Oliver Ruf

The supplement of the digital
Aesthetics and communication

Abstract

'Communication' is the basic concept of an aesthetic media theory and, under the title 'communication aesthetics', is particularly suitable for defining a capacity of that phenomenon that also describes a holistic experience of so-called digitality in a new way. In the passage through this concept of communication, 'communication aesthetics' is therefore also the basic term for studies of digital media cultures and is used here as an example to determine the relevant phenomena of mediality, materiality and the contemporary technological body practices associated with them. 'Aesthetics of communication' is then also the title word for the sought-after answer to the question of whether the speech of transfer between different arts as ekphrastic representation acquires a significance of its own that cannot be decomposed by unconditionally necessary and, as a rule, even more important reflection on its effects. The essay examines how both sides of the term – the 'aesthetic' and the 'communicative' – can be discussed in order to reflect on their connection, especially against the background of the implications of the digital per se. In the first part, the contrasts that determine this conceptual construction are analyzed using an example of media culture in order to read them as the basic definitions of a dialectical concept of the 'communicative-aesthetic'. Against this background, the second part of the essay deals with the related 'communication-aesthetic' practices that could be used as the ingredients and objects of a genuine interdisciplinary media theory.

oliver.ruf@h-brs.de (Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences)

> The digital media elevate difference to their proprium.
> H. Schanze, *Is there a digital a priori*?

> In the general digitization of news and channels, the differences between individual media disappear.
> F.A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*

> But one communicates [...].
> J. Lacan, *The Seminar. Book II*

1. *Introduction*

If one were to attempt to develop a theory of the corresponding philosophical discourse following a – fundamentally assumed – sufficient liaison of 'the aesthetic' and 'the communicative', it would not be easy to avoid the almost classical question that once again situates both fields in themselves[1]. Can this philosophical discourse be defined by the constraints of the media to which this synopsis is subject – to what extent and in what form? In other words, if we also consider the consideration of the history of the media as a great philosophical discourse, as a powerful discursive chain, which repeatedly calls up the two fields of 'aesthetics' and 'communication' in various constellations of artifacts, signs and bodies, for example, and also confronts them with contexts of technology and artistic production[2], this

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[1] See also – albeit from a non-media studies perspective – Thyssen 2011, in which 'aesthetic communication' is distinguished from Niklas Luhmann's theory of communication (1995: 141), in which communication is understood as a unity of three selections: information, utterance and understanding. The argument is that this concept of communication does not seem to cover aesthetic communication, which is not defined by its information in the ordinary sense of the word. By using Gregory Bateson's extended definition (1980: 110) which defines information as differences that make a difference, it is suggested instead that it is possible to include aesthetics under the general theory of communication. For the differences that make an aesthetic difference are not the empirical themes, nor the practical rules of communication, not even the normative principles, but rather the mode of communicating. Instead of information we might talk about the (in)formation of communication, i.e., the form of communication, knowing that the same information may be formed in different ways. The aim of not only focusing on, but actively using the aesthetic means is to enhance the pragmatic effectiveness of communication by seducing an audience and thereby making it more willing to accept an offer of communication.

[2] Costa (1991: 123) offers a brief and helpful definition of this, choosing an art-theoretical position to analyze the transition from techniques to technologies with a permutation of the media based arts (like photography, cinematography or audio recording).

allows us to immerse ourselves in a reserve of contemplation, in the systematic reserve of a reflection, in a reserved consideration of concepts and dispositives. Aren't there already obstacles in the way of this liaison due to the resources and the establishment of this reserve? How can this liaison be defined in more detail? Is it a problem-free or a conflict-laden constellation? Or is it a formal code that can be worked out on the basis of its respective basic assumptions? These pertinent questions (see also Ruf 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d; 2024e; Ruf 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; Ruf 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2022d; 2022e; 2022f) will accompany my following reflections. They undoubtedly have a longer tradition and they undoubtedly refer to the beginnings of media philosophy itself[3]. However, their repeated treatment, which I have attempted here and brought to a perspective of 'communication aesthetics', can hardly take place without a transformation or shift in the pair of concepts that constitute this liaison. As a product of the media philosophical discourse, the conceptual pair of 'aesthetics/communication' belongs to the area that one wanted to subordinate to it: media aesthetics as a method of media theory[4]. The pair of terms has a specific relevance for this, in that it decisively redefines a central point of the media-philosophical discourse on its objects.

