

Abstract

Contemporary praxis of mediation, and a phenomenon usually known as »media theory«, brings with itself the issue of epochal break with traditional culture of textuality, and all inherited ways of knowledge transmission. This represents conceptual narrowing of media to machines for electronic and digital processing of verbal, visual and sonic information. McLuhan's hot media of print and papers were replaced, at the beginning, by cold media of TV and movies, and finally, by even cooler medium, the computer, and »the coolest of all cold beasts« – the mobile phone! This paper is directed *against media*. But, for critical discourse on media and its manipulative role, it is necessary to know how to use properly – the very same media! Besides this, it is the intention of this strategy to use it as political weapon/toolkit. Only then, we should say that post-ideological ideology of overwhelming domination of *culture* is deconstructed. »The world after media« (Agentur BILWET) is in fact a political slogan that leads this paper.

Keywords:

media theory, textuality, *multimediatix*, culture as ideology, *disinfotainment*, Agentur BILWET

»The media are empty objects...
In the autumn of the media, we celebrate absence«.¹

The contemporary practice of mediation, as well as what is usually known as the »theory of media«, is very often distinguished from the traditional culture of *textuality* and, by extension, all inherited achievements of knowledge transmission. What is offered, on the other side of literacy, offered is primarily *the picture* (or *image*). This means that we are confronted with a »conceptual narrowing of media to devices for electronic and digital processing of verbal, pictorial and sound informations«.² Replacing McLuhan's »hot media« of papers and print are, above all, the *cool media* of movies and TeleVision, followed by an even cooler form of media – the computer. As for *the coolest of all cool-blooded beasts*, the media of mobile-phonning, I will say a few words in the latter part of the article. Nevertheless, this will be the keynote – the »ecstasy of communication«³ this text is intending to transmit!

What can really be said about media in general? What is my *modus operandi* concerning this overarching and omnipresent theoretical and practical category of contemporary discourses? *Cui bono*? If we turn to *mediology* – a relatively new area of investigation which, following the traces of McLuhan, was founded by Frenchman Régis Debray – we can see that it is all about the »discipline that studies culture in its relationship with technical structures of

¹ All quotations are from ADILKNO (Foundation for the ADvancement of ILlegal KNOWledge) – the English translation of the original Dutch name of the cooperative, BILWET – *The Media Archive*, Autonomedia 1998., electronic version is available at <http://thing.desk.nl/bilwet/adilkno/TheMediaArchive>. This cooperative strives for »the world after media«. See also Croatian edition: Agentur BILWET, *Arhiv medija*, Arkzin, Zagreb 1998.

² See the instructive article: Borislav Mikulić, »Res In Medias, ili Slijepe mrlje medijacije«, *Bastard* (Prilog *Arkzina* za kritičku publicistiku, No 4 (Zagreb, XI/1995).

³ See, especially, Jean Baudrillard, »The Ecstasy of Communication«, in: Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Washington 1983.

transmission«.⁴ If we continue to follow Marshal McLuhan and his famous statement that »medium is the message« – i.e. the *medium is such a phenomenon that, at the same time, represents its own message* – we would not be able to advance much beyond cultural-technical procedure which does not guarantee the kind of its applicability. Namely, *no media is good or bad by itself*.⁵

The democratizing effect of iconic communication, which amounts to an alteration of the paradigm against the phonetic and written word, is, according to many, of epochal significance. The book, as a medium-paradigm for modernity and the Enlightenment period, has been replaced by the *telecommunication network*, the result of which is extended consciousness and the wiping out of all the borderlines that are established by so-called »elite culture«. This is a sign of cultural and societal *postmodernity*. The advocates of media-theory, as well as the advocates of media as positive phenomena, would contend that the media is all about entering in »non-linear and, non-hierarchical« culture. For, *nota bene*, it is after all concerned with – *media culture*.

Transposition through the media, marking the end of the Western scale of values and the end of modernity's subject identity, is at the same time an expression of and catalyst for change in society. It is not just cultural technology that has democratically changed. This is likewise the case with the informational condition of society. The pictorial (the image), non-verbal and experiential consensus – according to advocates of the »positive role of media in society«, primarily thanks to the Internet and *e-mail*, although in fragments – realizes the autonomy of the individual as an Enlightenment claim.

