

TEMPORAL CHANGES UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Current online communication disintegrates linear time and supports the simultaneous. Fast online communication also accelerates the 'offline' world – the world of business, transportation and so on. Thus, new temporal changes introduce disruption and desynchronisation of the old temporalities. The authors identify 4 risks caused by temporal desynchronisation: 1 – on the media level – desynchronisation between linear and simultaneous time. 2 – on the cognitive level – desynchronisation between fast time and limited cognitive capacity in humans. 3 – on the social level – desynchronisation between fast work time and slow time that we use for recreation, family life and so on. 4 – on the environmental level – desynchronisation between the fast economy and the slow regeneration of natural resources. The authors see a solution in anti-temporalities, i.e. the ability to slow down fast time and switch between various time rhythms. However, we need to systematically learn how to use these anti-temporalities. The authors believe that the human mind needs quality cognitive training to be capable of slowing down and speeding up and thus switch efficiently between different time modes.

KEY WORDS:

contemporality, digital media, offline world, online communication, slow and fast time, temporal desynchronisation

1 Introduction

In his book *Média a rychlost (Media and Speed)*, S. Hubík mentions J. W. Goethe's letter to C. F. Zelter, where he complains about the quickening of society and the lagging reflection of these changes: "Everything nowadays is ultra; everything transcends, in thought and deeds. No one knows themselves any more, no one understands the element in which they move and act, no one grasps material with which they are working. ... Young people get stirred up much too early and then are carried away by the whirlpool of the times. Wealth and speed are what the world admires, and are aspired to by all."¹ In this letter, written almost 200 years ago, Goethe expressed deep concern over fast changes in society. What would he say about our era, when everything is super-fast and the speed of communication is close to the speed of light? What would he think of the present temporal changes in online and offline communication? And finally, what would he say about

¹ HUBÍK, S.: *Média a rychlost. Dromoskopická dromologie dromosférické dromokracie*. Olomouc: VUP, 2013, p. 21.

reflection on these changes that require slowing down and an awareness of perspective? Digital media have brought super-fast time and many people who work with information find themselves severely influenced by time stress. However, is this good? Is this merely technological progress that influences both the lives of individuals and the whole of society? Or does it mean a serious problem inside our society?

Being aware of these questions, we chose to study temporal changes under the influence of digital media, which is also the main objective of this scholarly study. As partial objectives, we aimed to clarify an understanding of time as influenced by digital media in the online world and the influence of online communication on the 'offline' world. Furthermore, we also tried to not only identify risks associated with experiencing various temporalities, but also to find ways to address them.

Our approach was theoretical, which is the reason we used qualitative methods, especially the phenomenological hermeneutical method. The phenomenological approach is used to explore the primary structure of media and deduce their influence on man, culture and society. The hermeneutic approach helps us understand the nature of media – we do this by comparing various forms of media.²

2 What Is Time?

If we want to understand temporal changes under the influence of digital media, we need to clarify the nature of time. Aristotle defined time as “a number of changes with respect to the before and after”.³ This definition can be decomposed into two inseparable aspects: consciousness (distinction of before/after) and movement sequence. Our consciousness, on the one hand, merges individual movements in a consistent flow; on the other hand, various movements establish various forms of temporality. This was noticed by the German philosopher J. G. Herder, whose words are quoted by T. T. Dvořák: “In reality, everything that changes uses its own time flow, there are not two things that use the same time scale. My heartbeat rate, the pace of my walk, the flow of my ideas – none of these sets pace for other people.”⁴ Dvořák notes⁵ correctly that Herder opposes Kant's and Newton's understanding of time as a universal concept, independent of humans, the human body and human thinking. Time is empirical, based on elementary reactions of the human body, and is subsequently transferred to language. Our body is a tool that can be used to measure time, surely not as precisely as scientific instruments, but it is precise enough to be used daily. On the other hand, our consciousness massively influences how we measure time. M. Heidegger notes that “time is a product of our thinking”.⁶ With no subject and no consciousness to synthesise the flow of movement, there would be no reason to speak of time. However, consciousness is dimensionless, therefore also time is rather dimensionless – it is impossible to construct. Also Aurelius Augustinus knew this, so when asked for an explanation of time, he answered humorously: “If nobody asked me, I would surely know what time is, but the moment somebody asks for an explanation, I do not know anything.”⁷ It is extremely difficult to explain consciousness, or aspects of consciousness, or how we process and calculate various movements. Moreover, it is multiple factors – including media – that influence how our consciousness approaches movements. There are several factors that influence how we merge and calculate movements – one of these factors is media. For that matter, Aristotle's approach of “before and after” was also probably the result of the idea of a linear sequence of movements, also promoted by phonetic writing.

