

**Mass media and Philosophy  
The Philosopher as a Journalist,  
Or the Synthesis of an Ostensive Ideology**

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**Abstract**

Today, when the scope of mass media has evidently outrun that of philosophy, being equalled with culture itself, the issue is how and to what extent the philosopher may share his “wisdom”, “truth”, or “knowledge” with the *par excellence* representative of these mass media: the journalist. Philosophy cannot confront itself with media unless it becomes an effective communication practice, meaning that it can change the way we communicate with ourselves and, by our own existence, with others as well. Due to the recent overtness of culture as a result of electronic media, the philosopher has the chance of becoming once more, albeit in communication alone, the old existential actor that he had once been, incorporating into his own existence the preceding text of his own thinking or of tradition.

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“I think of myself as a kind of journalist, as far as what interests me is the present, what happens around us, what we are, what is going on in the world. Philosophy’s *raison d’être* before Nietzsche was eternity. Nietzsche was the first philosopher-journalist. He introduced “today” in the field of philosophy... That is why philosophy is for me a kind of radical journalism.”

(Michel Foucault)

Ever since the dawn of philosophy, the philosopher has seen himself forced, out of modesty or obligation, to share his wisdom with others. According to Plato’s late and explicit formulation, nobody holds

(the entire) truth, only participates in it. And indeed, first in Greece, those whom we today call “literate” were considered wise, at least as much as Socrates’ wise predecessors. Later on, at the beginnings of modernity, the learned, the scientists were still considered wise, and all the more so as, in the case of certain philosophers such as Galilei, Descartes, or Leibniz, the two sides, philosophy and science, were cultivated by the same personality. However, today, when the scope of mass media has evidently outrun that of philosophy, being equalled with culture itself, the issue is how and to what extent the philosopher may share his “wisdom”, “truth”, or “knowledge” with the *par excellence* representative of these media: the journalist.<sup>1</sup> Because, while wondering how the philosopher and the journalist participate in “wisdom” and “truth”, we wonder in fact how philosophy and the mass media, as the *par excellence* visible form of the globalization of communication, participate in “wisdom” and “truth”.

In this direct formulation, the problem of philosophy–mass media relationship may sound superficial and unconvincing. But the direct comparison of today’s journalist with Socrates – who should be the emblematic figure of Western philosophy, just as Jesus is of Western religion – may make it more convincing and consistent. Because for Socrates, who carried out his dialogues in the market places of Athens, and formulated his questions on friendly meetings, the purpose of philosophy to question the values, convictions, and ideas of a community was obvious indeed. But today the philosophical art of maieutics, the art of asking questions about issues of at least trans-individual, if not also public relevance, to carry out dialogues in order to induce in the minds of participants and spectators ideas, convictions and attitudes based on unanimously recognized values, seems to pertain to the journalist. This is so because, while decades ago scientists and some – usually ideologically motivated – philosophers launched the community’s moral and conceptual self-questioning regarding social or political events as well as scientific discoveries, today only journalists are still in the position of

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, one must understand the journalist here in a very extensive emblematic sense, in the lack of a more suitable term for designating the man of media – an expression coined as a parallel to man of science – the “communicationist”, the professional of interpersonal and public communication, the therapist of inter-individual communication and the critic of public relations, the talk-show host, and the communication producer of political, cultural, social, and even personal events, as a figure supported by new communication sciences based on electronic technology.

doing so. Meanwhile the natural relationship of the philosopher with the existential subjects of present-day man and community has almost completely disappeared behind a discourse so abstract and sophisticated that it has lost all its audience except the extremely restricted group of learned academics. What is more, even if the philosopher still wanted to address the public at large, he would only be able to do it via the mass media and its discursive means.