Opponents have raised their voices against this kind of optimism following the short (less than a decade long!) »springtime of media«. They speak of a peculiar »barbarism of media«!⁶ For, in media, the question of their content could not be excluded. Most often, media carry with them (which is of less harm) completely trivial content, without any cognitive value, and (what is much more dangerous) complete *disinfotainment*⁷ – i.e. nothing but *lies* – which is now almost synonymous for communication, namely *manipulation* through so-called »mass-media«. Croatian author Mario Radovan, professor for information science at the University of Rijeka, gives us, in two of his most recent books, a survey of such attitudes towards media. In his reflections on information technology, nature and society – *Waiting for Hermes, The Way of Power* – he offers us all but a shiny image of the phenomenon that Agentur BILWET will call »the autumn of media«.⁸

⁴ See his initial book: Régis Debray, *Cours de médiologie générale*, Gallimard, Paris 1991.

⁵ This is the statement pronounced by Frank Hartmann. His article »Multimediatix« is also published in thematic unit of *Bastard* (Prilog *Arkhina* za kritičku publicistiku, No 4 (Zagreb, XI/1995).

⁶ See the above mentioned *The Media Archive*, and especially the essay »Media or Barbarism«. »There is increasing talk about `media or barbarism` ... If it's a matter of choice, we must examine the pros and cons of each option; we must make an assessment of the merits of media barbarism and the use of media by barbarians - or of barbarians by the media - in order to arrive at a sound and balanced judgment «. – Unit 11.

⁷ »Disinfotainment« is a term that is often used by Croatian philosopher Mario Radovan. See his book: *Waiting for Hermes. Reflections on Information technology and Society*, his own edition, Rijeka 2007.

»Informing and entertainment have joined into infotainment and mutated into *disinfotainment*; in the age of disinfotainment, to be well informed normally means to be correctly misinformed« (p. 53).

⁸ See: Mario Radovan, *The Way of Power. Reflections on technology, nature and society*, Rijeka 2008. Recently, there appeared a third book in the series: Mario Radovan, *In the Shadow of Time. Reflections on ephemerality, knowledge and imagination*, Rijeka 2009 (all in his private editions). These three books make up a certain kind of trilogy of media-society despair!

What is the role of media in shaping public discourse and in supporting political decision-making? What is the influence of information technology in this shaping? The answer to these questions goes hand-in-hand with a total discreditation of »contemporary media civilisation«. For, as Radovan states, that »the world has enough material means to eliminate poverty, but... there is no sufficient political will to do this«.⁹

The media – and in this context we usually think on (mass)media of an informational-communicational nature – manipulate people when holders of power want to, and show people the truth when it becomes irrelevant and worthless. The best example of this is »noisy campaign«, which is evident in the notorious case of the occupation of Iraq. This destructive and harmful enterprise had to be undertaken »because Iraq possessed weapon of mass destruction, sometimes chemical and sometimes nuclear, the same; when it turned out that this was not true, the destruction of Iraq was justified with claims that the Iraqi regime had links to terrorism, which was later also dismissed as ungrounded«.¹⁰ In the era of media, the art of manipulating people has become the supreme and most profitable art. The media are completely pushed aside by politics here, and politics is supposed to be, at least traditionally, care for the well-being of the community.

We have already seen that supporters of the positive valuing of media, as well as representatives of so-called »media theory«, emphasize the »democratization of public opinion« through media. They maintain that, through different types of access to information, we can also treat differently the hierarchical, i.e. linear transmission, of knowledge. For, as Frank Hartmann says, the text, in the time of its electronic disposition, »has lost its `sacred aura` of intellectuality and become one of the many other principles of cultural organization«.¹¹ So, again, we are talking about *culture*, at the cost of *politics!* – *versus* political exclusion, of course, from the position of power. Thus the *Weltgeist*/World Spirit is associated with the medium of book only through the prismatic shining of the digital processor.

Textuality – which is still a strong medium of the solidly structured subject – experiences its transformation. For the text written here is mediated by the materiality of digital inheritance. It is written, of course, through the use of a computer. Hartmann would say, in his apology of the so-called »provenience«, that even here we are talking less about the mediality of content, and much more about the change of the way we see things. In his ultimate optimism, he would dare to claim that this change concerning textuality brings with itself the image of an immoderate imagination of genius being evaporated, and this so-called »genius« is unavoidably pulling back before »relaxed creativity«.¹² But, from the middle 1990-ies – when we have marked Hartmann`s *multimediatrix* – things have dramatically changed. The optimism of imagination is progressively pulling back before the *media Real*.

