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## MIRACLE ON SALE

### THE MIRACLE PHENOMENON IN NEW MEDIA

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**Abstract:** The status/nature of a miracle in new media and contemporary Western civilization will be problematized in this paper through the examples of advertisements on the Internet. Quick and effective cures for the most difficult and persistent diseases (cancer, psoriasis, nail fungus, and the like) have already been examined as a form of the transformation of miraculous healing folklore narratives in the relevant literature. Contemporary narratives, however, differ significantly from oral templates in the elimination of the transcendent and the transformation of a miracle into market value. It is not only health that is on offer in the present Internet culture, but basically everything: beauty, potency, longevity, eternal youth, various skills (learning a language in a couple of weeks, mnemonic techniques), earning a salary without working, etc. The range of the offered “instant miracles” in advertisements and the formulative “recipes for happiness” provide the material for the reconstruction of the contemporary Western society value system and dislocate the miracle phenomenon from the emic to the etic perspective.

**Keywords:** miracle, new media, the Internet, healers, beauty, youth, capitalism  
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Current reflections on the disenchanting world metaphor—funded on the rationalization and secularization categories and on trust in the modernist concept of science which demystifies the otherworldly, magic and frauds<sup>1</sup>—are

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<sup>1</sup> A case in point is the “worm in ears” cure vitality example—it is a nonexistent disease whose diagnosis is based on largely general (and typical) symptoms and minor ailments (a child does not sleep, cries, tosses and turns, rubs face, ears, nose, and the like), and is cured by a fraud, as Biljana Sikimić (2019) showed on the basis of the corpus spanning over a century. A far more modern version would be a cure for parasites in the form of the concoction entitled Puridon (in the Czech and Romanian version—Bactefort): “[I]f you manifest any one of the symptoms—fatigue, anxiety, sleeplessness or blocked-up

generally critically directed at Max Weber's postulates. The arguments are based on the detection of numerous forms of belief in magical, occult, supernatural, scientifically unverifiable, as well as the alternative practices of healing which are considered superior to the official medical practice in certain social strata. Even a passing glance at the contemporary recordings testifies to the vitality of magical rites in the domain of traditional medicine, archaic concepts in the domain of "diagnostics" (iron smelting to prevent fear, incantations against charms, night walkers, chthonic beings called *babice* (midwives), anthrax, stepping on dug-up earth, *bartovci*, and the like) (Đorđević 2008; Đorđević 2011; Đorđević Belić 2019; Ilić 2005), as well as the active interaction of religious canons, phytomedicine, and the magic of words (inscriptions) (e.g., in the Sufi healing practice of the famous healer from Kaćun, Sheikh Mesud Hadžimejlić) (Ratković and Marjanić 2019). On the other hand, a greater usage of amulets and talismans has been noted in the Western civilization urban environment in the last thirty-odd years, which could probably be correlated with the general worsening of the socioeconomic status and social crises (Lecouteux 2009).<sup>2</sup> Eclectic healing practices which combine the New Age heritage and traditional medicine—"folk New Age"—are also formed in the environment in which there is a more intensive contact (and the intertwining of the two) between a traditional and citizens' (elite, educated, written, printed) culture (Radulović 2019: 187).<sup>3</sup> The powerlessness of the official medicine has also led to the alternative treatment practices revitalization (Ajdačić 2004: 274):

The interest in traditional medicine which withered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, revives at the moment when an individual fails to justify their trust in diagnostics and modern medicine treatment methods. The patient and their immediate surroundings, usually the family, resort to traditional means in the absence of diagnostics, due to the symptoms which wear them out or the official diagnosis rejection. (Sikimić 2019: 83)

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nose—there is a 99% chance that parasites exist in your body, and you have to get rid of them as soon as possible" (cf. <https://fakenews.rs/2019/09/10/izmisljeni-doktor-u-izmisljenom-intervjuu-siri-paniku-i-nudi-sumnjive-pilule/>; March 3, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The downfall of the communist and socialist ideologies in the countries where they were dominant at the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s created space for the revitalization of the religious and occult practices which had been repressed up to that point (although they had been present on the margins and in smaller groups) (Tomka 2011; Radulović 2019: 179).

<sup>3</sup> "Fragments of knowledge about esoteric teachings, magic, Chinese acupuncture, yoga, witchcraft, and traditional medicine are implemented in the religious syncretism of various cultures, but without the ideological foundation and consequences of their respective religious systems" (Ajdačić 2004: 274).

This paper, however, will not stay within the boundaries of well-trodden debates regarding the destiny and forms of survival of the irrational and otherworldly in the modern world, but quite the contrary—it will be focused on certain phenomena which were regarded or could in that context be regarded as a miracle, but have an utterly different status in new media.

A miracle is a basic mode of God's annunciation in the world in oral epic tradition, a form of his emanation and it appears in two primary situations:

1. to punish a sin<sup>4</sup> or indicate a potential sin,<sup>5</sup> and
2. when the innocent and hapless in trouble invoke God, which is the case that has a very frequent formula in Serbian oral epic tradition—"what she prays to God, that he grants to her." The formula occurs in poems with widely different plots, but it infallibly follows the great miracle theme:

2.1. the transformation of a woman into a bird (*The Death of the Jugović Mother*; Vuk II, 48)

The mother of Jugović prays to God,  
 The keen eyes of a falcon to give her  
 Alongside the snow-white wings of a swan,  
 To fly over the plain of Kosovo,  
 And to see the nine Jugović brothers,  
 And the tenth, old Jug Bogdan, the father.  
 What she prays to God, that he grants to her:

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<sup>4</sup> Examples are numerous: the unfaithful godfather, Grčić Manojlo, who replaces children of the two mothers (because one is male and the other one female) on account of the bribery in gold he receives from one of them, receives the punishment not short of the brutality exhibited in ancient myths—his child turns into a lamb and he slaughters, roasts, and eats him unknowingly (Vuk II, 5); Saint Sava mutes, blinds, cripples, or makes the Turks who have tried to desecrate his relics descend into madness (SANU III, 26; Vuk III, 14); haiduks who pillage a church and attack the relics of Saint Petka/Saint Sunday/Saint Paraskeva and the like, suffer from a severe and long-lasting illness (SM 41), etc.