On the other hand, these questions, which have long remained hidden within the discipline because they have sometimes been treated exclusively as fields of communication science (and not of media philosophy), are becoming predominant at a certain moment and can no longer be pushed aside[5]. This is also certainly not insignificant in relation to the point concerning the traditional relationship of philosophy to its own subject areas. Although this also raises the question of the limits of philosophy, the form in which I would like to approach the genuinely media-philosophical discourse in the present context has developed into a special and no less complex theoretical constellation. This connects numerous areas of media philosophy with each other, but above all cannot be separated from the consideration of significant individual media and their *coincidence* in the phenomena of so-called 'digital media'. At this point, I refer to such a point in both the reflexive media-philosophical debate and the

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[3] This is also in contrast to an older proposal by Campbell (1971), which explicates communication aesthetics exclusively as an arena in the field of communication (as a separate discipline).

[4] These can possibly be located in the media-aesthetic writings of Benjamin (2002).

[5] The examination of Fred Forest's media art (cf. Leruth 2017: 85-134) is a good place to start. See also Peters 2000.

observed development of media in the spectrum of so-called 'digitality' as a moment at which 'aesthetics' and 'communication' form a meaningful relationship – to each other and to the perceptions, orders and epistemes that are triggered by them.

In the following, further implicit considerations on an applied definition of 'aesthetics' and 'communication' will be formulated, which in turn, in the best case, can contribute to a view and visualization of the 'digital experience' within a media culture per se that is conditioned by media technology. To this end, it is proposed to focus on exemplary phenomena that, in their medial and material essence, always redeem 'media' on the one hand and, on the other, integrate 'bodies' (as 'subjects') in a new way: privilege them. The example that will be discussed in more detail comes from today's broad field of social media, is regarded as a kind of new visual (photography-based) medium and is at least a noteworthy example of digital communication. It is a now widespread and remarkably used application that appeared in 2020 and whose effects are sufficiently radiant in terms of media culture. *BeReal* distinguishes itself from other image-based social networks (such as *Instagram* or *TikTok*) primarily through the rules imposed on users – especially with regard to taking, editing and viewing photographic contributions using a digital-based interface: once a day, users are asked to take a photo with the front and rear cameras of their smartphone at a moment that has been announced shortly beforehand and share it without editing. The self-declared aim of *BeReal* is to give an explicitly authentic insight into the respective living environment, to show "who your friends really are in their daily life"[6]. With this negotiation of the medium of photography in the context of digital media use, it is possible to identify a 'communication-aesthetic process' that demonstrates the added value of the digital – as aesthetics of effect – that it signifies (see Spohr 2022 among others).

2. *On the aesthetics of photography*

These aesthetic effects of photographic works have been discussed extensively by media philosophers since the emergence of this medium, and indeed since analog cameras have existed (cf. Ruf, Rupert-Kruse, Grabbe 2022: 40-2, 102-6). Finally, Roland Barthes dealt with this discourse in a prominent media-philosophical position (cf. Emerling 2012: iii), especially

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[6] This is the promise formulated on the homepage of the application (see https://bereal.com).

in his book *Camera lucida* (*La chambre claire*) published in 1980, in which primarily those effects are classified into the phenomena of 'punctum' and 'studium'. Mindful of Walter Benjamin's media-philosophical thinking (or, more recently, that of Rosalind Krauss and Philippe Dubois), Barthes' theory of photography has had an afterlife right up to the media-philosophical present (cf. Stiegler 2010: 15; Brevern 2016: 273). Barthes, too, is ultimately concerned with the 'authenticity' or rather the 'truth' of photography. Through an almost exclusively subjectively guided reading of the media, which focuses on one's own perception as the center of observational reflection: as a rhetoric of the photographic image (cf. Barthes 1967: 27), Barthes develops an idea of those *actors* who complete photography as such in the first place. These must first be explained very briefly.