Let us once again give the word to Radovan. He says that media help those who manipulate much more than to those who want to speak in terms of relevant facts. Here Radovan would be very close to BILWET, in his claim about the unavoidable »barbarism« which soaks the

⁹ M. Radovan, *The Way of Power*, p. 261.

¹⁰ M. Radovan, *Waiting for Hermes*, p. 54.

¹¹ See Frank Hartmann, »Multimediatrix«, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2. But after the appearance of such an article, things have changed dramatically. We need, more than ever, to regain the significance of written texts, articles, books... Being digital, in my opinion, does not mean that we are more creative. On contrary! To become acquainted with the traditional medium of books, signifies the opportunity to put things in the framework of a possible »revolution« against overarching globalization.

media. Furthermore, this kind of deconstructing of the *freedom & democracy*-ideology also makes visible the deciding influence of *noise* on perception of media messages. Namely, noise also occupies the so-called »informative programmes«. I am afraid that the day is not too far away when we are going to watch central news-programmes along with over-joyed and noisy mobile-phones commercials!

How is all this already present in one of the commercials for a tele-communication company, where the mass of people gathered in London sing *karaoke* together? In the commercial, everybody sings in a square; they are happy and call their friends to tell them how superbly they enjoy themselves. The motto which accompanies the commercial is »Life`s for Sharing«, and this somehow super-imposes the content of that sharing, of participating in this over-enjoyment. This is certainly not sharing the experience of being exploited, or some kind of common knowledge of antagonisms, disharmony in the system`s functioning, but just of »happiness« because the system is functioning smoothly. Therefore, this is the feeling of authentic enjoyment, whose authenticity lies in a self-indulgent, self-satisfied system.¹³

Enough said about how *medium is the message* ideology functions, which is so typical of contemporary media situation. On the other hand, protest manifestations, like those against WTO-meetings, against gathering world leaders in the face of ever increasing poverty on the planet, and *last but not least* »humanitarian Bono-concerts«, and preaching talks with these leaders – is nothing but *media spectacle*.¹⁴ Radovan again:

»The media do not love such reports (i.e. - reports on unpleasant reality, op. a.) also because they don't have much good to say about the media themselves and about their masters. The media do speak about poverty in general as well as about the suffering of some specific people; but their discourse is normally shallow and biased. The media do not deal with the issue of the structure of power (at the local and global level), nor with the structural cuses of misery and suffering...«¹⁵

Why? Because that is not profitable for them, and that would also sound as an accusation of their masters. The media create a parallel world of pseudo-events and cover up the real issues that really matter in the real world for real people.¹⁶ According to Radovan, media are part of corporate business, and they sell images that propagate business-civilization, its values and goals.

What, then, is the contrary to the above, the strength and power of so-called »independent media«? Second to none, or eventually globally marginal! The autonomous »media zones« are nothing but drops in the sea of globalized capital of a predetermined new world order.¹⁷ The informativity and communication of people: what kind is it, in the so-called »informational-communicative paradise«? The answer to that difficult question?! I leave it to

¹³ I am here referring to a recent article. See: Šefik Tatlić, »Kultura Super Light«, www.kutturpunkt.hr, 24 June 2009. »The social conflict in culture, if such a conflict exists in the first place, is rather based on aesthetic singularities of some cultural phenomena, and not on production relationships, within where it was born.«

¹⁴ We must here remember: Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, Buchet-Castel, Paris 1968. Thesis 4: »The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images«.

¹⁵ M. Radovan, *The Way of Power*, p. 269.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ One of the many who speak on »autonomous media zones« is John Zerzan. A collection of his most fundamental texts on the roots of civilization, *Origins* (2010), is currently being published by Black and Green Press and FC Press.

the intuition of media consumers! Anyway, the consumers of mobile phones enjoy the benefits of sms-communication, fearing that they would be left alone with themselves with the question of *the meaning* of this telephone communication.¹⁸ The hypertrophy of communication is the sign of nothing but fear of *horror vacui*. Confrontation with oneself is the most horrific nightmare of the »communicational-informational paradise«! For in the so-called »free world of media« socially worthy content does not exist. That would be the pollution of the sanitary »cleanliness« of media space. For, indeed, people do not need information. They need »formations«. This is the result of the influence of entertainment, infotainment, on consciousness. Radovan would call it »disinfotainment«. The speed and shallowness is what we really need.

