic modality of the existence of the human. The modern era made him explicitly *finite* and therefore forced to engage oneself, as a direct answer to the situation.

In modern times, it took place a fundamental change in the understanding of place, nature, and even the sense of truth. When it comes to the surrounding reality, it is either impossible to establish the truth concerning it without provoking her by engagement – personal and/or collective – which obviously changes it, or that the reality is not even valuable enough, finally *is not true*, which raises the question of the purpose to search the truth on such a reality. Hence the wrong can be not only a statement about reality, a theory about it – but even reality itself can be "faulty". Based on this, it is even imaginable to develop not only a hatred attitude towards social reality, or some its parts, but also to urge establishing a more correct, *true reality*, and correlatively – a *true*

---

2   Husserl speaks of man's "self-understanding as being in being called to a *life of apodicticity*" (1970: 340; original emphasis). And the purpose of this demand is determined as follows: "But all this speculative knowledge is meant to serve man in his human purposes so that he may order his worldly life in the happiest possible way and shield it from disease, from every sort of evil fate, from disaster and death." (ibid: 284).

3   Bernard Cerquiglini, https://balises.bpi.fr/langues/savez-vous-a-quoi-lengagement-engage (accessed: September 15th, 2019).

man. Moreover, assuming a certain social determinism, in theory, it is possible to take point of departure from the fact that a true man can emerge only if surrounded by the true reality. Then the radical transformation of reality – i.e. revolution, becomes a social-historical first-class task.

And the psycho-emotional pretext for revolution: hatred of the real, i.e. towards to current social reality, tacitly equated with reality in general, it was completely unimaginable, and theoretically and practically impossible, until the modern age, when the European man gave himself the right and task to stands as a measure of all things and of all reality. If Plato introduced an *ontological comparative* by which ideas, for example, were more true than sensually observable objects, then in the modern situation, the criterion of the attributively re-interpreted truth of the real becomes its correspondence to human projections, i.e. to his *creative imagination*, which came to be the origin of compensatory truthfulness. So truth as correspondence, in an epochal sense, began to become obsolete.

Instead, to provide statements that correspond to the current (flawed and untrue) reality, the most important thing became the activity that was to *create the truth* – the true world and the true man, either through a constant, regular engagement that should lead to continuous progress – both, anthropological and social, or through extraordinary engagement for radical change – revolution. The latter solution becomes a historical option when one experiences a failure in attempts to change the world evolutionarily in accordance with one's own intentions. So the praxis of engagement could conceptually be determined as *the effort of truth-creation – within of a currently truth-less world*.

The forerunner of this turn from the conception truth as primarily epistemic to the existential category was Kierkegaard. According to him, the individual should ask himself personally about the truth, striving to reach personal truth with his existence – since there is no general truth, as well as that it has no systemic or even predominantly theoretical character. Instead of a firmly bound "circle" composed of theory and practice, as, perhaps ideally, it was presented at the beginnings of European philosophy, there remains only an auxiliary function for the thinking in the self-activities of existence. The basis of action cannot be in thinking, but it is rather compelled to try to produce its ground in and by itself – ultimately in a *radical decision*. Because of this a decision making individual can only by means of his life – when faced with its consequences – empirically determine whether his previous decision produced the *effect of foundation*.

Under presuppositions of the *engaged decisionalism*, one can only afterwards, by reflecting on one's consequent life practice, determine whether what one has committed oneself to is eligible to become his foundation. All of this is to point out that Descartes proclaimed the search of European man for the *fundamentum inconcussum*, which is the historical demarcation line between the modern and the pre-modern, with an existential turn towards engagement was altered in a few ways. The foundation of knowledge is no longer sought, but the foundation of existence and knowledge has lost its founding function

for human life, while the thought is overwhelmingly absorbed by life practice – as an *existential reflection*. There took place, so to speak, an epochal *fall into practicalism* – through a "short circuit" between what was previously called "practice" and "theory", so that the latter, at least in an existential context, becomes essentially epiphenomenal.

