



MACHINES OF ABSTRACTION

Or how to pass from the Subject to the Project?

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Stepanov¹

Abstract:

The question of media it's not just a question what is media, but how do they operate. Vilém Flusser has presented development of media as a gradual removal (abstraction) from a body. Dietmar Kamper takes Flusser's concept of "the ladder of abstraction" as a theoretical base and develops «an anthropological quadrangle: a body, a flatness, a line, a point» as a methodological base for the analysis of media. Offered concept: media as "machines of abstraction" allow to answer not only questions: what is the media, how they operate; but also to direct the person to his way to freedom in the world of a total mobilization of media.

Keywords: Machines of abstraction, Body, Image, Letter, Code, Streams, Experience of thinking and body.

¹ Doctorate in the Department of Philosophy and Political Sciences, Saint Petersburg State University about: Experience of thinking of body. E-mail: michail.stepanov@gmail.com



**First.**

The question of media is, first of all the question: what is media? What do we understand by media? Proceeding from a word, media (from latin medium - the middle, the centre) - means certain means, intermediaries. But an etymological interpretation in this case has is not enough. Between what and than the intermediary? Between a man and a man? Or man and apparat? I think the intermediary between people, to be exact between living human bodies. Bodies in time and space.

The theme of philosophical consideration for media is definitely not medial tools - an intermediaries, various devices, implements, computers, etc., but those attitudes of mediation organised by tools; it is an environment, the media environment where functions of media are performed. This gives rise to the question: how does media operate?

The media, first of all, is material's fixed / embodied statement - that means: in time and space, the certain mode. The purpose of media - transfer of the information, the communications which occur between people, and in any case affects bodies, as the phenomenology asserts, the communications occur between living human bodies. The communications take place at body level, and not at that of a cleanly conscious process of an exchange by signs. Thus, media - media of tools, - is means of transfer of an information, and, hence, a trans-formation and de-formations.

Experience of the communications, that is use of media, is experience of culture, it forms culture according to media-practice. To each culture also correspond the certain corporal practices and mechanisms of formation of types of the body adequate to this or that type of a social system. Thus, the body acts both as object and as result of mutual media attitudes.

Let's define media as machines of abstraction. Machines which operate by abstraction or otherwise (strip; tear off; flay), removal of the vital world (Lebenswelt).





With each step on the ladder of technical progress the man creates artificial «extensions of man» [McLuhan], however, oneself to refine him abilities. It's "extensions" becomes central, nominate the channel and oppress others. Every "external expansion" of anything excludes, automatic "abstracting", as its action is selective. The abstraction (as well as mediate) is inevitable, but not equal to the actuality, it is only human ability. Ability allowing to create set of realities, multi-realities.

Secondly.

Constant substitution of discourse of media on discussion about Media signalises a certain fundamental turn in development of media. What is this turn?

Vilem Flusser, the founder of the media theory, has developed the interesting concept «Menschwerdung / Becoming of the person», having related it with the development of media as removal from the vital world (Lebenswelt). He has named such development «Vom Subjekt zum Projekt / From the Subject to the Project».

In the same uncompleted book, Flusser makes a sketch of the history of development of a civilisation as changes in the leading means of the communications (media). Flusser writes: "Die langsame und muehselige kulturelle Entwicklung der Menschheit laesst sich als ein schrittweises Zurueckweichen von der Lebenswelt, als schrittweise zunehmende Entfremdung betrachten. Mit dem ersten Schrittt zurueck aus der Lebenswelt - aus dem Kontext der den Menschen angehenden Dinge - werden wir zu Behndlern, und die daraus folgende Praxis ist die Erzeugung von Instrumenten. Mit dem zweiten Schritt zurueck - diesmal aus der Dreidimensionalitaet der behandelten Dinge - werden wir zu Beobachtern, und die daraus folgende Praxis ist das Bildermachen. Mit dem dritten Schritt zurueck - diesmal aus der Zweidimensionalitaet der Imagination - werden wir zu Beschreibern, und die daraus folgende Praxis ist das Erzeugen von Texten. Mit dem vierten Schritt zurueck - diesmal aus der Eindimensionalitaet der alphabetischen Schrift - werden wir zu Kalkulierern, und die daraus folgende Praxis ist die moderne Technik.