Borislav Mikulić, in his article »Res in Medias, or Blind Spots of Mediation«, claims that the decisive revolutionary effect of new processes and machines for mediation consists in the optimalization of the mediation-speed of content, information, i.e. in the minimalisation of distance between form and content, as well as the elimination of older, much slower media.¹⁹ The media, in this interpretation, intend a holistic image of the world. They have to become *mythical*. (This is where postmodernity lies!). In line with McLuhan, media must also cancel its inner differentiation between form and content, and have to go back to the direct identity of media and message. What does this mean for »real content«? Real content, therefore, if not excluded, should be jumped over through the medium of picture. Here we can find the role of »noise in media culture«. Of a *sound in the channel*, which is the structural characteristics of »media culture«. Paraphrasing Marx, the media have become opium for the masses. We are witnessing the erosion of content, through mediation, speed and noise. What is most absurd, this noise and manipulation is called *communication*!²⁰ The truth is that media discourse does not *inform* people at all. It *forms* them! This media discourse is deafening – and stupifying! – noise which spreads ignorance, not to mention the spreading of knowledge in this context.

Tell me more, tell me more...

The fast and more efficient devices of communication do not bring with them the betterment of public discourse, political activity or social cohesion. The orgasmic joy of *karaoke* and mobile phones is the best example of the debilitating »ecstasy of communication« (Baudrillard). What is it, really, all about? It is about *society's unconscious* which should be kept subdued through mass ecstasy.

Tell me more, tell me more...

For everything that has any sense, meaning and content is nothing but *emotional pornography*. This »emotional pornography« hides behind the interests of the *informational* mobile phone industry. There is nothing but naked *formation*. Masses gathered at a London square is just this *formation*. It shouts and cries like at the Nürnberg-meeting in a movie titled *Die Triumph des Wiilens*.²¹

¹⁸ »That which obstructs communication is the *communication* itself; the people are separated by just that which supposes to connect them«. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, University of Minnesota Press, 2007., p. 27.

¹⁹ See his above mentioned text: Borislav Mikulić, »Res In Medias, ili Slijepe mrlje medijacije«, *Bastard* (Prilog *Arkzina* za kritičku publicistiku, No 4 (Zagreb, XI/1995).

²⁰ Is there any connection with this and that category Habermas called »communicative rationality«? See his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1981.

²¹ I am here refering to the classic movie by Leni Riefenstahl from 1934!

Tell me more, tell me more...
Not to inform, but to *form*.
Tell me more, tell me more...
Oh, what a wonderful feeling this is... Oh, what a joy!

We have entered the (SF)-era (sphere) of simulated mini-realities and parallel worlds, where palpable experience for real bodily and sensual existence has evaporated (BILWET). This is why my paper is directed strictly *against media*. Of course, this *against* should be taken *cum grano salis*. For to speak critically about media should be possible at all, and to speak critically about their manipulative role in today's world, we need, first of all, to use properly – the same media! Besides that, it is our intention that this proper use of media should be taken as a political toolkit or weaponry. Not until then will we be able to say that the »post-ideologic ideology« of the overwhelming domination of culture as such has begun to deconstruct itself. Not until then can we make visible »culture as new ideology«. ²² The culture (that cultural) has become keynote, or maybe just the reversed side of the neoliberal strategy of expelling politics or the *Political* into exile. At the same time, this culture has inaugurated *triviality* as a form of freedom (maybe better, *liberty*), but just as a freedom to participate in spectacle, i.e. freedom to integrate itself into the world market. We have a task to give back meaning to »public space« and the notion of the »political«, following the traces of Hannah Arendt's thinking. ²³

I reckon this would be the only possible way to keep our existence meaningful. »The world after media« is essentially a political motto, and that is in the intention of this paper! We should, therefore, go once again to BILWET:

»The media are empty objects. Located beyond the three-dimensional, they are the mirror image of God... Already, there are signs of a movement that, out of pure enthusiasm for an image-free society, will reintroduce socialism as a ban on images to be included in the declaration of universal human rights based on Judeo-Islamic Scripture.« ²⁴

The world is no longer as it used to be. In America, the capital of postmodern civilization, industrial capitalism has been replaced by the informational economy, whose main characteristics are reducing the working power of the body, which, through computers, manipulates with symbols that represent the procedure of production. The leading technology, besides the already long-standing domination of the TV screen, is the *virtual reality of cyberspace*. To add more, we have huge billboards that are getting bigger and bigger, almost of gigantic proportions, which occupy the attention of the postmodern consumer in a highly globalized welfare society's market. With cultural diversion in the empire of signs, probably, the politics of *culture jamming* takes on for itself the job to be engaged *against*. ²⁵