2 For more information on the phenomenological hermeneutical method, see: GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Influence of the Internet on the Cognitive Abilities of Man. Phenomenological and Hermeneutical Approach. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 6-9.

3 ARISTOTELES: *Fyzika*. Prague: Rezek, 1996, p. 122.

4 DVOŘÁK, T.: Alarm: Ke kulturním technikám synchronizace. In DVOŘÁK, T. et al.: *Temporalita (nových) médií*. Prague: The Academy of Performing Arts, 2016, p. 22.

5 DVOŘÁK, T.: Alarm: Ke kulturním technikám synchronizace. In DVOŘÁK, T. et al.: *Temporalita (nových) médií*. Prague: The Academy of Performing Arts, 2016, p. 23.

6 LEŠKO, V.: Heidegger a Parmenides. In *Filozofia*, 2017, Vol. 72, No. 5, p. 367.

7 AUGUSTÍN: *Významy*. Bratislava: Lúč, 1997, p. 327.

3 Media and Time

Traditional Media Influence on Understanding Time

Both S. Harnad⁸ and J. Lohisse⁹ distinguish four revolutionary forms of media and eras that also influence the idea of time: spoken word, written word, printed word and the Internet. J. Lohisse points out that along with these four forms of media, four cultural and social periods emerged, each one changing the previous understanding of time: the period of oral communication, the period of written communication, the period of mass communication and, finally, the information period. During the time of oral communication, the spoken word was accepted as the main communication tool. Spoken communication, with its capability to let people unite and exchange their ideas thoroughly, co-shaped the cyclic view of time. This was also promoted by aspects such as the day and night cycle, seasons of the year, but also magical and mythical narratives about soul-travelling journeys or the biological life cycle and similar. J. Lohisse notes on this: “A person living in an oral society is surrounded by the eternal, present time. They become a part of the life cycle. They are the life cycle. The same sun rises every morning and this cycle of nature keeps repeating, just like the life cycle does.”¹⁰

In the era of the written word, the cyclic view of time was broken by phonetic writing. Since the written word meant linear distribution of symbols, it also favoured linear time – a new style of measuring time that would be characterised by a continuous and progressing flow: past-present-future. Similarly, Lohisse explains that the written word splits the circle of time, introduces the terms “before” and “after” and thus regulates the time flow.¹¹ Surely, this change did not simply happen in a moment. The Antiquity period witnessed a prolonged rule of cyclic time, a result of Ancient Greek religion, but with a growing importance of the written word in the Middle Ages and Christian Eschatological Visions, linear time started to take over. Measuring this time was not as abstract and quantitative as we know it today because it relied of measuring movements of the Sun and Moon and on certain moments that occurred during the day – for example, the midday Church bell ringing, festivals and so on. Each hour, day and month was used to mark the time.

The qualitative understanding of time changed during the Modern Period thanks to Gutenberg's printing press and the massive spread of the printed word in periodicals. Printed media spread throughout the social environment and the linear understanding of time became even more important. Readers of newspapers started to use the same time coordinates even if they were physically in different places, giving thus great importance to a universal (and, at the same time, abstract and quantitative) approach to time.¹² This meant a separation from the subjective approach, and time markers such as festivals and important days throughout the year lost their importance. We can speak of newspapers and clocks (the pocket-size clock was invented in the 15th century) as important tools for organising time during the time of the Modern Period.

Here we can sum up and declare that traditional forms of media – the written word and the printed word¹³ – greatly influenced the formation of linear time and became an important component of European (or Western) society.