We sketched the connection between engagement and the modern epoch. Still, it would be an exaggeration to say that a pre-modern man could not engage. As a matter of fact, the human world was never so well-organized that it could not and/ or should change in something. On the other hand, a man of high civilizations was never totally absorbed by his world(-picture), and therefore he was not completely devoid of the possibility to choose and act. Therefore, Gehlen is right in saying that "human life has the paradoxical feature that it *must be engaged* [*eingesetzt*]" (Gehlen: 2016: 300; our emphasis). As being endowed with reason, o human makes decisions, choices, has preferences, etc., and he cannot put aside all that even in the most difficult situations, albeit fighting for bare survival, for instance. Therefore, in some sense it could be stated, that [pre-societal] "engagement" for survival is a kind of *engagement avant lettre*.

Historical Background and the Core of the Concept

The reality in which man lives is organized as a series of circumstances and states of affairs that for him carry the hermeneutic sign of *as* (Aristotelian *he*) – i. e. they are defined as certain so and so things, and in so far as they can be explicitly interpreted. This series is not a set of individual data, but it always produces a *living environment* (Diltheyean *Lebenszusammenhang*) whose individual elements should not be viewed separately. It is even more important that circumstances are not only internally related, but that they are *here for the corresponding entity* (one I, or We), whose all-encompassing "objective" correlate is my/ our situation. "It [situation] contains no static moments, but 'events'. [...] Events 'happen to me'. [...] What happens has a relation to me; it radiates into my own I" (Heidegger 2000: 173, 174). But this does not mean that human has an interpretative, let alone factual, power to determine the "essence" of circumstances at his discretion; the interpretative reference of circumstances to man is rather a consequence of his ontological co-determination by them.

The truth about human and truth about (surrounding) reality are inseparable, so this *situational determination of truth* – both on the "subjective" and "objective" side – finds its expression in another, secondary correlation: of what *is*, or what is *interpreted*. In these circumstances, interpretation is always qualified as a, at least *potential*, act, which is exercised over the interpreted state of affairs. This is possible only because the factual, speechless "interpretation" has previously been exposed to the real influence of the circumstances. So the connective member of being and (interpretative) speech is action, effect. The human activity is not primarily relevant as a kind of *Ersatz*-reality, but rather its exposure to the "impact" of circumstances. Human's indispensable commitment to act means actually, in return, *acting back* to his prior exposure to

personal and impersonal influences, which already took place. Moreover, engagement is a necessity that one must not avoid unless one wishes to be equivalent to just a passive outcome of his circumstances. Finally, a person can provoke reality, influence it, etc., only because it previously excitated him, and this always in a far more powerful and far-reaching way that surpasses his capabilities to cognize the given and to act (back). That is the essence of human's *condition of finiteness*.

However, the fact that an interpretation or the speech is an act-related does not mean that we are dealing with conceptually determined *performative acts* – such as, for example, institutional acts when a statement or gesture creates a new state of affairs. Unlike such acts, which *with certainty* produce a change in an area of purely symbolic reality, when it comes to engaged acts, one can mostly speak on *uncertainty about their outcomes*, i.e. whether the intended effect will be accomplished within (existential and/or social) reality. On the other hand, the intentional performativity is not even necessary in engagement, since it is possible for a human not only to be engaged when he does not know and/or do not want to, but he can also engage even when he is not aware of, since his acts "as such" serve as a tacit, although involuntarily invitation to others to follow them, i.e. to act in the same manner in similar situations. Understanding the inevitability of a *condition of commitment*, where engagement does not exclusively coincide with action, is represented by Sartre, admittedly, without reflecting on epochal typicality of the problem by himself:

> If I [...] choose to [...] I am not committing myself alone [...] my action commits all mankind. Or [...] if I decide to marry and have children [...] I am nonetheless [potentially – Ch. K.] committing not only myself but all of humanity, to the practice of monogamy. I am therefore responsible for myself and everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man ['as such' – Ch. K.]. (Sartre 2007: 24–25)

It is not only man's "being" inseparable from his situation, but his situation "belongs" in a way potentially to the others, and same goes for each and every person. My situation could possibly be ascribed to other people; it is not characterized with Heideggerian *Jemeinigkeit* ("mineness").