From the perspective of the history of western philosophy as the history of philosophical discourse, that is, of philosophy as communication, seen as a comparison of the two rather than emphasizing the specificity and importance of philosophy, the situation of the mass media–philosophy relationship and the issues it raises become more understandable and clear. Philosophy’s moment of origin, as well as some of its later moments, does not lack all similarity to the present situation. The first Greek thinkers who were called “wise men” (sofoi) shared, despite their name, their wisdom with the literates, with grand poets, such as Homer and Hesiod. Back then, even the form of discourse was similar to literature: aphorisms, sentences, poems. In the prose discourse – which, let us admit, is often difficult to follow – philosophy has found its place with quite a delay, with the acceptance of the name of philosophy. Then, by a double move, the old dispute between thinkers and poets regarding wisdom was also resolved: on the one hand the philosophers declared themselves, quite modestly, only the lovers of wisdom, while on the other hand they questioned the wisdom of poets. It was Plato who noticed that poets and artists in general are capable of describing things they do not know and cannot produce. How is this possible? Certainly, if they do not have a direct knowledge of that which they are speaking about, they can only do that by divine inspiration. In their inability to know what they are doing, the poets, just like the oracles, are seized by a kind of divine madness.

The wisdom of poets or oracles, which is a simple assertion inspired by gods, is opposed to the thinker’s love for wisdom: the philosopher knows what he speaks about as long as he can logically argue for his affirmations, and thus knows them from the inside of thinking. Such a differentiation did not seem enough for a philosopher like Plato, who treated poets with such animosity as to expel them, as we all know, from the rational fortress of philosophy. His great disciple, Aristotle, accepted them again, considering art a kind of knowledge obeying the rules of poetics. It was poetics and aesthetics that theoretically and normatively regulated art in the course of western

philosophy. They were the discursive watchdogs that philosophy used against all pretences of art to be the depository of wisdom. The historical fate of the West caused philosophy again to become religion, and be subordinated to theologians for almost a millennium henceforth. A double-edged destiny it was, however, as it should not be forgotten, that great Roman philosophers, whose work was unknown except for the elite of large cities, were familiarized with the middle class of classical Antiquity by Christian preaching and speculations,<sup>1</sup> and the monastic paradigm included aspects of the asocial lifestyle of the cynics...

When philosophy returned again triumphant in modernity as a discourse of knowledge, the situation was repeated once more, as it had to confront another pretender to the wisdom of knowledge: science. Just as Greek philosophy once did towards literature, the great German philosophy tried to keep scientific knowledge under its theoretical and normative supervision, constructing a general theory of knowledge. On this ground it overestimated its own knowledge, considering it total in its scope and absolute in its depth. The last great systematic philosopher, Hegel, defined philosophy as “the absolute knowledge of the Absolute”. Modern science, as the modest servant of usefulness, accepted to be entrusted with only a partial knowledge which can be tested by experiments, but then it guarded this knowledge by constructing its own particular theories of scientific knowledge as epistemologies of different fields (as mathematics, physics, biology, etc.). In mathematics it even proposed a kind of logic different from the classical philosophical, Aristotelian one. Later on the second generation sciences, the humanities and social sciences, sociological, psychological, economical, and linguistic theories, constructed more than their own epistemologies that would protect their approach and discourse from philosophy. They constructed their own theories about philosophical knowledge: their scientific meta-philosophies, which criticized, on occasions even as far as eliminating, the discourse and approach of philosophy.

We are today the inheritors of the consequences of these confrontations, already at home in the thematization of communication. Consequently, we become the witnesses of a new kind of confrontation: that between philosophy and mass media, between the journalist and the philosopher, or more precisely and generally between the thinker and the communication professional, the specialist of communication sciences and practices. The first confrontation, the one between the philosopher

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<sup>1</sup> For Nietzsche, Christianity is mass philosophy, vulgarized Platonism.

