

MARCIN TREPCZYNSKI  
University of Warsaw

## MAN OF HYPERMODERNISM

Are we living in an era of hypermodernism? Some believe that we are. Admittedly, they often understand the term "hypermodernism" differently. In general, however, they all refer it to the current situation of the societies of Western civilization<sup>1</sup>. If a new era has indeed opened up before us, then it is worth seeking an answer to the question: what are the characteristics of the man living in it? In other words: what is the man of hyper-modernism?

Consideration of this issue is philosophically important. After all, it may be the realization of the "know thyself" postulate. Therefore, below I will try to give an answer to it. And since hypermodernism is understood in many ways, it will have several variants and will be preceded by a brief presentation of the concepts concerning it<sup>2</sup>. One of the variants is a proposal of my own, based on the concept of hypermodernism, which I presented together with Witold Zakrzewski.

In addition, consideration of the aforementioned issue is a good exercise that can be carried out as part of philosophical education. This is so for at least three reasons. First – it deals with one of the key philosophical questions. Second – it involves uncovering something new - going beyond the usual, established

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<sup>1</sup> The other two understandings of hypermodernism - as a trend in architecture and as a way of playing chess - will be omitted here. Similarly, with regard to postmodernism - it will not be about a direction in architecture or a trend in literature.

<sup>2</sup> I presented the approaches to hypermodernism discussed below more extensively together with Witold Zakrzewski in the article *Hypermodernism? - Post-Modernist and Post-Modernist Perspectives*, in M. Lubecki (ed.): *Reflections on Postmodernity*. Kraków 2012, s. 77-115.

ways of thinking about man, carrying an element of philosophical creativity. Third – it forces one to carry out a philosophical analysis involving understanding the essential features of the various concepts and recognizing how they translate into the human condition.

Thus, the following reflections on the man of hypermodernism can be simultaneously used in the didactics of philosophy. They consist of three parts: 1) the presentation of different approaches to hypermodernism, 2) define the vision of man within each of these concepts, 3) comparisons of these concepts and visions of man. The first part can serve as an informational basis that the student of philosophy will analyze in order to identify through it the different visions of man regarding each of the concepts presented. Part two is an example of how to solve this task. The third part, in turn, is an example of formulating the conclusions that can be drawn when comparing the results obtained.

**1. Six faces of hypermodernism.** The presentation of the various approaches to hypermodernism should be preceded by the observation that they all relate in some way to modernism (in the sense of the era, also referred to as "modernity"<sup>3</sup>), and some of them also to postmodernism. Thus, in order to fully understand them, it is worth pointing out the basic features of the paradigms of thought they set. Regardless of whether postmodernism is considered the last phase of modernism<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> The terms "modernism," "modernity" and "no- modernity," which function in the Polish language, obviously have different meanings, but in many places they meet in meaning, especially when for the former one assumes the connotations existing in Western languages and when thinking of them exposes their philosophical assumptions. It is for these reasons that I choose in this text to make a certain simplification, sometimes involving the interchangeable use of these terms, stipulating that in these considerations I am mainly concerned with the spirit of modernism, modernity, modernity.

<sup>4</sup> On this subject, cf. among others: J.-F. Lyotard: *Answering the question: what is postmodernism?*, in J.-F. Lyotard: *Postmodernism for Children. Correspondence 1982-1985*, translated by J. Migasinski. Warsaw 1998, pp. 23-24; B. Baran: *Postmodernism*. Cracow 1992, p. 175; J.-F. Lyotard: *A note on the meaning of the prefix "post-,"* in J.-F. Lyotard, *Postmodernism for Children...*, p. 107. The issue of contrasting postmodernism with modernism has been taken up by, among others.

J. Habermas: *Modernism - an unfinished project*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, in R. Nycz (ed.):

or for the era that followed modernism, it is possible to point out important differences between the spirit of modernism and the spirit of postmodernism.