8 HARNAD, S.: Post-Gutenberg Galaxy: The Fourth Revolution in the Means of Production of Knowledge. In *The Public-Access Computer Systems Review*, 1991, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 39.

9 LOHISSE, J.: *Komunikační systémy. Socioantropologický pohled*. Prague: Karolinum, 2003, p. 12.

10 LOHISSE, J.: *Komunikační systémy. Socioantropologický pohled*. Prague: Karolinum, 2003, p. 27.

11 LOHISSE, J.: *Komunikační systémy. Socioantropologický pohled*. Prague: Karolinum, 2003, p. 50.

12 Remark by authors: T. Dvořák sees widespread use of printed media as an important factor that offered time synchronisation, which became even more widespread with the beginning of radio and TV broadcasting in the 20th century. For more, see: DVOŘÁK, T.: Alarm: Ke kulturním technikám synchronizace. In DVOŘÁK, T. et al.: *Temporalita (nových) médií*. Prague: The Academy of Performing Arts, 2016, p. 25.

13 Remark by authors: Written word and printed word, as forms of media, started to dominate in Europe during the Modern Period. With them, the cyclic idea of time, formed by spoken word, started to lose its position.

Digital Media Influence on Understanding Time

On the emergence of digital media, V. Flusser noted that the linear code would be replaced by a new one, based on technical imaging.¹⁴ Even though he could experience only the dawn of the digital era, he was able to correctly deduce the disintegration of linear code that was based on printed words. With the dominance of visual information (photographs, videos) and hypertext (i.e., non-linear distribution of characters and symbols), we have evidence at hand. Digital media, with the Internet taking the most prominent position, influence our sensory perception ideas and knowledge and, therefore, also our approach and understanding of time. Communication using the Internet, for example when we surf across different websites, share video streams or just play digital games, means our deep immersion into cyberspace that offers no physical reference point, no calculable movements. This is also strengthened by dominating visual content. It is not surprising that A. Martinengo speaks here of a “pictorial turn”¹⁵ in the existing culture. Along with immersion in cyberspace, we also see a network communication that has no beginning, no end and no straight path of communication that is typical for linear time. Therefore, the perception of time on the Internet is described as simultaneous.¹⁶ Such an approach to time and information also influences our attitude towards culture, which is, according to P. Lévy, not handed down, but thanks to the hypertext management of information, becomes present.¹⁷ P. Rankov, following P. Lévy’s ideas, says that “*On the network, culture only spreads horizontally and simultaneously, in a given environment and time loses any relevance... Time, when we speak of information transfer, is purely an accompanying effect in the network culture.*”¹⁸ Changing the way of passing on culture brings an intensification of the simultaneous experience of culture and a weakening of linear time; our view of the past-present-future perspective is not the same any more.

With an almost immediate transfer of information through the cyberspace of digital media and the simultaneous perception of time also comes the speeding up of the ‘offline’ world. T. H. Eriksen calls this speeding up “fast time”.¹⁹

Speeding Up of the ‘Offline’ Life

There is a direct link between fast communication and the speeding up of our social life because communication, and especially media communication, constitutes an important element of culture and society. With the exponential growth in the amount of information and its high-speed transfer, also comes pressure to speed up consumption and processing of this information in the physical world. A great deal of information is directly connected to transportation, selling and buying; these aspects then have a great influence on the acceleration of life in the ‘offline’ world. However, this is also true for a scientist who needs to select from a massive amount of information in a relatively short time. Today, it is especially knowledge workers, i.e., people who work with information that are under tremendous time stress.²⁰ Yet, speeding up of life also affects areas that were not considered to be affected, for example the theatre and music. T. H. Eriksen writes about a senior actor at the National Theatre in Oslo claiming that the original *Rosmerhold*, a play written by Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright, was 4 hours long, while “*the latest performance lasted 1 hour 58 minutes*

– *without considerable cuts in the lines*”.²¹ The Opera+ web portal came up with interesting findings about the speeding up of pop and classical music. This information was written in the scientific journal *Musicae Scientiae* published by the *European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music*. In 2017, they published information about speeding up in pop songs, caused by listeners’ inability to concentrate. The portal also mentions Max Martin, a music producer, who claims that “*everything is accelerating and pop music follows the evolution in the society*”. A recent study describes three recordings of Bach’s concerto for two violins. The oldest performance, with David Oistrach and Igor Oistrach, was recorded in 1961 and is 17 minutes long. A recording from 1978 is approximately 15 minutes long, while the most recent one, dated back to 2016, only lasts about 12 minutes, which means an almost 5-minute shorter version of the music composition.²²

Still, the acceleration of life in the ‘offline’ world meets some limits, especially in the cognitive functions and abilities in man. This is the reason why the call for speeding up may also generate some serious social problems.