and the poet, happened when philosophy thematized “that what is”. This round was won by philosophy, which applied its qualities of categorical description and logical argumentation of its own discourse, as opposed to the metaphors and poetic figures of literary discourse, and very often also the agreement between the philosophical discourse and one’s own life. The second thematization, during modernity, was that of knowledge. Great German philosophy claimed that “what is” is relative to what we know: to be means to be known. Being confronted with modern scientific knowledge, philosophical knowledge tried to equal the score, counterbalancing experiments and mathematical language with totalizing knowledge and axiological rationality. That is, although the score did not exactly favour philosophy, it did not put it at a disadvantage either, since philosophy proved its capacity to criticize the purpose of what science offered as means. The third thematization, that of contemporary philosophy, is communication. This is evident from the importance given to language and the sign, at Heidegger, at the structuralists and post-structuralists as well as in analytical philosophies and pragmatism. However, in the practice of globalized communication, philosophy has to confront now the means of mass communication.

Indeed, standing on the position of a kind of thinking which thematized communication in a most subtle and authentic manner, Heidegger reminded us that western philosophy has forgotten the Being. But the being was a solution rather than a problem in western philosophy! The being was a solution to the issue of the existence of evil, as long as it made the world be represented as asymmetric, and oriented towards goodness, truth, and beauty. Thanks to it, the evil could be defined as a deficiency of the being, and philosophy was able to say that (on the whole) “everything is well”. Similarly, these successive thematizations could be considered similar solutions: the evil is deficiency of knowledge and deficiency of communication, respectively. The real is thus the presence which resists us, which opposes us as an object. Paradise is the conformity of desire; reality shows us that the world is evil as long as it objects to our desire.

Consequently the issue for philosophy is the world with its real consistency. But in the third thematization the world is the world of communication, that is, of language. If we say that the man lives in the world, and not in the environment, this means that he lives in a reality constructed by significances and meanings.<sup>1</sup> (We do not walk through the

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<sup>1</sup> Because he is a prematurely born being, the man needs significances which

woods, we walk through the word woods!) As the language signifies first, and only then designates, all descriptions or words are theoretically and initially fictional, without their values of referential or intersubjective truth, which they only receive later, under certain circumstances. The plurality and parallelism of worlds dissolves the old monism, and institutes plurality and, in this way, the virtual. Everything is immanent; nevertheless, while living in the same space, they still live in different worlds. The plurality of worlds will finally come to replace transcendence and the transcendent, by simply transcending: here and now, in the immanence, but in the plurality of parallel worlds. This is the consequence of dissolving the pyramidal structures of the world's asymmetry, which philosophers consider to be oriented towards goodness, and the asymmetry of authority, and its replacement with the network structures of communication. At the same time, it is a different way of saying that there is no evil – there are only parallel alternative worlds. That is, different perspectives: whatever seems good in one place may seem evil in another place, but absolute evil exists nowhere. This is the new way of saying, according to traditional philosophical mysticism: (on the whole) everything is well!

The communication between these parallel virtual worlds marks the passage from the classical text to the hypertext of new electronic media. This reality of communication brings about an outside–inside indistinction, which makes the “outside” reality disappear. A kind of virtual reality appears at the same time, which is no longer synonymous with the concept of potential realities of old philosophies. The represented and the representer, the primary image and the copy (the imitation) are also indistinguishable. Represented reality is taken as effective reality; reality becomes similar with its communicated construction. The generalization of communication allows for a generalized simulation. The sovereignty of the simulacrum, of which Baudrillard speaks, is a result of the irreversible disappearance of other manners of believing in real presence except communication. The new media – new in their relation to modernity – incarnate this form of

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stories organize into specific meanings. The absence of meaning is unacceptable for man, it is a disaster, evil itself. However, man cannot fully experience the significances and meanings he invents. Life, or rather the adaptation to that what is always previously given, does not permit the transformation of the word into gesture. Therefore man is the animal of eternal nostalgia, since he cannot return there from where he has never been expelled because he has never experienced “pure” significance, yet he is always tempted to do so.