A few years after Sartre, Gehlen, it seems more thoroughly, touched on the core of the *condition*, in which the human has already lived for a certain time:

> When major political and real changes in a highly differentiated society have no longer a common focus, they brake, tease and collide with one another – insecurity becomes universal. *Then one has to make experiments with what lies at the very core* [...] A many of publicly expressed opinions emerge, and they make the underground current into which can fall almost everything – *since in this constellation, any statement appears as a possible action*. (Gehlen 2016: 48; our emphasizes)

Uncertainty, it turned out, provokes insecurity. For modernity typical insecurity of human's situation compels him to experiment, not only with something

interesting that arouses his curiosity – as in modern exact sciences – but also with the "essential", which is until then being considered immutable, and, ultimately, even with oneself. That experimentation is not a matter of mere play, or, inversely: the modern man *must play* an utterly serious "game" – with himself and his world. The point of this experimental engagement is to re-satisfy the "basic need for being grounded and established" (ibid), the absence of which is one of the key problems of modernity. In so doing, engagement, as the *existential modus operandi of human existence in a secular world*, carries a teleological moment – as *engagement for self-fulfillment*: "By engagement, we understand the concrete acceptance of responsibility for the work of future [self-]fulfillment, for man's directing attempts to shape [own] future" (Landsberg 1998: 119).

In such a constellation, man is not only compelled to experiment with the until then "essential", but he does so even when he is not aware of it, since "any statement appears as a possible action" and a(n) (public) action could "commit all of humanity". Not only can the reflection lay far behind what is actually, but the reflection could even turn out to be something more than what originally is – since, for Gehlen, she "can be understood as a trial acting" (Gehlen 2016: 12–13). In short, a very strange mixture of statements, thinking, acting and their receptions ensued, and uncertainty concerning their meaning produces human's existential sense of insecurity. Then becomes sometimes unclear whether an action will emerge from the mixture, or whether it will remain merely a speech or even just a reflexive act, as is it unclear whether that action will sink back into the ephemerality of everyday life the very moment after it was performed, or whether it will perhaps affect all the humanity, with unprecedented consequences. "Trivial" and "epochal" are being "cooked" together in one pot, and their "essential" difference can become clear only afterwards, *ex eventu.*

To be engaged means firstly to be strongly "receptive" to the circumstances, and that is because of his, to some extent, being handed over to them, without being able to throw them away. This is why they stand as something "given" within my situation. Human's determination by circumstances is never absolute. If the case, it would have made any engagement in advance impossible or meaningless. "Engagement", as being called by to the given that press, provoke, etc., but does not chain me – this is the starting point for the active engagement, which *acts back to the circumstances*. Engagement is possible only in the conditions of non-absolute and non-irrevocable determination. A creature that would have been completely free, non-conditioned, deprived of nothing important, could not even possibly engage. For example, God, as, by definition, non-conditioned and non-restrained, cannot be "engaged", because he makes his Will and/or Thought directly real, without the necessity to make any effort with uncertain consequences, perfectly in accordance with his creative intention. All this is, of course, reversed by (human) engagement. Needless to say, but still – a notion of "animal's engagement" would bare of any sense.

When engaging, one is not only limited in one's ability to act, but also in capability to see reality properly. Therefore, he reckons in advance that his

vision of reality is constrained and may prove wrong, as well as that his actions may be unsuccessful and may produce completely unintended consequences. All of these three internally related features belong to the situational finiteness of the engaged agent. His relative determination by the given and the relative openness for the possibility of practicing one's own freedom are two theoretically and practically inseparable and complementary concepts: "being free means being able to live in the direction of my own shaping, means being able to constantly fight against all obstacles that resist my actual personal life" (Landsberg 1998: 121). Finality and engagement are two faces of a structure that typologically occupies the middle ground between the absolute predetermination of life by circumstances, on the one hand, and the possibility of a 'sovereign', pseudo-divine govern of own life, on the other.

An engaged human is the one who, opposite early modern optimism, has realized that he is not an *alter Deus*, master of the world and the measure of all things. On the other hand, he will not and cannot return to those life roles and ways of shaping life practices that were largely predetermined by closed cosmo-social structures, as in pre-modernity. An engaged man is not only in the middle between complete powerlessness and omnipotence but also between inactive thinking and reckless, ultimately irresponsible, acting. He is therefore neither a "powerless intellectual" standing for an "excess" of reflection but a complete lack of action or its effectiveness, nor an "irresponsible thug" (Landsberg 1998: 122), representing an "excess" of (self-interested) activity, but a total lack of self-reflection and awareness of own responsibility. An engaged person is, therefore, one in which inseparable thought and action, as well as interest and responsibility.