<sup>5</sup> The most frequent circle of variants of this kind is the uncovering of a potential incest—the marriage of a brother and sister due to unawareness:

<p>When Marko comes to the foot of the hill,          The richly adorned girl undresses he,          And there casts her he onto the grass green,          In kisses her little face to cover.          Clear was the sky, and now is overcast,          From the cloud a single drop of blood falls,          Right on Marko's little face it descends. (MH II, 34)</p>	<p>Once they set foot in the house of our Lord,          To their candles holy fathers set flames,          Yet, of their own will the flames ceased to burn,          And all of their wine into water turned,          Into dead silence all clergymen fell. (SANU II, 17)</p>
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The keen eyes of a falcon God gives her  
Alongside the snow-white wings of a swan,  
Over the plain of Kosovo flies she,  
Dead she finds the nine Jugović brothers,  
And the tenth, old Jug Bogdan, the father.

2.2. the revival of the dead (*Brothers and a Sister*; MH I, 29)

Prayers sends she to the God almighty,  
To the God almighty and his mother,  
To grant prayers to her as a mother,  
To bring to life the darling son of hers,  
By the name of Trator from the black earth.  
When her prayers reach the ears of the God.  
Compassion shows Holy Lady to her,  
Thus, the two of her angels she sends her,  
To bring back to life Trator, her young child.

2.3. the birth of a snake-like child (*The Marriage of the Variegated Viper*; MH I, 34)

Prayers sends the wife of Ivan to God,  
Prayers sends she for all the nine years round,  
To let her the fruit of her own womb bear,  
If it were the variegated viper.  
Prayers sends the wife—God grants them to her,  
God let her the fruit of her own womb bear,  
'tis but the variegated viper.

2.4. a visit to hell (*The Fiery Mary in Hell*; Vuk II, 4), and the like.

Thus prays the Fiery Mary to God:  
“Give me, oh God, the keys to Heaven’s doors,  
So that together we may open them,  
So that Hell through Heaven’s land I may reach,  
So that my agèd mother I may see,  
And to liberate, oh her darling soul!”  
Prayers sends she, and God grants them to her,  
With the keys to Heaven he entrusts her,  
Peter the Apostle sends he with her,  
Thus, the doors of Heaven they two open,  
So traversed have they through Heaven to Hell.

Epic poetry, and, partially, legends of saints talk about more radical forms of miracle (metamorphosis, revival, visits to heaven and hell, manipulating waters and weather conditions,<sup>6</sup> etc.) and codify the system of religious<sup>7</sup> and ethical norms (respecting God and saints, abiding by the church canon, showing deference to blood relations and godfathers, honor, hospitality, etc.). Belief legends,<sup>8</sup> however, are aimed at the presence of miracle in everyday life and they are predominantly preoccupied with people's existential problems, among which the fundamental ones are illness and poverty. Both thematic knots have generated the mainstream of oral narrative: poverty—belief legends about hidden treasure; illness—stories about miraculous healings, which are probably the most numerous in the entire folklore fund.

God, Holy Mother, and saints possess the power. They are the ones to whom miracles are ascribed in belief narratives about healing, but their power in this type of narrative is, as a rule, manifested indirectly (through the miraculous icons, relics, pieces of saint's clothes, cult objects, etc.).<sup>9</sup> On the other

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<sup>6</sup> A typical oral formula which covers this miracle domain is "clear was the sky and now is overcast" (Vuk III, 8, 15), usually in interaction with lightnings, thunders, winds, blood, or stone rain, etc.: "Lo, behold the marvels of God our Lord, / And the marvels of the serf of our Lord, / Pasha's both arms have completely withered, / At the back of his head his mouth they've placed. / Yet no satisfaction found Lord in that. / Clear was the sky and now is overcast, / Thunder and lightning with blasting commenced, / And from the sky started blood stones falling" (Vuk VI, 48). The formula and cataclysmic events may also be transposed into the form of an ominous prophetic dream: "A dream dreamt a young girl upon a steed: / Clear was the sky and now is overcast, / From the cloud the silent dew has emerged, / Upon the wedding guests the dew descends, / Into the blood of a hero it turns" (SANU III, 17).

<sup>7</sup> "Supernatural, magical in legends is not horrifying as in belief legends, but sacred; it should not only confirm the existence of God, but also elevate a saint and it is often ascribed to him for patriotic reasons (e.g., Saint Sava)" (Milošević-Đorđević 2000: 179).

<sup>8</sup> The difference between legends of saints and belief legends is not easy to strictly delineate, but it is maybe best highlighted in the fact that a legend "more closely denoting a record of a saint's life and deeds ... has its source in the *Bible*, Old Testament and New Testament texts, but also in Biblical apocrypha and medieval hagiographies," while belief legends "are much more widely based on Christianized and older layers of tradition, on their mutual intertwining, but also in the national and local history understanding" (Samardžija 2011: 274–275). The topics of belief legends are also various kinds of encounters with demonic beings, episodes about sinners, the origin of some landforms, plants, animals, the theft of the Sun, the culture and disappearance of the giants, etc.