The spirit of modernism is colloquially associated with a belief in reason and in progress (both individual, social and civilizational). This faith, in turn, is associated with the realization in various ways of the so-called Enlightenment project, which assumes, among other things, progressive emancipation and the facilitation of life through the development of science and technology. In addition, however, Marshall Berman, in addition to the promise of "adventure, strength, joy, development, transformation," also associated with modernism a threat of "destruction of everything we have", resulting from "incessant disintegration and re-birth, contradictions and struggle, anguish and uncertainty"<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, at the level of philosophical and scientific cognition, epistemic certainty, postulated by successive luminaries of this era, is indicated as an essential feature of modernity, the source of which Tadeusz Bartoś sees in the thought of René Descartes. As this author notes, "Descartes in his philosophical stance created a true new paradigm of philosophical thinking, which became the common spiritual heritage of modernity", namely the possibility of achieving an absolute point of view and absolute truth<sup>6</sup>. Finally, in the paradigm of modernist thinking there is present an appeal to the ultimate justifications that guarantee the legitimacy of the theses proclaimed, namely to what postmodernists have called "metanarratives"<sup>7</sup>.

In turn, one of the main features of postmodernism seems to be the demand for the unmasking of grand narratives and their destruction, in other words: the debunking of modern myths. Linked to this is the belief that

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*Postmodernism. An anthology of translations.* Cracow 1998, p. 26. In turn, the issue of transcending modernity is considered, among others, by G. Vattimo: *Postmodernity and the End of History*, transl. B. Stelmachczyk, in R. Nycz (ed.): *Postmodernism. An Anthology...*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> M. Berman: *"Everything solid dissolves into air". A thing about the experience of modernity*, transl. M. Szuster. Cracow 2006, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> T. Bartoś: *The end of absolute truth*. Warsaw 2010, p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J.-F. Lyotard: *The postmodern condition*, transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasinski. Warsaw 1997, pp. 19, 111-112; J.-F. Lyotard: *An addendum on narrative*, in J.-F. Lyotard, *Postmodernism for Children...*, pp. 29-30.

it is impossible to grasp the whole and achieve total unity, resulting in a finite orientation, as well as pluralism, relativism and the destruction of concepts and the questioning of all assumptions. On this basis, postmodernism rejects the assumptions adopted by modernism: 1) The power of reason as a means to achieve happiness or prosperity; 2) The existence of an absolute point of view, absolute truths and the possibility of achieving ultimate certainty; 3) the established order of the world and its meaning<sup>8</sup>.

With this abbreviated overview, it can be seen that the first conception of hypermodernism that I would like to present refers only to the notion of modernism. This is because, according to this first conception, hypermodernism is an era of extreme intensification of modernist tendencies, mainly on the level of technology, consumption and pop culture. Authors, who understand hypermodernism in this way, thus recognized that the prefix *hyper-* indicates maximization, and moreover is associated with the key word "hypermarket" in this view – because, according to them, the hypermarket also best reflects the spirit of this era and the state of our culture. What modernity fought for and ultimately gave, began to exist in excess and unlimited variety. So although this approach does not apply to postmodernism, thanks to the intensification of the possibilities created by modernism, it makes possible the pluralism it assumed, but often given in a simplified form. An example of this understanding of hypermodernism can be found, among others, in Ursula Usakowska-Wolff's article on Japanese artist Mariko Mori. This author writes: "Mariko Mori's art heralds the advent of the era of hypermodernism, a virtual hypermarket on whose overflowing shelves stand video clips and advertising spots: ingredients for a light and pleasant esoteric mix of cartoonish Buddhism, glittering futurism and rosy enlightenment"<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. among others: J.-F. Lyotard: *Addendum...*, p. 30; J.-F. Lyotard: *Note on the senses...*, p. 106; O. Marquard: *Parting with the philosophy of first principles. Philosophical studies*, translated by K. Krze- mieniowa. Warsaw 1994, p. 16; T. Bartoś: *The end of...*, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> U. Usakowska-Wolff: *O tempora, o Mori!*", "ORO" 2000/1-2, at: <http://www.usakowska-wolff.com/mori.htm>, excerpt *Birth of Hypermodernism from the Spirit of the Hypermarket*.