4 Temporal Changes – Related Risks

New temporal changes could create a disharmonic fragmentation and desynchronisation in the old temporalities. This desynchronisation may bring at least four risks:

Linear time is either suppressed or destroyed on the media level, in communication within the cyberspace of digital media, and replaced by simultaneous time. Massive dominance of simultaneous time may lead to the weakening or even loss of historical memory. Mark Bauerlein conducted research on knowledge levels in young Americans which revealed that students are less interested in knowledge of history. His research, but also his experience proved that the cause of this lack of interest in history and history-related facts may be seen in digital media and especially on social networking sites. The thing is that young people use social networks to communicate only current and often trivial information. An unwillingness to learn about history causes a deficit of knowledge and may constitute a direct threat to democracy. Bauerlein notes: “*Youth-to-youth communications no longer limited by time or space wraps them up in a generational cocoon reaching all the way into their bedrooms. The autonomy has a cost: the more they attend to themselves, the less they remember the past and envision a future.*”²³

On the cognitive level, there is temporal desynchronisation between accelerating work pace and limited cognitive capacity in humans. We have communication technologies that offer almost unlimited memory capacity and a communication speed that almost reaches the speed of light, but humans are limited in terms of cognitive abilities and they do need to rest and sleep. Humans therefore cannot compete with these communication technologies, or with developing artificial intelligence. However, acceleration is definitely seen also in the ‘offline’ world, therefore the cognitive load is increasing, which means that we have to process a continuously growing amount of information in the same amount of time. When this load reaches the critical breaking point, we witness a cognitive or information overload. This negative state is sometimes also called burnout. When our cognitive ability adapts to the accelerated pace of work, we may get used to working fast and continuously and thus become workaholics. However, acceleration in all areas of life changes gear to a higher communication speed. T. H. Eriksen argues that speed is contagious²⁴ and we happily get addicted to the comfort of instant access to information and become impatient when the tempo reduces. I. Reifová speaks in this context of a new era of impatience.²⁵

On the social level, which in fact follows the previous, second level, we see a desynchronisation between the fast socio-economic time and the slow time meant for relaxation, relationships, hobbies,

14 STRÖHL, A.: *Vilém Flusser (1920 – 1991): Fenomenologie komunikace*. Prague : Argo, 2016, p. 101.

15 MARTINENGO, A.: From the Linguistic Turn to the Pictorial Turn – Hermeneutics Facing the ‘Third Copernican Revolution’. In *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, 2013, Vol. 5, p. 309.

16 Remark by authors: The term “simultaneous” is used in chess, when a chess player is playing multiple games at a time. Continuity of the game is then disrupted, as our chess player faces constantly changing situations on each of the chess boards. This is a good example of time linearity. Simultaneous time generated in cyberspace is isolated from the traditional progressing time. J. Piaček notes that we could describe it as perichrony, or timelessness. See: PIAČEK, J.: *Problémy perichronozofie*. In *Filozofia*, 2008, Vol. 63, No. 3, p. 210.

17 LÉVY, P.: *Kyberkultura*. Prague : Karolinum, 2000, p. 229.

18 RANKOV, P.: *Informačná spoločnosť – Perspektívy, problémy, paradoxy*. Levice : LCA Publisher Group, 2006, p. 26.

19 ERIKSEN, T. H.: *Tyranie okamžiku. Rychlý a pomalý čas v informačnom veku*. Brno : Doplněk, 2009, p. 27.

20 Remark by authors: Universities are subjects of acceleration as well. For more information: MROZOWSKA, S., RYLKO-KURPIEWSKA, A.: Polish Media about Act 2.0 (the Constitution for Science). In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 24. The problem of information selection is also related to the work of a scientist or knowledge worker. See: LEVITSKAYA, A., FEDOROV, A.: Analysis of Manipulative Media Texts: World Media Literacy Education Experience. In *Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)*, 2020, Vol. 60, No. 3, p. 433.