reality: the television was at first the real world of postmodernity. Now the cyber-space takes this reality even further, which is now becoming, as I have said, even more virtual. The internet may keep the show open and interactive – distinctly from the old film-type television which was a closed work – and its chances as everybody’s property, decentralized and indestructible, are even greater than those of other media, as it becomes the *par excellence* means of mass communication. While waiting for the promised complete integration – “comprehensive symbiosis” – of the mind and the electronic machine, the military training simulators become a form of education which encourages the acceptance of this reality. In the good and great tradition of the thematization of knowledge modernity has considered mass media as a description of reality, while for postmodern communication, evolving towards globalization, the real exists only as a system of signs organized into a discourse about the world. Today we know that the well-meaning presuppositions about the real depend on the way in which it is represented, described, introduced into the discourse and interpreted. There is nothing natural about the real, everything has always been cultural from the very beginning, that is, mediated by representations. Therefore, the mass media is a simulacrum of the real, deprived of significance and having no connection with reality, as philosophy conceived of it in its first two thematizations.

All these changes render quite problematic the result of recent confrontations between philosophy and mass media. What are then, under these circumstances, the chances of philosophical thinking to win, or at least survive, these new and harder confrontations with mass media? Certainly, regardless of the perception of reality, western philosophy has pretended to hold the truth and the knowledge. Let us observe thus, following the historical stages of the creation of philosophical discourse, the first difference in the current situation: although philosophy could once pretend to participate more to the truth than mythological literature, this claim has proven impossible by now. The great philosophical thematizations have also brought about a change in the perception of the truth. The first philosophical theory of the truth is connected to the first thematization – or episteme, as Foucault would have called it. This is the dawn of Greek philosophy, which questions “that what is”, seeking the principle, the foundation of this world, in matter and form. The order of existence, thinking, and speaking is one; they are not separated. Knowledge is true uttering at the same time, as long as it says “that what is”. In the correspondence theory of truth Aristotle most clearly expresses the first formula of truth. The

affirmation or negation is true if it corresponds to “what is”. In this theory of truth the quality of truth belongs to the relation, the connection between the enunciation and the fact. This is the kind of truth we find at the basis of sciences based on observation and direct experiment. With the second thematization related to knowledge, that what is will refer to that what we know. That is to say, that what we do not know does not exist to us in its reality. There are already two distinct orders here: the order of “that what is” on the one hand, and the order of thinking and speaking on the other. The order of “that what is” can no longer be directly accessed, or, as Kant believed, it cannot be accessed at all, as it is “the thing in itself”. Again in correspondence with Kant, the theory of truth becomes the theory of coherent truth. In other words, if the starting point is axiomatically correct and the steps we make are also correct, the result of our reasoning is correct as well.

For the third thematization, that of communication, “that what is” and that what we know as reality refers to communication: what we do not communicate does not exist for us! The third theory of the truth cannot yet be as clearly formulated as the first two. Still, one could find it outlined in Heidegger. This is the theory of significant truth about which the Romanian philosopher, Constantin Noica implicitly speaks, comparing it with the exact truth. Truth is even truer if its significance is universally acceptable. This type of truth is eventually the democratic truth of values. The truer a value is, the widest its scope or amplitude in connection to human groups. This type of significant truth or rather meaningful truth – intersubjectively and democratically established – is the present truth of the discourses of art, culture in general, and the political. At the same time, it also constitutes one of the principles of mass media productions, which lends them the character of mass communication. And if we measure the force of this new truth by how ample the scope of its significance is – as ultimately this is the most operational measure of a desired democracy! –: then what philosopher, no matter how Socratic, could measure himself with the audience and “consent” that any talkshow journalist enjoys? What philosophical system, what novel or poem does still possess today the modelling force of commercials or musical spots which shape the lifestyle, passions, and sexuality of the young generation? Today the transmission of the truth and social learning is not modelled by old traditions, neither by modern knowledge, but by the mass media.

