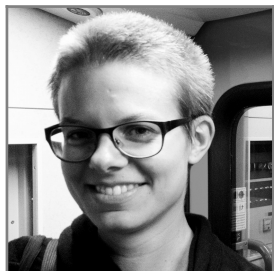


THE QUESTION OF REFLEXIVITY*

Markéta Jakešová – PhD
Candidist in Philosophy.
Charles University, Faculty of
Humanities.
U Kříže 8, Praha 5 – Jinonice,
158 00, Czech Republic
L'ERRaPhiS, Université
Toulouse – Jean Jaurès.
31058, 5 Allée Antonio
Machado, 31100 Toulouse,
France.
e-mail: jakesova.marketa@
gmail.com



This article aims to critically examine three approaches to reflexivity in philosophical texts, specifically the case when the textuality becomes its own topic. The first approach is when there is no reflexivity at all. It is just describing how – according to the author – things are. As an example of this approach I take German media philosophy. This tradition is specific because reflexivity is supposed to be its very topic. However, the media philosophers succeeded in touching the indefinability of mediality itself. Another method is to question one's own and possibly also the reader's position. I have chosen Annemarie Mol's empirical philosophy as the example here. The problem is that despite following the "ontological turn", the author remains (probably inevitably) also to a large extent trapped in the fact that he/she describes the world, that is, in subject/object dichotomy and therefore, in epistemology. The third way to write aims to make readers *feel* what the author *tells*. My example here is the varied work of Walter Benjamin whom I for the purpose of this article consider more as a prophet rather than the precise thinker who he (also) by all means was. While using the second approach myself, I discuss advantages and challenges of the three and find their points of touch.

Keywords: German media philosophy, Actor-Network Theory, Annemarie Mol, Walter Benjamin, ontology

ВОПРОС РЕФЛЕКСИВНОСТИ

Маркета Якешова – аспирант.
Карлов университет.
У Кříže 8, Прага 5 – Jinonice,
158 00, Чешская Республика.
L'ERRaPhiS, Университет
Тулуза – Жан Жорес.
31058, 5 Allée Antonio
Machado, 31100, Тулуза,
Франция.
e-mail: jakesova.marketa@
gmail.com

В данной статье рассматриваются три подхода к проблеме рефлексивности в философских текстах – а именно те случаи, когда текстуальность становится ее собственным предметом. Первый подход имеет место тогда, когда рефлексивность отсутствует. В этом случае автор просто описывает некоторые события так, как он их видит. В качестве примера этого подхода в статье рассматривается немецкая медиафилософия. Особенность этой традиции состоит в том, что рефлексивность составляет ее предметное поле. Между тем медиафилософам удалось нащупать медийность в ее неопределимости. Другой подход состоит в проблематизации чьей-либо (в том числе читательской) позиции. В качестве примера в статье рассматривается эмпирическая

* This publication was supported by The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – Institutional Support for Longterm Development of Research Organizations – Charles University, Faculty of Humanities (2019) and the foundation DFH-UFA (Université franco-allemande. Deutsch-Französische Hochschule).

Special thanks to Milan Kroulík for reading and commenting on previous versions of the article and correcting its language.



философия Аннмари Мол. Этот пример интересен тем, что, хотя Мол следует принципам «онтологического поворота», она все же остается (скорее всего, неизбежно) заложницей описания мира через эпистемологическую дихотомию «субъект-объект». Третий подход к повествованию заключается в стремлении заставить читателя *прочувствовать* то, о чем *рассказывает* автор. Такой подход характерен для разных работ Вальтера Беньямина, который в данной статье предстает скорее пророком, чем собственно мыслителем, коим он тоже несомненно являлся. Используя второй подход, автор этой статьи рассматривает преимущества и недостатки каждого из трех, а также ищет возможности для их соотнесения.

Ключевые слова: немецкая медиафилософия, акторно-сетевая теория, Аннмари Мол, Вальтер Беньямин, онтология

However much “writing” has become a topic that is theoretically discussed, there still aren’t many books that do something to enrich, complexify, and change academic writing practices. Writing methods are still not taken as seriously as methods of gathering and analyzing material.

Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple*

It is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation.

Walter Benjamin,
The Origin of German Tragic Drama

Introduction: The Text and Its Others

The problem of any text¹ is that it has at least two sides of being: it exists in its physical form (on paper, stone, clay tablet, or a data disc) and it tells something about something *other* than itself. Both of these sides have their own issues. The physical form had been until recently unrecognized by many people and while its concrete shape sometimes seems utterly unimportant, without materiality, no text would exist. And the referential aspect itself is unclear: how accurate is the reference? What is it that makes the text referential in the first place? What is that part that differentiates itself from the reference so that we recognize that the text is not the thing which is being described?

¹ I now restrict myself to the narrow meaning of the term, that is, I consider text to be something that is written in order to be – at least in theory – read and/or readable.



My text presents different strategies for dealing with these questions. I found three traditions that approach these from various perspectives, with different degrees of self-reflexivity and with diverse emphases either on the material existence of the text, or on the fact of sharing some meaning, the form of this sharing etc. The list is by no means exhaustive: my research touches some possibilities with their advantages and deficiencies, rather than giving a complete account.

The first of the traditions I engage with is German media philosophy (throughout the text called by the German expression “Medienwissenschaft”). Even though I am rather critical about the lack of reflexivity in most texts falling under *Medienwissenschaft*, the thematic focus of this approach is truly innovative because it tries to capture media – including text – in the very moment of their mediation, communication or referentiality.

The second tradition I want to discuss is derived from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), sometimes termed after-ANT. My main point of interest will be the empirical philosophy of Annemarie Mol. Like many others before her – both with an explicit ANT background and without – she is concerned with her own position in her research and most importantly for me, in her position as an author of academic texts. I hope to be able to present the particularity of her theory, as well as the questions or challenges it – maybe inevitably – fails to solve.

The last example is Walter Benjamin's metaphysical adventure in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. The text is notoriously difficult, even for Benjamin's standards. I was working with the text for some time but the transformation that I underwent thanks to it started taking its own shape. Therefore the last part of my text is to be taken as a chain of associations rather than a close interpretation. Using Benjamin as the conclusion is a leap back in time, but I like to think of it as a sort of Benjaminian “dialectical image”:² From the clash of new methods and Benjamin's somewhat old schoolish philosophy, that has nonetheless the power to transform its readers, might arise a new meaning. In a flash, in the fraction of time. “The eternal ... is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea.” [Benjamin, 2002, p. 463].

² I am aware of the fact that this concept was explicitly articulated only later but the immediate clash of two temporalities revealing something else; the truth as something that lets itself be seen discretely, not continuously, are motives already present in Benjamin's earlier texts.



What is the Other

In order to be considered as a text, ‘it’ has first to exist and second to give account of something else, something other than itself. I aim to explore the situation when this other is supposed to be a text – either the text as such or the very text the reader has in front of her.

I argue that even in this situation – the text being about itself – there is this other. The reasons are, first, that it makes explicit something that has been implicit till now, therefore it is obviously different; second, it is a never-ending game of mirroring, a spiral. In the attempt to write about the just written, there is always a space-time lag which is multiplying ad infinitum. It is because the existence of a text is always somewhere *else* than in the meaning of the written and the meaning only comes *after* the fact of the text. This is the problem Wittgenstein addressed in his *Tractatus*: What is *shown through* the text, cannot be *said by* the text.³ Thus also the existence of the text is shown but cannot be said, just like we cannot measure the length of the length norm: “There is one thing of which one can state neither that it is 1 metre long, nor that it is not 1 metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris.” [Wittgenstein, 2009: 29e, §50]

These problems emerge when we consider the text (and language in general) a grid to be put more or less accurately on the fixed world *out there*. And then we can speculate about the extent to which these two realms are entangled: on the one hand, everything I aim to approach is *al-ready* interpreted, so I cannot escape to sheer materiality [e.g. Mol, 2012, p. 3]; on the other hand, every text and every language production are at the same time material to some extent [e.g. Butler, 2011, p. 6] because it is materialized as aural, visual, or tactile marks.

