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From Hegel to Zielinski:
An Essay on German Media Philosophy

Since the nineteen-eighties an original idea in the philosophy of the media has emerged in the German-language area. The goal of the present essay is not to comprehensively interpret it but to present only some of its parts, a series of insights into its development dynamics. The starting point is Hegel's romantic vision of culture as language, the area of meanings conveyed by speech and writing, and ultimately reduced to poetry, whereas the end point is the vision of culture permeated by digital technologies. From the discourse, analytical and linear thinking, to practice oriented towards technology, towards machines producing meanings independently of consciousness. On this marked-out trail, philosophy unmasks the status of the power of communication in many ways: it deconstructs the medium of writing by showing its metaphysical connotations; it tries to circumvent the media in various ways and to return to the "lifeworld", the seat of the alleged, full-blooded "ego"; as "the criticism of the media", it (philosophy) is suspected of forgetting about them: about their technological dimension, about the fact that they do not only communicate but also leave their marks on a communication. The so-called "medial turn" is a new opening for philosophical reflection under the aegis of *Medienphilosophie*. What is it and why does the romantic style appear in it again – the return to theory as philology proposed by Siegfried Zielinski – the most interesting phenomenon in the contemporary German media theory?

Pure Self, Speech and Poetry

What can philosophy and the media have in common? Can this kind of abstract reflection allow us to find our way around our tangled daily world, in which we mechanically reach for a mobile to find the way – owing to satellite navigation – to the nearest food store, to pay the bill using a credit card, in the meantime to read the mail sent from a computer via SMS, and have a business conversation ...? To find the answer to these questions I will start from a remark made by Frank Hartmann: "It is no accident that it is now, with the invasion of new media technologies, that human consciousness is becoming a grand theme in philosophy. In the phenomenological analysis of the stream of human consciousness there are indications of breaking off with the methodological principle or the mechanical schematism to which Descartes assigned central philosophical importance: the crisis of the linear as a certain change of paradigms was to interdisciplinarily take place from

the mid-twentieth century – in a transformation from technical reproducibility of the industrial era to automation – as the *cybernetic principle*.¹

It indicates the founder of the modern world order and its twentieth-century grandsons – phenomenologists – engrossed in the subject of consciousness. There is a suggestion here that the Cartesian model of philosophy of consciousness, which they adopted, generates a set of cultural practices that form a certain “paradigm”, a pattern of behavior, a way of linearly acting and thinking: questions and answers like in mathematics, “in a straight line”, methodically, according to set patterns. Finally, we have here a thesis that since the mid-twentieth century something has changed: “crisis”, “breaking off” because of automation of the media. We should guess that some new paradigm based on “the cybernetic principle” is emerging which undermines and destabilizes the Cartesian world constructed according to the “methodological principle”.

In its main stream, modern philosophy legitimized the rational, ordered and confident self. The one who did so was not only Descartes, for whom mathematics was the exemplary cognition of the world, and a model man who used it in practice was an engineer. That was the self (subject) on which all spiritual successors of the author of *Discourse on the Method* also worked, whom Hegel summed up in his own way. Obviously, some evolution of the modern hero can be observed, but on closer look it is evidently more rhetorical than substantive. To Hegel, a model man is already a writer-intellectual (or preferably a philosopher) who is, however, close to the Cartesian *cogito* – he should after all be also a strong subject, “an isolated self of its own, willing and deciding on its own account.”² A self of its own, although already immersed in history and culture, therefore externally controlled (not autonomous according to Kantian criteria) and shaped by symbols and messages. In the process of blending into culture the self gets to know itself, it becomes a self-aware being, which, for the author of *The Phenomenology of Mind (Spirit)*, is identical with its becoming someone else, giving up itself. The price the self pays for the growing consciousness is, in a way, burials for which it has to pay itself. To use Hegelian terms: “its concrete realization consists solely in canceling and transcending the natural self”, or: “The extent of its culture [in it J. P. H] is the measure of its reality and its power.”³ It is assumed here all the time, however, that behind the cultural layer of each individual there is some “true ego”. It will be best revealed, and here Hegel repeats Plato’s well-known expression, through speech, which is the “existence of the pure self *qua* self”⁴; it is owing to speech that we become ourselves: “in speech *the self-existent singleness* of self-consciousness comes as such into existence, so that its particular individuality is *something for others*.” And further

¹ F. Hartmann, *Medienphilosophie*, WUV – Universitätsverlag: Wien 2000, p. 169.

² G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, transl. by J. B. Baillie, Harper & Row’s Torchbooks (1967), Hegel by HyperText (<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/phindex.htm>) p. 512.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

on: “Speech, however, contains this ego in its purity; it alone expresses I, I itself. Its existence in this case is, *qua* existence, a form of objectivity, which has in it its true nature. Ego is this particular ego, but at the same time universal”⁵

What is important from the perspective of media philosophy is that Hegel reactivates the topos of speech as the most perfect medium that conveys true knowledge to us: the medium almost devoid of properties because it is, as it were, a transparent mode of *expression, shape* of “ego in its purity”. Speech brings it into the *spiritual whole*, i.e. into language, culture: it demands the sense of hearing, the apprehended becomes something universal⁶, readable to all, *recognized* by everybody. The ego oscillates in a dialectical clash between the concrete and the general, while self-consciousness – the use of concepts – suspends it, makes it disappear, get rid of itself and become something/someone else. “I” recognized by others am no longer myself.

The author of *The Phenomenology of Mind* starts the discourse of the alienated subject, actually unhappy, deceived by cunning historical reason which constantly feeds it with some ready, false information. However, the medium of speech allows the philosopher to maintain the Cartesian myth of “ego” in its *purity*. It should only be sought behind everything that it says – this is a premise and clue for to hermeneutics, the art of interpreting gestures, which will develop in the next two centuries. Speech needs writing signs. Utterances always need some literary form. Idealist philosophy thereby legitimizes the literary quality of romanticism. From the perspective of the twentieth-century humanities this age is perceived as the culmination of a many-centuries-long process in the development of the culture of print, metaphorically called “the Gutenberg Galaxy”. The diagnosis is a part of the so-called “media revolution”, which will be discussed further on. According to it, the thing about the print medium is that through its precision, the exact linear record that compels standardization in typography, grammar and lexicon, it molds discursive thinking, i.e. rational, abstract, responsible for the Weberian *disenchantment of the world* and for mass culture, the thinking other than an unwritten/not printed idea dispersed and following that which comes from imagination and sense perceptions. But, from the presented point of view, Western culture was not protected from this technological determinism either by the eighteenth-century reduction of the concept of art to “fine arts” subsequently identified, in romanticism to be precise, with poetry, or by the creation of esthetics as a philosophical discipline intended to study art and its values other than cognitive/scientific or religious. Art and esthetics were expected to be a kind of place of refuge, a sanctuary from the rigors of increasingly rationalized social life, an escape into the state of unavoidability, as Odo Marquardt interpreted their emergence.⁷ This was only a seeming shelter.

⁵ Ibid..

⁶ Ibid..

⁷ See O. Marquardt, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen*. Philosophische Studien, Reclam: Stuttgart 1991.

Even if poetry were to be one, it is also a kind of literature and assumes responsibility for the abstract character of our thinking and its detachment from the “lifeworld”. Romantics make poetry a universal medium, transparent and invisible enough to ultimately fuse with reality itself. Friedrich Schlegel wrote: “No poetry, no reality.” Reality and the poetic = the literary are the same. Man and reader are also the same as a result. To read means to become human, and, in the Hegelian manner, to be constantly unhappy, and yearning to return to “nature”, to himself, the true ego. “To have genius is the natural state of humanity” – writes the German philosopher and philologist. One can return to this state only by means of poetry: “To read means to satisfy the philological drive, to make a literary impression on oneself”.⁸ It was also customary to read aloud in bourgeois salons at that time – the tradition lasted uninterrupted probably until the nineteen-thirties. There is an ample body of documents supporting this practice.

Communication and Return to the *Lifeworld*

The permanent point of reference in what is generally called “the media theory” in Germany is the communication theory of the Frankfurt School as practiced by Jürgen Habermas – it is particularly in opposition to that school that the medial turn took place there in the nineteen-eighties. In 1981 *The Theory of Communicative Action* first appeared, probably the most important study in world literature in the field of philosophical-sociological-linguistic communication theory. The “turn” we are dealing with took place between “media criticism” (*Medienkritik*), as a component/aspect of ideological criticism (*Ideologiekritik*), and “media philosophy” (*Medienphilosophie*): it meant in fact that research into communication and media studies went their separate ways, and a new “philosophy of media” emerged alongside the existing, academically stable disciplines like “media history” (*Mediengeschichte*), “media science” (*Medienwissenschaft*) or “media theory” (*Medientheorie*). We will return to the subject later. In order, however, to understand the sense of the presented change, we should, for the sake of exposition, mention at least the idea of Habermas’s project without going into details or discussing the vast literature on the subject.