The change is even more radical at the meeting points between knowledge, which philosophy has once claimed for itself, and



communication. We have seen what has become of the old ontological thinking as soon as it was taken over, with Kantian criticism, as a field of knowledge. It remains to be seen what happens with knowledge as it is taken over in the thematization of communication. In his well-known report on knowledge, Lyotard says: knowledge ceases to be a purpose in itself, losing its utility value and only becoming an exchange value. The acquisition of knowledge no longer means self-perfection or the training of the mind as in *The Glass Bead Game*... Knowledge becomes, similar to material goods, a product meant for sale, being turned to value by a new production. We must notice here that one of the neo-Marxist prophecies has come true: science becomes “an immediate force of production” and stops being the gratuitous preoccupation of a “fair soul”. And, indeed, the new scientific discoveries cost more money and employ more researchers, whose working efficiency is getting lower. Some more descriptive scientific disciplines, such as anatomy or geography, might be practically finished. But stagnation refers exactly to science’s quality as a theory. New theories exist in parallel with old ones (Newtonian theory with the theory of relativity), and the fact that they do not exclude each other shows that their truth is relative. Science theories prove to be similar to philosophical theories: they have lost their universality and they have long not been in the position to pretend a general agreement which would prove the variants false. Now they are equally uninfluential: science theories only matter as possible descriptions of the world, being identified thus with metaphysical philosophical theories.

The great theories, scientific or metaphysical, equally belong to the postmodern destiny of grand narratives. Henceforth, it is the techniques that will progress and it is more precise to speak about techno-science than science. All the more so as theoretical knowledge is deductive, sets up an up-to-down separation and hierarchy in a pyramidal formula, and thus blocks communication which is in harmony with the inductive and experimental style of knowledge – to learn by discovery, to learn by experiment. In communication everything is empirical, it is only the immediate effective experience which counts (the performance) and not the detached and distanced theoretical speculation (the competence); the music you can play, and not the one you can listen to! For knowledge, something is definitively established, once and for all, while communication means returns, additions, and changes: it is a continuous bidding, as is life itself. Modern knowledge leads to argumentation and monologue, while communication means discourse and dialogue. For knowledge, communication is merely expression. However, postmodern

communication may eliminate knowledge as content, as long as communication can be its own content for best or for worse.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge is in greater need of communication and expression than communication is of knowledge and content. In this sense, distinctly from the traditional concept of communication close to knowledge and relying on content, the postmodern concept of knowledge stresses its relating side.

Certainly, far from admitting, like the moderns, that the only authentic cognitive discourse is the scientific one, postmodernism does not privilege any cultural discourse, nor does it render them hierarchical. The postmodern worldview relies on a great number of models of order, and each of these generates a set of autonomous practices. The moderns select one order which thus becomes the correct one, and represents reality. Rather, the postmoderns are the interpreters, the translators of the ideas of a tradition, in order to make them understandable in a system of knowledge based on a different tradition. From this perspective, it is important to facilitate the communication between autonomous partners and prevent the distortion of meaning in the process of communication. Knowledge, especially modern, scientific knowledge, has relied on reference, and has asked for impersonal objectivation. Postmodern communication relies on representation, signification, and suggests an interpersonal and intra-personal subjectivity, culturally coded, as it is, according to the formula of alterity, of the other who is another myself, different because it is culturally programmed in a different way.

Philosophy has fully employed its status of theory, as well as methodology and ethics of communication, significance, and interpretation. The majority of the criticism of mass communication has been produced on these stances. Audience growth and the imposing figure of the journalist were not affected however; he may increasingly be considered the figure of our time's wise man. Why? Because classical philosophy was an ideology of rationality which has no influence any longer. It belongs to an erudite culture, an elite culture of contemplation and theoretical speculation. However, our culture has stopped being an erudite culture. It is entirely transferred to communication understood as an intersubjective relation rather than as information transmittance, as it

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<sup>1</sup> The inversion of the relation between knowledge and communication together with the passage from modern universalism to postmodern globalization is parallel and analogous with the inversion of the relation between production and consumption. Modernity was interested in knowledge as it was interested in production; postmodernity is interested in communication as it is interested in consumption.

was in the case of the thematization of knowledge. We leave behind a learned culture just as modernity, by the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-reformation, left behind the religious spirituality of the Middle Ages by a learned culture; and now we instate ourselves in a culture of everyday significance.

