

*ALIENATED MASSES, ALIENATED PRACTICE?*

*Inherent Ethics of Contemporary Media Theories*

*1. AVANT-GARDE VS. DYSTOPIA*

If we try to excerpt two paradigmatic reactions to the astounding development of the mass media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century amongst many, we would most certainly excerpt the avant-garde artistic movements and the so-called dystopias. In their philosophical core, contemporary theories of media are constituted in accordance with one of those two models. The exemplarity is not solely related to the inner complexity, or to the profound diagnostic power to introspect on the new media, but to establish the fact that they represent two opposite sides. The focus on the antagonism is in this case recommended for its interpretation provides the possibility of shading light on other argument, whose thesis fill the void of critic between them. That means that the starting assumptions of radicalized means of the theory of media are most commonly based on the foundations of either avant-garde or dystopia, but can also note the more moderate arguments which position themselves between the two models of foundation, combining their critical stands.

To summarize, the emergence of the new media is identified by the avant-garde with the possibilities of liberating the man and achieving true individuality, while dystopia qualifies that as the suffocation of the individuality, as ballast that levels out and averages a man, as a threat to human freedom. The media technology is for the avant-garde the embodiment of the enriched self and expanded capacities of selfhood, while for dystopia, the media technology is directed against selfhood,

since its effects start and end with the production of alienation, with the distortion of selfhood which is directed against the basic attributes of humanity.

On the contrary, for the avant-garde, the breach of media background awareness of the artistic expression has marked the definite parting with the age of alienated artistic practice. According to their most profound beliefs, staggering in the chains of figurative and narratives expressions, art has always served a different purpose, religion, pedagogy, politics, and ideology. From there, the turn towards the demands and logic of the self-serving media caught the marks of emergence from the state of alienation to the state of true achievement, to the emancipation of the artists and art. Considering that the avant-garde sees the calling of the artist as unrelated to the professional role we perform parallel with all other social roles, it aims to the entire human existence, that is, to its internal cultural dynamics, deepening the media self-consciousness which will give a warm welcome to the arrival of the new media.

Opposite to that, for dystopia, the new media is the true creator of alienation. The depth of the media influence is analogue to the level of annulment of the individual, with which the gap between the person and its surrounding is deepened. For dystopia, the triumph of the media can result only with the disaster of the persona, in the form of a citizen of an alienated world in which the recognizable traces of humanity can no longer be identified. After the expectations of the change of the social system have been failed and after the optimistic voices for extenuation of the malignant media effects were expected from the humanity of the emerging socialism/communism<sup>1</sup>, dystopia has constituted itself as the early warning mechanism.

Baring in mind that unlike the renaissance utopian projects, dystopia, left without the rhetoric of a soteric alternative or possible reconciliation, a lucky way out, has been left with only the possibility to continuously warn on the fatal effect of

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<sup>1</sup> For Clement Greenberg, expectations from socialism were not directly related to the fundamental transformation of culture, but “for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now”. The failure of society in the sense of the breakdown of capitalism has an aftermath in the breakdown of culture, that is, it’s vital resources which were solely related to the avant-garde, in the opinion of this art critic. Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, u: *Art und Culture*, London 1973, p. 21.

the coupling of media and politics. The age of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mass media has become to the dystopia the age of resignation, since the only instance in which control of media can be recognized is in the lap of political power and that power has shown that it is not even considering lessening and optimizing the effect of media, but only redirecting it and using it to its own purposes. That is how the image of an antenna or a transceiver for dystopia, became the symbol of repression directed against the freedom of an individual. Vis-à-vis, the avant-garde by default did not hide its proneness towards the revolutionary coloured political power whose pamphlets propagated the breakdown of the bourgeois culture and announced the new age, so the image in them awakened the associations to the rise of technology<sup>2</sup>, speed and life intensity.