Habermas associates his understanding of communication, in most general terms, with such a concept of philosophy which “in its postmetaphysical, post-Hegelian currents is converging toward the point of a *theory of rationality*”.⁹ To the category of “instrumental rationality”, used by

⁸ Three consecutive quotations: Friedrich Schlegel’s *Lucinde and the Fragments*, transl. by P. Firchow, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1971, p. 216 (Athenaeum Fragment 350 [1789]), p. 242 (Ideas 19 [1800]), p. 226 (Athenaeum Fragment 391)

⁹ J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, Reason and the Rationalization of Society, trans. by Th. McCarthy, Beacon Press: Boston 1984, p. 2.

Adorno and Horkheimer to criticize the Enlightenment and modern culture, including mass media, and, more broadly, “culture industry”,¹⁰ Habermas adds “communicative rationality” which should be applied in the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*). We should begin by briefly explaining this term.

The concept of *lifeworld* is one of the most important founding myths of twentieth-century philosophy which, in different ways and with different results, will be reactivated by both modernist thinkers like Habermas and by postmodernist ones: Lyotard, Welsch, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari... with their *event-based ontology*, *philosophy of difference*, *dissemblance* concept of meaning and the concept of *aisthesis*. It was coined and permanently introduced into humanistic discourse by Edmund Husserl in his famous lectures in the nineteen-thirties, devoted to diagnosing the condition of the crisis of Western culture. He then spoke about “the lifeworld as the forgotten meaning-fundament of natural science”, in which we live with all our bodily-personal endowment, and with experiences.¹¹ He also said that mathematical natural sciences and Enlightenment rationality separate science from “world-life” (*Weltleben*)¹² and forget about our “personal attitude” towards the “world of realities” we experience, which is “always pre-given with human beings in it”.¹³ Focusing on universal, i.e. objective, cognition should therefore radically/revolutionarily change man’s mode of being, separating his theoretical from practical life. Science can return to – remember about – the *whole experience of human life* only when it stops asking about the world “as it actually is”, about scientific facts, but about their importance, about the particular world which is valid for the persons, “the question is how they as persons, comport themselves in action and passion how they are motivated to their specifically personal acts of perception, of remembering, of thinking, of valuing, of making plans, of being frightened and automatically starting, of defending themselves, of attacking, etc.”¹⁴ Husserl believes that universal orientation towards human subjectivity, in which the world is given us as the world we experience, can be realized only through phenomenology. He does not leave the area of transcendental studies: he has in mind the humanistic science that can choose as its theme the whole of theoretical and extratheoretical human experience given to *transcendental subjectivity* that is recognized as a certain *genuine community*, as the *European man*¹⁵. The brilliant theorist of cognition actually presents the structure of eidetic studies free from all political-social contexts. To understand and practice science the contexts in the presented project are of no importance.

¹⁰ See M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Philosophical fragments, trans. by E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press 2002; M. Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, trans. by M. O’Connell, Continuum: New York 1994.

¹¹ This is the title of one of the fragments of lecture *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Culture* delivered by Husserl in Vienna in 1935. See E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. by D. Carr, Northwestern University Press: Evanston 1970, pp. 48-53.

¹² E. Husserl, *The Attitude of Natural Science and the Attitude of Humanistic Science*. Naturalism, Dualism, and Psychophysical Psychology, trans. by D. Carr, in: *ibid*, p. 328.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 317.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 317.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 333-334.

Habermas naturally also does not agree with this view: his style of analyses refers to hermeneutics on the one hand, and on the other – to Marxist sociology that combines science with ideology. The two standpoints allow him to adapt the abovementioned Enlightenment-romantic anthropology and place man/reader in the “lifeworld”, where communicative rationality oriented towards communication between people applies, and where it is only thanks to this rationality that the desirable fusion (also wanted by Husserl) of the private and the public, the practical and the theoretical, can take place. The process of this fusion can be, and constantly is, hindered by a political component, or the system by which Habermas means the institutions of state and economy that are governed by *instrumental* rationality based on the means/ends logic. This rationality has tendencies to colonize the lifeworld, and it is from them that science should protect it, identify economic interests that sneak into public media, and support those oppressed by capitalism and by heartless free-market mechanisms. To this end, science uses the benefits of democracy in the form of free public debates, and discursive solution of problems. Private sufferings, humiliations, economic, cultural and other inequities can be made public, thereby getting out/freeing people from them, and changing the social world only when there is an agreement between theorists and practitioners i.e. politicians who exercise power. But such an agreement can be reached on condition that science will be concerned with – and here is the room for hermeneutic studies – the self-understanding of a social group that it studies and whose integral part it is (i.e. scientists who practice it). And this means that without the free media, *without public discussions among the citizen body*, “the relation of the sciences to public opinion is constitutive for the scientization of politics”¹⁶, as Habermas concludes his reflections on the relations between theory and practice, already in the nineteen-sixties.

To avoid the colonization of the public sphere by the bureaucratic system of domination there must be political decision-making open to social science that accepts “the popular language of practice”. Theory is “already always” mediatized by points of view and experiences of (relevant) social actors. In any situation there are available to both parties – here: theorists and politicians – some ready-made patterns of interests, needs, values, ends, and norms that regulate how to behave, what decisions to make regarding the means and ways of solving given social issues. It is the job of scientists to hermeneutically clarify this knowledge but also to be concerned with molding public opinion in the democratic, institutionalized form of public discussions.¹⁷

¹⁶ J. Habermas, *The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion* [1964], in: J. Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society. Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. by J. J. Shapiro, Polity Press: Cambridge 1989, p. 69.

¹⁷ On critical social science understood in the Habermasian way, see inter alia J. Bohman, *Critical Theory as Practical Knowledge: Participants, Observers, and Critics*, in: *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, ed. by Stephen P. Turner and Paul A. Roth, Oxford 2003.

Habermas is often criticized. One of his best-known opponents was Niklas Luhmann, the author of the media systems theory. I will not go into details of the dispute.¹⁸ Its moot point in fact concerns *the lifeworld*. Luhmann is not a Habermas-like "critical" intellectual – he does not scrutinize the media from the standpoint of covert interests or motives behind them. For him, this kind of activity – critical, therapeutic – is pointless, he does not see any possibility of applying it, and thinks that it can be at best attributed a "corrective", future-oriented significance. In contrast, as he writes, "in the operationally current present, the world as it is and the world as it is being observed cannot be distinguished".¹⁹ There is no point, therefore, fighting for the *lifeworld*, defending it against the system, since everything is the system. Luhmann takes the constructivist position (operational, he adds): media coverage does not present the world as it is but rather as the system "sees" it. To such an ontology, bivalent logic does not apply because there is no going out beyond the system – there is no room for speaking of some "false" consciousness other than that programmed by the system, consequently, there is no enslavement of citizens: the mass media system defines reality, determining the possibilities of its own operation: information production and processing, perceiving something as information or as something non-informative. The media are structurally linked with other systems such as economy, science, or politics.

Habermas sees it differently. He is an Enlightenment-type of philosopher, trusting in cognition/reason as a tool capable of freeing people from any injustices. To him, the question about the media is part of a more general problem that is internal colonization consisting in institutionalizing the system mechanisms in the spheres of the *lifeworld*. Social criticism is based on the assumption – to use the expression from *The Theory of Communicative Action* – the subsystems of the economy and bureaucratized state administration are becoming more and more expansive as a result of capitalist development and they penetrate deeper and deeper into the *lifeworld* of members of formal organizations. In short, money and power reify people.²⁰ In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, it was a hot subject: the rhetoric of crisis, dangers to civilization under the conditions of the Cold War division of the world and the accompanying arms race were highly popular. It was the time of counter-culture and its alternative concepts, of ecological and feminist movements, and of diagnosing the *postindustrial, information and knowledge-based or, finally, postmodern* society. The crucial role in all these social processes and in ways of explaining them is played by the media. Critics

¹⁸ Luhmann maintains, for example, that public opinion makes possible the processes of forming sense but they can do it by focusing on controversies, without seeking to eliminate them at all: "in this sense" – he writes – public opinion enables participation. There is no guarantee in this, however, or even prospects for an achievable agreement on solving problems that exist each time." (N. Luhmann, *Öffentliche Meinung und Demokratie*, in: R. Maresch, N. Weber (Hrsg.) *Kommunikation, Medien, Macht*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 27.)

¹⁹ N. Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. by K. Cross, Stanford University Press: Stanford 2000, p. 11.

²⁰ J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. by Th. McCarthy, Beacon Press: Boston, p. 311-312. On the subject, see also J. Ritsert, *Themen und Thesen kritischer Gesellschaftstheorie. Ein Kompendium*, Beltz Juventa: Weinheim und Basel 2014, p. 70-78.

accuse them of producing the images of reality in accordance with the ideological criteria of the ruling authorities and of safeguarding the socio-political *status quo*, of serving to consolidate all economic, racial and class injustices...