Alleged Transparency of *Medienwissenschaft*

The entanglement and the infinite mirroring I have just described are truly vertiginous for me. Not only for me, to tell the truth: it is very similar to the German philosophical field called *Medienwissenschaft*'s struggle with the very description of mediation. Yes, mediation in general it may be, but the real problem is text and textuality, because it is unsurprisingly the medium of text through which *Medienwissenschaft* philosophers (just like most academics in general) form and tell their thoughts. I hope to demonstrate their problem later but to understand it, I believe that one

³ “Was gezeigt werden *kann*, *kann* nicht gesagt werden.” [Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 43, § 4.1212]



has to get an idea about fundamental propositions of *Medienwissenschaft* and its specificity.

One of the inspirational sources for contemporary *Medienwissenschaft* is Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message" quote. [McLuhan, 1995, p. 7] As one of the philosophers from the tradition, Sybille Krämer wrote, McLuhan's goal was to "take away the transitory transparency and neutrality of the media and make visible their autonomous opacity and instrumental shaping power." [Krämer, 2015, p. 28]. The 'medial turn' is analogical to the 'linguistic turn' but Krämer rightly points out that whereas the linguistic turn claimed that "language was no longer 'only' a medium", the medial turn aims at the mediation *itself*. Thus most of the authors of *Medienwissenschaft* discern themselves from previous 'turns' in that they do not concentrate on any specific communicative tool,⁴ rather they try to capture the space where mediation itself is (being) performed. So when we talk about various languages shaping our experience or different experiences when reading on a screen or a book made of paper, this is exactly what (at least some of) the authors of *Medienwissenschaft* are *not* interested in. In fact, according to Dieter Mersch, the function of media is their very disappearing. [Mersch, 2008, p. 305] McLuhan turns upside down! The medium here is *not* the message, or rather: the medium is exactly that, what the message is *not*. It's a trap and Mersch – while perfectly aware of the problem – does not see a way out. His biggest concern is language because it is his main tool for doing what he does but instead of trying to make his language speak about it, much less reveal it through performing, he seeks refuge in analogies from the field of art. Talking or writing – in a language of course – about mediation as if it was any other topic, without any reflection, is like ... well, it is very similar to the way I have been writing up to this point. If – as Dieter Mersch (2008, p. 306) says analogically to Wittgenstein: "no medium can inform of its own mediality because the form of the information itself cannot be informed about" but it "manifests itself", then I would expect to see or sense it *somewhere, anywhere*. The problem is that *Medienwissenschaft* philosophers were feeling the non-describable elusive space where mediation is being performed but they want to inform *about* it. How? Entirely transparently. The only way to manifest mediality Mersch came up with was a blank page in one of his book as he said in an interview [Mersch, 2016, p. 306] but when he talks about anamorphic paintings, he only uses art in order to *talk about* mediality and medial aspects of text, but he is not inspired to actually *make* such a depiction. After all, anamorphic paintings are made with painter's tools, on canvas or a desk and they are still reflexive and point to their own mediality so it is not unavoidable *not to write* in order to reflect writing,

⁴ I put aside very interesting materialist analyses by Friedrich Kittler. (E.g. Kittler, 1986)



just as one doesn't have to stop painting to reflect visual arts.⁵ Even though Dieter Mersch is perhaps the most striking example of this problem, it is quite similar with other *Medienwissenschaft* philosophers. Not that their texts are bad or their argumentation unconvincing, not at all, but they write as if no language, let alone medial turn ever happened. I think that one of the reasons is that they are afraid to step out of epistemology and dare to taste the space of new ontology: they try to describe how things are but neglect the fact that they inevitably also perform, create something. Which is so much the worse since this is what *Medienwissenschaft* is supposed to be about.