The expression *jamming* stems from radio-amateur slang, where it means illegal practice of deranging radio-transmissions and the the conversations of radio-amateurs, by imitating the

²² This is the sub-title of a book by Croatian philosopher and media theoretician, Žarko Paić. See: Žarko Paić, *Politika identiteta. Kultura kao nova ideologija*, Antibarbarus, Zagreb 2005. In the age of globalization, culture takes on the function of ideology. On the other hand, globalization is the universal ideology of a new world order. The latter is a realized culture of postmodernity as consumerist culture, the culture of life-styles.

²³ See especially her *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Penguin Books/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York 1977.

²⁴ See BILWET, »The World after Media«, in: *The Media Archive*, Autonomedia 1998.

²⁵ A description of *culture jamming* is given in the thematic unit of the magazine/journal *Libra Libera* (Zagreb 09/2001), where, from different perspectives, we can see the writings on *culture jamming* »cognitive mapping«.

sound of farts, by cursing, and by the same, mimic empty excesses. But *culture jamming*, beyond the above mentioned posted empty forms, is directed against the increasingly intrusive instrumentalization of technoculture. This technoculture's way of functioning consists in producing artificial consensus by the manipulation of symbols. *Culture jammers* are partially artistic terrorists, but, on the other hand, they are critics coming from common people; they are cultural diversants.

Finally, as was lucidly stated by Mark Derry, in his comprehensive description of *culture jamming*, »culture jammers are Groucho Marxists, ever mindful of the fun to be had in the joyful demolition of oppressive ideologies«. ²⁶ *Culture jamming* in itself consists of the whole series of techniques, methodologies and strategies connected with cultural and societal subversion. ²⁷ Besides *hackers* and *slashers*, probably the most vital segment of *culture jamming* is *adbustering*, ²⁸ i.e. »chasing away« commercials, its re-shaping and re-contextualization, so that they could be used for completely new and different messages, totally different from the ones initially imagined.

The success of *culture jamming* is most notably seen in the parallel success of Canadian magazine *Adbusters*, and perhaps in a planetary bestseller *No Logo*, by the Canadian star of the anti-corporate revolution, Naomi Klein. ²⁹ Although young Croatian theoretician Srećko Horvat would say that famous subversive groups – like *Adbusters* and *Billboard Liberation Front*, by their interventions in the medium of advertising – are doing nothing but strengthening advertising, I claim that *culture jamming* represents a significant subversive potentiality for media criticism, and that just from media literacy, in the field of billboard advertising.

²⁶ This description comes from: Mark Dery, *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*, Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, New York 1993.

²⁷ »An elastic category, culture jamming accommodates a multitude of subcultural practices. Outlaw computer hacking with the intent of exposing institutional or corporate wrongdoing is one example; 'slashing', or textual poaching, is another. (The term "slashing" derives from the pornographic "K/S" - short for 'Kirk/Spock' - stories written by female *Star Trek* fans and published in underground fanzines. Spun from the perceived homoerotic subtext in *Star Trek* narratives, K/S, or 'slash', tales are often animated by feminist impulses. I have appropriated the term for general use, applying it to any form of jamming in which tales told for mass consumption are perversely reworked.) Transmission jamming; pirate TV and radio broadcasting; and camcorder counter-surveillance (in which low-cost consumer technologies are used by DIY muckrakers to document police brutality or governmental corruption) are potential modus operandi for the culture jammer. So, too, is media activism such as the cheery immolation of a mound of television sets in front of CBS's Manhattan offices - part of a protest against media bias staged by FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting) during the Gulf War - and 'media-wrenching' such as ACT UP's disruption of *The MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour* in protest of infrequent AIDS coverage. A somewhat more conventional strain of culture jamming is mediawatch projects such as Paper Tiger Television, an independent production collective that produces segments critiquing the information industry; Deep Dish TV, a grassroots satellite network that distributes free-thinking programming to public access cable channels nationwide; and Not Channel Zero, a collective of young African-American 'camcorder activists' whose motto is 'The Revolution, Televised'. And then there is academy hacking - cultural studies, conducted outside university walls, by insurgent intellectuals.« See: Mark Dery, *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*, p. 13.