Against Discursive Culture – *aisthesis* and the Apology of Individual Events

The modern reality, imbued with literariness, and with the strong subject ruling over it – a romantic genius has divine attributes – is gradually receding into the past. First, through the mass media, imaginative pictures, still perceived by critics as some continuation of writing²¹, and then, radically, owing to the digital media and the world organized according to the “cybernetic rule” referred to by Frank Hartmann, cited in the foregoing pages. The anthropological effect of this change in the media culture can be clearly seen. It appears to have been analyzed, historically, in two stages.

In the nineteen-nineties, theory focused on the *lifeworld*, daily reality, increasingly mediatized and thereby constantly losing, as it were, its force of gravity. The omnipresence of the media is changing the world – it provides a stimulus to speaking of its new modernization as *esthetization* consisting in freeing things from their utilitarian and economic functions, and in giving them a sign/symbolic function i.e. esthetic one, if, following Kant, the esthetic is associated with the moment of disinterestedness, with being delighted with the sign for itself.²² But it was not only in this sense that this category was popular in culture and media studies. Its etymological, original meaning became attractive again: derived from Greek *aisthesis*, sense perception. Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote then about the postmodernist esthetics of the sublime oriented towards sensuality characteristic of the avant-garde art. He contrasted it with modernist esthetics, spiritually romantic, oriented towards forms/concepts, and nostalgically yearning for unattainable cognition; for this esthetics the unrepresentable=inexpressible exists in the vertical dimension, “there”, in some other metaphysical reality, in the words and images other than those here, which we can see or hear here and now, in a different time than the present. In the avant-garde approach, in contrast, the indeterminate is that “which occurs” (for example in painting it is the paint or the picture) and which

²¹ It is in romantic literariness that the Germans see the indication of the cultural opening to the new media. Friedrich Kittler, when writing about the notation systems in the 19th century, makes the following observation: “Romanticism as a virtual media technique, in the way it was maintained by complicity between the author, the reader and the hero, itself contributed to disrupting the European ruling monopoly of writing and to replacing the literature of imaginative pictures with the mass media such as photography or film.” (F. Kittler, *Die Laterna Magica der Literatur: Schillers und Hoffmanns Medienstrategien* (1994), cited after: S. Rieger, *Die Individualität der Medien. Eine Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 28.)

²² See inter alia Z. Bauman, *O szansach i pułapkach ponowoczesnego świata. Materiały z seminarium Profesora Z. Baumana w Instytucie Kultury (jesień 1995-wiosna 1996)*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 98-100.

precisely as an occurrence or event is something inexpressible that should be attested to. The un-presentable exists in the horizontal dimension; what is sublime is that here and now there is this particular picture rather than nothing. It takes place in the situation when neither for its “occurrence” (coming into being) nor for its perception, nor, finally, for its assessment there are any known rules or categories. In this way the avant-garde art retreats – to use Habermas’s language – from the *system*, or it forms enclaves of resistance to it: to a society organized by instrumental rationality, economization and standardization, under whose pressure that which in the reality is sensual, corporeal, i.e. aesthetic, deteriorates and loses its validity.²³

The same direction of overcoming the literary/discursive character of modern culture is taken, at the close of the twentieth century, in the reflection of Wolfgang Iser, one of the most prominent German representatives of postmodernism. He writes about the reconfiguration of *aisthesis* taking place in the world of the new media: we are beginning to appreciate the hearing sense again; auditory culture appears on equal terms with visual culture. However, Iser does not over-enthusiastically view the intermingling of the literary with the pictorial as a revolution, as some “twilight” of the “Gutenberg Galaxy” responsible for reducing man to a reader with hyperdeveloped sight (according to the well-known diagnoses by Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan). This situation does not necessarily have to mean *resurrectio*, the resurrection of integrated man. That is why the author of *Our Postmodern Modernity* disputes the great tradition of anti-modern thought – Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein – and argues we are not facing the alternative: disaster to which the domination of sight will lead inevitably, or salvation, which we can see only in developing receptive, communicative and semiotic relations of hearing with the world. Another positive consequence of the action of the media can be, in his view, the revalidation of non-electronic experiences: the highly developed electronic world neither overcomes nor absorbs traditional forms of experience. On the contrary, it is complementary to them. Electronic omnipresence – Iser writes – arouses a longing for another presence: for the unique presence *hic et nunc*, for an individual happening or event.²⁴

The parting with the literary model of culture also has its ontological implications. It refers to the historical process of departing from the image of the world, whose sequences of meanings are of extramundane origin, established in the metaphysical outlook, and the drive “upwards”, and,

²³ See J.-F. Lyotard, Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist postmodern? in: W. Iser (Hrsg.), Wege aus der Moderne: Schlüsseltexte der Postmoderne–Diskussion, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1994.

²⁴ W. Iser, Undoing Aesthetics, trans. by A. Inkpin, SAGE Publications: London 1997, p. 88. See also W. Iser, Unsere postmoderne Moderne, Acta Humaniora: Weinheim 1988. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also wrote at that time about the work of art as “a block of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and that provide the event with the compound that celebrates it” (G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, What is Philosophy?, trans. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, Columbia University Press: New York 1994, p. 176/168. (German version: Was ist Philosophie? [French edition 1991], aus dem Französischen von B. Schwibs und J. Vogl, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1996, p. 197.)

thereby, in the model of the culture of improvement, of rising towards something different than the lived in and experienced here. The event ontology (*Ereignisontologie*) practiced by Lyotard and Welsch, inspired by Martin Heidegger's ideas,²⁵ promotes contingency: one can only approximate an event rather than capture it in its presence, establish, or determine it. Rationality becomes a property of meanings revealed not through *being* that is given directly to a universal, objective subject, but through *events* in the historical, daily world. And instead of permanent competencies, previously called virtues, they (events) require the subject's flexibility and mobility that are required today only through cyberculture, the environment that in a way catalyzes contingency. Sociologists even speak of us being now overloaded with „wild contingency”.²⁶ This is a broad subject, but we are interested here only in the media component in this postmodern or liquid-modern (Zygmunt Bauman) narrative. The worlds and media products that are part of it have exactly opposite characteristics to those that are vested in the mass media: they are non-standard, ontologically unstable, heterogeneous and ephemeral, they can be reproduced in different versions – they have a modular structure, owing to which they can be presented in any configurations (image files, sound files, text files).²⁷ One can no longer get around this reality according to thinking processes that can be reproduced in print/writing. The mediological approach to it (reality) passes from perceiving man as the *medium of man* – an intermediary of textual, oral and/or written tradition – to treating him as the *medium of various media*.²⁸

Deconstruction of Writing

Theorists of the digital media are therefore no longer their critics with an implanted emancipatory imperative. The alienated subject was the negative hero of modern narratives about the “cunning reason” or “false consciousness”, from which it was necessary to free it and place it again in a certain “pure”, “genuine” social environment – nation, class or public sphere. This mode of social criticism and criticism of the media was based on the discursive model of culture, which was given up, each in their own way, by the postmodernists – Lyotard and Welsch, but first of all, in the context of media philosophy, by Jacques Derrida. It was he who, apparently, dealt the heaviest blow to the culture of speech and writing. Without him, it is also impossible to understand what is going on in *Medienphilosophie* today.

²⁵ See M. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 65, Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2003.

²⁶ See S. Rieger, *Die Individualität der Medien...*, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁷ See L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press: Massachusetts 2001.

²⁸ S. Rieger, *Die Individualität der Medien...*, op. cit., p. 18.

Derrida not only exposed the abovementioned model of culture as discourse, which others did before him, particularly Nietzsche and Heidegger, but at the same time he also undermined the structure of the concept of sign and challenged the previously stable ties between the signifier and the signified. The same ties that connected the mind with reality in the metaphysical imaginary and that were the basis for the so-called correspondence definition of truth. The author of *Of Grammatology* deconstructs this imaginary, showing its phonocentric, or speech-based character. Speech needs writing signs that assume the difference between the internal (mind) and the external (sign), between the word and the object: the signs – readable to the reader-subject who contacted *being* – turn out to be alien to the world, not giving it justice, robbing it of its particularity, and ultimately referring to nothing. The writing signs are based on the phonocentric model of communication, in which people are standing face to face, directly within hearing range, thereby exposing themselves to one another, depriving themselves of mystery, any trace of difference²⁹: thus the signs in question have violence and tyranny encoded in them.