Speaking of dystopia, we cannot forget that its basic ideas are a part of text of the first theoreticians of new media. When Captain Beatty in Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* speaks of the causes which lead to the break of the old world, he is no longer thinking on the great historical events. On the contrary, the true historical subjects are given new contexts. *Ancien régime* was not brought down by the French Revolution but by the invention of photography. What's new in his way of reasoning is that the key turns in human history should not be observed through the looking glass of conventional historical sciences, nor the philosophical history.

Contrary to the popular belief, the real changes in society are not to be observed as consequences of epochal breakdowns such as revolutions, wars or political turnovers. The true change starts with the introduction of a new media, and the socio-political transformations can be reflected upon only if we are aware of the consequences of the actual articulations of political ideas on the horizon of the existing media. In general, there is no understanding of social turmoil without the understanding of media. From the title *Understanding Media* has a more universal meaning and surpasses expectations of a single McLuhan's book, because it represents the literary form of dystopia in its attempt to display the configuration of modern society.

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<sup>2</sup> "Most of the artists of the avant-garde were at the end ready for an active cooperation with the power and to the role of its faithful propagandists." Boris Groys, *Erfindung Russland's*, München/Wien 1995, p. 188.

## 2. *DYSTOPIA: AGAINST AUTONOMOUS THEORY OF MEDIA*

Following the patterns of dystopia, the breakdown of the old world is a consequence of the removal of old media of social communication and their replacement with new ones. That is not a spontaneous social process, nor the irrefutable background of establishing new technologies. On the contrary, dystopia insists that what we are dealing with is the conscious dominance of the new and brutal censorship of the old media. That points out a specific, *invisible media war of our age*, between literary and audiovisual, with a tendency for a book, and along with it the autonomy of individual to be put aside by television. Since the alienation effect of the new media is put in front, dystopia is left without the illusion that permanent alienation can result with absolute freedom, so it puts all hopes into the preservation of the literary age. In its core form, the fundamental request of dystopia could be reduced to the battle for social relevance of the book, since it increases individuality, freedom of self-reflection and with that the dignity of the individual and the entire community.

*The hero of dystopia is not the envoy of the new media, but a compassionate literate.* His beliefs are based on discontent created by the forms of mass ways of thinking and living, tabloid world in which spirituality is reduced to the effect of a gag and the production of the expected, but non-reflected sense of present satisfaction. He sees himself as a heretic and exile which represents a foreign tissue in the public saturated with audiovisual contents. Claiming that the base effect of the new media is in *levelling, the process in which different individuals become equal, think, feel and speak alike* – Bradbury still does not reveal new insights, but combines the thesis of Ortega y Gasset with Kracauer critique of the world offered by the new media: radio, movies and photography in the context of the rise of illustrated magazines. Instead of old perplexity and lamination, superficiality and frivolity appear. Maximum condensation and reduction of texts in illustrated magazines is made up with the mosaic structure. Critical intermediance, as a foundation of a serious approach to the problems of the community, has been replaced with the naked image of the current conditions, however, not from the

perspective of the objective and all-round positivism, but from a carefully chosen perspective, in which only that that the holders of the power wish to be seen, remains visible: “The intent of an illustrated magazine is the complete transfer of the world available to a camera”.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of that world is decided by, of course, the point of view, that is, the perspective from which it is photographed.

Paradoxally, the new media have made our senses more active in the reception of what they are trying to present to us, but the result of that was not a more profound attachment to the content of the happening. On the contrary, when the monotonous letters were replaced with mobile and immobile images and tones, our image of the world became richer in sensations, but poorer in the context of the real contact with social phenomena: “With the astounding development of technology, man has been hit by a completely new feeling of poverty”.<sup>4</sup> The better we are “media informed” the greater becomes the gap that divides us from reality.