21 ERIKSEN, T. H.: *Tyranie okamžiku. Rychlý a pomalý čas v informačnom veku*. Brno : Doplněk, 2009, p. 54.

22 OPERA+: *Bach se neustále zrychluje, tvrdí vědecká studie*. [online]. [2020-12-30]. Available at: <<https://operaplus.cz/bach-stale-zrychluje/>>.

23 BAUERLEIN, M.: *Najhlípejšia generácia. Ako digitálna éra ohlupuje mladých Američanov a ohrozuje našu budúcnosť alebo: Never nikomu pod 30*. Bratislava : Spolok slovenských spisovateľov, 2010, p. 19.

24 ERIKSEN, T. H.: *Tyranie okamžiku. Rychlý a pomalý čas v informačnom veku*. Brno : Doplněk, 2009, s. 72.

25 REIFOVÁ, I.: Not as We Know It: Televizní diváctví ve věku netrpělivosti. In DVOŘÁK, T. et al.: *Temporalita (nových) médií*. Prague : The Academy of Performing Arts, 2016, p. 103.

family and so on. The late modern style of work, especially work with information means fast time, but it is stealing from the slow time that should be used as leisure time, thus erasing the difference between working time and spare time. T. H. Eriksen speaks on this: “*Variety of professions – journalists, dealers, website developers – are confronted with the fact that the fast-working time is stealing from the slow, personal time. (...) With the work demands escalating, many people feel that there is something inappropriate and problematic in the routines of family life.*”²⁶ The fast work pace is quite often associated with the so-called multitasking, i.e., performing multiple tasks at the same time. The idea of multitasking is based on a false assumption that performing multiple tasks at the same time increases work efficiency. What happens is, in fact, the opposite. P. Rankov also agrees with this idea, commenting that switching between tasks impairs attention, thinking becomes shallower and errors are more frequent.²⁷ We can therefore sum up that the expansion of fast time into slow time constitutes a considerable risk for social life.

On the environmental level, we speak of a temporal desynchronisation between the fast economy and slow ecosystem recovery. We, indeed, speak of today’s economy as of a post-industrial economy, information economy and so on, an economy that should be less harmful to the environment, but fast and global electronic communication, too, is material and not consumption-free. L. Likavčan even claims that “*energy for the 21st century cloud still comes from sources that should long have been lost in history – especially coal. Also, this is the reason why Matteo Pasquinelli speaks of cloud as a part of carbon and silicone machinery.*”²⁸ Digital industry, apart from energy-related demands, also produces a great deal of waste, creating an environmental burden. However, this industry also accelerates the ‘offline’ world, especially business and transport, constituting thus a growing pressure on ecosystems. Since recovery is slow in the environment, the conflict between fast economy and ‘slow’ nature remains not only open, but today also critical.

5 Possible Solution

Risk factors existing in both fast online communication and the accelerating ‘offline’ world were first reflected in arts and humanities and only after that in social sciences. Art, in this case literature, is more sensible and capable of detecting cultural and social changes than science, which needs more time and separation to study something. For example, as early as 1983, S. Nadolny wrote his novel *The Discovery of Slowness*, in which the main character constitutes the perfection of slowness because his scientific work is more relevant than that of his faster colleagues. Thus, in 1983, Nadolny offers anti-temporality – slowing down – as a cure for the fast life. P. Handke with his work *Essay on Tiredness*, published in 1989, sees tiredness as something positive, something that we can understand as a part of anti-temporality. C. Honoré, in his book *Praise of Slowness*, written in 2004, elaborates quite consistently the so-called slow philosophy that opposes the cult of fast speed. He seeks a balance between slow and fast life pace.