Ontological Entanglements

Authors connected to the tradition of Actor-Network Theory have chosen a different path. Mostly because they are interested in ontology. [Gad; Jensen, 2010, p. 64] Therefore Annemarie Mol's main question is how things *are*. After having experienced and described many different situations in which a particular disease – in Mol's book it is atherosclerosis – is talked about and worked on, her answer is quite simple: they are how they are being *done*, how they are *enacted* by themselves and by others. [Mol, 2002] And since things, bodies, people, diseases, identities etc. are being done differently at different places and in different times, reality loses its presumed singularity. The multiplicity that proliferates in Mol's texts is more typical of so called after-ANT work, whereas what now can be called classical ANT is better known for – and has been criticized for – neat networks where the victorious and the most *active* actor defines everything. Nevertheless, most of the authors connected to ANT (be it the classical ANT or its after-version) are occupied with writing style (Gad; Jensen, 2010: 60ff) because they know that they cannot exclude themselves from the ontological facts they ... well, write *about*. Thus also the critical article by Christopher Gad and Casper Bruun Jensen I have been referring to made this clear, although it is itself written in a rather asymptomatic style: "For those already working with ANT, it should be obvious that our effort, as any other, is not simply descriptive but also has an integral performative component, which aims to guide further development of ANT in certain directions rather than others." (57)

This stance is explicitly reflective towards what the reader is just about to read (if she reads from the beginning to the end) and it is one of the ways to relate to the text. But ANT scholars are quite creative in this

⁵ The blank canvas as a means to reflect and maybe criticize painting only came much later. Probably the most famous example I know of from the Western art history are Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* from 1951. (See e.g. [Joseph, 2003, 25ff.])



respect. Bruno Latour (over)uses exclamation marks – maybe to wake up his readers (e.g. Latour, 1993); Helen Verran wrote her book *Science and an African Logic* (2001) as a dialogue between her various writing selves, across time; Annemarie Mol in her first book *Body Multiple* (2002) wrote in fact two books running in alongside each other: one on the upper half of pages describing the body affected by atherosclerosis in a hospital, another one at the bottom of pages relating to literature. This book is not one, not many, “more than one – but less than many”, it is truly *multiple*. (55)

This is not the only way Mol explicitly reflects on writing style: she cites a Dutch article and then comments on the language difference,⁶ she cites famous books to give herself credibility but pokes fun at the fact, that credibility is gained by this very citing: “If I import Strathern my text becomes stronger ... But how do authors ever acquire authority? Answer: by being related to. It is a circle.” (23) When I was reading the text for the first time, I was fascinated by how Mol was waking me up from the comfortable irreflective snooze a reader can sometimes experience when she is immersed in reading, by a question, joke or shout. It is where the text suddenly appears outside of itself, because it leaps from the neutral place where the reading is being done, straight onto me. It is an anamorphic depiction Dieter Mersch was seeking: the painting in which depicted objects appear *somewhere else*. [Mersch, 2008, p. 311] It is here where I see “intrusions, disruptions, obstacles, reversals of structures, extreme retardations or accelerations, doubling or iteration of signs” that should be according to Mersch “the basic lines of a negative medial theory” (314) and that I so desperately wanted to find in the texts of *Medienwissenschaft*.

I used to like Mol’s leaps in space and I still do but now, after a couple of years, I appreciate primarily Mol’s doing what she does by describing it at the same time, as in the quote about quoting above. A circle, indeed, but a circle that makes your thoughts spin.

Another example of this is the claim made by Mol in the beginning of the third chapter of *Body Multiple*, where she revisited the question from the very beginning of the book: What is atherosclerosis? “But after the shift from an epistemological to a praxiographic appreciation of reality, telling about what atherosclerosis *is* isn’t quite what it used to be. Somewhere along the way the meaning of the word ‘is’ has changed.” I mentioned earlier that for Mol, entities *are* through *enacting* and that’s also the reason why reality multiplies. It is also the answer to her question, the question and its answer around which the whole book is built on.