The *presented* concept of *writing* calls for a redefinition, as a result of which it ceases to be perceived as a medium that represents reality, in contrast, it becomes a “game in language”, which is obviously a reference to Wittgenstein’s term *language-games*. But while the author of *Philosophical Investigation* treated *language-games* (*Sprachspiele*) as a method of investigating colloquial language, to distinguish different models of language practices in it – “I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language-game’”³⁰ – to Derrida “game” means first of all the “absence of the transcendental signified”.³¹ Between the *signifiant* and *signifié* there occur any cultural-context dependent translocations that cannot be stabilized. Nor can we also think of writing that would be a medium of cognition for cognition itself, oriented towards the ideal world. It is an illusion only, one of cultural representations. We are rather dealing with a mutual game of linguistic representations – in different constellations. Self-presence, Derrida says, is never being given “but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance.”³² Hegel might have therefore been right when he thought that self-consciousness denoted negation, nullification, *Aufhebung des Subjekt-Objekt-Gegensatzes*, but he was wrong when he believed that there at all existed something like *Subjekt*, “ego in its purity”, strong and capable of going beyond time and treating it precisely as *presence* i.e. the object, a certain *Vorhandenes*.³³ To the French philosopher, what can be *pure* can be only “movement which produces

²⁹ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by G. Ch. Spivak, John Hopkins University: Baltimore 1997, p. 70.

³⁰ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell 1986, p. 5 (§ 7).

³¹ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., p. 50.

³² *Ibid*, p. 112.

³³ See J. Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question*, trans. by G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London 1991, p. 27.

difference³⁴ and precedes any determinate content. *The pure movement* is *differance* – the call sign of Derridean philosophy – which is never a present being, cannot be communicated through signs, is prior to the sign, concept or action. “It permits the articulation of speech and writing”, it founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, then between signifier and signified.³⁵ *Differance* leaves behind only *traces* – unintentional, casual, whose relation to the sign resembles the Freudian relationship between the unconsciousness and that which is accessible to consciousness.³⁶ That is why the meanings that are revealed through traces are always contingent, dispersed, disseminated, approximate, and are yet to come ... The case is different with meanings revealed by signs: they are always determined by giving names to things, by distinguishing and selecting them. All these sign functions are a gesture of violence to relevant things; they threaten them with the “loss of the proper”.³⁷ Consequently, for them there is no “transcendental signified” – nothing exists before text, everything is text, a game of references.

The deconstruction of the writing medium effected by Derrida presents an intellectual offer capable of describing and explaining phenomena in the world organized by the “cybernetic principle”, which (the world) has lost its stability and continues to expand. This principle operates without violence, it assumes a communication feedback, it challenges the opposition treatment of the sender/recipient or man/technology relationship; rather than *colonize*, it *mediatizes* the “life world”, creating an entirely new research area, both for the already existing media sciences – psychology, sociology, communicology – and for philosophical reflection. When meanings continue to drift away, when they appear on the “horizon”, when “there is no ‘perfect state’”, therefore, of communication which the theory could recognize or could serve the purpose of fulfilling this state in the human world, there is one thing left for it to be, as Denis McQuail put it, a “navigational tool on journeys to various destinations that we choose for independent reasons”.³⁸ Theory here becomes a cultural practice – a set of human actions and behaviors, ways of accumulating and expressing knowledge that are different in different place and time. Out of these actions, it is not possible to select “purely” cognitive acts that would allegedly have access to reality itself. “The navigational tool” does not harbor such illusions, it should serve both experts and laypersons on their journey about the empirical phenomena of daily life.

³⁴ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., p. 62.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 63.

³⁶ See S. Krämer, *Das Medium als Spur und als Apparat*, in: S. Krämer (Hrsg.) *Medien, Computer, Realität. Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und Neue Medien*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. M. 2000, p. 81.

³⁷ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., p. 112.

³⁸ D. McQuail, *New Horizons for Communication Theory in the New Media Age*, in: *A Companion to Media Studies*, ed. by A. N. Valdivia, Blackwell: Oxford 2003, p. 40.

The Medial Turn and *Medienphilosophie*

The use of a sign according to the principle of dissemination, dispersion, splitting, and proliferation of meanings, has an anti-violence potential because there is no dominant sender here, or unidirectional media transmission. The digital media operate based on this principle. The new *culture of the media* requires new thinking which goes beyond the ontology of the world exposed to standardization and homogenization. One of the formulas of such thinking is the new philosophy of the media, which, in the German academic world, begins to autonomize itself as a separate discipline: it appears that, taking into account different ways and styles of practicing it, we can use a certain generalization and speak of the *German philosophy of the media*. In fact, it would be more appropriate to speak of *media philosophy* (medial?) (*Medienphilosophie*) – that is supposed to differ from the existing philosophical reflection on the media, i.e. from the “philosophy of the media” (*Philosophie der Medien*).³⁹ The concept is being redefined and the new academic discipline emerges after the so-called *medial turn*, whose main authors were Friedrich Kittler and Vilém Flusser. The epistemological background to these events is provided first of all by poststructuralists such as Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and others. Their approaches in the reflections on the new media are utilized in different ways inter alia by Frank Hartmann, Dietrich Mersch, Sybille Krämer, Reinhard Margreiter or (here the impact of Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatism is seen) by Mike Sandbothe (the author of the pragmatic philosophy of the media).⁴⁰ Drawing from the same sources, Siegfried Zielinski creates a philosophically sophisticated history of media under the façade of archeology and variantology: he is a phenomenal figure as compared with the others.

Poststructuralist inspirations in the philosophical diagnosis of the new media reality are detectable in such statements by Frank Hartmann as the following: ““The desirable rhizomatic jumble, in which connections also operate by diverse encodings, corresponds to the heterogeneity of the changing cultural-media matrix. The Cartesian categories and dualisms like man and technology, recognized for centuries as fundamental ontological constants, are replaced by concepts of the new media reality that, according to the formulations by Deleuze and Guattari, no longer permit ‘any radical cuts between sign regimes and their objects’ and demand the multimedia decentering of language into ‘other dimensions and registers’. It does not come out of nowhere that some

³⁹ On the subject, see S. Munker, *After the Medial Turn. Sieben Thesen zur Medienphilosophie*, in: S. Munkler, A. Roesler, M. Sandbothe (Hrsg.), *Medienphilosophie. Beiträge zur Klärung eines Begriffs*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag: 2003.

⁴⁰ See inter alia. F. Hartmann, *Medienphilosophie*, op. cit.; D. Mersch, *Medientheorien zur Einführung*, Junius Verlag: Hamburg 2006; R. Margreiter, *Medienphilosophie. Eine Einführung*, Parerga: Berlin 2007; M. Sandbothe, *Pragmatische Medienphilosophie. Grundlegung einer neuen Disziplin im Zeitalter des Internet*, Weilerswist 2001; S. Munkler, A. Roesler, M. Sandbothe (Hrsg.), *Medienphilosophie. Beiträge zur Klärung eines Begriffs*, op. cit.; M. Sandbothe, L. Nagl (Hrsg.), *Systematische Medienphilosophie*, “Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie“, Sonderband 7, Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2005.

unprecedented claim from the lifeworld kindled the sparkles of this kind in the area of the philosophical molding of theory. Society was (and is) for radically changing its media functions of expression and its conditions of reproducing knowledge, and it is only on the reflective level that it begins to grasp itself as an ‘information processing system’ (Michael Giesecke). Epistemological cut: can the book and books-related thinking really face it?”⁴¹

This is the end of literariness but also of the reality enveloped by the former in a uniform, linear and analytic way of thinking. The end of the media theory using dualisms like signifier/signified, representation/represented, or sender/receiver, which is realized as part of criticism of ideologies or theories of communication derived from *book culture*. These approaches are now being accused of using a false model of meaning/sign on one hand, while on the other hand, of “forgetting the media” or “blindness” to them – to technologies. It is in these two registers that the drama of inter alia Sybille Krämer’s original reflection on the media can be written out. She relates Derridean dissemination as a model of communication to what she calls “the postal principle (*postalische Prinzip*)” consisting in “revealing that which is uniform amongst the different”, a task, which, according to this philosopher, can be best described and explained by the “messenger” metaphor. “Messenger” is the key metaphor serving to explain what the media do: they translate one language into another (Hermes translated/interpreted to travelers the plans that gods had towards them) – the media are situated between two sides, separated from the context, etc. Krämer asks rhetorically: “And is not the good side of our communicative and ritual practice more structurally related to the dissemination of ‘that which is sent’ according to the ‘one-to-many principle’ than according to the principle of dyadic dialogue? To Peters, Socrates as a proponent of the dialogical, and Jesus of Nazareth as a master of dissemination become two main figures embodying different models of communication. The asymmetric public speech of dissemination follows the diffusion model, in which communicative effectiveness is decided exclusively by the activity of the recipients.”⁴²

The “messenger” figure by no means connects Krämer with understanding the medium as language. On the contrary, like Hartmann, she becomes part of the discourse after the *medial turn*, which emphasizes the technological factor of the medium and aims to remind of it to philosophy,