Presenting the media of his time through the prism of confrontation of the historical and present, intermediation and directness, Kracauer has pointed out the emerging breakthrough of the single-use and gratuitous contents of the human existence. Non-critical consummation of media for him represents the willing suspension of one’s humanity and spirituality. When Bradbury says that magazines “have become fine baby mush”<sup>5</sup>, he is just literary presents what Kracauer and his colleagues were warning about during the 20s. Media brings the apotheosis of the moment, whose equivalents are displayed in the absent-mindedness as a consequence of the cancellation of the inner history, and the nomadic pursuit of happiness. However, the media formed baby is everything but the harmless and innocent embodiment of *homo sapiens*. Hedonistic consumer of the petty-bourgeois sensibility is by profession a “sinecurist”<sup>6</sup> since his main social concerns are to attain the means of satisfying the unstable and unpredictable appetites. Media “wiring” of society, as a process from which the number of consumers of identical contents rapidly grew, has been paid for with a new type of asocial. Unlike the old

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<sup>3</sup> Sigfried Kracauer, “Die Photographie”, u: *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt a/M 1977, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Erfahrung und Armut”, u: *Aura und Reflexion. Schriften zur Kunsttheorie und Ästhetik*, Frankfurt a/M 2007, p. 347-348.

<sup>5</sup> Rej Bradberi, *Farenhajt 451*, Beograd 2003, translated by G. Kapetanović, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Milenko Perović, *Svijet malograđanina*, Zagreb 1989, p. 276.

asocial, the new one is no longer reserved for extreme introverts, but has become a mass phenomenon.

From there, for dystopia and the first critics of the new media the only intelligent attitude towards the media reality is subversive. His mission is to reveal the political and economic powers which attempt to introduce one image of reality while hiding the other. A theoretic of media is a phenomenologist armed with scepticism, since the presented media image cannot be give the status of “better than real”. He suspends the media reality to be able to come to reality, convinced that the truth of the media world is not available to the media consumers, but to those who remove the veil wrapped around the rhetoric of “objective information” and turn their attention towards its producers. When that scepticism is pushed to the limits, as Enzensberger did, we come to the conclusion that every usage of media assumes manipulation. If so, “the question is not where the media are being manipulated or not, but who is manipulating them”,<sup>7</sup> and with that, the absolute power of the media *genius malignus* which can transform every personality which comes into contact with. Consequently, this kind of understanding assumes the characteristics of a paranoid escape form the contemporary media in search for benevolent manipulators, whose final outcome remains blur if we remember that honesty, openness and fairness disappear the moment one steps on the media stage. Even in its more moderate forms, it claims that the real image is not the media image, since it is always hidden behind the event shown, but the roots of its production are not in the studio, or the editor’s office in which the process of selection, collage, cuts, shading and montage occurs. Studios and editorial offices are not the point of departure for the media trains, only an inevitable side-station.

Theory of media does not solely base its studies on media, but on the society in which the economic and political power serves the media as means of communication with individuals. In that sense, the theory of media is criticism of propaganda which tries to reveal the predominant social structures. From there thematization of media is not lead with theoretical aims bit presents a mean for the effect of exiting social forms to show in the spheres with which is most commonly

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien”, u: *Massenkommunikationsforschung 2: Konsumtion*, Hg. D. Prokop, Frankfurt a/M 1973, p. 426.

not connected with – in the cinema or at a photo exhibition. For dystopia and the noted theoreticians of media, to establish a theory of media as a spate discipline means working on strengthening the current structures of power, or, as Zamyatin would say, “in the process of strengthening, crystallization of life”<sup>8</sup>. Because of that, it is much more appropriate to say the Kracauer and Benjamin are first theoreticians of society and as such, indirectly, theoreticians of media.

### 3. MCLUHAN AND THE STRATEGY OF AVANT-GARDE

The establishment of the theory of media was enabled by the 20<sup>th</sup> century strategies of the avant-garde movement. The first step consisted of adhering to the belief the “the contemporary is always right”, that is of promoting historicism in the image of the world whose core tendencies were not the product of the millennia development, but of the unique morphing powers of the contemporary moment. In the eyes of the avant-garde, the passing beyond the horizon of a certain historical necessity presented the prime condition for art to turn to itself. In other words, to keep in touch with our own time, we must break all bonds with the past and with all elements which come from it. Without that enthusiastic trust with the productive consequences of tearing the stitches of the historical time, the avant-garde itself, along with the contemporary theory of media, cannot be understood.<sup>9</sup>