⁶ “The article mentioned is entitled ‘Gesprekken over ziekte in een Kameroenees dorp: Een kritische reflectie op medisch-antropologisch onderzoek’ (Pool 1989). Do you recognize the language? It’s Dutch. There must be lots of interesting articles I cannot relate to because they are in languages I do not understand.” [Mol, 2002, p. 24]



For my present argument, these two passages are crucial and the most important. The first section of the two is a part of Mol's text written at the bottom of pages. Those are the passages dedicated to literature so here it is easier to use the meta-ontological level and doing something by commenting on that very action: the text is both the topic and – obviously – the tool, but consciously used. In the case of the other passage, it is more covert. Mol actually couldn't say it while doing it because then the ontological dimension would be lost. But she informs us about it, because informing about her methods is a very distinct part of her writing style. Along with J. L. Austin (e.g. 1962, p. 52) I hold the opinion that every text inevitably *does* something in the strong ontological sense, that is, it affects the world around itself and not admitting it doesn't change anything about it. Mol is very reflective of it but this part is still special because "the meaning of the word 'is'" is changing through the very reading of the text. Every text changes its readers, at least in the sense that they get some information – not necessarily *new* information, but ... some. However, here the author changes the meaning of a word by showing it: we live through this change while reading. The technique is similar to narrative methods in novels or movies: instead of *saying that* a character is annoying, it is usually more useful to *show* it, or even better to make the character annoy the readers or spectators. Mol's virtuosity consists in the fact that she uses this method in an unusual context: it is not that difficult to, say, make people feel sick by describing something repugnant; but to shift the meaning of the word 'is' through describing the being of the disease (and not the disease everybody is talking about on top of that, like cancer for example), that is a true masterpiece.

Nevertheless, no matter how much I like Mol's work, I see that there is a problem. It lies in the fact that even though her topic is practice, she still mostly writes *about* it instead of practicing it. Not that I have any idea myself how else it could be done without the text becoming utterly cryptic. After all, a writer has to write about *something* and if it is practice they are interested in and how it changes ontology, one can write about the ontology of the text and how it is established through the practice of writing and reading but ... in case of everything else, one ends up in descriptions of a world *out there*.

It is characteristic of ANT-inspired scholars that they refuse to stay in what they call an epistemological realm, instead they, in various ways, relate themselves to ontology. Helen Verran for example writes that when she was doing her research in Australia, on the topic of different burning practices of indigenous and white Australians, the whites were perplexed by the incommensurability between the world they were used to and the indigenous techniques: "Coming to life within disparate epistemic regimes, the forms of generalizing they embed are justified by incommensurable metaphysics." [Verran, 2002, pp. 730–731] Before the so-called "ontolo-



gical turn” in anthropology, if we were progressive enough, we did not deprive others of their right to interpret reality from their perspective, but we still presumed the material reality at the center to be something fixed and, well, suitably very similar to our own perspective. Facing a different and for us incomprehensible ontology that nevertheless works, our world starts losing its contours: white scientists saw indigenous Australians skillfully setting and managing forest fires, while performing tasks that don’t make any sense, no matter which perspective they were willing to accept as possible.

It is not my intention here to question the ontological turn or to endorse it, although I am very much fond of it, as is probably already obvious from this text. The problem is that I don’t see any way to be true to these ontological propositions in writing. The world is being reshaped at every moment by any action which applies to the existence of the text too. But what the text *is* – which here means also what and how it does, in Annemarie Mol’s sense – is not what the text is *about*. Mol does not enact the atherosclerosis in her text, instead she describes it. And every time she tells her readers about what she has just done through the text, the intended effect weakens. What is told by the text, cannot be performed through it. Or rather: the more the text tells about something, the less successfully can it be performed.

Unfolding Reality

Medienwissenschaft addresses an interesting problem, but the authors seem to pretend that it doesn’t concern their own writing. Annemarie Mol and many other (after-)ANT authors first write *about* performativity – or how they often call it, ‘enactment’ – while performing something else (that is, shaping the world by writing), and then they write about this new performativity. A circle again. It’s usually called reflexivity and for now, it is my model to follow. My text is performative like any other text, persuasive, and it tries to be suggestive. However, there is another philosophical style I would like to discuss, the bold literary one, that doesn’t explain or describe but shows. The less it seems intentional from the author, the better it works. In contrast to the previous examples, it turns around: it is no longer the text which is a medium, it is the author. The text doesn’t have to be and cannot be a medium because it is the reality itself. Before turning to Walter Benjamin, whom I have chosen for more reasons, it is necessary to note that there are many texts like this. One shining example is G.W.F. Hegel and his *Science of Logic*. When we read in the beginning of the text the first phrase “*Being, pure being*”, it is not a description, it is building up the world anew. I have to hold my breath, not to proceed too fast, let it come to existence at its proper pace.