Dieser vierte Schritt in Richtung totaler Abstraktion - in Richtung der Nulldimensionalitaet - ist mit der Renaissance geleistet worden, und gegenwaertig ist er vollzogen. Ein weiterer Schritt zurueck in die Abstraktion ist nicht tunlich: weniger als nichts kann es nicht geben. Daher wenden wir uns sozusagen um 180 Grad und beginnen, ebenso langsam und muehselig, in Richtung des Konkreten (der Lebenswelt) zurueckschreiten. Daher die neue Praxis des Komputierens und Projizierens von Punktelementen zu Linien, Flaechen, Koerpern und uns angehenden Koerpern" [4, 21].

The new practice of which Flusser speaks, consists in designing the possible, instead of available/present. If natural images search for similarities with the available, then the «techno image» is the project, it that which should be that can be. Synthetic images - a photo, video, cinema, display, etc. do not feign pretend to reproduce the actuality, but create-project the new reality. Here it becomes possible to see the hitherto impossible, that existed only in the form of symbols, concepts, formulas and texts. So, in his opinion, opens the sphere, not of the philosophy of terms, but of the philosophy of working with images.

Flusser remarks, that since second half XX century we can observe a new, unusual development of figurativeness. It enters into various spheres of human space, essentially changing them. This situation: total visualisation of the world, has received the name «picture turn», following on from earlier the ontology and linguistic turns of XX century. The picture turn marks itself, that the world can no longer speak as a model of text. It is a situation when the image becomes so essential, that there is no space left for a body and the text. «Now, everything, that exists, it is possible to transform into an image», - enthusiastically declares Vilem Flusser.

Alongside this, Flusser develops a new concept of the person as Project which, in his opinion, allows to turn from Subject = «the obsequious enslaver» to Project = "designer (Entwerfer)". The new technical equipment evinces that we are no longer





Subjects of the objective world given to us, but now Projects of the alternative worlds. If the Subject - is always subordinated, he depending on an object, then the Project is essentially plural, he is free from obedience. It is possible to tell that the Project is singularity, free from identity. The Project assumes the manufacture/assembly/designing of the world at the most different levels, it is the process of becomings.

«Der Mensch als Projekt, dieser formal denkende Systemanalytiker und -synthetiker, ist ein Kuenstler" [3, 285]. Vilem Flusser tries to show that projective character was human existence, and that there is henceforth an obligatory condition for becoming the person in general. He shows, that means of the communications, passing beyond desires of the person, enter into the cultural, political, ideological, economic, ecological and so forth contexts of a life. The person here is not imperious / dominant. Therefore there are as a matter of fact revolutions into existence as with changes of means of communications the basic structures of our thinking are transformed.

Thirdly.

There is an obvious question: if heretofore the person «touched things», then what occurs from «the fourth step» into the «zero dimension of numerical thinking»? What became of the person as a living body in a limit of abstraction? How does the intensity of machines of abstraction affect a body of actions? What mutual relations are there at steps of abstraction between a body and image, a body and the letter, a body and digital coding?

German philosopher Ditmar Kamper represents the four steps of abstraction Flusser's in the form of «an anthropological quadrangle: a body, a flatness, a line, a point» (Koerper-Abstraktionen. Das anthropologische Viereck von Raum, Flaeche, Linie und Punkt). This is important as a methodological principle.

Kamper develops the scheme of dimensions, that is attitudes of the person to space and time in which people are involved feeling, looking, writing and acting.





Consideration to "an anthropological quadrangle" he formulates names of dimensions: «the body / space, the flatness / image, the letter / line, the time / point». The similar formulation enters other dynamics and other starting points into the game. It becomes clear, that ordinary speech about an existential continuum is absolutely insufficient, unless only to recognise that the continuum is a capacity for pure step-type behaviour. As, at close examination, transition from one fixed point to another is a precipice. Thereof the interrelation becomes no clearer than it was without it. How do these abstractions of bodies correspond? It is already a question of structure and an origin, of topology and history of bodies-abstraction, as they not only a subject of knowledge, but also a condition of the knowledge of opportunity.

Nevertheless at definition of " a quadrangle ", we have a problem. What is with language? There is a directly hypercomplex state of affairs when should consider dimensions of specifically human abilities. Kamper writes that it would be necessary to name: feeling in space; sight on a flatness of the image; the letter in a font line, the bill in time. Reading belongs to the letter, the bill calculation. But, what about the processes of speaking and hearing? There is not a passing suspicion, that ordering in space and time cannot be carried out without these " competences ", that instruments, tools and " media " have crucial importance for dimensions and their interrelations.