⁴¹ F. Hartmann, *Der rosarote Panther lebt*, in: S. Münkler, A. Roesler, M. Sandbothe (Hrsg.), *Medienphilosophie. Beiträge zur Klärung eines Begriffs*, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴² S. Krämer, *Medien, Boten, Spuren*, in: S. Münkler, A. Roesler (Hrsg.), *Was ist ein Medium?*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 78.) Krämer adapts for her theory inter alia the analyses by John Durham Peters, American media theorist, who, in his history of communication ideas, challenged the position of dialogue as the best way of successful communication. He referred to the experiences of twentieth-century anti-modernist thinkers – Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Arendt, Levinas – who recognized the ultimate impossibility of dialogue. “Whatever ‘communication’ might mean, it is more fundamentally a political and ethical problem than a semantic one (...). In renouncing the dream of ‘communication’ I am not saying that the urge to connect is bad; rather, I mean that the dream itself inhibits the hard work of connection. This book bids us out of Wittgenstein’s fly-bottle. Too often, ‘communication’ misleads us from the task of building worlds together.” (J. D. Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London 1999, p. 30.) On the figure of messenger, see above all S. Krämer, *Medium, Bote, Übertragung. Kleine Metaphysik der Medialität*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2008.

and in broader terms to the humanities. The restored memory would already belong to man perceived as the *medium of different media*. Actually, Walter Benjamin worked on this memory in the nineteen-thirties but it was publicized – in connection with television – in the nineteen-sixties by Marshall McLuhan, in whose view – in accordance with the proposition: “the medium is the message” – communication is not only about the message, the content, what also counts is the technological factor. Any information sent via the medium thus carries its memory with it, and retains its trace/mark. This general structuralist assumption – the form more important than the content – turned out to be the starting point for the “medial turn” in question. Both Hartmann and Krämer take part in the debate on what is the primary scenery in which the medial takes place, and on what is going to be the right object of humanistic studies – the transmission of signs/meanings as the ideology-critique would have it, or technological artifacts? This is one of the versions of the dispute between discursive and technological understanding of culture: culture as text, the symbolic vs. culture as daily techniques of perception, communication, representation, archiving, calculating, measuring, etc.⁴³

Sybille Krämer argues here with Derrida. The reconstruction of her viewpoint should be more or less as follows: one thing is the disseminative model of meaning: it is actually acceptable because it overcomes the dialogical character of the writing culture, in which the sender/writer shows the recipient/reader, his discussion partner, around the world, leading him to the land of eternal bliss. The falsity of this assumption is otherwise exposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who in *Tristes Tropiques* asserts that “Writing is a strange thing”⁴⁴, repeating in a sense Plato’s famous phrase “Writing ... has this strange quality”.⁴⁵ The anthropologist puts an end to the hopes, eternally associated with writing and relevant after the modern Enlightenment facelift, of getting to know the world, which would free the readers from all oppressions allegedly caused by ignorance and analphabetism. Lévi-Strauss believes that history of culture provides evidence for an entirely opposite thesis that usually “writing may not have sufficed to consolidate human knowledge”, it did not

⁴³ See S. Krämer, *Das Medium als Spur und als Apparat*, w: S. Krämer (Hrsg.), *Medien, Computer, Realität. Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und Neuen Medien*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 73-78; S. Krämer, H. Bredekamp, *Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques – Moving Beyond Text*, “Theory, Culture & Society”, 30 (6), 2013, pp. 20-29. See also: F. Hartmann, *Kommunikation als “Ideologie”*, in: B. Mersmann, Th. Weber (Hrsg.), *Avinus Verlag: Berlin* 2008, p. 89-90. One of the eminent opponents of the “medial turn” was Niklas Luhmann, according to whom people do not perceive the media but only forms, perceptual frames: semantically empty that are filled up depending on the perspective adopted by a communication participant. These meanings – the message – are not influenced at all by media techniques. Although “the way in which these technologies work structures and limits what is possible as mass communication.” (...) “Nonetheless”, Luhmann writes, “we do not want to regard the work of these machines, nor indeed their mechanical or electronic internal workings, as an operation within the system of the mass media. Not everything which is a condition of possibility of systems operation can be a part of operational sequences of the system itself.” (N. Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, op. cit., p. 3.)

⁴⁴ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by J. Russell, Criterion Books: New York 1961, p. 291.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 275d, in: *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 trans. by H. N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925.

serve the idea *objective* and *disinterested* cognition and “it may well have been indispensable to the establishment of an enduring dominion”, and exploitation of the people.⁴⁶ Krämer certainly knows and also accepts this point of view – Derrida presents it in one of the chapters in *Of Grammatology*. However, she thinks, and this is the second point, that Derrida is not consistent because he forgets in his conception of writing about the practices of using writing, independent of speaking aloud, such as mathematical formalization, logical calculations, programming languages, musical notations or choreographic systems. In the German philosopher’s view they determined the “signature of Western metaphysics” at least to the same extent as phonocentrism. The main objection is that Derrida was unable or did not want to free himself from associations of writing with language.⁴⁷ Krämer does not deny that any notation can be presented in a discursive way – but this does not change the fact that in the history of Western culture a constitutive role is played by literacy – writing originally understood as a certain way of giving the language. The *linguistic turn* in the twentieth century also confirmed the tendency for treating culture as text. “It is time that writing in its iconographic dimension, i.e. as writing pictoriality=notational iconicity [*Schriftbildlichkeit*] be placed in the center of attention.”⁴⁸ Hence also comes the suggestion of returning to the etymological meaning of culture – *cultura agri* – which was “‘refined’ into *cultura animi*”⁴⁹, and thereby deprived of the impetus to act, to be technically worked on. Now is the time to return to the “diagrammatic” as constitutive of “operational iconicity (pictoriality),” which is associated with cultural techniques, operational processes that enable work with objects and symbols that come into existence “as a result of interactions within the triad of imagination, hand and eye”.⁵⁰ Krämer explains operationality in the following way: “Prints, charts and maps not only represent something but at the same time open spaces so that the represented could be utilized, observed and studied. And this happens the more so if it is manifested through that which cannot be otherwise seen or, if it is stabilized – we mean the transience of speech sounds and musical sounds – it is manifested through that which is usually ephemeral, elusive, and fragile. Operational iconicity manifests itself, therefore, not only as the visualization medium [*Anschauungsmedium*] but also as a tool and an ‘instrument of reflection’ [*Reflexionsinstrument*]”.⁵¹

The departure from the discursive concept of nature is illustrated by the transition from text to technology, from a symbol to its “manipulative materiality”, where algorithmic ways of

⁴⁶ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, op. cit., p. 293, 292.

⁴⁷ S. Krämer, *Operative Bildlichkeit. Von der ‚Grammatologie‘ zu einer ‚Diagrammatologie‘? Reflexionen über erkennendes ‚Sehen‘*, in: M. Hessler, D. Mersch (Hg.), *Logik des Bildlichen. Zur Kritik der ikonischen Vernunft*, Transcript Verlag: Bielefeld 2009, p. 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ S. Krämer, H. Bredekamp, *Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques – Moving Beyond Text*, op. cit. p. 21.

⁵⁰ S. Krämer, *Operative Bildlichkeit...*, op. cit. p. 105.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 104.

transforming it matter more than interpretations. This change is documented inter alia by the so-called “performative turn” in the humanities, which focuses on culture as actions, rituals, and routine behaviors. It (change) is also observable in the most recent versions of science theory that focus on the practices of operating with objects and with instruments in laboratories, lecture halls, etc. as is the case with Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory. Finally, this is the change that is illustrated by the above-cited “medial turn”, associated in Germany first of all with the name of Friedrich Kittler.⁵² It was he who started the abovementioned dispute in the nineteen-eighties, shifting responsibility for the then contemporary notions of the media onto the literary narratives, created between 1880 and 1920, resulting from their authors’ astonishment with the film, typewriter and gramophone. The direct object of Kittler’s attack on these traditions is the discourse on Heidegger’s concept of technology, in vogue in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. In the introduction to his famous book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986) he writes as follows: “Obviously, stories of this kind cannot replace a history of technology. Even if they were countless they would remain numberless, and thus would fail to capture the real upon which all innovations are based. Conversely, number series, blueprints, and diagrams never turn back into writing, only into machines. Heidegger said as much with his fine statement that technology itself prevents any experience of its essence. However, Heidegger’s textbook-like confusion of writing and experience need not be; in lieu of philosophical inquiries into essence, simple knowledge will do.”⁵³

Speculation will not therefore replace “simple” knowledge in technology. It is a strong objection – it concerns the most important moments in the twentieth-century German philosophy of media (*Philosophie der Medien*), to be precise. They are speculated about not only by Heideggerians with their narrative about technology as the crowning of metaphysics in the history of the *forgetting of Being*, and about modernity as *the time of the world picture*, but also by critical philosophers. Although both kinds of philosophers started from different assumptions and were after something different in philosophizing, they were united nonetheless in their view on technology from the perspective of the history of the decline of civilization (*Verfallsgeschichte der Zivilisation*). Social critics: Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse were concerned with emancipation, liberation of people from this fatal slippage, which, they believed, could only be effected by revolutionizing science and technology, including the media, integrated with the logic (rationality) of control and domination.⁵⁴

⁵² See S. Krämer, H. Bredekamp, *Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques – Moving Beyond Text*, op. cit., p. 23-24.

⁵³ F. A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by G. Winthrop-Young and M. Wutz, Stanford University Press: Stanford 1999, p. xl. Heidegger’s sentence from *Holzwege* (1950). On the subject see also S. Rieger, *Die Individualität der Medien...*, op. cit. p. 21.