A similar approach to hypermodernism is proposed by Canadian thinker of Polish origin Mark Węgierski, intending by the term "hypermodernism" to mean the last phase of modernism. It differs from the one presented above in terms of the issues that define the understanding of this era. For, according to this author, it is characterized by: "the triumph of technology over humanity, of the machine over humanistic culture, of oligarchy over community, of soulless capital over human decency"<sup>10</sup>. Hypermodernism is thus marked by a reversal of roles in the areas of technology and power, and, as this author also emphasizes, an inappropriate relationship to nature. Crucial to this conception is the alternative proposal he sees for the ongoing era thus presented. This proposal, in turn, is postmodernism, which has not yet arrived, and which would be the restoration of the pre-modernistic order and "the tearing of humanity from the iron grip of technology"<sup>11</sup>. As can be seen, M. Węgierski prefers to use the term "postmodernism" in a different sense than is commonly accepted; as he explains, this is a deliberate procedure to juxtapose "post-modernism" on one level with "pre-modernism."

Meanwhile, anthropologist Marc Augé characterizes the era of *hypermodernism* or *hyper-modernity* (*surmodernité*), in which, in his opinion, we have come to live, through three excesses – time, space and *ego*. First of them boils down to the fact that time is everywhere precisely measured and counted down, and has become extremely dense: even in a small section of it there is an unusually large amount going on, which – thanks to the rapid flow of information – everyone immediately learns about, and on top of that, since the world is changing much faster than it used to, successive decades even seem like epochs. The second comes down to the fact that the remotest corners of the world have become accessible to everyone, if only through television programs, while the former Others, who came from those corners, have come to us. The third, meanwhile, is an overemphasis on individualism – such an intense focus on the self

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<sup>10</sup> M. Węgierski: *The Dilemma of Hypermodernism*, translated by. O. Swolkien. "Green Brigades. A journal of environmentalists," 1993/4, at: <http://zb.eco.pl/zb/46/dylemat.htm> - reprinted from "Perspectives," issue 5, winter 1992/3, ak. 28.

<sup>11</sup> M. Węgierski: *The Dilemma*, ac. 29.

itself, that it is difficult at least to look at reality not through the prism of the self. In this era, the sense of doubt is not brought – as in postmodernism – by the destruction of grand narratives, but precisely by these three excesses. In the situation of hypermodernism thus understood, M. Augé proposed a new model for conducting anthropological research. He based it on the concept of "non-places". He placed these "non-places" in opposition to traditional anthropological places, which are characterized by stability, differentiation, peculiarity and familiarity. "Non-places" include the halls of airports, hotel rooms or gas stations - identical everywhere, guaranteeing anonymity (though requiring identification) and, moreover, bringing solace in a hypermodern world full of excess<sup>12</sup>.

Philosopher Sébastien Charles characterizes hypermodernism even differently. In his view, the postmodernists did not destroy through deconstruction such notions as history, progress, nation, identity, and did not ultimately overthrow grand narratives, but made them take a different form, and the related ideas of democracy, the market, technology and human rights in the current era of hypermodernism still persist, only that they are no longer ideologically laden and disputed, but have begun to be accepted as part of a general consensus on the basis of common sense. Related to this is the fact that both these ideas and the demands for deconstruction and unmasking themselves are now being approached without emotion, without enthusiasm. Instead, the key feeling of people in the era of hypermodernism has become *crispation* – dejection, uncertainty, fear. Another determinant of hypermodernism is the logic inherent in this era, which S. Charles describes as "binaric" and "schizophrenic," as behavior is now governed by contradictory pairs at the same time, such as pleasure and suffering, responsibility and irresponsibility, the results of which include divorce and partnerships instead of marriage. Related to this

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. Augé: *Non-places. Introduction to the anthropology of hyper-modernity*, transl. R. Chymkowski. Warsaw 2010, p. 13 and n. Cf. also A. Kilian: *We are shrinking in time and space - a conversation with Marek Augé*. "Życie Warszawy.PL", 9.07.2011, at: <http://www.zw.com.pl/artykul/0,614569.html>.

Also diagnosed by the Canadian philosopher are the concomitant phenomena of hyperindividualization and hyperconsumerism. However, this author does not believe that modernity in this next phase, which is hypermodernism, is undergoing any crisis, but that it is simply deepening and developing<sup>13</sup>.