Human's exposure to the given is not only a consequence of external conditionality, but the potential for it carries within himself; his situationality does not only stem from the external environment. Namely, "to live humanly" means to be "inserted into space and time", to be "tied to the contingency of the body" and thus "rooted" in the situation (Ladrière 1969: 650). Moreover, thanks to our physicality, we "receive the ability to be situational" (ibid). To have a flesh, or rather: being-flesh (which is, according to Helmuth Plessner, quite different from animals' mode of corporeality) – it is the germ of a person's situational engagement, of his being-already-committed. Only by departing from his physical situatedness, as being "planted" oneself somewhere within the space through own body, can human afterwards become actively engaged, by word, mental, physical, symbolic, institutional... act. Passive engagement (i.e. flesh-dependent situationality) precedes – both temporally and conceptually – not only active engagement but is also its direct precondition. Moreover, the latter is a form of reciprocation, of a "polemic" – between my being "caught" in a situation and my endeavour to not only conceptualize it, but also to overcome, or at least relativize, the initial state of my *being thrown* into a situation randomly "assigned" to me. In the engagement, if put to the extreme, it is always at work an *active resistance* to my own unchosen, accidental and, as it were, senseless being-assigned to a situation which is supposed to be me

mine. By doing this, I should try to make sense of the mere fact of being here and then, as such and such, surrounded by those and those...

My physicality is an a priori condition for my capability of reception of external physicality – enjoying it, feeling threatened with it, or being indifferent towards it. Physicality is in and around me. Hence Merleau-Ponty's question: "Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? [...] The world seen is not 'in' my body, and my body is not 'in' the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it." (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 138) There is a relationship of mutual conditioning between "internal" and "external" physicality: "The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body, nor the flesh of the body by the negativity or self that inhabits it – the 3 phenomena are simultaneous." (ibid: 250)

A given could be of different kinds – given of experiences, effects, my/our past life, social situations, historical situations... – but all of them are possible on the ground of the original form of the givenness – and this is one's own flesh. Human, however, is not only surrounded by the given, not he just incorporates, but also produces it. Even something he created is further received by him as a given, as something whose meaning and being he cannot possess and determine. That is why for Levinas "every work is a failed act" (Levinas 1998: 29). Due to the initial predominance of being-situated/committed over my agency, alienation from the agent's intentions is immanent to its actions' effects, so that their consequences are not solely *my creation*, but instead, they also bear the mark of something essentially *other*, a given which is not mine. However, the given of which I am the (co)author is, in its genuine sense, a residual of my intentional acting back to the world as many of already existing given. In any case, engaging in one important sense is always *counter-engaging* – a response to the realm of the factual realities already being here.

The actual meaning of intentional engagement is to relativize the pressure exerted on me by the realm of givenness – by creating an alternative, *my* own landscape of existence, where I could recognize the environment as friendly, like the one I/we created, where, as far as possible, the dispute between the self and his situation will be settled. However, what is done tends always to alienate itself from its author, to "behave" as a (new) state of affairs which is alien to him, rather than being his expression; in short, it serves not as an occasion for his self-recognition but *disidentification*. That is why the agent's latent-unconscious ontological desire of all engagement must always generally remain: to make his own situation, and consequently his own identity, solely his own creation. Nevertheless, this is impossible, so the "fall" in the condition of finiteness even in the case of the most "successful" life engagement – is ultimately irrevocable.

In a concrete act of engagement, therefore, it is never a question of creating the ideal situation, but it always presupposes the tacit assent to imperfection. It could be said, that engagement even requires "certain decisions for imperfect things" (Landsberg 1998: 119). The same author emphasizes that

it is difficult to decide for an imperfect thing [...] but the value of engagement lies in the fruitful tension between the imperfection of the thing [for which one is engaged] and its irrevocable character. Due to the awareness of imperfection, fidelity to a thing will be protected from bigotry, i.e. from every conviction that one lives in the possession of complete and absolute truth. (ibid)

The last statement in the quotation provides the external regulatory principle of engagement, which, however, does not stem from its very "nature", which explains the fact that unfortunately engaged people are not often guided by it.