Barthes calls the subject who operates the photographic camera as a media artifact and through whom the photograph is taken an 'operator', whereas Barthes calls the viewer of photographic works a 'spectator' (cf. Barthes 1980: 17) – a role in which, incidentally, he also finds himself. Conclusions are drawn from the perception of this viewer – from the simple "I like / I don't like" (Barthes 1980: 26) to his possible sensual wounding, for example by a *detail* in the picture (cf. Barthes 1980: 36). In contrast, for Barthes the 'spectrum' means the ghostly image of the photographed object on the surface of the photograph (cf. Barthes 1980: 17); the object itself is described as the 'referent', which triggers the experience that the photograph does not allow its image to correspond with the self (cf. Barthes 1980: 20). However, the starting point of the considerations remains the perspective and position of the 'spectator', who feels a real attraction to the medium of photography (cf. Barthes 1980: 26). This can be described as an aesthetic effect, which Barthes names differently, but mostly as a form of "adventure" (Barthes 1980: 28). At the same time, the basic concept of this photography theory remains the duality of 'punctum' and 'studium', which is suitable for reading the selected exemplum *BeReal* firstly as an expression of social media aesthetics, which secondly produces communicative orders that go beyond the photographic medium. According to Barthes, when a 'spectator' looks at a photograph, he perceives it in two ways, which exist side by side and whose relationship to each other is not regulated (cf. Barthes 1980: 50). The first type is, as I said before, the 'studium', which is understood as the extraction of information from the image and the understanding of its meaning within a cultural context (cf. Barthes 1980: 35).

To this end, it becomes conceivable to consider photography as a whole, including its technical, formal and content-related characteristics.

In comparison to the 'punctum', for Barthes the 'studium' is extremely relevant, but emotionless. A photograph without a 'punctum' could arouse a "general and, if you like, polite interest" (Barthes 1980: 35), but would not affect the 'spectator' any further. The talk of a 'polite interest' in this context demonstrates a *social expectation*, an interest for the sake of others, so to speak, which explicitly does not arise from the 'spectator's' own deep emotion and sensuality. At the same time, Barthes emphasizes that the 'spectator' can certainly find pleasure in photographs that have no 'punctum', but that this always means a certain incompleteness. For it is "the same kind of vague, superficial, irresponsible interest that one takes in people, actors, clothes, books that one finds 'good'" (Barthes 1980: 36). The 'studium' refers to the examination of the intention of the 'operator', be it benevolent or critical (cf. Barthes 1980: 37). Barthes downright devalues monotonous photographs that depict stereotypical or clichéd images that are already anchored in the cultural imagination, as they lack individual expressiveness or artistic originality, since they merely reproduce an existing idea or convention (cf. Barthes 1980: 50).

According to Barthes, however, the perception of a photograph can also have a second side, an accidental detail in a photograph that in turn touches or offends the viewer sensually – the 'punctum': "The punctum of a photograph, that is that accidental thing about it that captivates me (but also wounds me, strikes me)" (Barthes 1980: 36). The 'punctum' strikes the 'spectator' unexpectedly; it can be individual and address the viewer's preferences or experiences. But it can also be universal in nature and have a similar effect on many 'spectators'. When Barthes mentions such details in his book, which he himself is specifically sensually wounded by, he again consciously provides a glimpse into the subjective mode of action of the photographic image (cf. Barthes 1980: 53). For this reason, *Camera lucida* is not a neutral description of the effect of photography, but an attempt to subjectivize media philosophy in greater depth. The idea of the 'punctum' is evidence of such a movement of thought. In contrast to the 'studium', which refers to the general context and meaning of a photograph, the 'punctum' thus concentrates on a specific detail and if its effect is absent, it is because the 'operator' consciously uses this detail: "Consequently, the detail that interests me is not, or at least not necessarily intended to be, and probably must not be" (Barthes 1980: 57).

That a deliberately placed *detail*, a deliberate 'punctum', could trigger a crisis in the 'spectator' seems unlikely to Barthes, but not impossible. In any case, it is a *coincidence*, because the photographer can never assess the personal effect of every detail in the picture: Perhaps a completely

different detail offends the 'spectator' completely unintentionally. While the individual trigger is already present in the photograph, the 'punctum' is rather the actual (inner) reaction that takes place in the 'spectator': in his unconscious[7]. Thus the 'punctum' is effective at the moment of viewing. However, the spectator can only become aware of its personal point of connection, the individual connection, later (cf. Barthes 1980: 62f.). This is to be distinguished from other surprises that the photographer consciously uses in his photograph, for example the shock or the shocking effect of what is shown as an intended, sudden reaction that the 'operator' triggers by photographing unexpectedly. While the 'punctum' flips an invisible switch inside the 'spectator', so to speak, here the shock has the task of communicating a truth about the photographed. In addition, the 'operator' surprises the 'spectator' with "deformations through technology" (Barthes 1980: 42). These are technical measures that can initially be used in analog photography: "double exposures, anamorphoses, deliberate exploitation of certain defects (edge resolution, blurring, distortion of perspective)" (Barthes 1980: 42).