On the other hand, on an internal philosophical level, the Wittgensteinian program has been generalized one way or another: philosophy's primary task and unique justification has become the clarification of the meanings of language. Out of a means to regard things, language has become the target of a philosophical regard. Consequently, in order to be efficient, the philosophical criticism of communication must follow the general theoretical shift from the linguistic turn to the pragmatic turn. Today, "pragmatic turn" means to take into consideration the cultural historical background: the categories of knowledge cannot escape history; there are no fixed substances in people's minds which would mirror the reality (Richard Rorty). But the media are not so much communication theory as they are communication practice. Consequently, the media have a pre-emption right: they represent a practice that philosophy is just explaining theoretically. Philosophy cannot confront with the media unless it becomes an effective practice of communication, a mode of the communication process. Today it is the mass media which bring with themselves the promise of a new cultural synthesis: after that of the philosopher and the literate, or the philosopher and the man of science, that of the philosopher and the journalist, the philosopher and the man of communication, the "communicationist".<sup>1</sup>

This figure belongs to the new culture of immanent and daily spirituality, and is the figure of an ostensive ideology which shows presumptive signifiers rather than imposing significances and meanings. A new era is about to start, in which the entertainment masses, made up

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<sup>1</sup> The actor of the contemporary cultural scene is no longer the author (the writer), and even less the reporter or the actor, but a sort of communicational animator and curator. It is the author's evolution to a manager. To a management of communication. In the thematization of communication the manager is the hero because he creates contact, opens the channel of communication between different partners without consuming any resources. He is the man of phatic function, which proves to be the role of all mobile phones, sms-es and e-mails. On a cultural level, he is something of an oral storyteller, animator, and director, who captures and maintains the attention, who produces (pseudo-)events, narrative and imaginative (in the direction of images) alike.

of isolated individuals sitting in front of televisions, are manipulated and seduced by the image. The image is only assertive: it might act in a manipulative manner, but as such, it primarily acts in a seductive manner. There is a need of a new, critical or radical thinking – capable of confronting images, manipulation, and seduction, of a new thinking which fights against the enchantment of our consciousness by the ever more forceful means of our communication. Indeed, we cannot lucidly expect the return of the Christian individual, nor of the Kantian subject. Even if it was possible for the subject to return in various ways, that certain thinkers hurry to announce, this return would be that of the subject of communication and not the subject of knowledge, that the late modern West is still waiting for, and which definitively has succumbed to the criticisms of various theories of communication, leaving behind only the residue of the entertainment masses.<sup>1</sup>

However, the fact that we regard philosophy as a discourse, and that it may appear as a literary genre offers us a promising initial starting point as it implies an analogy with the contemporary destiny of art. This is so because philosophy may find its place in relation to the mass media of contemporary culture if it follows art rather than scientific knowledge. Indeed, art has followed in a way these thematizations: while the first form or art contented itself with the symbolic doubling and eulogy of

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<sup>1</sup> That is, in fact, the imposition of alterity which is one of the metamorphoses of the idea of subject, deriving from the failure of the Christian idea of the individual. The Antiquity has produced a spatial ontological model which viewed things as entities; Christian modernity has produced a temporal ontological model which viewed things as entities in a relation; now the ontological model is that of alterity, of the differences in time and space, of the relation which constitutes the entities. Traditional and classical metaphysics has always tried to demonstrate that things which apparently differ are actually identical, and derive from a unique principle, while contemporary thinking attempts exactly the opposite, to demonstrate that things which seem identical are actually different and appear thus as a consequence of a previous relation. There is thus a significant difference between alterity, which at its first clear appearance in Hegelian dialectics is still connected to the thematization of knowledge and ultimately represents the intersubjectivity of two quasi-Kantian subjects, and communication alterity, in which the subjects are constituted by the relation of communication. Communication alterity is a chiasmus (Merleau-Ponty): that what is one's own and that what is alien occur simultaneously, they are interwoven and original to the same degree. Irreducible alterity, which appears thus as a guarantee of authentic communication, represents the only way out from the solipsism introduced by the thematization of knowledge.