Personal engagement is framed by a situation that is not only mine, nor the situation of the few I know, with whom I regularly keep up a face-to-face relationship, but, in an important sense, the situation of many, to me, largely unknown multitude. That is why self-engagement is in principle – though not necessarily always in each case – inseparable from collective or social engagement. This moment, in broad strokes, is sketched again by Landsberg:

Thrown into a world full of opposites, each of us often experiences the need to withdraw from the game and to posit oneself above the events, as a separate observer. The motive behind such an escape from the world is not sheer egoism, but rather a desire for the possibility of establishing a meaningful life in one's personal and isolated sphere, to become in line with oneself. [...] However, we soon realize that this attitude does not fit our true *situation*. [...] [o]ur human existence is so entangled in the collective destiny that our lives can never reach their meaning beyond participation in the history of the collectives to which we belong. (ibid)

Thus, it turns out, that something that commences as a personal engagement gets its social component as well. However, social engagement is not only a complement to personal engagement, but rather there is a circular relationship between the two – in that personal engagement can also be seen as contributing to the goals of a particular community or, by extrapolation, of all humanity. Social engagement should be perceived just as an extension of existential engagement also because, for example, a personal existential situation is not limited to an "immediate" environment. Engaging for others, that is, for us (the "other plus me"), is just as legitimate a modality of engagement as engaging for oneself. Ideally, the one who works on himself, to fit his situation to his goals, is also engaged in the domestication of *our* present life circumstances, which adds to his personal engagement a social dimension. Viewed in the opposite direction, the "self-embedding" of individual existence into collective existence might redeem meaning and value to the former that it could not produce or attain if relying just on oneself.

The difference between social and existential engagement does not coincide with the difference between public and private engagement – neither in extension nor in intensity. Although most of the social engagement is public, and much of existential engagement is private, there is also existential public engagement – say the preacher, who with his own words publicly testifies the

truth he stands for, and the same could go even for a professor in humanities. Again, private engagement needs not only to be just about one's existence – although existential engagement may involve "significant others". Loving-emotional engagement, raising children and engaging in a friendly relationship is private engagement.[4] And besides, each of these sub-segments must not necessarily be relevant to the question of who I actually am, or who I want to be, i.e. for the existential engagement in the narrow sense. Social engagement, on the other hand, does not have to be public, as in case not only of secret societies but also when it comes to behind-the-scenes arrangements, where narrow, publicly unknown circles decide on matters of social importance. Often, contrary to Kant's provisions, precisely that "private use of the mind" can be more influential in dealing with public affairs than its public use.

Existential and societal engagement may differ in scope, and public and private in form. This, however, does not exhaust the typology of essential forms of engagement. There is a possibility of "engagement for values" (Ladrière), which by its very nature is aimed at enabling a "normal" praxis. Namely, its sense is not to achieve some goals, but rather to enable or re-create the conditions for a dignified personal and/or communal life. Thus, such an engagement has a *corrective-regulatory* function, and, obviously, stands in direct analogy with what Sartre called a "secondary act." Such an engagement is relevant in the general field of practice since the commitment to universal and unconditional self-worth (Justice, Truth, Good) should create the preconditions for expedient and dignified individual and collective (primary) engagement. However, it is also important as an (at least) attempt at (compensatory) production of the structure of objective meaning in the modern world, devoid of a transcendent order, and can therefore also be regarded as a *cosmological engagement*.

Due to its "pedagogical" relevance, such engagement is mostly linked to the public space. However, it does not have to be exclusively publicly performed. Even in the private circle, it is possible to push for the highest values – friendship, loyalty, love, truthfulness, patriotism ... – without disclosing outside of an intimate circle of persons. Furthermore, from the individual attitude to one's own particular, so to say, "axiological" engagement depends on where and in which way one's own private and public engagement will be separated and where will they not. Besides, this shaping of attitude towards own engagement is also an additional type kind of engagement – *engagement towards engagement*, namely, which points to the *engagement's reflexivity*, already indicated concerning secondary acts, or, if rephrased: *metaengagement*. Finally, from this conceptual exposition, we can so far conclude that the various forms of engagement do not constitute a conceptual whole whose individual cases fall under a single, overarching notion of engagement, but are rather linked by the pattern of "family resemblance".

---

4   Therefore, it is not sustainable that "the sphere of engagement is always public" (Makowiak 2005). Not every manifestation is public, and not every exteriority of the acting subject is the public.