This is the point at which photography theory à la Roland Barthes is confronted with the horizon of possibilities of digital photographic practice and which become virulent, especially in view of the aesthetic implications of the *BeReal* example. The processing of digitally recorded photographs ultimately increases the options of technically possible deformation in the sense of Barthes[8]. However, this damages a central principle of photography, that of "it-is-as-it-was" (Stiegler 2010: 16). While analog photos are ascribed an authentic, documentary character, digital images can always be edited in order to change the expression, mood, setting or entire image content. This means that there is always uncertainty as to whether these images actually reflect reality at the time they were taken

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[7] According to Breckner (2010: 255), the effect of the 'punctum' in Barthes' sense unfolds precisely in this unconscious. As an example, Breckner cites the picture of Barthes' mother in a winter garden. In the 'punctum', Barthes recognizes both the transience of his mother and the transience of his own person. This unconsciously causes him an injury. With this 'punctum', the photograph does not prove that the mother existed, but rather that the image of her being corresponds to reality. This consideration shows how much the sensual perception of the 'punctum' differs from the pure 'studium', the analysis of the clothing shown (and photographed), the surroundings, the facial expression, etc., and represents a separate dimension in the viewing of photographs.

[8] *BeReal* thus represents a kind of culmination of the transition from analogic photography to self-editable computer graphics. See Lunenfeld (2002: 160) as well as the contributions in Wombell (1991).

(cf. Barthes 1980: 17). In other words, the digitalization of photography has undermined the fundamental principles of analogue photography, to which Barthes must exclusively refer at the time: it has deconstructed them.

3. *On the aesthetics of digital social media photography*

While Barthes distinguishes between the subjects involved in a photograph in *Camera lucida*, those in *BeReal* experience their states simultaneously: as 'spectators' they view the photographs of other users, as 'operators' they photograph (and share) their own contributions and as 'referents' they are themselves depicted in these[9]. *BeReal* deliberately prevents users from using the platform solely as silent observers. This means that *friends*' posts can only be seen (or rather viewed) after you have shared your own post. In this way, you are literally forced to become an 'operator' every day in order to be a 'spectator'. For a *BeReal* post, users photograph twice, as already mentioned: once with the front camera of their smartphone and once with the rear camera to take a picture of themselves and one of their surroundings. In other words, they are always both 'operator' and 'referent'. As a photographer, Barthes wanted his image to always correspond to his (famously deep) 'self' (cf. Barthes 1980: 20). Today's smartphone[10] photography allows *BeReal* users to view their photo on the display before taking it and thus consciously influence their facial expression or the angle of the shot. This can be used for self-expression or to consciously take on a completely different role. According to Barthes, however, there can be no complete control over one's own effect, since the 'spectrum', the image of the 'referent', never quite matches the latter, no matter how hard the latter tries (cf. Barthes 1980: 17). Despite the claim (or also: the promise) of *BeReal* to create authenticity, this mixing of 'operator' and 'spectator' could open up a path towards self-staging.

While Barthes divides the effect of photographs into 'punctum' and 'studium', a *BeReal* contribution itself produces three pages: two photographs and a description. In *BeReal*, the two images taken with the smartphone's front and rear cameras are virtually inseparable and fulfill different tasks. The image from the front camera shows the user

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[9] In contrast, Barthes (1980/1989: 17) states: "[I]m not a photographer, not even an amateur photographer."
[10] See also the attempt to aestheticize this media artefact itself and to consider it in terms of media culture (see Ruf 2018a).