<sup>9</sup> The stories about healing which healers themselves narrate as a form of justification of their own healing powers are a special narrative type. They can also contain the elements of etiology: "Narratives which have successful healings theme and are primarily

hand, the outcomes of the healing power are often perceived in the archaic coordinates in this type of narrative, thus, the healing power is assigned to holy stones (cf. Popovska 2009; Popovska 2012), or trees (sacred trees, certain types of herbs<sup>10</sup>). However, what predominates in urban legends (and new media which circulate them) are the healers who have “some sort of a supernatural power or, according to some interpretations, a supernatural degree of a natural ability available to everyone.” The origin of this power “is usually not explained ... especially not by the power of faith or its supernatural character” (Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2007: 236). If the etiology is established, the endowment is explained by birth, some sort of knowledge transmission (usually within a family), “revelation” or individual initiation (healers gain the healing gift in a personal confrontation with a difficult, deadly disease) (Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2007: 236–237; Ajdačić 2004: 275). This belief narrative type has retained the fundamental trait of the genre—the credibility rhetoric.<sup>11</sup>

What is mutual for all the examined cases [thirty-eight texts from the tabloid newspapers] is that the credibility of a statement is proven by the fact that it is a real person who said it, someone with a name and surname, place of residence, of certain age, profession, and the photos are occasionally displayed. Even in the cases in which only the initials or the name of the cured patient are mentioned instead of the full profile, this “presentation” leaves an impression of verifiability, since it is supplemented by a list of facts. ... This insistence on the veracity, factuality is a very important feature of these texts’ poetics (Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2007: 243).

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 narrated by the ‘healers’, make the elements of a thematic complex, i.e. a text with a special social role. As the fieldwork showcases, together with the concrete examples of successful healings, the emphasizing of the connection with a metaphysical entity occurs as a leitmotif almost without fail in incantation narratives” (Đorđević 2011: 175).

<sup>10</sup> Veselin Čajkanović enlists a number of examples of “the incubation under the ash trees” (*dictamnus albus*)—the healing of a patient under the sacred tree which is prescribed by ritual (Čajkanović 1994: 408–415).

<sup>11</sup> Although even the tellers who do not believe in what is narrated can transmit belief legends, a fact proven by numerous comments of informers and the whole system of (mostly closing) oral formula (cf. e.g. Bošković-Stulli 1975: 128; Marks 1996: 26–27; Rudan 2006; Mencej 2008: 325–329; Popović 2013: 210–211; Popović Nikolić 2014) and although it is impossible to have a direct insight into the relationship between the teller and the narrated (Marković 2012: 167), “stylistic realism” is one of the fundamental traits of the genre in the discursive level, about which has been written many a time. A “systemic” reference to belief legends is given in Samarđžija 2011, while a “classical” choice from the relevant literature (Maja Bošković-Stulli, Nada Milošević-Đorđević, Vljako Palavestra, Linda Dégh, Ūlo Valk, Kirill Čistov, Willem de Blecourt, etc.) is given in Ljuštanović and Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2015: 137–138.

The Internet culture has inaugurated a new “healing” practice: advertisements which, for a certain amount of money, offer “instant miracles” in the domain of treatment—or simply recipes which most promptly relieve you of all sorts of discomforts. There are numerous “cures” for cancer on the Internet and newspaper websites. Psoriasis and nail fungus can be cured in a few days, cartilage and tendons can regenerate sooner than nails, with a formulative formulation:

In only 7 days COMPLETE REGENERATION of bones, tendons, joints, and total pain elimination<sup>12</sup>

In 7 days, it regenerates bones, joints, and tendons: Get rid of pain forever with one ingredient you have at home<sup>13</sup>

In 7 days, it regenerates bones, joints, and tendons: One ingredient which will relieve you of pain forever! (RECIPE)<sup>14</sup>

In only 7 days COMPLETE regeneration of bones, tendons, joints, and absolute PAIN ELIMINATION!<sup>15</sup>

This product is stated to be a miracle—it completely regenerates joints. An exclusive interview with a legendary man to whom this miracle happened!<sup>16</sup>

When joints prevent us from living normally, we can only hope for a miracle!—An exclusive interview with the legendary man to whom this miracle happened!<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.srbijadanas.com/clanak/idealno-recept-za-samo-7-dana-kompletno-obnavljanje-kostiju-tetiva-zglobova-i-totalno> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> <https://net.hr/zena/zdravlje-ljepota/za-7-dana-obnavlja-kosti-zglobove-i-tetive-zauvijek-se-rijesite-bolova-uz-jedan-sastojak-kojeg-imate-kod-kuce/> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> <https://stil.kurir.rs/lepi-zdravi/54013/za-7-dana-obnavlja-kosti-zglobove-i-tetive-jedan-sastojak-zauvek-ce-vas-resiti-bolova-recept> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> <http://zdravoiljekovito.com/za-samo-7-dana-kompletno-obnavljanje-kostiju-tetiva-zglobova-totalno-otklanjanje-bola/> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kurir.rs/zabava/zena/3186441/ova-zena-ima-80-godina-a-izgleda-30-godna-mladje-ishrana-joj-je-70-20-10-a-svako-jutro-nikad-ne-zaboravi-da-uradi-ovu-stvar-foto> (February 28, 2020). The advertisement in question is Flekosteel, for which is offered a 50% discount only that day in a pop-up ad of the following content: „Jeste li iz Belgrade? Pričekajte! Najveći broj žalbi dobijamo iz Belgrade i Vaše regije zbog ozbiljnih bolesti leđa i zglobova. Samo jedan dan—29.02.2020 prilikom naručivanja Fleksosteel sredstva, svako iz ovih mesta dobiće 50% popusta“ [“Are you from Belgrade? Wait! We get the largest number of complaints from Belgrade and Your region because of serious back and joints illnesses. Only today—February 29, 2020 by ordering Flekosteel, everyone from these places gets a 50% discount.”] This text has been translated (Google) and generated (date) by a computer.

<sup>17</sup> <http://pushh.mypartnerbank.ru/FleekoTodayRs/> (March 3, 2020).