Civil norms lose all sorts of commitment, and become the usual target of the avant-garde attacks. In the language of cinema, the past becomes the antihero in every aspect, which we must get rid of and cast away from the modern stage at all costs. The inherited contents of sociality must be cast away, but that loss of self is in the old Christian manure reengineered as its actual gain. The opponents of Dadaism could have characterized by Tristan Tzara as “self-kleptomaniacs”<sup>10</sup>, since they are in fact stealing their self, and by avoiding accepting the logic of the contemporary,

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<sup>8</sup> Jevgenij Zamjatin, *Mi*, Beograd 2001, translated by M. Lalić, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Claiming that “simulacrum win the battle over history” Baudrillard references to non other than McLuhan and Benjamin. Žan Bodrijar, *Simbolička razmena i smrt*, G. Milanovac 1991, translated by M. Marković, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Tristan Tzara, “Dada manifeste sur l’amour faible et l’amour amer”, u : *Sept manifestes Dada*, [Paris] 1968, p. 61.

end up losing their self. Instead of them, it is museums that bring the shadows of the past, irrelevant and drained of every meaning. Having that in mind, it will not surprise us that Marinetti equalizes the cemetery and a museum: “Museums, cemeteries! They are truly identical in this unfortunate battle of the bodies that no longer recognize themselves”.<sup>11</sup>

The second step was consisted in the deepening of the medial self-reflection. Malévitch’s call for the liberation from weight of things has become the unspoken credo of the avant-garde. In that way, the consciousness of the artists becomes drained of content, free for all the demands and the need of the material world. Noting that: “art is nothing more, than the suite of the object”<sup>12</sup> Malévitch has not evoked the uniqueness of the image of the material world displayed through the optics of the artist, but has shown that the medium of arts has its own time and space. That space indicates to the world without objects, a world projected on the other side of the being-in-time, within a transcendent dimension of artistic subjectivity. The existing dualism of the subject and object is resolved in favour of the artists power to generate an abstraction<sup>13</sup> which, at the same time, becomes both the subject and the object. Parallel processes were also occurring in the sphere of music, or poetry. Freedom from objectivity, for the sake of gaining a different view from the perspective of the tone has in the music of John Cage been morphed to allow “the river of sound to dissolve to sound drops, allowing each individual sound it own space”<sup>14</sup>, while in Dadaistic poetry, it had the courage to take on speech itself, on top of the boundaries set by language: ”a verse is an opportunity to reach the end with no words and with no language [...] I wish to have a word, there where it stops and where it begins. Every object has its word, but every word has become an object of its own”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “‘Premier manifeste du futurisme’ (Le Figaro, 20. 02. 1909)”, in: *Le futurisme*, Milano/Lausanne 1980, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> K. S. Malévitch, *De Cézanne au suprématisme*, Lausanne 1974, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Because of this Malévitch’s method is rightfully refer to as “abstract phenomenology “ by Martineau. Emmanuel Martineau, *Malévitch et la philosophie. La question de la peinture abstraite*, Lausanne 1977, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Grundmotiven einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Hugo Ball, “Dadaistisches Manifest”, in: Raoul Schrott, *Dada 15/25*, Innsbruck 1992, p. 53.



As long as it was tied to the narrative and the figurative, art suffered from the blindness caused by guidelines of the material world. As Husserl was able to recognize the basic philosophical step in the stride from the natural attitude to the plain in which the way we see, not just the way it has been seen is themed, so did the artist of the avant-garde make demands on the artwork to go into the sphere where the genesis of the visible and sensible occurred. In the background of both premises lies the idea that art affect our way of seeing and hearing, that it is capable of logically transforming the colours and the sounds of our world. This is about deepening the understanding of perspective, about our limited, but very dynamical point of view. However, that deepening of understanding of perspective cannot be reduced to the deepening of perspective itself, since it tends to overcome the limitations which are inevitably associate with perspective and to present an integral, total view. Picasso's poly-perspectivism can then be interpreted as the competition of the phenomenological confrontation with the *Abschattung*. Observing from multiple perspectives naturalizing the limitations of our natural view by using artistic means, where the objects have been given shadows which correlate with the certain point of view.<sup>16</sup>