what is, the second form of art, simultaneously with the projection into the Euclidian space and the *trompe-l'œil*, was a form of representation according to certain methods, such as knowledge. The third form of art is inevitably connected to communication; indeed, it is an art of communication: it becomes a modality to present art in communication. The artists only open the space for communication, create the proportion of certain aspects, highlight and apply certain messages. Artists have become communicators, and art has withdrawn into a certain manner of communication. Anyhow, implicitly or explicitly, art has largely become to belong to the practice of communication proper.

Provided it followed the direction of this cultural shift of art, philosophy would have the chance to find one of its somewhat mystical or rather shamanic (because original) meanings. Not in the sense of turning philosophy into a modality of saying that “everything is right”, but in turning western philosophy into an activity instead of a theory. Indeed, as long as philosophy was an ideology of rationality – approximately until Schopenhauer – it was mainly an activity of instating a normative and interpretive code of a traditional textual inspiration. Philosophical thinking now allows you however to identify the codes of your own programming, so it is a critical philosophy of culture understood as the ontology of the social. But western philosophy itself is a cultural code, a programming of the individual according to the ideology of rationality. The meaning of codification is very suggestively formulated by Wittgenstein when saying that the idea “is like a pair of glasses on our nose”. Consequently, the new meaning of philosophy may be formulated by paraphrasing Heidegger: one must free the word from literature and thinking from philosophy. Philosophy is not so much a theory any longer, but art, technique, practice, and in this sense thinking. If reality, truth, and ultimately even wisdom stand with communication more than it was the case for knowledge, then philosophy must become a wise practice of communication.<sup>1</sup>

It is often said that whatever brings the danger, brings the salvation too, that the solution lies in the problem. Thanks precisely to

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<sup>1</sup> A task which, let us admit, is very difficult as long as the practice of communication is defined as follows: “the ordinary man says what he knows, the expert knows what he says”. Many of the media people who are considered significant thinkers are rather experts in communication: they know what to say to entertainment masses. A wise practice of communication would mean to be able to say to the entertainment masses what we know that must be said, with the efficiency of a person who knows what he is talking about.

the instauration of ostensiveness in culture by means of electronic mass media, the philosopher has the chance of becoming once more – albeit only in communication – the existential actor that it used to be once. He used to incorporate into his own existence a certain previous text, that of his own thinking or of tradition. With the modern imposition of the dialectic process, the previous codification has been lost to the advantage of a method offered by knowledge. Now, in a communication in which everything is process, interaction, the philosopher becomes a *commedia dell' arte* actor who cannot control but his own style of communication with himself and others. As compared to communication, philosophy as a form of western culture can only provide an existential communicational style,<sup>1</sup> or, in the case of having an inadequate one, to change the existential communicational style, understanding by this that it changes the way in which we communicate with ourselves and by our existence with others.