The same kind of media also cherishes other ways of traditional belief narratives “mental disposition.” Belief narratives about hidden treasure have been modified in urban legends into the narratives of unexpected inheritance or an invitation for a child to go abroad, which, by some quirk of fate, brings prosperity to both the child and the family. It is precisely these belief narratives that have been transformed into the Internet offers which vulgarly sublimate the proto-narrative logics: “How to earn money effortlessly.”<sup>18</sup> Recipes for easy and quick money<sup>19</sup> have a wide variety of modes, from the guidelines for “simple” global stock market trade which even laymen master in a few minutes:

THIS JOB REQUIRES ONLY TEN MINUTES: You get 50 euros as soon as you start working and the sum total can be huge. ... How? Easily—by trading in the global stock market. You don’t have to be a finance expert to trade and earn money in the global stock market. Millions of people like you trade there and also thousands of our countrymen<sup>20</sup>

to the instructions with the elements of (accidental?) irony and grotesque:

My first experience with salary on the Internet was on neobux The page is very simple, you should just click on pages and stay on them for 30 (until you see a green tick) seconds and that’s that you will be paid for that:) under the referral name put Robijash<sup>21</sup> and you’ll get a welcoming \$0.2!!! not to forget the page does give you money it is not some kind of scam, you just need to make an account on alertpay to get your payments!!! you can find the links for signing up here to the right!! first alertplay then neobux.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “I was checking some newsgroups a few weeks ago, and I came across an article similar to this one in which it said that you could earn thousands of dinars in only A FEW WEEKS with a very small stake of 250 dinars! ... Then I invested those miserable 250 dinars AND GUESS WHAT!?! within 7 days, I started receiving money by post! I was flabbergasted! I thought that it would all end soon, but the money kept rolling in. ... Read carefully this whole message! Follow these simple rules, and watch as the money keeps coming! It’s easy. It’s legal. PLEASE, TRUST ME, I WISH YOU ONLY GOOD!!! ... I GUARANTEE THIS IS LEGAL! You make a legal request, and you pay it! Like most of us, I was a bit sceptical and worried about how legal that all was. Then I checked it with the U.S. Post Office (1-800-725-2161), and they confirmed that it was really legal” (<https://opusteno.rs/razno-fl/kako-doci-do-novca-bez-trunke-znoja-t4123.html>; February 28, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Oral tradition used to connect big and easy money: “Those who make a lot of money quickly are said to have found hidden treasure somewhere” (SEZ 15, 1911, 701; according to Karanović 1989: 90).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.srbijadanas.com/biz/srbija/za-ovaj-posao-treba-samo-deset-minuta-dobijate-50-evra-cim-krenete-ukupna-zarada-moze-biti-ogromna-2016-11-03> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Prisoner.

<sup>22</sup> <http://kakodonovca.weebly.com/> (February 28, 2020).



We are not familiar with the destinies of the people who have followed the paths of these ads and pieces of advice, but we are aware of the traditional culture response to the hidden treasure hunt: “In the texts collected in the territory of the Serbo-Croatian language speaking area, the treasure is usually not found, although the explanations themselves for this failure may vary” (Karanović 1989: 85).<sup>23</sup>

Maintaining beauty and the “eternal” youth imperative are equally—or even more so—valued as quick money and “instant healing” in the contemporary media. They are also common topics of belief legends: from those about Cleopatra, who, as the legend goes, bathed in donkey’s milk to preserve youth and beauty, to those about the notorious Hungarian noblewoman Elizabeth Bathory, who, according to the story, sought youth in bathing in the blood of innocent girls (or in drinking their blood). Contemporary Western culture establishes youth almost aggressively not only as a biological but also socially desirable state (“ageism”),<sup>24</sup> while the limit for the old age is set already at the age of forty (Zeman and Geiger Zeman 2018: 29). Enormous wealth which is utilized (and earned) for preserving the youth of bodies shows why youth has become one of the capitalist culture’s priorities:

In the culture which, on the one hand highlights the importance of a woman’s (and not man’s)<sup>25</sup> physical appearance and, on the other hand, perceives only youth and youthfulness as physically attractive (Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko 2011; Wolf 2008; Calasanti 2005), women resort even to cosmetic interventions in their struggle with losing physical attractiveness. (Zeman and Geiger Zeman 2018: 30)

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<sup>23</sup> The treasure can be already taken (someone has previously found it) and if the hunters do find the treasure, the stake is very high (their children die) or the narrative takes form of an apology of the righteous, which is the poetics of an entirely different genre (Karanović 1989: 89–92).

<sup>24</sup> “Once regarded as a natural process, ageing is now viewed as a social problem: a perspective that embraces stereotypes of physical and cognitive decline (Fiske 1998). Seniors are no longer venerated in Western culture; instead, they are typically seen as ‘feeble yet loveable, doddering but dear’ (Cuddy and Fiske 2002: 4)” (Ellis and Morrison 2005: 58).

<sup>25</sup> Man’s attractiveness and changes related to the ageing process are mainly evaluated in the categories of functionality, including the sensitive zone of potency (Marshall and Katz 2012: 229). Therefore, the Internet market, press, and other means of advertising (ads on walls, lampposts, etc.) are inundated with the concoctions which promise potency or enhance male “performances.”

The function and features of magic—with the miracle rhetoric (“MAKEUP AS MAGIC”) and the miracle effect (“it has rejuvenated this old lady in 45 minutes”)—is, therefore, overtaken by makeup too, in a perverted Dorian-Greyan endeavor which stipulates that the painting does not age:<sup>26</sup>



Such a status of youth, vitality, and beauty (no matter how the canon is defined, even though it has changed significantly throughout the course of history)<sup>27</sup> has set up not only a wide consumer map, but also a whole array of narratives about the ways how to become beautiful and young “miraculously” in a very short time or to “suspend” time and ageing:

<sup>26</sup> Taken from: <https://stil.kurir.rs/lepi-zdravi/nutricija/57275/sa-svakom-kasikom-skidate-po-1-cm-sa-struka-cudesna-smesa-koju-treba-odmah-da-probate-recept> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Beauty is a cultural construct, which is testified by just a passing glance at the beauty perception cross-section offered by Umberto Eco (2004: 16–33)—from the sculptures of Egyptian pharaohs and Greek athletes and gods, through medieval and Romantic portraits of saints and rulers, film and rock stars (Rudolph Valentino, Johnny Weissmuller, Humphrey Bogart, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Jim Morrison, Arnold Schwarzenegger) to Dennis Rodman. Speaking of the female ideal type—from the Venus of Willendorf, to ample Baroque figures, Expressionist fascination with dark-skinned bodies, Sarah Bernard, Greta Garbo, Audrey Hepburn, Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe, Twiggy ... to Madonna and Monica Bellucci. The “aesthetics of implants,” among other things, is present today, which, in its most radical forms, intentionally gravitates towards eccentric and freakish: “The extreme manifestation of superficial transformations culture is the one in which the aforementioned objects are built directly into the body—if possible, bloodlessly. ... Modern—extremely modified—method of this practice is showcased in the documentary ‘Flesh and Blood’, available on the Internet, in which is depicted the way the flesh culture members consciously and willingly become their own modifiers or, like the protagonists of Banville’s trilogy, ‘the sculptors of the self’, thus, wanting to