From there, is not a coincidence that the formulation that made McLuhan famous – media is message – came from his interpretations of cubism.<sup>17</sup> Like the avant-garde, cubism insisted on the displacement of attention from the seen to seeing, which, as a consequence, had a coup in which form became the content. As cubism used the capacities of the painting media in attempt to create content of it, so did McLuhan cease to relate the effect of the media form with its content. Accentuating that familiarity, Groys has rightfully questioned the relevancy of this thesis, of which depended the survival of fall of the theoretical autonomy of the media research: "Cubism has made medium a message. Because of that, McLuhan,

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<sup>16</sup> In that sense Biemel's phenomenological interpretation of Picasso no longer hesitates to commend cubism on more than one occasion, because of the high degree of the artists assignment reflection. Walter Biemel, *Philosophische Analysen zur Kunst der Gegenwart. Kafka/Proust/Picasso*, Den Haag 1968.

<sup>17</sup> "Cubism, by seizing on instant total awareness, suddenly announced that *the medium is the message* ... Is that not what has happened in physics as in painting, poetry and communication?" Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge, Mass./London 1998, p. 13.

while writing his book after the emergence of cubism, could have thought that the media has essentially always been a message".<sup>18</sup> In other words, can the logic of the avant-garde be historically universalised? Can its key thesis be applied on ages from which it has distanced itself, building its identity in normativity and exclusiveness of cut and halt? It appears that the answer to this question is ambivalent.

From one side, McLuhan has theoretically proven why we cannot count on the same effect if we read the same text or if we observe its performance on stage. Behind those deceptively naive questions on the difference between the effects the text has when we read it and when we hear it, comes McLuhan idea of the superiority of the medial when compared to the conceptual. That superiority is based on the thesis of the advantage of the audiovisual sphere upon the logosphere. In other words, in the power of media to change the "patterns of attention", which no concept has allegedly been able to do: "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception"<sup>19</sup>. If Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* or some Husserl's paper appeared on the extensive list of literature used, the book *Understanding Media* might have looked differently. Conceptualization with those two philosophers is shown as a productive corrective which does not remain solely in the plain of abstraction, but is also capable of initiating a shift from one stand-point to the other. However, in his defence, McLuhan could point to his determination of the artist, as a man of integral consciousness whose work does not have anything to do with art. The key to the doors of avant-garde was connected to the profound media self-awareness, and that has given McLuhan a right to, by analogy, expand the term of the artists to the sphere of humanist sciences, that is, everywhere the media determination of our senses, and correlation knowledge is taken into account.

However, the sign of a developed awareness of addiction of knowledge on the media by which it is transferred can be found in ancient times. McLuhan could find his predecessors in Plato or Augustine, in the fundamental differences between

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<sup>18</sup> Boris Groys, *Unter Verdacht. Eine Phänomenologie der Medien*, München/Wien 2000, p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, *ibid*, p. 18.

speech and the letter from *Phaedrus*, or in the confrontation of *legere in silentio* and *clara lectio*. His *differentia specifica* is contained in the attempt to establish the reflection of media in a systematic way, which includes the possibility to recognize the dominant morphing effect of media in certain historical formations.

Literary speaking, Groys has appoint when he claims that McLuhan gives the past an avant-garde paradigm, since for one Aristotle or Michelangelo their own medias were not messages but had the status of organon. When Heraclitus says “If you are not listening to me, but to the logos”, he is speaking form a perspective opposed to McLuhan’s, since he insists on the superiority of the conceptual sphere over media. He is completely indifferent on how his message will be received: it is irrelevant whether we will hear that directly from him or if we will read it, just as long as the message he is passing on is comprehended. Indeed, for most thinkers and artists until the avant-garde, the medium was an organon, and not a message.