²⁸ The most known group of this kind is *Adbusters*. They were founded by Kalle and Bill Schmalz, as a political and activist's anti-capitalist magazine directed against consumerism. Besides other activities, they made big billboards that subvert original messages. As Croatian philosopher Srećko Horvat says: »They are primarily directed towards media culture, TV-commercials, campaigns like 'blackspot shoes', but their jumbo-panels are not deconstruction of already existing commercials but their own commercials, indeed directed against capitalism.« See: Srećko Horvat, *Znakovi postmodernog grada* (The Signs of Postmodern City), Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb 2007.

²⁹ Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, Harper-Collins, London 2001.

The next significant movement of resistance to media is linked to the potential of the »most liberal medium«, that is – the *computer*. *A Hacker Manifesto*, published in Harvard, and on *peer-to-peer* networks, it is already meant to be the most important revolutionary edition since Marx-Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* and Guy Debord's *The Society of Spectacle*.³⁰ It is precisely in this sequence of books that it finds its natural surroundings and environment. Namely, both predecessors of *A Hacker Manifesto* are edited in a group of theses with numbers. In Marx, it is not literally visible, but in Debord this is made completely explicit!

Wark's book begins with a paraphrase from Marx: »A double spooks the world, the double of abstraction [001]«, and somewhere near the end we can find Debord's version also: »The overcomplexity of life in the most advanced areas of the world manifests itself as a huge accumulation of vectors [336]«. Thus vector is, of course, that which coincides with Debord's notion of 'spectacle'! *A Hacker Manifesto* is by no means a book on pure and practical »hacking«, i.e. on methods and techniques of computer guerilla, that derails the world of strict control and monitoring over computer-produced information.

Wark's work, more precisely 'the text' is the general theory of society for the new millennium... the new theoretic bomb with mean intentions... with revolutionary intentions! At the beginning the *nothing*, i.e. *abstraction*, towards the end wants to become *All*, i.e. *the world*.

What are the *hackers* doing? They make *abstractions*. Abstractions are that which have to be explained. Whether material or immaterial, by means of those abstractions the hackers express the virtuality of nature. The productive potentiality of the earth is made abstract through the medium of property, i.e. capital. *Information* is, therefore, the abstraction of resources from capital, formerly abstracted from the earth. The latter is abstracted again in the form of »intellectual property«. This term should manifest itself as decisive, both for the hacker's conception of world, as well as for every further reconceptualization of *class society*. Here the ruling class is – *the vectoral class*. The vectorials are for McKenzie Wark – new capitalists, the exploiters of free information.

Through the vectoral class, the newborn ruling class of our age, the hackers were being deappropriated, as individuals, as well as the class. McKenzie Wark declares a revolutionary shout: *The hackers as historical followers of farmers and workers, that are the producers of world, have to unite with them now*.³¹ What the producing classes – farmers, workers and hackers – have in common is an interest in freeing production from its subordination to ruling classes who turn production into the production of new necessities, who wrest slavery from surplus. The elements of a free productivity exist already in an atomised form, in the productive classes.

Well, who are the hackers? They are producers. At the beginning *the providers* for informational society to function, they have become the power of resistance. The hackers are freeing productive and investigational resources from »the myth of poverty«. In the society of *abstraction*, free information – through hackers – serves people. The key thesis of *A Hacker Manifesto* is as follows: »The information wants to be free, but is everywhere in chains [126]«. ³² As many contemporary theoreticians would claim today – and which I reckon to be a decisive factor in evaluating of our so-called »society of communication«! – we are not in need of communication. We have it in too enormous a quantity. (Let us just see the new,

³⁰ McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 2004.

³¹ The slightly modified version of this shout is also present in paragraph [23].

³² McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* [126], there are no numbered pages in the edition!

overnumbered, ever increasing race of a population addicted to mobile phones and text communication and messages!)

We need creation and resistance to contemporaneity! Information is, at the same time, just *that resistance*, and that which it resists is – in its own dead form! – i.e. *Communication*. In the overrated and overwhelming desire for information, we can find the visible lack of sense, meaning, and a goal in life. That is already an ontological question that escapes from contemporaneity and cannot be answered in its framework. Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*³³ certainly is not the mobile phone community and the community of e-mail communication, which is indulged in self-purpose, but has to be »something completely different«.³⁴

McKenzie Wark advocates so-called »third politics«. It stands between fundamentalistic traditionalism and vectoralism. It is a kind of »politics without state«, which escapes³⁵ representation. »The politics can become expressive only when we are talking on politics of freeing the virtuality of information [255]«. That politics does not intend to overthrow the state-regime. It intends to spread the seeds of alternative practices in everyday living. *A Hacker Manifesto*, therefore, becomes a theoretic toolkit, an *organon* of struggle – and not just a hacker's struggle! – against vectoralist – but also media character – of a monopoly to information.