How to look 10 years younger in only 10 minutes<sup>28</sup>

SHE IS 50, BUT SHE LOOKS AT LEAST 10 YEARS YOUNGER! These are 5 SECRETS of women who have stopped AGEING!<sup>29</sup>

Eternal youth is finally available to you, and it is revealed by the women from the Land of the Rising Sun<sup>30</sup>

How to look 20 years younger: a famous scientist reveals a magical recipe for rejuvenating ... How to stop the ageing process: expert advice<sup>31</sup>

She is 55, but she looks 30 years younger! Famous model reveals the secret of her good looks and admits what she has excluded from her diet<sup>32</sup>

SHOCK! Natalie is 72 years old: This is why she looks 30 years younger and everyone envies her!<sup>33</sup>

The novelty of New Age and media in the context of the ideas and narratives of the ideal beauty when compared to the traditional corpus (beside methods which are based on new technological possibilities) is the obsession with weight, generated by the twiggy ideal, imposed in the culture in which is easier to be overweight than thin on a global scale.

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change their role on the stage (and in life). 'Flesh and Blood' depicts this process through the works of Steve Haworth, one of the pioneers in the three-dimensional implantation sphere. His surgical innovations are stated to attract people from all over the world, those who find tattooing and piercing insufficient. Haworth embeds all sorts of three-dimensional objects under their skin—crosses, stars, ribs (as subdermal)—and he also does transdermal procedures by which a plate is built under the skin onto which various decorative elements can later be screwed in and removed, imported and exported from the body as one wishes" (Mašović 2015: 370–371).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.lepaisrecna.rs/lepota-i-stil/beauty/12433-kako-da-izgledate-10-godina-mladje-za-samo-10-minuta.html> (February 29, 2020). It is indicative that the name of the website identifies beauty and happiness.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.kurir.rs/zabava/zena/3404095/ona-ima-50-a-izgleda-barem-10-godina-mladje-ovo-je-5-tajni-zena-koje-su-zaustavile-starenje-sve-su-prirodne> (February 29, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.telegraf.rs/zivot-i-stil/2293819-tajne-japanskih-zena-evo-kako-izgledaju-i-po-30-godina-mladje> (February 29, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.lovesensa.rs/clanci/pro-age/kako-da-izgledate-20-godine-mlade-poznata-naucnica-otkrila-cudesan-recept-za-podmladivanje> (February 29, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.prva.rs/zivot/zdravlje/316507/ima-55-a-izgleda-30-godina-mladje-slavna-manekenka-otkrila-tajnu-svog-izgleda-i-priznala-sta-je-izbacila-iz-ishrane> (February 29, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.srbijadanas.com/zena/lepota/sok-natalija-ima-72-godine-zbog-ovoga-izgleda-30-godina-mlade-i-svi-joj-zavide-foto-2019-12-20> (February 29, 2020).

That is partly due to the lack of physical activity, partly due to bad, genetically modified, and hormone-saturated food, but also because of abundance, which was unknown in traditional cultures.<sup>34</sup> Numerous diets which are on the menu of tabloid newspapers and the Internet promise such results of dieting that they can be easily positioned in the sphere of the supernatural:

DANISH DIET: Up to 20kg less in 13 days!,<sup>35</sup>

It improves memory by 80%, burns fat: The strongest natural cure ever! (RECIPE),<sup>36</sup>

Juice which will literally melt you down: Thighs and stomach from a magazine! (RECIPE),<sup>37</sup>

YOU WILL LOSE WEIGHT OVERNIGHT, BUT REALLY! This beverage literally melts down everything you have eaten!<sup>38</sup>

If taking care of fitness (which is an imperative of the public sphere, media, and current aesthetics) could be categorized as a beauty longing which is recognized in folkloric narratives, offers for studying foreign languages are an absolute novelty on the Internet market. The ad which offers a possibility to learn English in two weeks or several languages in a few months, which is verified by a nameless waitress from Niš<sup>39</sup> who has learnt thirteen languages thanks to it, has caught our attention:

**Samostalno Naučila 13 Jezika**  
hitechno-blog.com  
**Banaln način učenja jezika**  
Konobarica iz Niša otkriva kako savladati strani jezik. Otkrij metodu!

OPEN

.....

<sup>34</sup> The obesity problem basically did not exist in one and the same Western culture during the Middle Ages, when one in ten years was a year of hunger, and food resources were limited and very moderate (cf. Petrović 2014). Therefore, gluttony was included in the noncanonical “seven deadly sins.”

<sup>35</sup> <http://malakuharica.com/danska-dijeta-za-13-dana-i-do-20-kg-manje/> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> <https://stil.kurir.rs/lepi-zdravi/nutricija/57275/sa-svakom-kasikom-skidate-po-1-cm-sa-struka-cudesna-smesa-koju-treba-odmah-da-probate-recept> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>37</sup> <https://stil.kurir.rs/lepi-zdravi/nutricija/66191/sok-koji-ce-vas-bukvalno-istopiti-butine-i-stomak-kao-iz-casopisa-recept> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.kurir.rs/zabava/zena/2612143/smrsacete-preko-noci-ali-stvarno> (February 28, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> A city in Serbia.