Thus, Kamper gives fundamental character to "the ladder of abstraction". In the zero-dimension, a limit of abstraction where « all is possible », the multivariate existence of the person becomes a problem. The living body of the person disappears in the image. The body becomes useless. But it is excessive and in its excessiveness or is better to tell immensity there is a condition for creative personality and opportunities for communications as such. In zero dimension order the mechanised sight under which things wish to disappear as soon as possible, to become image by means of a photo, video, TV - records of images and further having lost a place and time to become a part of





the intangible world Imagined. Machines of abstraction have processed a body in information streams, have got rid of a body, he is thrown out from the communications and reduced by the image or the text, a digital code.

The philosopher diagnoses the intrusion of the Imagined into the Present. Taking as his basis Lacan's concept of about three registers (Imagined, Symbolical, Real) - Kamper marks the total visualisation of the reality which are destroying/replacing as Real (never achievable - stars, a body), and Symbolical (language, a social structure). If symbolical - it is discrete, files, in him are built in, to him are filed. But the Imagined envelops, sticks together. An image belonging to the register of the Imagined, continuous, it envelops the victim, replacing her. A image also is replaced, in perpetual exchanges with other images.

In the homogeneous world a body is the fulfilled material from which measurements are taken, it is left as offal, production garbage of a new reality.

However the body remains unreduced, and he is not superfluous and essential. Him, a living human body, it is impossible to calculate. A medial milieu as a product of machines of abstraction is wrongly accepted to "reality". Media are unable to seize a body and the completeness of senses produced by him, only the anatomic, dead body is accessible to them.

The human body can be thought over as a place of crossing and a meeting of various streams - coded /symbolical and imaginative / figurative. Where the first belong to the symbolical order, that is, are constructed on discrete sign systems which mark and fragment a body; the second belong to the order of the imagined. Imaginative streams, unlike coded, do not fragment, but pack a body, envelop it in impenetrable images, fit his dense environment, packaged. In it their danger - they replace a body with figurative packing. Imaginative streams leave a flat image from a body. « manufacturing of pictures became death of a body » - writes Kamper in his latest monograph.





The screen technologies generating never-ending images of self-identification, a cult of narcissism, allow us to speak about a narcissism of the modern person. Excessive present bodies transforms into an image, an icon or an idol, in a digital code or it is simple as a token of and by that makes an alive body - dead, that has pernicious consequences in thought and society.

The new medial reality where images randomly breed and commit incest being crossed with each other without everyone with him with communication, fine exists maintaining itself. However the body actually has not disappeared anywhere, he remains in a shadow of this reality. And the violence on the screen generates violence above the screen, but it not imitation. The imagined reality operates «behind a person's back», it covers and grasps him, instead of him imitating her. From here stems the "progressive" growth of violence over a real life. Abstracting from a body, becoming the universal subject, interacts with another as with material, as to «gun meat» wars on the screen - from here stem the murders at schools and colleges of the "civilised society"; tortures photographed (captured) on video.

In a magnetic force-field of images the Narcissus reigns. Intoxicated look, torn communication with surrounding validity, he is bewitched by the images flowing from the screen accepted by it as the present, which accept them as (present) reality. For the Narcissus there is no Another, there is no world around - all except for vision is possible. And when another anything - then his life is possible, but as well as he can be killed. So kills the gaze of the Narcissus.

At last

Each machine of abstraction demands its own experience of thinking and experience, it is necessary to know on what «steps of abstraction», in what "dimension" we are, with what machine of abstraction to exploit. The way from the Subject to the





Project to pass in wield a machine of abstraction. It demands experience of thinking and body.

Electronic figurativeness, simulation does not destroy the monotony of standardization, but on the contrary intensifies its it, accelerates its course and a living body, being the heterogeneous remainder in homogeneous world, finds its own value. It occurs mainly in art, through sports, and also through a bulimia (as the unconscious aspiration to finding weight and density).

Media the sphere varies also as types of a body and thinking. These changes are also poorly appreciable as change in language. However the speed of change of media of means, devices demand to this attention. Nothing does not remain how to develop strategy of thinking corresponding new medial environments. And it means to be above the device, can ask it over/across its programme and receive the answer - the new reality, a new standpoint/point of readout. It is boldness to demand not only knowledge of the programme of media, but also the corporal ability to overcome it.

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