Anti-temporality could constitute a usable approach to deal with the risks associated with the fast time. In media, anti-temporality could help us understand reading books and the press as something that opposes communication in cyberspace. This would be helpful to strengthen the position of linear time in the fight between linear time and simultaneous time. On the cognitive level, anti-temporality could be used as a means of information hygiene and media ‘diet’ and could also promote selective work with information and the organisation of working time, as well as learning to maintain a healthy perspective on media.²⁹ On the social level, the fight against fast time could be realised by means of actively slowing down during the time that is

26 ERIKSEN, T. H.: *Tyranie okamžiku. Rychlý a pomalý čas v informačním věku*. Brno : Doplněk, 2009, s. 129.

27 RANKOV, P.: Media Multitasking as Perception Strategy. In *Communication Today*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 28. Remark by authors: Family in our cultural – Christian – context also takes religion. Religion opposes the fast time. See more: RYLKO-KURPIEWSKA, A., KUJASZEWSKI, W.: The Specificity of Presenting a Family in Advertising Religious, Cultural and Social Conditions. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2020, Vol. 16, No. 5, p. 134.

28 LIKAVČAN, L.: Vidět jako platforma: Politická epistemologie digitálních infrastruktur. In DVOŘÁK, T. et al.: *Epistemologie (nových) médií*. Prague : The Academy of Performing Arts, 2018, p. 120.

29 Remark by authors: However, the condition for acquiring such abilities and skills is efficient media education. See: FEDOROV, A., MIKHALEVA, G.: Current Trends in Media and Information Literacy in Research and Scientific Publications of the Early 21st Century. In *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 158.

meant to be spent socialising inside the family, raising children, relaxing and so on. On the environmental level, anti-temporality would indeed slow down the economy, but it would also make it more ecological and sustainable in the long-term perspective.

These forms of anti-temporality will not appear automatically; it requires systematic learning and approach. The human mind needs good cognitive training in order to be able to slow down and speed up and thus optimise switching between time regimes. We could therefore speak of anti-temporality as of a kind of transversal rationality (as understood in publications by W. Welsch) and push it towards transversal temporality.³⁰

6 Conclusion

Communication in the cyberspace of digital media has inducted a number of temporal changes. In online communication, we can speak of shifting from linear time to simultaneous time, with a consequent acceleration in the ‘offline’ world, meaning the world of business, transport, services and people who work with information. However, this acceleration may be risky and cannot be unlimited. P. Virilio was extremely disturbed by this increasing speed of life and considered it to be a threat to the Western world. S. Hubík cites P. Virilio: “*The absolute speed is a vector of an integral breakdown of the Western world.*”³¹ P. Virilio had no knowledge that we would be facing a global pandemic caused by the rapid spread of coronavirus. This disease hit the globe because of global travelling and transport. So far, the only effective measure that we currently know of is a lockdown, meaning purposeful restrictions on travel, or slowing down. Speeding up of the ‘offline’ world brings not only a desynchronisation between people and nature (mutations found in the virus may well be a result of this negative approach), but also between humans and their cognitive and psychological abilities. This is the reason why slowing down should be a significant component of the concept of a *good* life.

We can finally say that we agree with P. Virilio and also J. W. Goethe that we find ourselves trapped in a dromoscopic hallucination, in which money and speed are the best which we can achieve. The global pandemic and other negative effects bring a warning that humankind will have to principally slow down and establish harmony with slower temporalities.

Acknowledgement: The study was elaborated within a national research project supported by the Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA) No. 1/0283/20, titled ‘Synergy of the Media Industry Segments in the Context of Critical Political Economy of Media’. Affiliated researcher: prof. PhDr. Slavomír Gálik, Ph.D. (2021 – 2022).

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30 Remark by authors: Our term “transversal temporality” was inspired by Welsch’s concept of “transversal rationality”, i.e., the ability of the mind to accept various discourses. See: WELSCH, W.: *Umelé rajske záhrady? Skúmanie sveta elektronických médií a iných svetov*. Bratislava : Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts, 1995, p. 9.

31 HUBÍK, S.: *Média a rychlost*. Olomouc : Palacký University, 2013, p. 155.

- GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Influence of the Internet on the Cognitive Abilities of Man. Phenomenological and Hermeneutical Approach. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 4-15. ISSN 1338-130X.
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