The method in question is “Pingulingo” which has been developed, according to the website <https://kvalitetno-ijeftino.com/pingulingo/3814/index.php>, by the American university professor Aaron Stone. Another website (<https://www.kurir.rs/zabava/3023689/bez-muke-ovom-cudesnom-metodom-savladaj-strani-jezik-za-2-nedelje>; February 22, 2020), however, claims that the inventor of this “revolutionary” method of studying languages is “the polyglot Davor Vorgić, who speaks 23 languages fluently,” with the appropriate miracle rhetoric: “Master a foreign language in 2 weeks—effortlessly—with this miraculous method!” The testimonies of “regular people” which are cited are also in the domain of the unreal: “I am at lesson 11 today, and I understand most of English programs,” “Honestly, people who have learnt 500 words in the first 48 hours contacted me. Most of them started speaking freely in the new language after 1 week,” and the like.

The search for the university at which the stated author works and his professional biography ends at step one, because the name Aaron Stone is simultaneously the name of a popular Canadian and American TV series, which “covers” a huge percentage of hits in the search. Fake news researchers have detected the usage of the same photographs for Aaron Stone and the authors of similar studying programs which were popular in the past (“Learnlingo”—Franz Reinmann; “Ling Fluent”/“Easy Phrases”—Leo Anders).<sup>40</sup>



<sup>40</sup> <https://fakenews.rs/2019/12/11/lazne-poliglote-godinama-reklamiraju-carobnu-metodu-za-ucenje-jezika/> (March 2, 2020).

Le multi-polyglotte de 62 ans, Leo Anders, couramment 23 langues, a présenté aux fr fameuse formule d'apprentissage des lang semaines. Elle permet en peu de tems de commencer à communiquer aisément dan étrangère. La méthode du polyglotte suédé défi lancé aux écoles de langues traditionn

Déjà 75 000 français ont laissé tomber les mét traditionnelles d'apprentissage des langues in ont rejoint Leo. Vous aussi, indépendamment c de l'éducation et de la capacité, déjà dans 2 s verrez les visages étonnés des membres de la amis et des collègues. Quand ils entendront o parlez bien anglais, allemand ou espagnol, ils pas vous croire, que vous apprenez la langue

Ο βέλγος Leo Anders μιλά 23 γλώσσες και φανερώσει το μυστικό του (βίντεο)

Multipolígota, Leo Anders el Danés de 6 años habla con soltura 20 idiomas y ha presentado a los españoles su nueva fórmula para aprendi uno en tan solo un mes. Su método ya re a las academias lingüísticas.

Hello,

My name is Gregory Hughes and it's a pleasure for me to introduce Leo Anders his 2-week formula of automatic language learning to the UK. I'm really excited about it as Leo's method is groundbreaking in the field of linguistics.

For 15 years I've been running my own language school in London, where I managed to help more than 4,700 people to learn their chosen foreign language: English, French, German, Japanese, Swedish.

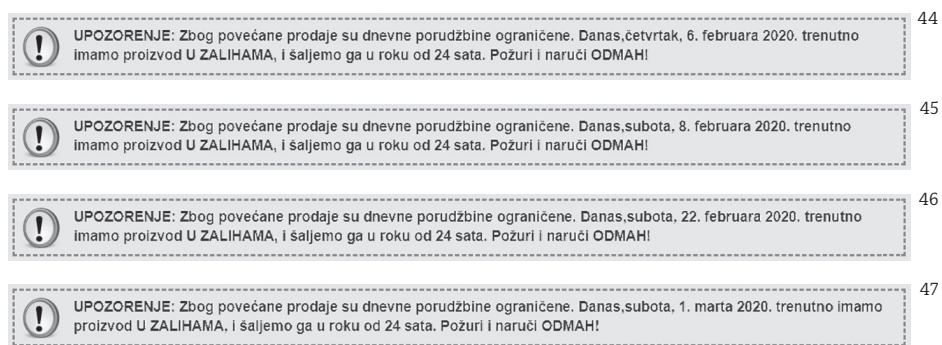
Pozdrav,

moje ime je Stefan Mlinarić, i imam čast da sa Aaron Stone-om Srbiji predstavim 2-nedeljnu formulu automatskog učenja stranih jezika. Jako sam uzbuđen jer je Aaron-ova metoda revolucija u lingvistici.

Već 17 godina vodim svoju školu stranih jezika, gde sam pomogao više od 2000 ljudi da nauče jezike, uključujući engleski, francuski, nemački, japanski i švedski.

The names of inventors of the miraculous methods are consequently adjusted to the market for which the ads are made: “What is common for Aaron, Franz, and Leo is that they have mastered 23 languages. That is exactly the number of languages that speaks the ‘polyglot’ Davor Vorgić who ‘presented to the Serbs his famous 2-week formula for studying languages’ last year via *Kurir* and *Pravda*.<sup>41</sup> Davorin Vrdoljak presented ‘his famous formula’ to the Croats, and Damjan Vehovarja to the Slovenians. Amazingly, all of them speak 23 languages.”<sup>42</sup>

Ads of this type come with the generically produced information that the visitor of the website is lucky, and despite enormous demand—if they hurry and order “now”—they can get the desired product:<sup>43</sup>



.....  
<sup>41</sup> Serbian tabloid newspapers.

<sup>42</sup> <https://fakenews.rs/2019/12/11/lazne-poliglote-godinama-reklamiraju-carobnu-metodu-za-ucenje-jezika/> (March 2, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> The example is from the website: [https://kvalitetno-ijeftino.com/pingulingo/3814/?utm\\_source=media&utm\\_campaign=kurir.rs\\_361-911-RS-20180403&utm\\_placement=kurir.rs&utm\\_create=m0001-001&utm\\_keyword=zabava&utm\\_adposition=4%20](https://kvalitetno-ijeftino.com/pingulingo/3814/?utm_source=media&utm_campaign=kurir.rs_361-911-RS-20180403&utm_placement=kurir.rs&utm_create=m0001-001&utm_keyword=zabava&utm_adposition=4%20). The time of the visit can be seen in the date of the “warning,” apart from March 1 (today, Saturday, March 1, 2020), which was visited on Saturday, February 29, 2020. Leap year was apparently not taken into consideration.