themselves, usually in the form of a selfie that shows the person's face from an arm's length away. The 'operator' turns out to be the 'referent': viewers can recognize *details* of the facial expression as well as clothing, accessories, hairstyles, beards, etc. The surroundings are often largely obscured and disappear into the background. The image from the rear camera is displayed to the 'Spectator' in full screen within the *BeReal* contribution, while the image from the front camera is shown in a reduced size at the top left. The viewers here see the surroundings of the 'operator', roughly what he himself is looking at. It seems difficult to precisely assign 'studium' and 'punctum' to both photographs. Both images contain information that can be clearly assigned to the 'studium'; the 'spectator' can extract information that places the image in a cultural context from the landscape features, objects or situations in the image from the rear camera and the clothing and expression of the speaker in the image from the front camera. And the apt 'punctum', the incidental *detail*, can also be contained in each of the two photographs. But it can also only emerge from the combination of the two: For example, if the facial expression shown does not match the scenery or if the 'spectator' discovers a *hidden detail* in this scenery that explains the previously inexplicable facial expression of the speaker. In addition to the two photographs, users can also add a caption consisting of text and emoticons to their *BeReal* contribution. Although this text is not a photograph, it can still provide additional information about the 'studium' of the contribution or even contain the *detail* of the 'punctum'. Thus, elements of the photographic effect (of the 'studium' as well as the 'punctum') can be found in the elements of the *BeReal* contribution, in the image of the front camera, in the image of the rear camera and in the caption. However, the categories cannot be clearly assigned to one another due to their diversity. Rather, by combining them, this social network attempts to generate an aesthetic factor that remains a hope in itself: authenticity.

By deliberately setting guidelines and restrictions on photographic freedom, *BeReal* tries to encourage users to present an authentic picture of their life that has been realized in this way. According to the website, the app offers "a new and unique way to discover who your friends really are in their daily life" (https://bereal.com, last accessed March 14, 2024). One key element of the idea of the 'punctum' remains to be emphasized: the unintentionality of its placement. As explained, Barthes does not rule out the possibility that an intentional 'punctum' could also have a captivating effect on the 'spectator' (cf. Barthes 1980: 57) – in practice, however, this rarely seems to be the case at first. An authentic, less staged

image could therefore rather contain a 'punctum'. This unintentional creation of a 'punctum' is deliberately sought by *BeReal*. Users of the app receive a daily notification at different times of the day asking them to publish a post within the next two minutes. Any number of new pictures can be taken within the time limit. However, if the time limit is exceeded, *friends* will be notified that the post was shared too late when they view it later. The spontaneity of the timing, the shortness of time and the social sanctioning of failure seem to be aimed at the following: Instead of giving users time to arrange (or stage) facial expressions and backgrounds, for example, in order to choose an exciting scene for the rear camera image if necessary, the technically generated time pressure inevitably restricts this self-staging. *BeReal* goes one step further: users are only able to see their friends' daily *BeReals* once they have shared their own post. It is true that there is a risk that this compulsion could lead to poor-quality mandatory contributions. *BeReal* has decided to make this type of 'communication' possible by means of the aesthetically guided image machine described above. When uninspired and unmotivated snapshots are shared just to see friends' posts, these in turn provide space for unwanted but charming and touching details that may make the images themselves more attractive and possibly captivate viewers anew. In other words: Provoked in this way is, as Barthes says (Barthes 1980: 57), the "inevitable and delightful ingredient" of the 'punctum'.

However, Barthes also identifies concepts that *BeReal* cannot control despite its own rules, such as the above-mentioned shock as a sudden reaction of the 'referent' while being photographed (cf. Barthes 1980: 41). The task of the 'operator' "to surprise something or someone [...] and that this action is perfect when it is carried out without the knowledge of the photographed subject" (Barthes 1980: 41) seems downright impossible in view of the use of the front camera image in the case of *BeReal.* In most cases, the subject of the authentic representation remains both 'referent' and 'operator' at the same time. However, the shock as a kind of quality feature of the photography is quite possible if, for example, other subjects can be seen in one of the photos. Moreover, in *BeReal*, one also looks through the image at the 'referent'; one breaks through the digital interface and becomes aware of the photographed real body of the subject. To depict this 'reality effect' (see also Barthes 1968), this digital medium uses the communication symbols that are generally characteristic of social media, in this case so-called *RealMojis*, which are intended to depict the claim to authenticity using specific emojis known or modified from chat communication. Five usable *RealMojis* symbolize the expressions 'agreeing',

'happy', 'scared', 'in love' and 'amused'; they consist of a personalized photo of your own face and the matching small emoji. These are stored temporarily and can be used immediately or later in response to posts from other *BeReal* users. In addition, the *Instant RealMoji* function offers the option of recording a spontaneous and unique live reaction to a post. By combining sensual emojis and facial photographs in this way, *BeReal* to a certain extent eliminates the lack of labeling (in the sense of Barthes) of photography and makes it communicatively manageable. A 'punctum' could also lie in the photographs processed in this way, perhaps even triggered by a contradiction between anticipated emotion and actual image.