⁵⁴ Habermas also adds Schelling, Marx and Benjamin to this series of names, pointing out the roots of the presented way of thinking in the Jewish and protestant mysticisms of promise of “resurrection of fallen nature”, See J. Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als „Ideologie“*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1969, p. 54.

Kittler's successors, who regard themselves as "theorists/philosophers of the media", dissociate themselves from "theorists of communication" although the majority of them appear to avoid his style of aggressive technological fetishism. The object of their reflection is obviously technology-dominated digital culture: an *empirically adequate* theory as a "navigational tool" must also take into account the "diagrammatical" and generally all digital techniques, for example the logics of databases, that are capable of creating meanings without the presence of consciousness acts, without necessary linguistic encoding and understanding.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, *Medienphilosophen* (=media philosophers) do not focus only on the material, on media infrastructure and technology, disregarding cultural contexts and social relations since it is impossible to entirely "expel the spirit from the humanities".⁵⁶ Remember that in German the humanities are called *Geisteswissenschaften* "sciences of the spirit" – if we cut off the word *Geist* – spirit from this compound noun, what is left is only *Wissenschaften* or sciences. We owe the new type/character of relationships that we make with others on the internet forums and social networking and our new "spontaneity" of our responses, gestures, behaviors as the users of networked computers, smartphones, or tablets to the "digital machines of reality" widening "the lifeworld with the possibility of transmission and envisioning."⁵⁷ The expansion of the lifeworld's space, more than time compression i.e. the increasing possibilities of utilizing it effectively, of combining different actions in a time bracket (when jogging or driving a car we listen to MP3 music, etc.) is becoming a turning point in media history. The computer, as a more perfect version of apparatus, better than an analog telephone, radio, television or record player, shows the difference between it and the "tool" as a technological instrument. A tool only makes man's work easier while "technology as apparatus", as Krämer explains, "creates artificial worlds, releases experiences and enables the conduct that would not be possible at all without apparatuses". And the conclusion from this observation: "It is not increased efficiency but generating of the world that is the effective sense of media technologies."⁵⁸

Together with space, its inhabitants are also "generated" – never-ready subjectivities; not-present, not-necessary fusions of intellectual, ethnic, moral, political, etc. qualities. We are no longer "the subjects of a given objective world but projects of alternative worlds"⁵⁹, says Vilém Flusser (1920-1991), one of the fathers of the "medial turn" in question. To present his ideas would require a separate study, which would interrupt the line of our argument focused on the present. And the

⁵⁵ See for example F. Hartmann, *Der rosarote Panther lebt*, op. cit., p. 139; F. Hartmann, *Kommunikation als "Ideologie"*, in: B. Mersmann, Th. Weber (Hrsg.), *Avinus Verlag*: Berlin 2008, p. 89-90.

⁵⁶ S. Krämer, *Medien, Boten, Spuren*, in: S. Münker, A. Roesler (Hrsg.), *Was ist ein Medium?*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 66.

⁵⁷ F. Hartmann, *Kommunikation als „Ideologie“*, op. cit. p. 87.

⁵⁸ S. Krämer, *Das Medium als Spur und als Apparat*, op. cit., p. 85.

⁵⁹ It is Vilém Flusser's thesis. Cited after: F. Hartmann, *Kommunikation als "Ideologie"*, op. cit. p. 87. See V. Flusser, *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt: Menschwerdung*, Fischer: Frankfurt am Main 1998.

most original thinker of the present day, in his sweeping style of philosophizing, in the research area, and finally in his temperament most resembling that of Flusser, is Siegfried Zielinski.

Navigator – the Case of Siegfried Zielinski

Theory as a navigational tool draws inferences from deconstructing metaphysics and has no ambition to explain things as a whole; it accepts the fragmentariness of the object of its research and its own participation in molding it. From the perspective of democratic realities of the Western world built on media technologies, the utopian Habermasian narratives about the media that will improve the world appear ridiculous. The media “have become integrated with daily violence, which is called coercion”, Siegfried Zielinski concludes briefly, and no longer educate us or stimulate esthetically, nor do they make us feverishly excited. They are simply cultural techniques we have to learn to acquire necessary social competencies.⁶⁰ They deserve separate attention only in the context of the question about art that uses them. Perhaps art will suggest something in this situation and open some new registers of freedom to us? Perhaps artistic experimenting with the media will support us in creative and critical thinking capable of going beyond barren pastures marked out for consumers, exposed to being constantly tested for their competence and usefulness?

Methodological Anarchism

Zielinski’s theory is a research project combining the history of the media with the history of science and technology. Its source inspirations should be sought in the ideas of Friedrich Kittler and Vilém Flusser – the most important figures for the original theory of the media in the German-speaking area in recent decades. From the standpoint of theory of science the project becomes comprehensible, on the one hand in the context of Derrida’s and Foucault’s poststructuralism – in particular, it uses the latter’s idea for archeology of knowledge/power⁶¹ – while on the other hand in the context of transformations (associated with poststructuralism) in methodological consciousness which have occurred since the nineteen-seventies. Most generally, these transformations consisted in treating science as a cultural practice and in seeking new forms of pursuing it, propagated under the banner of inter- and transdisciplinarity. They related to the category of the *culture of*

⁶⁰ S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] News from the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century, trans. by G. Custance, Univocal Publishing: Minneapolis 2013, p. 18-21.

⁶¹ See *ibid.* p. 173-175.

knowledge, which emphasizes the moment itself of “cultivation” (from Latin *colo, colere*) of knowledge, and pragmatic and performative elements. Cultivation is a process, activity, action; it therefore pertains to the skill and competence of doing something: creating knowledge, sharing and utilizing it. The Latin *navis* denotes a ship, a boat, *navigare* means to travel by boat, sail – *theory, as a navigational tool*, thus refers to transport equipment/devices and to the activities carried out when using them, associated with preparations for a journey and its course, that end with the safe arrival at a port, different on each journey. This is what Zielinski seems to think about theory. What he does in science is a perfect illustration of the thesis of the greatest “anarchist” in the twentieth-century philosophy of science, Paul Feyerabend, according to whom “science is neither a single tradition, nor the best tradition there is, except for people who have become accustomed to its presence, its benefits and its disadvantages.”⁶²

What choices of cultural benefits and/or disadvantages = boats, journeys, ports did the author of *Deep Time of the Media* (i.e. Zielinski) make? Each attempt to describe them brings certain order and systematizes them, which cannot be avoided even in a study on the reconstruction of the programmatically not only anti-systemic but also even anti-systematic thought. Our task can be made easier by being confined merely to an outline of this philosophical-methodological aspect, disregarding the whole historical-media subject. We have to start from the fact that in his studies on media archeology Zielinski chooses anarchists like him as his partners in discussion. He treats alchemists seriously – “magical thinkers”. He views their experiments in the media as fundamental to contemporary science in general, including the theory of media. This extension of the semantic field of science took place first of all because of Vilém Flusser, it was meant to contribute new impetuses to debates about the media in the nineteen-eighties, and to fill in the devastations made by “grand narratives” – structuralist, Marxist, or Lacanian. “The great abstract works” – Zielinski asserts – “bored artists and others, who wanted to change the world using the latest media, for they were unable to discover in these texts any relationship to their own work of transformation. By contrast, Flusser succeeded in arousing passionate motivation to try out the possible shift ‘from subject to project’, both in theoretical and practical media work with all its contradictions and paradoxes.”⁶³ The author of this comment, when he speaks with acceptance and admiration about his heroes in the history of media-technological thinking and activity often rejected by the contemporaries and ignored in academic handbooks, emphasizes the navigational function of their risky ventures. For example, in the case of the Italian scientist Giovanni Battista della Porta (1535-1615),

⁶² P. K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* [first published 1975], Verso: New York 1993, p. 8. On the culture of knowledge see P. Celiński, J. P. Hudzik (eds.), *Kultura wiedzy*, Wydawnictwo UJ: Kraków 2012.