[Hegel, 2010, p. 59]⁷ The language here has the mystical power to bring into existence, much like the word of God. “Reading the *Logic* and comprehending it is to read the mind of God before he created the world.” [Ruda, 2018, p. 87] The language is coessential with reality.

With Walter Benjamin, it is similar, or at least I feel it in a similar way. One of his questions in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” of *The Origin of Tragic Drama* is the question of representation,⁸ that is, the problem of philosophical form or style in a broad sense: how to make, or rather let the truth talk.⁹ To be able to do this, the form is supposed to be the performance of the truth itself. The proper form for philosophy is thus “the representation of truth” and philosophy should practice this form rather than anticipate it. It is an intended tautology because through the exercise of form, form is being implemented.

For Benjamin, “method is a digression”, which means that while practicing philosophy I am not allowed to ‘ask’ for the truth directly, like I ask if I stay in the realm of knowledge, which is something radically different. In “representation of truth”, there is no place for a firm structure or uninterrupted argument: the original object of our thinking stands in the middle of our practical efforts and we should approach it each time from a different angle. Never directly, as if by alternation of breathing and holding breath. The truth-content can therefore be grasped only through immersing oneself in the factual details, not by presupposing a unity which is yet to appear. The text – lacking intonation, gesticulation, or facial expressions which help to smooth a narrated speech – is inevitably incoherent: “the writer must stop and restart with every new sentence.”¹⁰

Benjamin uses his method even when describing his very method. Or rather, the method is performed and co-created through the existence of the text.¹¹ In his own words (translated to English of course), it is “the art of the interruption in contrast to the chain of deduction; the tenacity of

⁷ I owe these ideas to the workshop I attended at Humboldt University in Berlin on November 24–25. [Schneider, 2018]

⁸ The German expression *Darstellung* translated as “representation” has a broader meaning: it is also presentation, depiction, bringing something to light.

⁹ The following two paragraphs are my interpretation of [Benjamin, 1998, p. 28–32].

¹⁰ It is also reflected in the sentence structure, which is possible in German, but not common. Many sentences start with the rheme and only after that the theme follows. “Benjamin’s text thus gets peculiar dynamics of breath ... thanks to which ... an appeal and voice penetrate the text and perhaps it might not be too presumptuous to assume that the lingering of the rheme is thus intensified. ... The rheme is not saved to be a surprise at the end of the sentence – on the contrary it is disclosed in advance and the thought stays with it throughout the whole length of the sentence.” [Pokorný, 2016, p. 16 – my translation].

¹¹ It is possible to trace an analogy between language and truth: “Just like language cannot be reduced to semantics, the truth cannot be reduced to conceptuality, to the conceptual grasp of events.” [Ritter, 2019 – my translation]



the essay in contrast to the single gesture of the fragment; the repetition of themes in contrast to shallow universalism; the fullness of concentrated positivity in contrast to the negation of polemic.” (32)

A philosopher is supposed to approach their topic (which is the truth in its ultimate goal) every time from the beginning, so that every shard reflects the whole, imperfectly. It is like Leibnizian monads: each of them reflects all the other monads, the whole world, but each one on a different level of perfection.¹² This is the method used in the Prologue, as well as later, in two long chapters about the baroque tragic drama itself.