It is also worth noting the take provided by one of the authors of the *hypermodernity* entry in the English-language version of Wikipedia about Nick Flammingo (author of the May 17, 2007 changes). He pointed out that from the concept of *hypermodernity*, which is defined as "a type, modus, state of society reflecting the deepening intensification of modernism," one can distinguish the concept of *supermodernity*, understood as "a step beyond the ontological void of postmodernism." Hypermodernity, or rather supermodernity, understood in this way, "is based on a vision of plausible truths," and "is not concerned with the creation or identification of truth (*truth value*)" as modernism and postmodernism are, because according to this view of the "useful information is selected from the super-abundant sources of the new media"; it functions "in the midst of *chatter* (*chatter*) and transcending meaning in order to escape the nihilistic tautology of postmodernity," which, along with deconstruction, prevents the creation of truths<sup>14</sup>. Thus, this is not so much an epoch, but rather a way of addressing the issue of truthfulness in everyday information practice, which, however, in my opinion, can impinge on the perception of the whole reality, since its image is built on the basis of information obtained from various sources.

Yet another take on *hypermodernism*, although sharing some intuitions with the concept of *supermodernity* presented by Flammingo, I presented with Witold Zakrzewski in an article on hypermodernism as a possibility to go beyond postmodernism. It refers to the meaning of the prefix *hyper-*, which means "above," and assumes that, in that case, hypermodernism should be something above modernism, and furthermore - because postmodernism, as

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. Charles: *L'hypermoderne explique aux enfants*. Montreal 2007, pp. 11, 18-19, 21, 103-119.

<sup>14</sup> See : <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hypermodernity&oldid=131538179>

largely a negation of modernism, is on the same plane with it – at the same time above postmodernism. Being above cannot involve only negation, since we are talking here about being above mutually negating theses; it must therefore partially negate itself, and at the same time combine the achievements of both directions, be – in the Hegelian sense – a synthesis of antitheses. Hypermodernism understood in this way takes into account postmodern criticism. However, it does not accept the dogma that the subject is everything; the limitations of the subject, therefore, do not necessarily mean that there is nothing outside of it. Thus, it assumes the possibility of achieving what can be called certainty in uncertainty. He assumes that all narratives are on one level (there are no metanarratives), and yet he allows for the intuition that some narratives are distinguished and that it is on them that something further can be successfully built. In the consciousness of human and linguistic finitude, he maintains an openness to infinity and the possibility – again – of intuiting it; while in the cognitive humility – a certain rebelliousness, an intuition that one can know something "more", going beyond limitations. It combines the consciousness of disempowerment with the simultaneous struggle for the subject, and the renunciation of the madness of progress, truth and self-righteousness – with the belief in the sense of action, improvement, opening up to the truth<sup>15</sup>. Hypermodernism in this view can hardly be called an era. Rather, it can be considered as a way of relating to reality, self-understanding or simply a certain culture as defined by Krzysztof Okopien<sup>16</sup>. It can also be described as a state of mind of some people living today or a certain proposal or program to be implemented.

**2. Man thrown into hypermodernism.** With the above abbreviated presentation, an attempt can be made to determine what characterizes or determines a person living according to the various approaches to hypermodernism presented here.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Trepczynski, W. Zakrzewski: *Hypermodernism?...*, pp. 107-109.

<sup>16</sup> K. Okopień defines culture as a situation of double reference – to *arche* (conditions of possibility of what is) and *telos* (what should be), a situation "where man is the one who bears the double difference" (K. Okopień: *Theses on the ontology of culture*, in Z. Rosińska, A. Łabuńska (ed.): *Crossing aesthetics*. Warsaw 2003, pp. 82-83).



In the case of the first concept, it is difficult to exhaust the characteristics of the man of hypermodernism. However, at least exemplary characteristics of him can be given. The man living in the world, of which the hypermarket is a metaphor, appears as thrown into the multiplicity, full availability, abundance of products of different quality. He is also primarily a consumer. This situation can be evaluated in two ways - as a great opportunity to creatively use whatever one feels like and achieve valuable goals thanks to it, or as a danger of getting lost in this multiplicity and ultimately – slavery. For if hypermodernism understood in this way is not accompanied by properly conducted education (and, consequently, awareness and real freedom within the framework of the choices made), then the world-hypermarket becomes profoundly anti-humanistic, as the unconscious consumer ceases to be a subject meaningfully benefiting from the abundance of goods, and transforms into a buying animal, indolent and thus prone to falling into banality or primitivism, and furthermore subject to its own whims, and in the end, to the hypermarket itself, which, by giving the consumer the impression of use, uses it itself. Because of these dangers, it would seem worthwhile to develop a philosophical anthropology of a normative nature and an ethics of the hypermarket man, helpful in maturely navigating such a functioning world.