⁶³ S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media. Toward an Archeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, MIT Press: Cambridge Mass. 2008, p. 97.

who – and Zielinski likes it – “first and foremost explored the world here on Earth, with its absurdities, tensions, and turbulences, not the celestial world of church nor the conceptual world of mind.”⁶⁴

This is a methodological hint to the media theorist of the twenty-first century: in his inquiries he also avoids speculations, transcendentalization, or the use of idealizations. Instead, he speaks of “necessary flexibility between disciplines”, and is willing to take them into consideration – regardless of place (preferably the provinces, periphery) and time – “the most exciting processes in knowledge or know-how”, he has an ambition “to draft a cartography of research that deviates from the familiar map of established and well-known [cultural] centers”⁶⁵. Diverse points on this mobile map: central and peripheral, mutually mixed up, are those discourses/disciplines between which the media do their translation work. Studies on them have to have the same architecture as they have – interdiscursive and network-like: they (investigations/studies) are conducted at transition points and intersections (*inter* means between, among, inside) between discourses and disciplines, they form combinations of media art and philosophy of the media, theology and natural sciences, physics and biology.⁶⁶ They are conducted in infinite movement, they are not located in any specific place: they are *utopian* in the etymological meaning of the word: from Greek *outopos*: non-place, no-where, they thus characterize a thought that cannot stop, show its justification, foundation, or be placed in some transcendence, an ideal communication situation. This kind of thinking *no longer refers to things* – it is rather a component of the *matter of things*. Consequently, *I think* is also no “subject” here, tirelessly constructed by philosophy followed by communication science (sender/recipient, author, reader...), always around some transcendental *pure ego*, but it is a “project” of becoming other – the project of transformation via that which happens around us, of committing errors, submitting to passions ... Variable and mobile is here both thinking and being in their diverse porous forms and shapes: scientific, technological, artistic, together and in-between each other.

Studies on the media do not ultimately consist in gaining knowledge but, as we will see, in being stimulated=navigated by *sensational events*. That is why this research is not conducted according to some *method* – it is difficult, uncertain and unpredictable. To speak positively: the investiga-

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See S. Zielinski, S. M. Wagnermaier, *Depth of Subject and Diversity of Method. An Introduction to Variantology*, in: *Variantology 1. On Deep Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies*, ed. by S. Zielinski and S. M. Wagnermaier, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König: Köln 2005, pp. 8 - 10.

⁶⁶ See “Past is an infinite set of possibilities”: Siegfried Zieliński in conversation on an-archeology of media, “Teksty Drugie” no. 3, 2014, pp. 233-234. See also remarks on the “interparadigmatic structure of paradigms” W. Welsch, *Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1995, p. 597 ff.

tions are oriented towards interpenetration, rather than chronological succession, of magical, scientific and technological media practices and towards the texts about the media produced in the process by authors who are not professional/academic scholars. It was they, in Zielinski's view, who wrote the most innovative works that impacted theory of the media both in their "deep" and recent, twentieth-century history – they were writers: Brecht, Enzensberger, Jean-Louis Baudry, or philosophers: Walter Benjamin, Günther Anders. "The most fruitful media discourses" are consequently those that "move freely between disciplines", "mobility [intellectual, J. P. H.] and the state of being in-between are here of equal importance".⁶⁷ Not valid and false, however, is teleological thinking that seeks to discover in the history/theory of the media some universal developmental laws indicative of progress, which is why the patron of the approach in question is Kairos, the Greek god of the right, opportune circumstances, a moment that can be used only once or missed altogether. Media theorists are "Kairos-pilots"⁶⁸, navigators in our orientation: they create relationships, constellations between "sensational artifacts", or media-technological-cultural "events". The new image of thinking is navigation – conceptual fluid magma, on which unusual events are imprinted like the momentarily widening circles of ripples on water. Success in the work on achieving the immediate, provisional, experimental coherence and determinacy of concepts, capable of retaining the infinite and the indefinable and showing due respect to it, requires that pilots/navigators have certain artistic-technical-scientific competence and... sensitivity – hence come both the emphasis on their cognitive "curiosity" and readiness to become rich through otherness.⁶⁹ In *Deep Time of the Media* Zielinski even agrees to have his historiography defined as romantic, and its objective scope as a collection of curiosities⁷⁰ – all these, presumably, to be closer to the *lifeworld*.

Philosophical representations of this world came to light after the Nietzschean diagnosis of the "death" of god: the infinite and the inconceivable had now to find shelter in the horizontal order that Habermas saw in the *ideal communication community*, that Heidegger saw in his ontological difference, in *Being's* clearing through each specific entity, and after the author of *Sein und Zeit*, a whole group of French philosophers: Derrida saw it in *différance*, Deleuze and Guattari in *becoming*, Lacan in the field of the imaginary, etc.⁷¹ Zielinski thinks highly especially of the last group, seeking allies in them for his concept of the sensoriality of a media event that happens here and now,

⁶⁷ S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media...*, op. cit., p. 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 275.

⁶⁹ S. Zielinski, S. M. Wagnermaier, *Depth of Subject and Diversity of Method...*, op. cit., p. 9. This means being guided in thinking by "the idea of a tension between reality that is filed away in concepts and a reality that is experienced", a tension compared with that occurring between "calculation and imagination". (S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media...*, op. cit., p. 34.)

⁷⁰ S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media...*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁷¹ See S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] *News From the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*, op. cit., p. 215-216.

which (the one here) is also, incidentally, conditioned by time, it is nothing but a non-place.⁷² The proposed methodology of research procedure – NB it is not the same as research method – appears to be best described with the category of *transversal reason*⁷³ characterized by flexibility, the ability to resonate with the changeable, heterogeneous reality, to freely move between different forms and types of rationality. This kind of knowledge and competencies to acquire it enable a theorist to be a scientist, artist and engineer in one, not only to participate in condensing and complementing the existing knowledge, but also to act subversively, and to iconoclastically turn it in other, new directions. And all this takes place with the lack of access to that spiritual whole – language, culture – which Hegel, from whom we started this discussion, regarded as the seat of truth. Zielinski parted for good with his distant ancestor, who would have been shocked by the information that almost two centuries after his death, in Berlin, someone could lecture on the theory of art and culture, without being interested in *cognition of the world*. Certainly not the cognition he had in mind. The author of *Deep Time of the Media* accepted the fact that behind the media there is no *objective reality*, that the world can only be accessed via the “form of interface”, that also theory can necessarily be only a form of experience, cultural practice consisting in transversally navigating and moving between different areas of art, science and technology separated from one another by porous borders. A theorist-navigator is an “observer” “with great presence of mind” and “activist” at the same time who can grasp this Kairos turning point that can either “contribute to the world’s destruction”, or “for fleeting moments, help to transform it into paradise”. And such should be “the world of media and the art that is produced with and through them”.⁷⁴

Zielinski is an anti-naturalist – he knows that there is no direct access to *things themselves*. To him, the medium is, consequently, a concept “as wide open as possible”.⁷⁵ And this would mean that there is actually nothing outside the media. Since everything can be a medium, we might just as well speak of the situation “after the media”, in which no definite concept of medium or media is necessary. If not definite, then what? Zielinski treats the concept of media in Wittgensteinian terms, as a “game”, linguistic practice stemming from different forms of life/different discourses that are only – like “family resemblances” – partly similar (they have less than more in common)

⁷² Zielinski declares his links particularly with a “band of thinkers”, as he calls them, successors of Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, such as Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Ranciere, or (the Italian) Giorgio Agamben, who, he claims, appear to be indifferent to the “interdiscursive field of the techno-imaginary third party” and “on the contemporary theory market they represent a strange phenomenon that is influenced by the writing and thought of the Romance countries” (S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] *News From the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*, op. cit., p. 202.) Their programmatically non-systemic and unsystematic thinking, their idea of event and contingency of truth are to support Zielinski’s concept of experimental culture and studies on it, which are interdisciplinary by nature.

⁷³ See W. Welsch, *Vernunft...*, op. cit.

⁷⁴ S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media...*, op. cit., p. 30-31. Zielinski understands art as “an experimental aesthetic praxis which engages with science and technology” (S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] *News From the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*, op. cit., p. 128.)

⁷⁵ S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media...*, op. cit., p. 33.

so that it is not enough to define them. The concept thus refers to the “heterogeneous, interdiscursive field (...) [where] media process a variety of concrete, resistant artifacts, programs, and issues located between the arts, sciences, and technologies”.⁷⁶ Elsewhere we read: “The case of media is similar to Roessler the endophysicist’s relation to consciousness: we swim in it like the fish in the ocean, it is essential for us, and for this reason it is ultimately inaccessible to us. All we can do is to make certain cuts across it to gain operational access. These cuts can be defined as built constructs; in the case of media, as interfaces, devices, programs, technical systems, networks, and media forms of expression and realization, such as film, video, machine installations, books, or websites. We find them located between the one and the other, between the technology and its users, different places and times. In this in-between realm, media process, model, standardize, symbolize, transform, structure, expand, combine, and link. This they perform with the aid of symbols that can be accessed by the human senses: numbers, images, texts, sounds, designs, and choreography. Media worlds are phenomena of the relational.”⁷⁷

Finding it impossible to define the media, as can be seen, Zielinski, according to the logic of family resemblance, decides to choose an enumerative description, which denotes such and such and also everything that resembles it, additionally trying to operationalize the concept (“operational access”) or performatize it (indicating “cuts”). He thereby rejects all apriorism and essentialism together with dichotomies of thinking/action, substance/accident, words/things, science /art (as Greek *techné*). The idea of archeological research additionally frees him from the abovementioned “method”, which means: from observing the rigors of hermeneutic, phenomenological, structuralist or psychoanalytical analyses. Instead, it allows him to enjoy the methodological and ontological freedom of “variantology”⁷⁸ (= one of the *modi operandi* of archeology; from Latin *variare*: change, transform, modify), characterized in esthetic or rather *aesthetic* terms by lightness and ease of experimenting in mutual relationships between art and science plus technology. The purpose is to show the “nontrivial interaction”⁷⁹, taking place between the three fields, which consists in treating seriously and with respect the technological and the symbolic, in taking the risk of experimenting with a re-symbiosis of technology and culture, between which there had been successive disunity since the Renaissance. This declaration, well-known from philosophical texts after the “medial turn” – Krämer and Hartmann, as could be seen, spoke in a similar vein – contains the fair balance principle between technological fetishism, say in the style of Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality, in which media technologies “kill” reality, and spiritually scientific thinking about the media according to

⁷⁶ S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] News From the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century, op. cit., p. 14.