One finding also remains apparent for this act of aesthetic self- and other-experience in the space of digital media cultures. These are only possible thanks to advances in media technology and its ostinato dissemination, which produces new media usage spaces with discursive power (for example as 'smartphone culture'; cf. Ruf 2018b). Digital photographs can now be fully edited, they are completely editable and can always be further processed graphically (cf. Lunenfeld 2002: 160). One could say that this 'technical progress' in itself jeopardizes the attribution of authenticity to photography. *BeReal*, however, makes a virtue of this danger by limiting it on this platform with technical means. The application forces users to take new photos instead of using edited photos from their own photo gallery and does not offer any technical editing options or filters. Even if *BeReal* cannot prevent all possibilities of digital image manipulation, such as taking a photo of another screen, there is a clear effort to at least limit manipulation. This photography with digital means thus approaches the character of analog photography; it comes close to the actual act of photographic-'aesthetic communication' and ultimately adds a further surplus to it: the spectrum of the digital, which – basically consciously – creates a phenomenon that this medium always says goodbye to, namely in the form of transience. This is because the daily posts that are uploaded to this social network can only be viewed by other users for a total of 24 hours. Whereas with an analogue photo it was still difficult to snatch it out of the 'spectator's' hand and destroy it, the digitalization of photography now makes it possible to prevent it from being viewed (at least without first making a copy). We are dealing with a form of ephemeral 'aesthetic communication'.

4. *Conclusion*

The *actors* 'operator', 'referent' and 'spectator', delineated in terms of media philosophy, become blurred when considering the 'aesthetics' and 'communication' of *BeReal*. The formative aspects of photographic perception ('punctum' and 'studium') cannot be assigned to this digital media specimen in a differentiated way, which appears to be an unconditional advantage of this exemplary 'communicative-aesthetic' act. The double photography of *BeReal* is part of the attempt to animate users to make hoped-for authentic contributions, which, to quote Barthes again, tend to contain an unintended 'punctum' and can thus have an *exciting* and *captivating* effect on the viewer. The manipulability of digital photography, which the concept of *BeReal* emphasizes in its confrontation with a more traditional theory of photography, as undertaken by Barthes, is limited by this media application primarily through technical measures. On the one hand, in the face of *BeReal*, we are once again approaching a supposedly lost immutability of analog photography. On the other hand, it is precisely this that also puts users under pressure, for example by means of the randomly requested time of the respective contribution, by limiting its availability and through social sanctioning. In this way, staging is at least restricted and at best prevented, and the unintentional creation of a 'punctum' is downright provoked. Seen in this light, the media-philosophical view of the 'communication aesthetics' of this digital *thing* not only updates Barthes' theses on photography theory. The epistemological ground of the relationship between 'aesthetics' and 'communication' per se is demonstrated – in the beholding or even more clearly: in the contemplation of the digital. At the same time, by recognizing this way of photographing as well as digitizing, the view of what Barthes once again calls a "revelation of the object" (1980: 18), which releases the measure of a knowledge, becomes clearer. Barthes:

What does my body know about photography? I have noticed that a photograph can be the object of three activities (or three emotions or three intentions): doing, letting happen, contemplating. [...] And what is photographed is a target, [...] a kind of small idol, an eidolon separated from the object, which [...] preserves a relationship to the 'spectacle' through its root and, moreover, gives it the somewhat uncanny aftertaste inherent in every photograph: the return of the dead. (Barthes 1980: 18)

Perhaps, one could conclude, we die with every photograph, something dies with every photographic act – and at the same time rises again from the dead. At least this would (also) be an apt idea for the spectrum of experiences, uses and effects of the media as a whole, especially those of digital provenance and 'communication-aesthetic' nature. The fusion of 'aesthetics and communication' then always has an essential reference to eternity: to survival. The temptation is great, and in fact hard to suppress, to view the increasing dominance of the digital as such a process of abstraction and the semantic abundance that goes with it. Examining this 'history' means getting to the bottom of an 'aesthetics of communication'. Does this not mean recognizing the constitution of the supplement of the digital as a utopian potential, even if it is viewed critically in structural terms? Does this not mean that a kind of original profit is suspected in it, with everything that such a perspective implies for the environment of the media? The desire for the supplement of the digital drives both the one and the other to permanently orient their approach towards this instance. It is an approach and a horizon that remains in that supplement once it has been recognized. When it comes to not only pursuing but recognizing 'aesthetics' and 'communication' as a real liaison, it is undoubtedly through the power of media theory as such.

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