Speaking about engagement's taxonomy, it can, in short, be divided into individual, intersubjective, group and institutional – concerning its degree or scope. As for the first type, it does not imply any manifest interaction with the others, but it might involve *latent* affective, emotional or rational intentionality directed towards the others, which remains unknown to them. Intersubjective interaction involves the exchange between persons being in close contact so that their interaction involves I-thou-relationship. In a collective interaction, however, such a personal relationship is rare and is not representative of its nature and outcomes. Furthermore, it is possible to divide the engagement into *passive* (being-committed) – be it voluntarily or unchosen – and active, i. e. intentional engaging. Individual and intersubjective engagement is *mostly* space where existential engagement is performed, while group-collective and institutional engagement is a space for practicing social engagement. But contrary to what might be expected, intersubjective engagement can also be public (for instance in so-called "talk-show"), as well as group engagement can remain private, for instance in case closed groups insisting on their separation from the rest of society (such as in religious sects). Finally, engagement can be sub-divided by its format: engagements related to the dynamics of the (un)conscious, behaviour, act and deed.

Engagement in a "Postmodern" Environment

In recent years, even decades, new technologies have led to the expansion and internal multiplication of the space of the life-world, so that the virtual becomes the ever-important co-scene of life practice, which, in addition, causes both – multiplication and atomization of forms of engagement. An individual could emerge as an engaged agent in many different roles, which do not necessarily have to converge towards the regulatory criterion of achieving the unity of the overall individual's practice. In each of these roles – as professionally, economically, politically, friendly, emotionally, scientifically ... engaged – it is possible to undertake a variety of *micro-engagements*, i.e. separate actions or to experience short-lived sequences, also in the virtual sphere. The recent experience confirms that this area is not just another field of engagement, but a sphere that also mediates and, more or less, changes all known, "traditional" (i.e. technologically non-virtualized) forms of engagement. This type of experience, in addition to the easy and simplified possibility of "acting", is – in comparison with the "real" world – distinguished by the atypical looseness of the linkage between acting, its effects, and consequences. While in the non-virtual sphere, the agent almost immediately feels the consequences and the factual weight of what he has done, which constantly reminds him of his responsibility for it, this feeling is fairly relativized in the virtual realm. However, the virtuality contains one important moment similar to the pre-virtual reality: it is not only a field of heightened, excessive freedom but also an area where also new type realities and their respective relationships could emerge.

The growth and hypertrophy of the mechanisms of technological mediation of the whole, both non-virtual and virtual reality are followed by an increase of different types of relationships and the degree of mutual dependence and co-referentiality of the agents while enhancing the number and types of roles in which an individual emerges in everyday life. For example, a man from the time before the invention of motor vehicles could simply move through settlements, without being obliged to carry institutionally recognized, i.e. imposed role of "traffic participant", be it driver or pedestrian. Being a priori attributed with this possibility [*Können* – Adolf Reinach] means to be included in the corresponding circuits, ie. he is *engaged* as a traffic participant, and therefore has a duty to take note of it and to act in accordance with the respective, positive rules. Thus, one realized technological possibility imposed on him an obligation that he could not ignore – if he did not want to be held legally, in some case even morally responsible, i.e. to endanger himself and other people.

There are many such roles, and they are partly "active" (as an opportunity to get new institutional possibilities) and partly "passive" (as a duty, obligation): voter, taxpayer, bearer of health insurance, public transport user, a user of bank services/cards, the "holder" of personal accounts on various websites ... Today's man has, thus, become overburdened with all these innumerable roles – and above all, with passive commitments, which lulls him with the obligation to constantly, often simultaneously, respond to them. If one takes into account the degree of individual's exposure to information and sensory impacts in the public and private space is getting emerged, a clear picture of the real danger that due to the burden of expanding sensory-cognitive material,[5] which excites and seduces his, and because of growing multiplication of the roles he must play at the same time – his ability to constitute himself as an *engaging subject* and to remain so is markedly diminished.