The hackers also use vectoral communication. But their use of this kind of communication is connected with breaking down the laws of the ruling paradigm. The hackers use the vector of communication for spreading culture and knowledge throughout the world. The domination of information as property has replaced the domination of the proprietor's capital – and this is the main characteristic of a world at the break of millenia. The *free* productivity of information means a revolutionary break at the historical level of consciousness.

* * *

After the resistance against market-oriented and computer media repression, we are now coming to eminently media-resistance and explicit advocacy for »the world after the media«. ³⁶ Agentur BILWET, which (shortened from Dutch) means: *Foundation for the Advancement of Illegal Knowledge*, is a theory-cooperative, founded in Amsterdam at the end of 1980-ies of the last century. Its main goal is to thematize contemporary media and invent a new theoretical language or idiom which would suit the needs of the (postmodern!) environment, that intends to cultivate new, open possibilities for global communication.

The media are material from which BILWET gains its theoretical impulses and strenght. They are a certain kind of environment, the area which is like space that comprehends all possible cultures. All that is meant and said in this theoretical discourse is deeply imbued by media practice. This, therefore, is not a theory which comes from without, or *von oben*, but is deduced from an unbreakable connection their authors have had in direct participation in media-society and media-culture. Concerning this, BILWET have had to know media from

³³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*: »That which obstructs communication is the *communication* itself; the people are separated by just that which supposse to connect them«.

³⁴ Remember here Monty Python Flying Circus' motto!

³⁵ McKenzie Wark, *ibid.* [273].

³⁶ This is the title from the above mentioned book *The Media Archive*. This chapter advocates an »image-free society«.

the inside, they had to intrude into their way of functioning... they listen to how the media breathe!

One of the members of this cooperative, Geert Lovink, would say that media theory, on which he has worked from the middle of 1980-ies, has its roots in studying philosophy and studying literature, and not, as it might be expected, in statistics and semiology.³⁷ Wanting to penetrate the media, the authors try to think from a point of view which should be *beyond media*. This point of view would carry something from the radicalism of resistance to the overwhelming and absolute predomination of media, to which the average consumer in contemporaneity is so »ruthlessly« exposed.

To live in a complex empire of media is not easy. It needs special ways of forming relationships and inter-relations (interactions) which would not only try to negate media – as was the case in an old paradigm of Marxist provenience, *the paradigm of alienation*, deduced from the heritage of the Frankfurt Critical School of Adorno and Marcuse – but which, from the way media are functioning, try to explain this media universum.

The motto is: *to become media literate*. And that can be done not only by reading McLuhan, Derrida or Nietzsche, but by *practicing media*. This practice is included in the intensive participation of creating one own`s media – that is where BILWET is probably the most indicative example. *Media theory itself becomes a medium*. And this is the media wherein it would, in the best possible way, manifest its attitude towards media, not putting itself as some kind of meta-instance, but in a form inherently structured as the media themselves. Agentur BILWET never takes itself too seriously and stringently, but that does not mean that it is theoretically unaware. On contrary! Just this way of stressing its connection with philosophy and literature is very relevant as a sign of belonging to the humanistic heritage, and not to the pattern of the superior »exactness of natural sciences«.³⁸

The product of the overarching project presented by BILWET is – we have to accept the fact that media does not interfere anymore with everyday events. In a context of McLuhan`s classic proverb »Medium is a message«, the media are realizing a parallel reality of almost opiotic consequences. This also explains the inclination, shown by BILWET, to connect the phenomenon of media with their own experiments with drugs, as well as the most often thematization of drugs as peculiar to one own`s medium of transformation of consciousness and freeing the latter from its overloading with everyday existential worries in so-called »real reality«.

The media, in this context, try to be reflected as the creation of a specific labyrinth of networks and contacts under contemporary ways of communicating. Instead of pushing the events towards some final result, work has to be done on a long lasting strategy of dissemination; and that is what happens with spreading of *e-mail communication* on a network and its mediated widespread information. This is, as is shown nowadays, of essential importance for society.