<sup>44</sup> “WARNING! Because of an increased volume of sale daily offers are limited. Today, Thursday, February 6, 2020, we currently have the product IN STOCK, and we will send it to you within 24 hours. Hurry up and order NOW!”

<sup>45</sup> “WARNING! Because of an increased volume of sale daily offers are limited. Today, Saturday, February 8, 2020, we currently have the product IN STOCK, and we will send it to you within 24 hours. Hurry up and order NOW!”

<sup>46</sup> “WARNING! Because of an increased volume of sale daily offers are limited. Today, Saturday, February 22, 2020, we currently have the product IN STOCK, and we will send it to you within 24 hours. Hurry up and order NOW!”

<sup>47</sup> “WARNING! Because of an increased volume of sale daily offers are limited. Today, Saturday, March 1, 2020, we currently have the product IN STOCK, and we will send it to you within 24 hours. Hurry up and order NOW!”

Regardless of the obvious Internet scam,<sup>48</sup> this example is invaluable for at least two reasons. The first is that the Internet ad platforms developed in this way indicate the modification of the old “assuring of the veracity” models, and the introduction of new strategies with the same purpose. Veracity in this particular case—and it is representative of the Internet ads of the kind—is simulated by the hypertrophy of (unverifiable) pieces of information. Instead of citing the source or witnesses known to the narrator and their audience (“And my mother told me,” “My grandmother said to me,” “My father told me,” and the like; cf. Popović 2013: 232–233), an endless list of testimonies is given, which (over)saturates attention. The cited link provides us with eight photographs of the users with comments, four “legally” blurred e-mails of the customers, and a selection of one hundred and fifty-six typical comments on the posts, with the option to see the other 572:

49



Facebook plugin

Pingulingo knjiga je zanimljiv i jednostavan način učenja engleskog jezika. Garantuje uspeh svim starosnim grupama, i savladavanje jednogodišnjeg gradiva kursa u samo 2 nedelje.\* Lako se koristi i brzo daje rezultate.

Despite numerous attempts, the authors of this text did not succeed in activating either the option “View 572 more” or “Add a comment.” Moreover, the last hit was “1 hour ago” by Mikulić Dejan, with the accompanying “girl next door” photograph, which basically opens up a whole set of questions

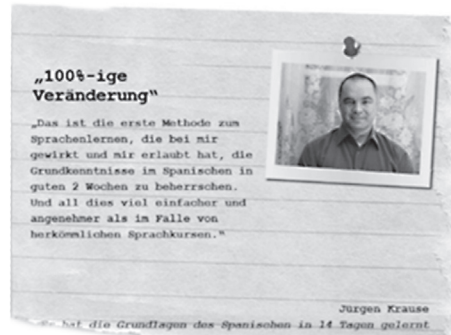
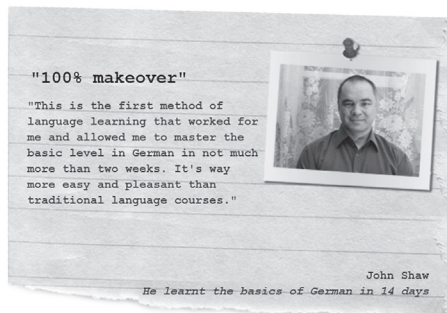
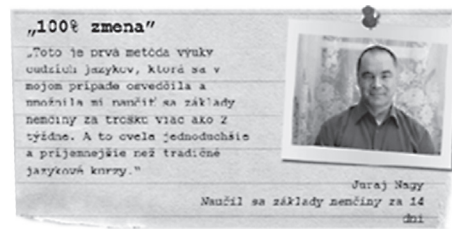
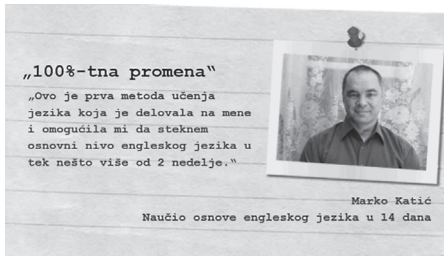
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<sup>48</sup> FakeNews researcher Danka Mihajlović highlights that “it is exactly the same mechanism which is present ... in the advertising of Puridon and Fleckosteel pills, Nutrivix weight loss pills, as well as Binatex, the platform for the trading of the binary options” (<https://fakenews.rs/2019/12/11/lazne-poliglote-godinama-reklamiraju-carobnu-metodu-za-ucenje-jezika/>) (March 2, 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Aleksandra Grdović: “Interesting and useful!”  
Mikulić Dejan: “Ordered and got it when it was in the sale;)”  
“Pingulingo book is an interesting and simple way of learning the English language. It guarantees success to people of all ages and tackling one-year volume of course studying material in only two weeks.\* It is easy to use, and you can see the results quickly.”



regarding the elements of the Internet identification (by a purposely selected photograph, of someone close or unknown, transvestism, etc.). This is the case of intentionally constructed identities. “Dozens of satisfied customers have shared their experience. However, all of them have their lookalikes on webpages in different languages. Although the experience is thoroughly identical, the names are adjusted to the language areas from which they supposedly come”.<sup>50</sup>



Calling upon a certain witness profile is a new narration veracity strategy. Cogency is not achieved by naming the people or toponyms familiar to the listeners in new medium and age, but by a selection of the anonymous from those social groups in which climbing the social ladder is more radical through learning languages—which speaks for the quality of the method. Simultaneously, the utopian projection of an individual excluded from social elites is activated by it, because the cited experiences “testify” to the possibility to join the elite (waitresses, divorced women,<sup>51</sup> students who want to go abroad, and the like, study languages—not Mensa members, university professors, banks, corporations CEOs, or reputable athletes).