⁷⁷ S. Zielinski, Deep Time of the Media..., op. cit., p. 33.

⁷⁸ A neologism whose connotation meaning is to relate to Georges Bataille’s concept of “heterology”, or Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopias”.

⁷⁹ S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] News From the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century, op. cit., p. 223.

dichotomous divisions into signs and things, fictions and facts, subject and object. The nontrivial game should *lead into the center* of what Zielinski calls *cultura experimentalis*, within which the researcher/media theorist himself also behaves as an experimenter.⁸⁰ Variantology is meant “to react naively to his culture of bloc formation and programmatic standardization”, to deal with heterogeneous phenomena *diametrically opposed, dubbing each other, even showing mutual repulsion*. It should offer “a provisional roof” to them, guaranteeing that “at any time they are able to drift apart again and operate autonomously”.⁸¹ This is a manifesto of methodological anarchism in pure form. The contemporary knowledge of what, in general, science owes much to this standpoint. This is a separate subject, however and should be left aside.

Ontology of Things and the *Lifeworld*

Triviality as a category of evaluation of theories is wrestled with by scholars trying to pierce, in a way, the armor of orders/disciplines of political, esthetic, religious, artistic and other things that are closed to one another and separate from the *lifeworld*. Ultimately, it is the matter of the navigational tool which will remember about this world and gain access to it, and will be able to map it. The desire to *return to things*, revived by Husserl in his *Lebenswelt* concept, each time unfulfilled, ending up in some mediation, leaves the theorist in suspense, feeling the risk of uncertainty about the accuracy of the made decisions, choices and assessments. This also the case with Zielinski, who keeps looking for an *accurate* conceptual-pragmatic formula of the return: archeology, anarcheology, variantology, and (as we will now see) philology... The concept of accuracy excludes any single option – “accurate” has semantic connotations associated with the approximate; “accurate” does not go well with the true-false dichotomy. To finish this presentation, just one more question: if theory is to be a navigational tool leading accurately *to things*, what are these “things” here supposed to be if, as we have established, there is nothing outside the media?

To explain this concept, we will use related intuitions of Bruno Latour. This interpretive device is additionally justified by the fact that both Zielinski and Latour are institutionally linked with Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe.⁸² Latour, as the curator of the exhibition devoted to “public things”, held there in 2004, explains the meaning of the German neologism *Dingpolitik* in the introduction to its catalogue. The word should be the key to answer the

⁸⁰ See also S. Zielinski, *Tekst elektroniczny. Niektóre problemy audiowizualnych tekstur*, trans. by K. Szydłowski, “Teksty Drugie”, no. 3, 2014, pp. 223-225.

⁸¹ S. Zielinski, S. M. Wagnermaier, *Depth of Subject and Diversity of Method...*, op. cit., pp. 8.

⁸² Recently Zielinski was the curator of the exhibition: *Globale: Allahs Automaten. Artefakte der arabisch-islamischen Renaissance (800-1200)* (from 31-10-2015 to 28-02-2016).

central question that the authors of this artistic-scientific-technological enterprise asked “What would an object-oriented democracy look like?” “The general hypothesis”, writes the sociologist, “is so simple that it might sound trivial – but being trivial might be part of what it is to become a ‘realist’ in politics. We might be more connected to each other by our worries, our matters of concern, the issues we care for, than by any other set of values, opinions, attitudes or principles.”⁸³ This is a bold assumption – the renaissance of “realism”, the concept discredited in a thousand ways in the twentieth-century philosophy, not to mention its earlier fates. It is also bold because it is chronically exposed to triviality. The stake in this risky game, however, is – it should be thus understood– to regain the *lifeworld*, a nostalgic, utopian undertaking, caused by a yearning, apparently irremovable in the modern world, for *being at home*. A manifestation of this longing is both Hegel’s “pure ego”, constantly unhappy in its historical existence and yearning for *acknowledgement*, and Husserl’s “transcendental ego”, which was expected to lead “zurück zu den Sachen selbst” (to the things themselves), and led to the *ideal essences of phenomena* appearing in the conditions of *abolishing, bracketing* the natural attitude towards the world. Latour certainly knows all the unsuccessful undertakings of his predecessors and he does not want to repeat them. His *Ding – thing*, therefore, is to denote something to which we “are bound”, and in many ways at that, in the case of each individual thing by means of a different set of opinions, attitudes, agreements and disagreements, internally incoherent and discontinuous, but, as the sociologist thinks, connected by “a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence”, “hidden geography” that “bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of ‘the political’”.⁸⁴ The political – to refer to the well-known distinction used inter alia by Chantal Mouffe⁸⁵ – relates to the level of “ontology”, pertains to legitimization, is connected with findings regarding the meanings of the fundamental concepts of power, freedom, subject, etc. But this is only a part of the political – Latour says that “only half” – the other half is that which is at the “ontic level”: “The other [half] lies in the issues themselves, in the matters that matter, in the *res* that creates a public around it.”⁸⁶

Back to Zielinski: in search of an even more accurate, *nontrivial* formula of “return to the thing”, he proposes a theory of the media as “a philology of precise things that is as exact as possible”⁸⁷ – devices, technological objects, artifacts. This theory is still to be substantiated by an *ontology of events* according to which “sensationality” of events is not mute or, in other words, is not non-

⁸³ B. Latour, *From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public*, catalogue of the show at ZKM, MIT Press, 2005, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ See Ch. Mouffe, *On the Political*, Routledge: Abingdon and New York 2005.

⁸⁶ B. Latour, *From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁸⁷ S. Zielinski, [...After the Media] *News From the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*, op. cit., p. 225.

linguistic (this is after the “linguistic turn”). It is impossible to separate language from things, a change in one results in a change in the other and the other way round. The ontological order cannot be separated from the ontic one. *A thing* does not have its essence independent of thinking about it: it exists only in a relation, always within some perceptual and linguistic framework. The awareness of this feedback is the fundamental element of/condition for what Zielinski understands by experimental culture – after all, it is “the game of generating new knowledge”.⁸⁸ To understand how things come into being is tantamount to taking part in generating them, in generating what they mean to us, in becoming bound to them again – organizing the new public around them and living anew in the world we are already in. This requires the creation of a language as precise as possible by means of which devices, things-texts such as software commands could be philologically analyzed. The synthesis of philology and technology is here consequent upon constructivism, a standpoint according to which all things, including natural, processed by technology, are artifacts because they are always selected according to specific criteria, a new artificial order. By reason of this, they are always somehow provisional, substitutive, not entirely suitable, which ultimately prompts Zielinski to speak of “ubiquitous imperfection” of technical things and systems, and, as a result, to advocate, as he writes, “a philology as exact as possible of nonperfect precise things, which will be devised and developed to support communications with others, to facilitate them, to make them a sensational, even perhaps scandalous happening. This philology is not interested in the systemic function of things”⁸⁹ – he finally adds. *Non-perfect precise* means not banal, nontrivial, but it also means not embarrassing, non-conformist, resisting objective evaluation systems and market ways of being and thinking.

And this is how the theory of media is again becoming, starting from the period of German romanticism, a philology – history seems to have come full circle, returned to the beginning, the Hegelian-Schlegelian vision of culture as the realm of the spoken and written word, based on the metaphysics (logic) of spirit. Is it really so, however? No, only seemingly – if romanticism were to be the right category to characterize this kind of theorizing, it would be only a metaphor serving to define its style– variantological, deluding, free from all academic rigors. Romantic in negative terms means undisciplined, unparametrizable; in positive terms it stands for: exciting, open to the adventure of experiencing something unusual, curious about otherness, about difference amongst chronically imperfect things cut off from any telos, deprived of changes of a lasting common grammar and coherent semantic sequences. However, there is no room here either for a history of downfall or utopia of progress. Kairos, the god of coincidence, does not have to be cruel, he gives one an opportunity to notice an *event* that suddenly combines, in the blink of an eye, accidental sets of

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 225.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 226.

things that surround us, owing to which we agree on them, and establish a temporary, unique community of fates. This chance is an opportunity for the media theorist, his entrance ticket to freely driving between many scientific disciplines and discourses of culture. A time-trial drive to make it home – to the *lifeworld*, the area of multitude and diversity, of human freedom and creativity... The time that is always still to come.