Walter Benjamin’s style is well traceable, he was influenced by early German Romantics, for whom the “art, brought to completion by criticism, converged with philosophy (Schlegel) and religion (Novalis) as revelation of truth.” [Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 124] It is a program that Benjamin followed in the essay *Goethe’s Elective Affinities* and that is also present in *The Origin*. But in the midst of writing *The Origin*, his attention was engaged by Marxist surrealism which too affected his style of writing and thinking to a large extent. And although something we can call the surrealist method is more developed in Benjamin’s later work, such as the *Arcades Project*, it is easy to notice it here already: in *The Origin*, Benjamin emphasized the importance of “the authoritative quotation” as an educative tool. [Benjamin, 1998, p. 28] His writing style is thus a little bit like a collage, a favorite surrealist art technique, or a film montage,¹³ which was especially praised by Benjamin: “It was the artistic technique of surrealism that fascinated Benjamin. Surrealist art portrayed everyday objects in their existing, material form [...], yet these objects were at the same time transformed by the very fact of their presentation as art, where they appeared in a collage of remote and antithetical extremes.” [Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 125]

No matter how non-standard the style of *The Origin* was for academic writing at Benjamin’s time,¹⁴ from the above written, it is obvious that the author chose his words and sentences carefully and by no means in a random way, making use of the contemporary academic and art vocabulary and style, as well as of the language that was characteristic of

¹² “[...] chaque substance simple a des rapports qui expriment toutes les autres, et qu’elle est par conséquent un miroir vivant perpétuel de l’univers.” [Leibniz, 2002, p. 19, M56]

¹³ It was actually the only aspect of film, which Benjamin considered to be truly artistic. [Benjamin, 2006, p. 110]

¹⁴ “He uses many words, whose sense the author doesn’t consider to be necessary to clarify, but which don’t have any fixed meanings. Or if we understood them in their usual meanings, they do not make sense in the commonly used context. ... therefore I cannot suppress the objection in myself that with his unintelligible way of expressions – which however has to be considered as a factual vagueness – he is not suitable to be students’ guide in this area,” wrote professor Hans Cornelius in his rejection of *The Origin* as Benjamin’s habilitation. ([Cornelius, 1991, pp. 771–772] – my translation)



the artworks and older academic literature he wrote about. However, the metaphysical conviction deductible from the text and also Benjamin's time distance allow more speculative reading, where despite the truth being the ultimate goal of philosophy, it is even more the source, the origin of everything and as such not anything we can reach by means of usual methods: "The object of knowledge, determined as it is by the intention inherent in the concept, is not the truth. Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas. The proper approach to it is not therefore one of intention and knowledge, but rather a total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention." [Benjamin, 1998, p. 36]

In this reading, Benjamin would be a prophet through whose mouth the very truth speaks, rather than a rejected academic. It is however the performative in the strongest sense, the truth of the tragic drama is being unfolded through and by the words of the text. The style like this is only possible in the realm of metaphysics, where language has a creative power. I am not promoting this kind of philosophy, it may be no longer possible to write this way and certainly not for me. But Benjamin's texts are extraordinary and when I was reading them for longer time, my world sensing and understanding changed and words lost their instrumentality, unimportance, and innocence. Lacking the knowledge and world shape of Benjamin's contemporaries, now in the time of the ontological turn in human sciences, Benjamin's truth may emerge: "Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time." [Benjamin, 2002, pp. 462–463]

Conclusion

In this text I explored three different styles of treating the text. Simultaneously, all three methods have textuality as one of their topics. *Medienwissenschaft* is concerned with the abstract notion of mediality, in a rather original way, but media philosophers don't seem to be able to give it a distinct shape, much less to perform it through their own writing.

Annemarie Mol and other after-ANT scholars are aware of the ontological aspect of their texts but the performative power is inevitably reduced while describing the so-called "real world". In Mol's texts specifically, the choice to write as clearly and reflectively as possible and thus to make her texts comprehensible for their readers, turns the performativity into a loop. It is not wrong, it is a choice I am grateful for, actually.