However, if we persist in the claim that the thesis media is message can be applied exclusively on the period after the avant-garde, we put ourselves on harm’s way of overlooking the fact that the avant-garde was initiated by the new media: “Perhaps the great revolution produced by photograph was in the traditional arts. The painter could no longer depict a world that had been much photographed. He turned, instead, to reveal the inner process of creativity in expressionism and in abstract art”<sup>20</sup>. Without a strictly determined media configuration, the base insight of the avant-garde would be virtually impossible. From that point, it seems justified enough to switch thesis and to cast aside the options that it is unjustified to universalise the stand-point of cubism in favour of investigating the media conditioning of every opinion, event that which recognizes the significance of the, media “condition of possibility”. In short, the fact that the avant-garde discovered that for it media is message does not mean that is it illegitimate to investigate the “message” which the media has reshaped in previous historical ages.

On the other hand, putting in action McLuhan’s idea required a significant degree of historical awareness. It requires both the profound awareness of human historicism and the conceptual system which can be confronted what the demand of

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<sup>20</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, ibid, p. 194.

interrelation of historical continuities and discontinuities. If we consider the fact that the avant-garde relation towards tradition can be reduced to historicism, that is to the logic by which each era has its own counter-point in itself, then we are faced with the challenge which comes out of the fact that the theory of media must at the same time be something of a philosophy of history. It is certain that on such a challenge one cannot respond using the means of historicism, since its logic insists on the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each historical and cultural formation, while McLuhan explicitly refers to the mediation which occurs between the old and the new media, and writes remarkable pages on the character of recycling via which the role of the new media, amongst others, is consisted of reshaping the function of the old media. The fact is, the theatre has survived in spite of the film, and the museum have not been torn down in spite of the demands of the avant-garde and the new constitution of archives, gives McLuhan the right.

#### 4. PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE MEDIA AWARENESS

That all put aside, McLuhan has another ace up his sleeve: the high degree of understanding of the human historicism. It is demonstrated in the comprehension that the media does not simply add itself on that what we are. What we call the means of communication, are not means at all. Unlike the naive belief in the possibility of our direct communication with the contents, McLuhan has demonstrated the constitutive role of the media through which all content is shaped. Since it is not the same if we heard a statement out loud or read it in a book or received it from the television screen, the media factor gets the status once reserved for the transcendent dimension of awareness: “the media of communication are not mere catalyst but have their own physics and chemistry which enter into every moment of social alchemy and change”.<sup>21</sup>

Metaphorical speech on physics or chemistry is completely compatible with the avant-garde ideas that the artistic media poses their own time and space. Kant's transcendent intuitions have that way finally been given a foundation upon which

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<sup>21</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations*, New York/Frankfurt/Villefranche-sur-mer 1967, [p. 40].

they ease to be plain forms, being given the historically shaped content. If we no longer observe the media as auxiliary means of social communication, but we start to see the dynamical and active constituent which contributes to the structure of our intuitions space and time, it will become clear why the sensation of space and time is fundamentally different with the shamans in the caves of Altamira, in the monastery surrounding of a mediaeval monk and with a contemporary internet user.

If we recall that even the post-Kantian philosophy undermined that the character and the reaches of the cognitive powers cannot be examined without the *sub specie aeternitatis*, and that the objects of cognizance can be accepted as stiff, rigid and timeless, McLuhan's contribution to that tendency is consisted in the highlight of the shift from one state of consciousness into the other, quoting Blake's poem Jerusalem: "If Perceptive Organs vary, Objects of Perception seem to vary"<sup>22</sup>, McLuhan is implying that the actualization of the theory of media leads to the founding of a certain phenomenology of the characters of media consciousness. Its determining accent is rightfully placed on the moments of overcoming and mutual confrontation of the old media form with the new one: "We become extremely conscious of cultural models and bias when moving from one dominant form of awareness to another"<sup>23</sup>.