Nevertheless, philosophy is confronted by the mass media not only as a discourse of knowledge, as an ideology of rationality – or, to be more explicit, as a religion for the rational elites of the West, as Derrida or Eliade would say – but also directly, in its discursive quality. As I have said, philosophy is a discourse of literary genre, attached to a “natural language” and the letter of the text. However, the mass media, together with computers and new instruments of communication, belong to the sound (the voice), if not also directly to the almighty image. Certainly, it is clear today that this fight between philosophy on the one side and literature or art on the other, conceals a debate as old as that between speech and writing: the debate between the image and the text. Or, on a more general level, according to Vilém Flusser, a struggle which is visible in the engagement of Hebrew prophets and Greek philosophers (especially Plato) against the image, a debate whose ultimate religious aim is against idolatry. Let us recognize that later on in its history philosophy has often won against rigorous scientific knowledge by the qualities of a literary image. But the force of image in contemporary media is incomparable. Rorty could still think philosophically together with literature (and at the same time against it); but how is it possible to think now together with the film and even more with the image of electronic media in general (and at the same time against it)?

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<sup>1</sup> Instead of “know yourself”, “communicate well with yourself”, and instead of “love your neighbour as yourself”, “respect in communication the alterity of your neighbour”.

The ostensive ideology and the new text-image relationship that it brings with itself is, consequently, the great challenge for philosophy. Let us notice that from the perspective of the thematization of communication, the two successive philosophical criticisms, that of knowledge and communication, question in fact the content of communication and the relation of communication, respectively. They can be paralleled with the digital and the analogue: the content of verbal communication is on the digital side, the relation is on the analogue side. Ostensiveness, by its analogous character, functions mainly on the relational level of communication. Indeed, against all contrary pretensions, for us, citizens of a globalized world, today communication is a relationship rather than information transmittance. At the same time, the digital discourse of reality is confronted once more with an analogous one in the cultural history of the West, becoming a global history. It is clearly seen now that the debate between philosophical concepts and literary images was secondary or lateral. The frontal confrontation is between a purely computing thinking and the image, between the digital and the analogue.

The digital – the unmotivated signs, such as language – and the analogue – motivated signs – are two possible sides of human communication which tend to be balanced in the historical motion of communication. At least after the Reformation and Counter-Reformation the digital side of communication imposed itself against the images and the imaginary of the Renaissance, just as the Hebrew prophets or Plato did once against the worship of images. Philosophy has been from its very beginnings the partisan of the digital with multiple consequences (from phonocentrism to logocentrism), which Derrida, following Heidegger and Nietzsche, has emphasized with considerable insistence. Philosophy cannot but stay on the digital side against the analogue, because it is only the digital which may sustain the criticism of seductive and manipulative images. The “here and now” of immanence is opposed to “there and elsewhere” of transcendence, just as the analogue is opposed to the digital. Thinking may transcend the images, even if the soul does not transcend the body and the principle does not transcend the world. This is transcending without transcendence which may limit itself at emphasizing the seduction of images, manipulation by images, or persuasion by images. Philosophy should remain on the digital side as the side of a communication practice which only transcends without invoking any transcendence: negating here and now without proposing any transcendence or transcendental. This kind of philosophy is very

much like Zen Buddhism. However, simple transcendence appears here as a process of communication in which we have to deal with reciprocal transcendences in the functioning of understanding.

In this sense, opposed to the recent triumph of the image, philosophy in the best of its tradition of subverting the proportion of forces should beware of the weak side, the digital. As I have said, art may point out today for philosophy the direction of critical mobility. It uses the image against manipulation and seduction exercised by means of the ostensive ideology. Images may also be used in deconstructing the instaurative hermeneutics of images, as art does today. Displacement, differing, spacing may come from taking sides with the transcendence without transcendence of the double articulation of digital sign systems. But even as a literary genre, the philosophical discourse has taken sides with digital which constructed its images starting from this discourse, as it happens also with the construction of computer images, starting from different software and information using an exclusively digital language. Owing to ostensiveness, the philosopher may use his own life once more in order to communicate. Life's force of analogy is greater than that of any image. Things are only complicated by the fact that, even if he only wished to use silence, he must use a communicative silence. Just as images are installed by means of the digital, the digital side which philosophy wishes to keep must be able to produce a communicative image of life. Even more than the artist who uses his own body, the philosopher may want to turn his own life into a performance, and the events of this life into a happening.

Translated by Emese G. Czintos