I deliberately concluded with the oldest thinker. Anachronistically, Walter Benjamin could be considered as a part of the ontological turn, and a very radical one at that. With him, the ontological is folded into



the words themselves but – at the cost of entering the metaphysical realm. However, Benjamin’s truth can talk to us in “the now of a particular recognizability”. [Benjamin, 2002, p. 463]

Список литературы / References

- Austin, 1962 – Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 167 pp.
- Benjamin, 1998 – Benjamin, W. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. London; New York: Verso, 1998, 256 pp.
- Benjamin, 2002 – Benjamin, W. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, 1088 pp.
- Benjamin, 2006 – Benjamin, W. “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (2nd Version)”, in: W. Benjamin. *Selected Writings, Volume III: 1935–1938*. Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 101–133.
- Buck-Morss, 1977 – Buck Morss, S. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics. Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*. New York; London: The Free Press, 1977, 335 pp.
- Butler, 2011 – Butler, J. *Bodies That Matter. On the discursive limits of “sex”*. London; New York: Routledge, 2011, 219 pp.
- Cornelius, 1991 – Cornelius, H. “Erstes Referat über die Habilitationsschrift von Dr. Benjamin”, in: W. Benjamin. *Gesammelte Schriften VI*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 771–772.
- Gad; Jensen, 2010 – Gad, C. & Jensen, C.B. “On the Consequences of Post-ANT”, *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 2010, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 55–80.
- Hegel, 2010 – Hegel, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 790 pp.
- Joseph 2003 – Joseph, B.W. *Random Order. Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003, 432 pp.
- Kittler, 1986 – Kittler, F. *Grammophon Film Typewriter*. Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986, 431 pp.
- Krämer, 2015 – Krämer, S. *Medium, Messenger, Transmission. An Approach to Media Philosophy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015, 269 pp.
- Latour, 1993 – Latour, B. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, 157 pp.
- Leibniz, 2002 – Leibniz, G.W. *La Monadologie*. Québec: Chicoutimi, 2002, 25 pp.
- McLuhan, 1994 – McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1994, 390 pp.
- Mersch, 2008 – Mersch, D. “Tertium datur. Einleitung in eine negative Medientheorie“, in: S. Münker; A. Roesler (eds.). *Was ist ein Medium?* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008, pp. 304–321.
- Mersch, 2016 – Mersch, D. “Kateřina Křtilová: Performativní reflexe. Rozhovor s Dieterem Merschem”, in: K. Křtilová & K. Svatoňová (eds.). *Medienwissenschaft. Východiska a aktuální pozice německé filozofie a teorie médií*. Praha: Academia, 2016, pp. 301–316.



Mol, 2002 – Mol, A. *The Body Multiple. Ontology in Medical Practice*. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2002. 216 pp.

Mol, 2012 – Mol, A. “Mind Your Plate! The Ontonorms Of Dutch Dieting”, *Social Studies of Science*, 2012, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 379–396.

Pokorný, 2016 – Pokorný, M. “Nad Původem německé truchlohy”, *Souvislosti*, 2016, vol. 4, pp. 10–22.

Ritter, 2019 – Ritter, M. “Die Unmittelbarkeit des Mediums. Zur Aktualität der Medienphilosophie Walter Benjamins”, *Internationales Jahrbuch für Medienphilosophie*, 2019, Vol. 5. In print.

Ruda, 2018 – Ruda, F. “Hegel’s First Words”, in: R. Comay & F. Ruda. *The Dash – The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*. Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2018, pp. 87–106.

Schneider, 2018 – Schneider, A. “To Begin with ... Dialectics, Materialism and Mathematical Formalism in Hegel and Badiou. Or: Thinking between Philosophy and Science”, *Workshop sponsored by Central-Kolleg at Humboldt-University, Berlin, November 24–25, 2018*.

Verran, 2001 – Verran, H. *Science and an African Logic*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, 277 pp.

Verran, 2002 – Verran, H. “A Postcolonial Moment in Science Studies. Alternative Firing Regimes of Environmental Scientists and Aboriginal Landowners”, *Social Studies of Science*, 2002, vol. 32, no. 5–6, pp. 729–762.

Wittgenstein 1969 – Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969, 114 pp.

Wittgenstein, 2009 – Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Chichester: Wiley – Blackwell, 2009, 592 pp.