The man of hypermodernism, in Mark Węgiński conception, is overcome by technique and technology and governed from the outside. The ethics that guide him and his environment are subordinated to the laws of capital. Finally, he finds himself in a situation in which his home – the environment – is threatened. Viewed in this way, hypermodernism strips man of his freedom and disempowers him, and puts him in a situation of imminent annihilation. At the same time, however, this man has hope in the form of postmodernism as a return to the assumptions of premodernism without giving up some of the achievements of civilization. As M. Węgiński points out, postmodern society "would try to combine the characteristic feature of practically all premodern societies – the spirit of community and a sense of connection with nature – with a reasonable amount of material benefits and comforts

offered by technology in the modern world"<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, it would "exercise strict control over technology," return to "historically ingrained ways of life, by which we could control our boundless lust for the acquisition and possession of excess goods," and, moreover, by tapping into "the deepest, unconscious roots of our self," it would open "to human feelings."<sup>18</sup> According to this author, a new anthropology, based on interpersonal ties, connection with nature, wise management of goods and moderation in their usage, is still open to the man of hypermodernism.

In contrast, from Marc Augé's conception emerges a man thrown into three excesses. He hysterically counts time, overwhelmed at the same time by its density – the multiplicity of events and focused on the present. He can get everywhere and explore every corner of the earthly globe, which makes him feel that the world is shrinking. In addition, at the base of every thought he has this "I", through which everything is "filtered." Tired of these excesses, he has two kinds of asylums at his disposal: traditional places and non-places. He appears somewhat as a man of fatigue and escape-relief, as if stretched constantly between these two moments.

Sébastien Charles' hypermodern man, on the other hand, is someone who lives in constant turmoil, uncertainty, and is driven by contradictory principles that bring hedonistic fulfillment, but at the same time – unfortunately – also certain side effects (including the aforementioned divorces). This man adheres to individualized, freely chosen ideas, including his own rationality. His goal is his own satisfaction and happiness. In order to achieve this happiness, and at the same time to make possible the aforementioned degree of irresponsibility and his own rationality, he submits himself to a social contract - of a purely pragmatic nature - which is supposed to provide hypermodern education, social justice and security<sup>19</sup> for all. Interestingly, this precarious,

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<sup>17</sup> M. Węsierski: *The Dilemma...*, ac. 29.

<sup>18</sup> M. Węsierski: *The Dilemma...*, ac. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. S. Charles: *L'hypermoderne...*, pp. 79-84.

inconsistent, pragmatic and hedonistically oriented man is accepted as much as possible by Charles.

What, on the other hand, is the man of supmodernism according to Flammingo? All that can be said about him is that he is aware of his ability to evaluate the reliability of the truths he finds, to combine them, and to choose from their multiplicity those that are useful. So he has something to build on and he knows it. As this author notes, "searching the Internet and building interconnected blogs is an excellent metaphor for the workings of a super-modern subject." Thus, the man of super-modernism appears here as someone who is intelligent, able to move efficiently among the multiplicity of various kinds of statements, thus free from postmodern nihilism.

On the other hand, according to the concept I presented with W. Zakrzewski, the man of hypermodernism, although he has cognitive humility – he knows about his limitations and that he is always in their power – nevertheless intuits that there is something beyond, something that somehow governs discourses and reality. This man never has ultimate certainty, but believes in the existence of some meaning. So he is capable of transcending: beyond himself, beyond his own limitations, habits, etc. In going beyond, in turn, he does not gain certainty, but "establishes" certain horizons which immensity and presence he intuitively feels, but which he does not see. By establishing these horizons, however, he broadens his intellectual spectrum and makes himself open to this assumed possibility. With this approach, he is able to take responsibility, take on tasks, and build. Discussions around this concept, as well as my own reflections, have reinforced my conviction that a good example for imagining a man functioning in this way is a Christian who accepts the achievements of postmodernism: although he knows that in this life he will know neither the meaning of this world, nor whether God exists, nor other truths, but as a result of the graces given (often thanks to the man's openness to something unknown but possible), among others, the grace of faith (which is more than taking someone's word for it), he strongly senses that it is the Christian narrative that is true, senses another reality, the presence of God and the meaning of both the existence of the world and various actions,