If at the (modern) beginnings of what we called the condition of commitment engagement was a standard form of the human relationship to the world, nowadays it is increasingly becoming something to be fought for. Inflationary (*passive*) *commitments* – despite the abundance of opportunities offered today – is inversely proportional to (*active*) *engagement* and, moreover, seriously questions it. It is, therefore, necessary to somehow "clear" (not remove, which is impossible) the abundance around us (and in ourselves), to re-organize it so that, instead of being merely a passive recipient – which we essentially remain even when driven by the abundance of possibilities at hand, have the illusion of out active agency – we become a truly active agent, again. If Sartre speaks of secondary engagement, which is to enable my true ("primary") acting through

---

5   The idea of enslavement of the mind is well-known, but newly has been insisted upon the concept of sensory enslavement. For Berleant, "those capacities of human sensibility have been deliberately appropriated and distorted in mass consumer culture in at least four distinct ways: by gastronomic co-optation, technological co-optation, emotional co-optation, and psychological co-optation. By appropriating, controlling, and impairing the capacities of human perception, these forms of co-optation undermine the free sensibility." (Berleant 2017: 4)

the acts that I wish to pursue a certain state of affairs, then nowadays emerges the necessity of, so to speak, "tertiary engagement," which will give me the opportunity to become aware of the nature of my commitment, and to regain my cognitive-practical[6] status as a subject capable of engaging.

The multiplication of possible types of engagement is not the only novelty of human's condition of commitment in the postmodern era. An utter abundance of the possible, as a matter of fact ever more disproportionate to its existential, and not least biological finiteness, is by some felt like an occasion to *experiment with own engagement(s)*. Thus instead of the "traditional" (existentialist) projection of convergence of all particular cases and types of one's engagement towards the unity of one's practice, and hence the unity of one's identity – the individual of today is often rather inclined to practice *intentionally divergent engagement(s)*, whose "purpose" lies not in a kind of self-realization, but in experiencing ever new, as numerous as possible opportunities. Thus, due to the exponential expansion of the field of possibilities, whose bearers, performers, "users" are in many cases increasingly difficult to identify, former individual's ambition of bringing the multitude of things into the unity of life practice is resigning, and he tacitly accepts a different, two-sided life-practical imperative: *experience for the sake of experience*, or: *(logical) possibility as equal to (practical) opportunity*. Instead of an intention towards the unity of the multitude, to attain identity, as a correlate of the final, well-rounded outcome of existence, this sort of behaviour establishes a pattern of *counter(self) realization*, which now occupies the place of self-realization. The human is, namely, eager to try out ever new possibilities, which do not have to create a narrative, let alone "higher" type of unity with his earlier life.

As part of such alternative, experimental engagement, it is also possible – even for the sake of sheer "play" – to apply patterns from one field of engagement into another one, which is one way of exploring and discovering new (fields) of opportunities for engagement. In this sense, a typical phenomenon of contemporary hyper-individualistic life-practice is the *entrepreneurial attitude* of the individual towards own life (not only of his professional aspect), but also, for instance, towards the body – as a means of taking risks, but also as a way of alternative counter-realization – within a framework where one's fluid, in infinite distance lying "identity" is greatly reduced to physicality. "The body, whose shape changed after intense training, has become the most important part of the subject – it is a *visible social form of personality*." "Being-fit becomes a program of the 'right' lifestyle."[7] "Fit" actually means well-adapted, or, more accurately: willing to *actively adapt* oneself, fitting to the social imperatives of today – and not being always just physically well-prepared. This

---

6   An engaged man, of course, is not only reduced to cognition: "An engagement act is a 'total act', since it is not only an act of isolated intelligence, or of an isolated will, but is "an act of an *integral* man in which the intellect and the will mix." (Landsberg 1998: 120)
7   Alkemeyer 2007: 17 (emphasized by Ch. K.).

adjustment is made based on "free choice", as an ideological catalyzer of "active living". Here, however, there is not about actually active living – as it was, in a self-congratulating manner, "labeled", since in such a practical constellation the form of the life goal, if there is awareness of such a thing, is already more or less predetermined. Such *pseudo-engagement*, living in the false appearance of freedom and activity, follows the pre-accepted and critically unreflected guidelines of life practice, strictly conformed to a technologically mediated social system, which, in effect, turns out to be a totalitarian. Thus, ostensibly, the creative-exploratory extension of the field of the exercise of own personal freedom (for), has as her reverse side, a tacit consent to the individual-collective imitation of the existing social order and the demands of leading, increasingly anonymous forces within it.