³⁷ This could be concluded by reading his interview he gave – in the mid 1990-ies – to an alternative magazine in Croatia, *Arkzin*. The title to the interview is »To become media literate«. *Fractal*, ps. 5-7. »The media are material, and that is a general idea. They are not channels which transmit the message from A to B, but material that you can play with. This idea of play as an essential aspect of media we have alrerady had in the 1970-ies, when we started a series of media experiments... The media theory on which I work from the mid 1980-ies does not deal with statistics or semiology, but has its roots in philosophy and literature studies. Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

BILWET is trying to overcome the journalists' approach to media. They do not write on media, but are trying to penetrate inside media, and at the same time passing through that space of data, trying to find a position that would be »beyond media«. This is here where BILWET wants to see if there is even today possible, the position which is radically against. They are trying to found a strong anti-media movement, and at the same time to be aware that we all are part of this media empire.³⁹ In this process of becoming, we can also expect changes in a system of values. Internationality, networks, transgressivity... these are the values that stand at the top of a hierarchic list for the contemporary person, with media awareness and consciousness. (Unfortunately, here in Croatia, we are still obsessed with national border and language, and with a secularized faith in the mission of a nation-state.)

In a text entitled »The world after media«,⁴⁰ which is almost programmatic for BILWET's theory, we see that we have to hope for the self-destruction of media and the coming of a »postmedia society«. What it should be like we cannot predict at the moment with certainty, but it will surely offer some kind of return of a *human factor* included in the pure technological matrix. This *wetware* will give us meaning in a technologically predetermined media epoch.⁴¹

»Just as the death of God rendered religion a private affair, so the image will become a matter of personal experience (...) The implosion of reality in the media has been adequately recorded and proclaimed. The ban on images will cause a chain reaction: the descent of the media into reality (...) Socialism, unwarranted by historical-materialist laws, will establish itself in the emptiness of the postmedial era. An object-orientated communism will reign in an image-free society.«⁴²

A final thought. Though, on the surface, the theory of media represented by BILWET does not have any direct points of connection with a strictly philosophical discourse, its consequences are deeply *philosophical*, both for an individual and for societal communities at the turn of the millenia.

Theory of media, announced by a peculiar media-guru in an embodiment of Marshall McLuhan, in BILWET is supplied with totally defined contours and becomes one of the most intriguing theoretical, but also practical, discourses in the epoch in which we live. It is philosophical so long as it intends to comprehend the whole position the media inflicted subject-object has in a contemporary, postmodern civilization. This subject-object is completely imbued with this kind of media theory. After the demise of great emancipatory and utopian projects that we inherited from modern Western rationalistic philosophy, we have entered the (SF)-sphere of simulational mini-realities and the era of simulacra and parallel worlds, where we could lose our palpable sense for real bodily and sensuous existence.⁴³

³⁹ »The media are certain environment in which you participate, and the media environment is vast, like a global space, and comprises all possible cultures, not just a reality you are currently in«. Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰ I can here refer to the Croatian edition published by Arkzin in Zagreb 1999, pp. 248-252.

⁴¹ The most representative text for this matter is »Wetware«, in Croatian you can find it on pp. 141-150.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 251-252.

⁴³ Probably, this was best explained in an essay titled »Remember Baudrillard«. BILWET – *The Media Archive*, Autonomedia 1998: »In 1972, Jean Baudrillard opens his 'Requiem for the Media' with the observation, 'There is no media theory'. He continues: If we are to understand media, we must abandon the idea that media establish communication. There is no question of an exchange between transmitter and receiver; there are only messages. If the media are to be understood, they will have to be destroyed first«.

Therefore, and it may come as some kind of conclusion to this text, we have to show some resistance to all manipulative aspects of media on a global scale, where, after all, media have established themselves... resistance against the predetermining influence of media in the contemporary world. I am convinced that »resistance«, through the subversive activities mentioned above, could serve as some necessity in relationships with the media (un)culture which surrounds us.

At the end, once again, let us give a word to BILWET: »The media are empty objects... In the autumn of the media, we celebrate absence.« And... »If media is the answer, the question must be fucking stupid!«⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ The last quotation comes from especially written article for Croatian edition: »S Balkan platou u Fukuyamin jarak« (*With Balcans Plate to Fukuyama`s Ditch*), Arkzin, Zagreb 1998., p. 269.