and is ready to devote his entire life to an activity that others may find senseless, but which he will be completely overconfident about, even though, as I pointed out, he accepts the criticism leveled by postmodernism.

**3. Conclusion.** The above presentations and analyses allow us to formulate some important conclusions.

1. According to some of the approaches, hypermodernism is an ongoing era; while according to others, hypermodernism should be understood as an attitude to certain issues, an attitude to reality or culture in the sense of K. Okopien. While the approaches belonging to the first case (the first four) assume that we are living in a time of hypermodernism, and therefore we are people of hypermodernism, the concepts included in the second case (the last two) rather assume that hypermodernists are at least some people, or that hypermodernism is only a certain proposal, which perhaps some people are already pursuing, but which is still open to the rest. Thus, it is not clear whether hypermodernism has come into existence, whether it exists in part, or whether it is only possible for the time being.

2. The first four concepts attempted to capture the condition of modern man, making – necessarily – a large generalization. Depending on the concept adopted, this man turned out to be a consumer in a world-hypermarket, a slave to technology, capital and power, an individual constantly troubled by the three excesses, or an individualistic, pragmatic hedonist living in uncertainty. Arguably, each of these descriptions represents some truth about every person in Western civilization. However, it can be doubted whether any of them really describes us well, that is – whether we are really people of hypermodernism understood in any of these ways.

3. The last two approaches do not pretend to describe the current reality, but rather try to present the very concept of hypermodernism – as something that may or may not be fulfilled.

4. In one case (M. Węgiński take), the man of hypermodernism is presented in a dramatic situation – enslavement and the threat of annihilation of the place where he lives. However, according to this conception, an optimistic alternative in the form of original postmodernism is possible. On the other hand, in the case of two approaches (the world-hypermarket and Augé's conception), the human situation can possibly be considered unsatisfactory – the first presents man as a consumer, with the threat of disempowerment and trivialization, while the second assumes doubt and fatigue caused by excesses.

5. In the last three cases, the man of hypermodernism is a distinctly post-postmodern man, i.e. one who benefits from the achievements of postmodernism.

6. In the case of the second and sixth approaches, there are elements of anthropology (in the philosophical sense, as the concept of man): 1) elements of an anthropology of original postmodernism assuming human life in full harmony with nature, cordial human ties based on feelings, reaching deep into the human self, and a return to ancient ways of life that would nullify the lust for possessions; 2) elements of the anthropology of hypermodernism as a synthesis of antitheses, enriched by the achievements of postmodernism, but embracing the opening of man to what remains beyond his cognitive abilities, the possibility of intuiting the infinite and the meaning and distinguished (true) narratives, so that he is able to achieve certainty in uncertainty and total dedication to an idea chosen with full conviction of its rightness. Perhaps anthropology can be called the vision of modern man outlined and accepted by S. Charles. In other cases, it is difficult to speak of even elements of anthropology; in the first case, it seems desirable to develop such an anthropology, along with the ethics proper to it.

7. According to the above findings, the answer to the question of whether we are the people of hypermodernism depends on adopting any of the concepts above and assessing their relation to current reality.

### Summary

In recent years in a philosophical discourse about the culture there appeared such a term as "hypermodernity", to describe a present age of Western civilization. A new age entails a new conditions for human beings. Therefore in this paper I try to answer the question: what is human of hypermodernity like? Beacuse hypermodernity has not only one stiff meaning I present six different concepts of hypermodernity, ia. those famous proposed by M. Augé and S. Charles and one new - hypermodernity as a synthesis of antitheses. I suggest that considering this topic may be a good exercise for students during the process of philosophical education.

**Key words:** hypermodernity, modernism, postmodernism, Augé, Charles, anthropology, education.