Instead of engagement's, as previously, being shaped as acting back to the primary being-committed, it turns into seemingly active, but, in the core, ideologically repressive repetition of existing structures of *illegitimate* power. Thus, if seen from the angle of individual, who tacitly "agreed" with its con-formation to the environment, the *permanent crisis*, caused by the of the secular largely unfinished and therefore questionable cosmosocial image, *is being ideologically normalized*. The absent cosmosocial truth in advanced postmodernity is compensated by its successfully effective appearance. Thanks to this maneuver, one who tacitly agrees to such an arrangement – offered to him through epistemically-practically-normatively charged social structures – ceases to be as a forcedly engaged "hostage" of (absent) truth. Human's "engagement" is no longer a consequence of truth's absence, but it is rather a permanent confirmation of ideologically stabilized pseudo-truth of the current System.

The essence of the System is anonymous, uncontrolled power, which becomes a key feature of the "solution" of the problem of truth in our epoch (of so-called "post-truth") only in advanced postmodernity, when emerge – either spontaneously generated, or purposefully invented – socio-psychological mechanisms of finding, embedding and stabilizing ideological substitutions of truth. Then, since the (public) problem of truth is supposedly closed, there is no need for genuine engagement, where almost everything essential for the human is at stake. Even more, the guardians of post-truth watch carefully after her, to prevent the raising of reasonable demands for re-opening social discussion on truth. The only risk that the contemporary, hyper-activist, highly fitted individual is exposed – is the *social* failure, in the game of competition for the (re)distribution of individually or group-specific power, but not the failure of one's own practical projection of truth, as the basis for the fulfillment of own life practice. The hyper-conformed individual already "knows" the whole, "Truth", because he is anesthetized with a socio-psychological structure, within which any explicit asking the question about the truth is rendered as superfluous, strange, even dangerous, in advance. Therefore, the age of the so-called "Post-truth" also becomes the age of "post-engagement".

References

Alkemeyer, Thomas (2007), "Aufrecht und biegsam. Eine politische Geschichte des Körperkults", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, pp 6–18.

Berleant, Arnold (2017), *The Subversion of Beauty*, accessed at Research Gate (13th September 2019).

Gehlen, Arnold (2016), *Urmensch und Spätkukltur*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.

Heidegger, Martin (2000), *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, transl. by T. Sadler. London and New Brunswick: The Athlone Press.

—. (1996), *Being and Time*, transl. by J. Stambaugh. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Husserl, Edmund (1970), *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*. transl. by D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Krainz, Waltraud (2009), "Postmoderne Körperkulturen. Riskante Bewegunspraxen", in: M. Marschik et al. (eds.), *Sport Studies*, Wien: Facultas Verlags- und Buchhandels AG, pp. 239–251.

Ladrière, Jean (1969), "Engagement", *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Vol 6, Paris, pp. 647–651.

Landsberg, Paul-Louis (1998), "Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel", *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 60: 118–123.

Levinas, Emmanuel (1998), *Entre nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, transl. by M. B. Smith and B. Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1968), *The Visible and the Invisible*, transl. by A. Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul (2007), *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. transl. by Carol Macomber. New Haven: Yale University Press.

—. (1988), *"What is Literature?" and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Suits, Bernard (1978). *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Časlav D. Koprivica

Pojam angažovanja

Apstrakt

U ovom radu osvjetljavamo osnovne crte koncepta angažovanja, koji je postao moguć tek u sekularnom svijetu, s pojavom moderne indvidue lišene bilo kakvog stabilnog, vječnog poretka i hijerarhije vrijednosti. Ipak, angažovanje je pritom nije samo individualno nego i kolektivno, budući da izostanak izvjesnosti o istini ne pogađa samo zajednicu i društvo nego i njih motiviše da slijede istu paradigmu kao pojedinac – da sebe stave na kocku, ne znajući kuda će to voditi, ali s namjerom da na koncu proizvede opipljive i stabilne socio-kosmičke strukture, koja bi mogla ublažiti neizvjesnost, a time i nesigurnost. Nužnost angažovanja potiče od okolnosti da čovjek živi u kontekstu zasićenom značenjima koja ga već unaprijed prozivaju i utiču na njega. Stoga angažovanje znači uzvratno djelovanje izloženosti značenjima i strukturama koja su već uticala na čovjeka i njegovu situaciju. Jedan odjeljak teksta posvećen je razumijevanja angažovanja u savremenoj, „postmodernoj" epohi.

Ključne reči: angažovanje, egzistencijalna situacija, neizvjesnost, filosofija konačnosti, sekularnost, postmoderna