<sup>50</sup> <https://fakenews.rs/2019/12/11/lazne-poliglote-godinama-reklamiraju-carobnu-metodu-za-ucenje-jezika/> (March 2, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> “A divorced woman ‘has decided to work on her accomplishments’ in both Serbian and Polish version, but unlike ‘other lovelorn abandoned women—gym, hairdo, nails’, she has learnt three foreign languages which she speaks perfectly” (<https://fakenews.rs/2019/12/11/lazne-poliglote-godinama-reklamiraju-carobnu-metodu-za-ucenje-jezika/>; March 3, 2020).

The fact that the veracity guarantors are unfamiliar in the media and are not public figures collides directly with the traditional verification of a story. This contradictory fact that the information guarantors are unknown people actually speaks of something else. On the one hand, it speaks of the unreliability of the information, intentional scams, and identities blurring (according to Pingulingo method, Roger Federer, Brad Pitt, or Rihanna could have learnt thirteen languages, and it would be highly unlikely that a typical Serbian Internet user could check that or virtually impossible to prosecute the false information). On the other hand, a more fundamental implication is that the guarantors of information are no longer people, but the medium that shares it, regardless of who they cite as their source, which is confirmed by the comments of the people who impart healing stories: “Even when they talked about some kind of immediate experience, it was very important for the narrators to highlight how and what was stated about the cure/healer in the newspaper” (Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2007: 235).

Maps which provide a semblance of information based on a fundamental incommensurability of small and big dimensions are a new veracity technique.<sup>52</sup> They apparently—by actually not doing that in any way —“locate” the successful method users:



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<sup>52</sup> This is one of the basic laws of logic and physics: seen from a great distance, a three-dimensional column loses its two dimensions, and it becomes a line. By the same logic, if the perspective is “high” enough, the outlines of a locality and people which the map ostensibly marks are lost. None of the red markers indicate anything or anyone.

<sup>53</sup> “More than 4,000 satisfied customers in Serbia last year!”

In spite of numerous strategies to convince the readership of the story's veracity, among other things—by naming the inventor, healer, and the cured—contemporary age and Internet culture are marked by a complete impersonality of the ones who proffer knowledge, health, wealth, beauty, or youth. Miracle in the new media environment has become an everyday life fact—it is available on the market, “translatable” into different languages and cultural models; the miracle merchants have taken form of unnamed internet pages and ads creators.<sup>54</sup>

The other reason for “the Pingulingo case” being invaluable is that the energy invested in the ad (a developed platform for a very wide European market) points at the status of knowing (English primarily, but not exclusively)<sup>55</sup> a language in the contemporary Western culture. Having become essentially important for the positioning on the social map and the capitalist imperative for a good salary,<sup>56</sup> that knowledge has become significant enough to activate the “miracle” rhetoric. The language knowledge has positioned itself at the very top of the axiological ladder and the modern society pragma. Together with youth, beauty, and fitness, it forms the canon of “the desirability” and the foundation of a tremendous industry and franchise.

Health is positioned in the narrative focus by a different logic—as an essentially important category at all times and in all societies, most directly connected to life and death, which is testified by the traditional stand sublimed in the proverb: “A healthy man has a thousand worries, an ill man—only one.” When confronted with pain, helplessness, and potential death, people resort to hope which is usually grounded in some form of a miracle.

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<sup>54</sup> The practice was previously inaugurated by tabloids and magazines, partly by TV production, but still at a much smaller scale than the latter Internet: “After the 1990 all the abovementioned phenomena became even more widespread, and, what is more important, they started to become commercialized. The free market opened the doors for healing businesses too. Private healers and agencies specialized in this emerged” (Radulović 2019: 180).

<sup>55</sup> “Knowing no foreign language = no job opportunities. I learnt French and everything has changed. I got a huge promotion at work and now I am cooperating closely with our branch in Paris. My salary is twice as high and finally I can afford a more comfortable life”—Damian Abramowski, London (<https://eduspaceonline.com/44/lf-edu/>) (compare the footnote below).

<sup>56</sup> “Not knowing a language = lack of career advancement prospects. I have learnt English and everything has changed. I have progressed considerably at work, and I am closely cooperating with our London office now. My salary has almost doubled, and I can finally afford a comfortable living”—Vladimir Cindrić, Niš (<https://kvalitetno-ijeftino.com/pingulingo/3814/index.php>; March 3, 2020).

Despite the modern man's trust in science and institutional medicine, people turn to alternative forms of treatment and practices which deal with the otherworldly in borderline situations:

The miraculous, supernatural, power, and knowledge which transcend the borders of the real (no matter whether they come from the supernatural features of the healer, from tradition, or from an intensive relationship with nature, which "contains everything") particularly stand out in contrast with the knowledge of our age, mainly designated as scientific, regardless of the domain of science. It is, by and large, the power and powerlessness opposition; empathy and understanding versus cold-heartedness and lack of understanding; unacknowledged, but healing and the scientifically accepted, but powerless in that case. (Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2007: 239)

Authentic and fictional experiences are of vital importance in decision-making:

Trust in the personally seen and experienced, the feeling of relief, the closeness of the miracle experience and healing, versus the confidence in sense, meet, confront, and finally come to terms finding a new place on the Internet pages. ... Just like the personal statements which can be found on the Internet these days, people react better to the experienced in literature than to the anonymous scientific facts. (Sikimić 2019: 84)

That ultimately explains the audience's trust and confidence in the powers of healers to manipulate life and death, which is accompanied by the formulae of "birth" and "resurrection" (patients are "re-born," "alive and kicking once again," "as good as new," the teaching of a healer "brings life back," a child cured from tumor refers to the healer as "the savior," a cured patient claims, "Stevo has brought me back to life," etc.; Pešikan-Ljuštanović 2007: 238). Notwithstanding that rhetoric, bringing back to life and metamorphosis are the only traditional miracles that are not offered on the Internet market, although transforming a woman into a bird is not less likely than completely regenerated cartilage in seven days. This is the place at which—humorously said and referring to the derived and shifted meaning of the lexeme *miracle*<sup>57</sup>—the miraculous experience moves from the emic to the etic perspective.

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<sup>57</sup> Lexemes "miracle" and "wonder" are derived from the same lexical root in Serbian.

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