However, although McLuhan's basic idea implies such conduct, a reader whose expectation from his theory of media go towards a systematic phenomenology of consciousness must remain disappointed. Instead of the phenomenological, the author decides to introduce the musical approach whose strategy is closer to the cubist poly-perspectivism form the one demonstrated by the systematic-historic study. From McLuhan's perspective, complying with the unity of the systematic and historical would mean to accept the historical anachronism, the linear approach completely foreign to the modern age: "linear exposition is abandoned in favour of what he calls 'the mosaic approach'; and by means of techniques which are closely copied from those of Dada movement"<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, isto, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*, London 1962, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan*, London 1971, p. 130.

Hegel could have written the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in that way, since the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in the sign of the dominance of the printed media, while the integral character of the electronic age requires a totally new approach. Based on that fact, we can pay our respect to McLuhan for consequently applying his own assumptions, since the articulation of his theoretical opinions remained faithful to the media self-awareness of his own time, but at the same time we can question to what extent the integral, mythical time characteristic for the electronic age, can communicate with the historical phenomena. Even if we forget the fact that phenomenology of the media consciousness cannot function alone, that is, without the philosophical-historical support,<sup>25</sup> we can hardly agree to the possibility that the task McLuhan has set for himself can be extracted from the perspective of a historized modern awareness. After all, his avant-garde role-models would never decide to take this step, since they have simply disqualified the relevancy of the past to the present moment.

Unlike them, McLuhan requires the past to understand his own time. He is forced to that by the insight in the fact that the new media are destroying the old selfhood, but since they cannot annul it completely, which in other words means that the avant-garde breakup with the past is not completely possible, while at the same time not leaving it fictive and declarative. That means that the breakthrough of the historical consciousness of the media is not correlative to their own historicity. However, the insight in that correlation is not possible solely through the usage of logic of global and integral thinking McLuhan is representing, but only through the support of a certain genetic analysis. "If McLuhan was right, scholars at Sorbonne would still be writing their thesis in Latin."<sup>26</sup>

Truth to be told, perhaps the acceptance of the genetic analysis would represent a step which would significantly bring McLuhan closer to the dystopically structured, meaning the confronted wing of the media theory. The very thesis he insist on, that the actual content of a man and society is based on their historical

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<sup>25</sup> Rosenberg has on that sense rightfully criticized McLuhan that with him the "Drama of history is reduced to a charade whose profound intent is metamorphosis of a man via media" Harold Rosenberg, "Une sorte de Whitman...", u: *Pour ou contre McLuhan*, présente par G. E. Stearn, Paris 1969, p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> Režis Debre, *Uvod u mediologiju*, Beograd 2000, translated by M. Ivanović, p. 48.

genesis, and that the new media through the absolutizing the present moment in the existence of a man are introducing an accent on the present and superficial, by which he is generally alienated from his own being. McLuhan would discard such argumentation, on the basis of two reasons. For him, the emanation of the historical as the key segment of humanity is the product of Guttenberg's workshop, which means it is usurping the rights to universality. On the other hand, by giving a humanizing role to the old media, and by reducing the new media to viral agent of alienation and dehumanization is more of an act of resentment<sup>27</sup> of the overcome historical shapes of media consciousness and immature sentimentality, then a serious theory of media. From his prospective, *dystopia is not readable as a dark prognosis of a malignant political propaganda which with the help of the new media is destroying spirituality and humanness, but is more of a resigned farewell of a literary world in demise.*

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<sup>27</sup> If we agree to point out that if we agree with Kostelanetz that every medium: "creates a public whose love for it is larger than the interest for its content" (Ričard Kostelanec, "Maršal Makluan – prvosveštenik elektronskog sela", u: *Makluanova galaksija*, Beograd 1971, translated by S. Đorđević, p. 27), then the discontent of a man whose ties become repressed and made meaningless by the new media become understandable. To illustrate the issue, it's sufficient to recall the aggressive attitude of the renaissance collector of calligraphic books towards the emergence of the impersonal printed books. Since he was convinced that the contents of a higher spirituality must be transferred by a luxuriously equipped book, made of the finest sheepskin and ink, for him, the emergence of the printed book was identical with a breakdown of spirituality, and not with its massing and individuation, to which they consequently lead.